

ENVISION YOUR NURSING FUTURE

# Taking the *Next Step* in Your Nursing Education



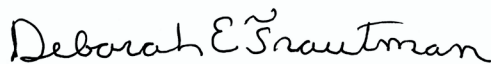
Dear Student,

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (OADN), we commend your interest in advancing your education. It is through knowledge that we grow as professionals and in turn, the patient, their family, and the community truly benefit from our enhanced understanding of nursing science, healthcare systems, and quality outcome measures. Now is the time to focus on developing a cadre of nurses who are ready to meet the changes and challenges that will come with reform to our nation's healthcare delivery system.


In 2010, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Medicine released a landmark report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. This report was commissioned to investigate what role nurses will play in addressing the increasing demand for safe, high-quality, and effective health care. After thoroughly investigating current trends and evidence-based research, the report outlined key messages that include:

*Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.*

AACN and OADN believe that academic progression is critical to the growth of our profession and each individual nurse. Serving as leaders for the profession's educational infrastructure, AACN is the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education programs and OADN is recognized nationally as the voice for associate degree nursing, representing community college nursing programs and individual members. Our organizations are committed to increasing students' awareness of potential career pathways and have developed this tool to present the facts about nursing programs and advancing your education. The decision to pursue higher education is one that each nurse must consider and weigh individually as he or she evaluates the impact they would like to make on the lives of America's patients and the healthcare system. Our organizations believe that all nurses should embrace lifelong learning.



**Deborah Trautman, PhD, RN, FAAN**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
American Association of Colleges of Nursing



**Donna Meyer, MS, RN, ANEF**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Organization for Associate Degree Nursing



# Nursing Education Pathways

Doctor of  
Philosophy

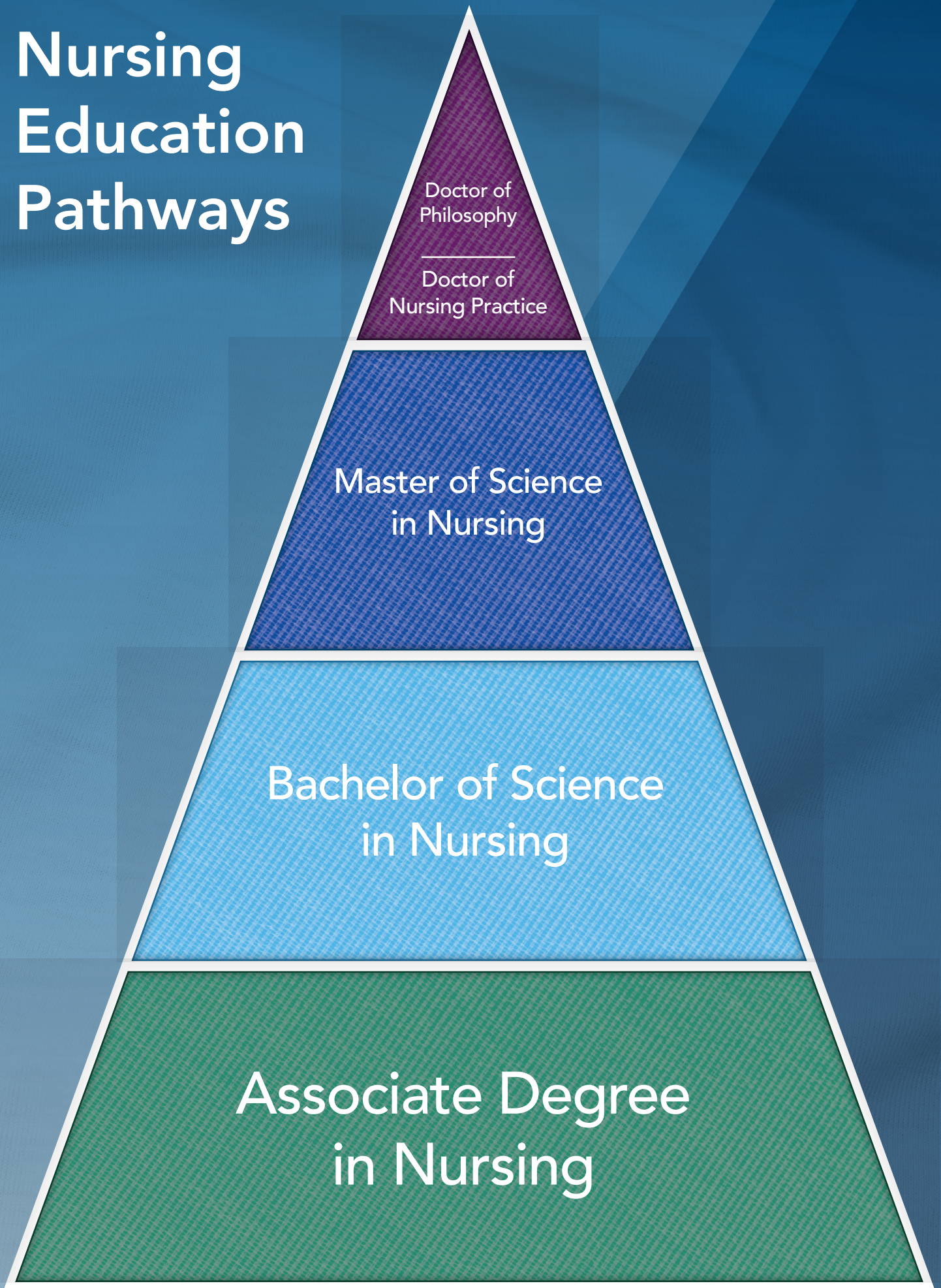
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Doctor of  
Nursing Practice

Master of Science  
in Nursing

Bachelor of Science  
in Nursing

Associate Degree  
in Nursing



# Is Doctoral Education Right for You?

Once you have completed your master's program, you'll be looking for opportunities that would allow you to obtain advanced leadership positions in research or practice. A doctorate may be the appropriate credential for you. There are two doctoral programs: the PhD in Nursing and the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Nurses with their PhD or DNP serve as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN), assume faculty roles, embark on careers as research scientists, and pursue leadership roles in the healthcare arena. Those seeking a terminal nursing degree should consider these offerings:

## *Doctor of Nursing Practice*

The DNP is designed for nurses seeking the highest level of preparation in nursing practice. In 2004, nursing schools affiliated with AACN voted to move the level of education necessary for advanced nursing practice from the master's degree to the doctorate. This move transformed APRN education to the doctoral level, including Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists, and Clinical Nurse-Midwives – as well as for other nurses engaged in advanced specialty practice. Both post-baccalaureate and post-master's DNP programs are available with more than 290 nursing schools currently offering this degree. DNP graduates are leaders in the health system and work collaboratively with nurse researchers to implement new nursing science and practice innovations. The length of these programs will vary based on whether the student is full or part-time.



## *PhD in Nursing*

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) represents the highest level of formal education for a career in research and the scholarship of discovery. Program graduates develop new nursing science, serve as leaders of the profession, and educate the next generation of nurses. In the academic setting, the PhD is required for success as a researcher in any discipline, not just nursing. In the scientific arena, the PhD is the beginning preparation for the development of independence in scientific pursuit. Attainment of the PhD requires a strong scientific emphasis within the discipline; an understanding of the science of related disciplines and translation science; dissemination of innovations; and interprofessional collaboration. Currently, more than 130 nursing schools offer a research-focused doctorate. The length of these programs will vary based on whether the student is full or part-time.

# What are Your Educational Options?

If you are currently in an associate degree program and would like to continue your education, there are two main paths to travel. The Registered Nurse (RN) to Baccalaureate or the RN to Master's program.

## *RN to Baccalaureate Programs*

RN to Baccalaureate (Bachelor of Science in Nursing, BSN) programs build on initial nursing preparation with course work to enhance professional development, prepare for a broader scope of practice, and provide a better understanding of the cultural, political, economic, and social issues that affect patients and influence care delivery. Specific knowledge that students will acquire in these programs is leadership development, a research background to inform practice, and a deeper understanding of community and population health.

Currently, more than 720 RN to BSN programs are available nationwide, including almost 600 programs offered at least partially online. Program length varies between 1 to 2 years depending upon the school's requirements, program type and the student's previous academic achievement. To search for RN to Baccalaureate programs, see <https://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/nursing-program-search>.

Many professional practice settings, including Magnet® hospitals and academic health centers, now require or prefer the baccalaureate degree for specific nursing roles.

## *RN to Master's Degree Programs*

The second option for ADN students is the RN to Master's (MSN, MS or Master of Science in Nursing degree) programs. The baccalaureate level content missing from ADN programs is built into the front-end of the RN to MSN program. Mastery of this upper level basic nursing content is necessary for students to move on to graduate study. Upon completion, many programs award both the baccalaureate and master's degree, while some only confirm the master's degree. These programs prepare nurses to assume positions requiring graduate preparation, including roles in administration, teaching, research, and as Clinical Nurse Leaders.

Currently, there are 219 programs available nationwide to transition RNs with associate degrees to the master's degree level. Though the majority of these programs are offered in traditional classroom settings, some RN to MSN programs are offered largely online or in a blended classroom/online format. RN to MSN programs generally take about 2 to 3 years to complete with specific requirements varying by institution and the student's previous course work.

To search for RN to MSN programs, see <https://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/nursing-program-search>.

Master's degree-prepared nurses are in high demand as expert clinicians, nurse executives, faculty, health policy consultants, and research associates.



## Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs)

The four APRN roles: Nurse Practitioner, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, Certified Nurse-Midwife, Clinical Nurse Specialist.



## Resources for You as You Consider Advancing Your Education

- **American Association of Colleges of Nursing**  
[www.aacn.nche.edu](http://www.aacn.nche.edu)  
Mission: As the collective voice for academic nursing, AACN serves as the catalyst for excellence and innovation in nursing education, research, and practice.
- **Organization for Associate Degree Nursing**  
<https://www.oadn.org>  
Mission: Promote Associate Degree Nursing through leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and education to ensure excellence in the future of health care and professional nursing practice.
- **Accreditation**  
Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing:  
<http://www.acenursing.org/>  
Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education:  
<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/ccne-accreditation>
- **Financing Your Education**  
OADN Scholarships:  
<https://www.oadn.org/index.php/about-us/oadn-foundation>  
AACN Resources on Scholarships and Loans:  
<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/students>  
Health Resources and Services Administration Scholarships and Loans:  
<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/scholarshipsloans/index.html>  
Minority Nurse Scholarships:  
<http://minoritynurse.com/nursing-scholarships/>