Choosing the Right RN to BSN Program:

6 Critical Questions You Need to Ask
CHOOSING AN ONLINE PROVIDER FOR YOUR RN TO BSN

A number of traditional brick-and-mortar universities are now delivering their campus-based curriculum to the online learner, most even allowing the online student to walk in the graduation ceremony.

As you begin to consider the programs and choices that are at your disposal, it is important to ask several critical questions regarding the features and limitations of each RN to BSN program. Then, based on the answers you receive, decide which program best fits your personal goals for career growth and helps define the type of nurse you aspire to be. We’ll elaborate on these questions below.

As you conduct your research, please use the chart at the end of this guide to compare programs side-by-side to determine which RN to BSN program is best for you.

6 Questions to Ask Before Choosing A BSN Program

Now we’ll detail the six questions to ask of online RN to BSN degree completion programs when choosing which program best suits your needs.

What Do I Need to Qualify for the Program?

Requirements are the items that each school uses to determine your eligibility for attendance in their program. These are minimum requirements that you must have completed prior to being accepted into their respective program. Most programs will have a few basic core requirements such as:

• Nursing diploma or AA degree from an accredited nursing program
• Active US registered nurse license
• Minimum GPA requirement

All programs vary greatly in the number of requirements they will seek for potential admittance. Some will boast “easy entry” while others maintain a strict body of requirements geared to restrict the number of students applying for the program. In most cases, an institution that has greater requirements is typically one that maintains a higher standard for their students than one that does not.

Another consideration is the type of students the program attracts. Shared learning through an online community means that you will have an opportunity to learn from others during your experience. Choosing a school where the learning desires and outcomes are consistent between you and your classmates can make a significant difference in your overall education.
What is the Program’s Reputation?

The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) is the accrediting body for nursing colleges and departments. Choosing a program that has been CCNE accredited ensures that the program you’ve chosen for your degree meets the minimum quality standards. Considerations such as the educational level of the faculty, student-to-faculty ratio and assessment standards are used to determine a program’s qualification for CCNE accreditation.

Often, programs don’t just meet minimum standards for accreditation – they exceed them. This is especially common in programs that are widely recognized as programs of excellence. Earning an education from a school with an excellent reputation can lead to recognition by potential employers, as it can instantly separate you from the crowd.

Accreditation and other distinctions that come with highly regarded programs can be especially important if you plan on earning a higher degree in nursing such as an MSN degree.

How Quickly Can I Complete the Program?

Whether or not a program is “quick to finish” should not be a major factor. While it is well recognized that the RN to BSN degree completion program is an in-demand path for many students due to employer requirements, where you decide to go for that education is something that will be reflective of you throughout your career. Another point to consider is the length of time you must wait to begin the program. Some RN to BSN programs have several start times per year, even as often as every eight weeks, making for shorter wait times. While a number of programs offer an easier or quicker way to complete your BSN degree, you must remember to be cautious to select the program that best represents your nursing career path and the program that will best help you achieve your goals.
What Will the Program Actually Cost?

As you probably know already, not all programs are priced equally. Some give the impression of being less expensive by offering a lower rate per credit hour, but in the long run, they require more credit hours for completion or charge additional hidden fees. Others can be confusing when you draw a comparison with quarter hour credits versus those with semester credits. It is important that you understand how the institutions you are considering are pricing your education. However, do not rely on “Per Credit Hour” rates alone, but be sure to compare the total cost of each program. Also take into account any grants or scholarships institutions may offer to help alleviate some of these costs. Calculate them through their individual pricing models all the way to the end so that you are making a more direct comparison. Sometimes you will find a program that will be able to extend a scholarship opportunity or help you locate some other types of financial assistance such as available loan sources, grant programs or employer tuition reimbursement.

Getting What You Pay For

Of utmost importance is evaluating the cost versus value/benefit. Most RN to BSN programs are priced in relation to their overall value offering. Some online schools possess the same resources available to campus-based programs including writing labs, tutoring and library services. Still others may offer a career track or the option to progress on to an MSN or DNP. Therefore, price typically indicates the type of program and resources that are being offered when compared to similar programs of the same quality. Keep in mind, private university programs are frequently more costly than their public university counterparts because state governments pay for most of the cost of operating public universities. This influx of public money is why tuition is lower at a public university. Class size is another major difference. Private universities keep classes small with easy access to professors.
Is the Program Worth the Cost?

The value of an educational provider is probably the single most important factor in choosing your nursing education.

Ask yourself questions about the value that is offered by one university over another: Is one more credible than the other? Can they deliver the same quality of education? What does their curriculum look like? Beyond watching online videos, is there an asynchronous interaction that occurs in the program? How are the online communications integrated, and what does their learning platform allow the student to do?

Understanding the quality of the instructors is a very good idea as well. Evaluating the faculty’s reputation, core values and academic backgrounds can provide you a significant insight into the value of a program. Often a university will make faculty available for Q/A from prospective students via online information sessions, email communications or open house.

Value can also be determined by speaking with the alumni of a program. Alumni can give a first-hand account of what you can expect, including the program’s rigor as well as what you will be able to take with you when you are finished. They may also be able to give you tips and pointers on how to approach the program and how the workforce may receive you after your graduation from that program.
Where Will I Perform My Clinicals?

Your clinical rotations are essential to your overall learning experience in nursing school. This is where you take the theories and concepts learned in the classroom and apply them to actual patient care. It is important to keep in mind where your clinicals will be taking place and how long each rotation will last. If travel is not an option for you, look for programs that allow you to complete your clinicals locally. Every school that offers an RN to BSN degree varies by curriculum. Some programs take a less intensive approach when it comes to the clinical hours while others are much more strenuous.

One overlooked part of any clinical experience is the value in networking opportunities. Where you go to complete your clinical rotations and who you meet there can help you achieve your professional goals. While deciding what nursing school is right for you, check to see if your program has specific clinical affiliations. Many online RN to BSN degree completion programs will help you establish clinical affiliations with hospitals in your area, perhaps even with one where you are currently employed. All accredited nursing schools have a clinical requirement to help you gain the experience in a specialization that fits you and where you want to go in your career.

Deciding on the Right Program for You

On the following page is a chart to help you determine the differences between Jacksonville University and other programs you may be considering.

An empty column has been provided on the right side of the chart. Answer each question regarding the program under consideration as accurately as possible for best comparison results.

Please note: This chart is a high-level overview of program features and benefits and intended for quick reference only.
# What Do I Need to Qualify for the Program?

- Graduated from a state-approved Associate's Degree in Nursing (AND) or Diploma nursing program
- Must have earned a “C” or better in general education courses where transfer credit is requested
- Required to have an active U.S. registered nurse license; licensure in the State of Florida is not required
- If applicant earned an Associate of Arts (AA) from a regionally accredited college or university, up to 60 general education course credits can be awarded, plus 30 credits for an active RN license
- Those who earned an AS, AAS or diploma may also apply

# What is the Program’s Reputation?

- Accredited by CCNE and the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- U.S. News & World Report has repeatedly named Jacksonville as one of America’s best colleges
- Recipients of awards from the Carnegie Foundation, Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, and American Council on Education
- Nearly 3,000 students have graduated since 2001
- Leader in online nursing education for over 10 years
- As of 2014, nursing graduates had a 96.72% passing rate on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN®). The Florida NCLEX-RN pass rate is 77.47% to date for 2014

# How Quickly Can I Complete the Program?

- As quickly as 10 months*
- Classes start every 8 weeks

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*If a student has an AA and all the BSN core courses, they can complete it in 10 months (2 courses a term for 6 eight-week terms) and if prerequisites are satisfied at the time of enrollment.
### 4 What Will the Program Actually Cost?

- $485 per credit hour
- Books and materials
- No hidden fees
- Scholarships are available to students

### 5 Is the Program Worth the Cost?

**Key Features/Benefits**

- Online video (recorded sessions)
- Flexible live instruction (though online interaction)
- MP3 and MP4 downloads
- Mobile classroom
- Success coach assigned to each student
- Network with classmates using popular social networking sites
- Receive faculty assistance via live chat, VOIP, email, and discussion boards
- Same curriculum as ground-based school
- Highly respected educators with doctoral degrees – many of the same professors who teach ground-based nursing programs
- Enrolled directly with university
- May participate in commencement
- Can receive convocation honors
- Can apply for the Jacksonville University Online RN to BSN Honor Scholarship
- Access to writing labs, library resources and tutoring

### 6 Where Will I Perform My Clinicals?

- Clinical experience a.k.a. practice project (NUR 456) completed with student’s choice of project and preceptor
- Can be done in student’s hometown