

FAQ: Degree in Nursing versus Diploma

To help eliminate confusion, the [West Virginia University School of Nursing](#) is **not** affiliated with the recently announced 21-month diploma program being offered by WVU Medicine (WVUM). The WVUM diploma program will allow graduates to take registered nurse licensing exams but will **not** result in an associate or bachelor's degree.

The WVU School of Nursing offers a wide range of degree programs for your consideration — traditional four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), LPN to BSN, RN to BSN and an Accelerated BSN for individuals who already have a bachelor's degree in another field. We also offer graduate degree options, including Master of Science in Nursing, Post-MSN Certificates, Doctor of Nursing Practice, DNP Nurse Anesthetist and PhD.

Below, you will find frequently asked questions about the program differences to help you determine which path is right for you.

What is the difference between a degree and a diploma?

A diploma program allows graduates to sit for the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) and become licensed registered nurses (RN). It allows students to graduate quickly and garner employment in an in-demand field.

A degree program also allows students to sit for the NCLEX to be a licensed RN, but degree programs provide more training and higher education opportunities. A BSN is the highest entry level degree into the profession. BSN graduates command higher salaries, are in more demand, have opportunities for employment at prestigious medical facilities, and transition easily into continuing education programs, such as graduate nursing education.

Obtaining an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) also supports higher education opportunities. The WVU School of Nursing currently partners with 11 community colleges for RN to BSN transfer agreements, which provide students the affordability and proximity of a community college, with the opportunity to seamlessly transfer into a fully online RN to BSN program with us.

These partnerships include Blue Ridge Community and Technical College; [BridgeValley Community and Technical College](#); Columbus State Community College; College of Southern Maryland; Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C); Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College; Hagerstown Community College; Harford Community College; Hocking College; New River Community and Technical College and West Virginia Northern Community College.

What are the advantages of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree?

Personal Advantages: BSN-prepared nurses earn higher salaries and are in higher demand, which leads to more employment opportunities nationally and internationally, along with more negotiation power and a shorter pathway to graduate level degrees. For some states, regions, and healthcare organizations, a BSN is required.

Patient Care Advantages: BSN-prepared nurses are better prepared due to the number of clinical hours completed — roughly 1,200 hours in the WVU School of Nursing program. In addition, BSN graduates have additional training in ethics and healthcare policy, evidence-based practice, and community health nursing. The increased exposure in clinicals and additional coursework provides the experience and builds the confidence necessary for nurses to shift to their respective fields. An abundance of research shows [BSN-prepared nurses provide better patient outcomes](#).

I'm interested in a BSN, but I'm worried about student debt. What should I do?

Student debt is a concern for many college students, regardless of major. Thankfully, nursing provides exceptional opportunities that other programs cannot match.

- West Virginia University offers a competitive [Climb Higher Scholarship](#) for first-time freshman and transfers.
- The School of Nursing at WVU offers a variety of [scholarships](#) for undergraduate students. No application necessary!
- There are also scholarships available through non-WVU funding, such as the [West Virginia Nursing Scholarship Program](#), [Nurse Corps Scholarship Program](#), or the [Aspiring Nurse Program](#).

Scholarships aside, many prominent healthcare organizations provide financial assistance to new nurses, such as sign-on bonuses, student loan reimbursement, relocation assistance, continuing education, or retention bonuses.

What does accreditation mean?

Accreditation means that an institution or program has met a third-party's approved level of educational standards. Institutions themselves can receive accreditation (regional accreditation), and individual programs can also have specific accreditations (national accreditation).

There are six (6) regionally accrediting bodies that accredit institutions. West Virginia University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

There are three (3) national accrediting bodies that accredit nursing programs. The WVU School of Nursing is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). CCNE accredits many baccalaureate and graduate programs.

The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) and the National League for Nursing (NLN) Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (NLN CNEA) are also national accrediting bodies. They accredit a variety of programs, from diploma and practical, up to graduate programs.

Completing programs that are nationally accredited for respective programs, like nursing, **and** regionally accredited institutions, such as WVU, means students are receiving the best education possible. These are usually requirements necessary to continue education, transfer credits, or sit for the NCELX. There are some requirements that may be fulfilled only by national nursing program accreditation, but others may require the institution to be regionally accredited as well.

How does my program selection impact my future opportunities?

Choosing the correct program can be challenging, as there are many factors to consider.

Some essential questions to ask yourself:

1. Is my institution regionally accredited?
2. Is my program nationally accredited?
3. What is the length of the program?
4. How much does the program cost?
5. Is the program flexible to my lifestyle?
6. Do I want to move to a different location upon graduating?
7. Is graduate school in my future?

Speaking to a representative from an institution is a great way to start! Find out about accreditation, cost, program length, NCLEX pass rates, program rankings, and time dedication requirements.

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For more information about WVU School of Nursing programs, please contact our recruitment specialist, Phillip Engelkemier, at phillip.engelkemier@hsc.wvu.edu.

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