

***Fact Sheet:***

**Accelerated Baccalaureate and Master's Degrees in Nursing**

With the U.S. Department of Labor projecting the need for more than one million new and replacement registered nurses by 2016, nursing schools around the country are exploring creative ways to increase capacity and reach new student populations. One innovative approach to nursing education that is gaining momentum is the accelerated degree program for non-nursing graduates. Offered at the baccalaureate and master's degree levels, these programs build on previous learning experiences and provide a way for individuals with undergraduate degrees in other disciplines to transition into nursing.

**Program Basics**

- Accelerated baccalaureate programs offer the quickest route to licensure as a registered nurse (RN) for adults who have already completed a bachelor's or graduate degree in a non-nursing discipline.
- Fast-track baccalaureate programs take between 11 and 18 months to complete, including prerequisites. Fast-track master's degree programs generally take about 3 years to complete.
- Accelerated nursing programs are available in 43 states plus the District of Columbia and Guam. In 2008, there were 218 accelerated baccalaureate programs and 57 accelerated master's programs available at nursing schools nationwide. In addition, 26 new accelerated baccalaureate programs are in the planning stages, and 7 new accelerated master's programs are also taking shape. For a list of accelerated nursing programs, see <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/APLIST.PDF>.

**Fast-Track Nursing Education**

- Accelerated baccalaureate programs accomplish programmatic objectives in a short time by building on previous learning experiences. Instruction is intense with courses offered full-time with no breaks between sessions. Students receive the same number of clinical hours as their counterparts in traditional entry-level nursing programs.
- Admission standards for accelerated programs are high with programs typically requiring a minimum of a 3.0 GPA and a thorough prescreening process. Identifying students who will flourish in this environment is a priority for administrators. Students enrolled in accelerated programs are encouraged NOT to work given the rigor associated with completing degree requirements.
- Accelerated baccalaureate and master's programs in nursing are appropriately geared to individuals who have already proven their ability to succeed at a senior college or university. Having already completed a bachelor's degree, many second-degree students are attracted to the fast-track master's program as the natural next step in their higher education.

## **Accelerated Program Graduates**

- The typical second-degree nursing student is motivated, older, and has higher academic expectations than traditional entry-level nursing students. Accelerated students excel in class and are eager to gain clinical experiences. Faculty find them to be excellent learners who are not afraid to challenge their instructors.
- Graduates of accelerated programs are prized by nurse employers who value the many layers of skill and education these graduates bring to the workplace. Employers report that these graduates are more mature, possess strong clinical skills, and are quick studies on the job.
- AACN's 2008 survey found that 11,018 students were enrolled in accelerated baccalaureate programs, up from 9,938, 8,493, 7,829 and 6,090 students in 2007, 2006, 2005 and 2004, respectively. The number of program graduates has also increased with 6,870 graduates in 2008 as compared to 5,881, 5,232, 3,769 and 2,422 graduates in 2007, 2006, 2005 and 2004, respectively. In accelerated master's degree nursing programs, 4,577 students were enrolled and 1,177 students graduated in 2008. By comparison, in 2007, there were 4,303 students enrolled and 1,032 graduates from these programs.
- Given their experience and level of educational achievement, many graduates of accelerated master's programs are being encouraged to pursue roles as nurse educators to help stem the growing shortage of nurse faculty.

## **Supporting Accelerated Programs**

- Financial aid for students enrolled in accelerated baccalaureate and master's programs in nursing is limited. Many practice settings are partnering with schools and offering tuition repayment to graduates as a mechanism to recruit highly qualified nurses.
- Hospitals, health care systems, and other practice settings are encouraged to form partnerships with schools offering accelerated programs to remove the student's financial burden in exchange for a steady stream of new nurse recruits. Nurse employers including Tenet Healthcare, Carondelet Health Network, University of Missouri Health Care, North Carolina Baptist Hospital, Duke University Health System, and many others are actively supporting the development and growth of accelerated baccalaureate programs in nursing.
- Legislators on the state and federal levels are encouraged to increase scholarship and grant funding for these programs that produce entry-level nurses faster than any other basic nursing education program. These programs are ideal career transition vehicles for those segments of the labor force impacted by fluctuations in the economy.

**For more information on accelerated nursing degrees, including a list of schools offering this type of program, see <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Publications/issues/Aug02.htm>.**

## Research on Accelerated Nursing Programs

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