

SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES (SHS) SIMMONS COLLEGE

Thank you for your interest in the nursing profession and **graduate** nursing programs at Simmons College. This document has **two purposes**: 1. to provide a general overview of the nursing profession, trends, types of nursing credentials and educational pathways, and which nursing degree might be appropriate for you. 2. to provide specific highlights about the Simmons graduate nursing programs.

Carefully review this information and our website (www.simmons.edu/shs) before seeking further details. Since SHS offers many programs, and each has different application deadline dates, be certain to read SHS Degrees at a Glance located in the upper right-end corner of the page in the link below to determine the program for you and when you must submit materials.

<http://www.simmons.edu/shs/docs/SHSDegreesataGlanceAug2808.pdf>

Information about the Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) or options for adult students (24 years or older) at the undergraduate level (Dorothea Dix Scholars-for women seeking a first or second bachelor's degree via the 18 month option) or the two or three year bachelor's degree options at Simmons, is available through the Office of Undergraduate Admission at 617-521-2051 or ugadm@simmons.edu. **Simmons College is an all-female institution at the undergraduate level. The Office of Admission for the School of Health Sciences (SHS) administers the application process for graduate programs. (M.S., Doctorate). SHS is coeducational.**

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SIMMONS GRADUATE NURSING PROGRAM

- Simmons has offered professional preparation in the nursing profession for over 100 years; the first nursing student graduated in 1907.
- Nursing faculty are teachers, practitioners, mentors, advisors, and researchers.
- Graduate students complete clinical rotations in a variety of settings (over 200 sites available) affording great opportunities to learn about the range of health care specialties. Students are prepared in a strong generalist manner and will be prepared to provide care as family nurse practitioners after graduation. Students can opt for specialty rotations with advisement and support of faculty.
- **The ratio of student/clinical instructor is 6:1.** The Massachusetts Board of Registration in Nursing mandates a maximum ratio of 1 faculty to 10 students
- First-time pass rate for the NCLEX¹ (national licensing exam to be qualified as a R.N., registered nurse) is nearly 100% -undoubtedly due to the quality of clinical rotations, close faculty mentoring, and a timely review course just before the NCLEX is taken.
- Graduate students complete research projects which can be used as a transition to future work. The research portion is being revised to enable a student to more seamlessly move to the DNP (see below).
- First-time pass rate on N.P. exam (Nurse Practitioner) is 100%.
- The master's nursing programs will prepare students for a variety of specialties and settings. Simmons M.S. will prepare graduates for an array of roles. Our graduates are presently working as NPs in academic and community clinical settings, as faculty, researchers, policy analysts and advocates and administrators. Our graduates do great things. Some of our alums own their own practices, serve the most vulnerable in homeless clinics and in nursing homes and care for the most critically ill in intensive care units. We are everywhere and we answer the need for quality healthcare wherever patients need us.
- The role is broad and the possibilities boundless with a Simmons M.S.

¹ This NCLEX examination, and another one for Practical Nurses, were both developed by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN).

LEVELS/TYPES OF NURSING CREDENTIALS

Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) – Academic preparation and clinical experience last about one year. Applicants can enter from high school, and can take courses at technical or vocational schools, or in community colleges. Most LPNs provide basic bedside care. They administer prescribed medications and therapies. They are entry level direct care nurses who practice under a registered nurse. See U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos102.htm> LPNs are required to take the NCLEX examination for Practical Nurses. That examination is then used by state boards of nursing to assist in making licensure decisions. See <https://www.nesbn.org/245.htm>. This credential only allows for very basic responsibilities. **Simmons College does not offer this credential.**

Registered Nurses (R.N.s) – To become RNs, high school graduates can earn associate degrees in two-year nursing programs in community colleges; or they can earn diplomas in three-year programs offered by hospitals. The availability of such programs varies by regions of the country. Additionally, individuals can earn a bachelor of science in nursing degree (B.S.N.). B.S.N. programs usually take four years to complete and combine liberal arts courses with a scientific and technical track. All programs include patient care experience. The B.S.N. incorporates the foundation of liberal arts into the curriculum. Students are required to problem solve, to creatively think through the issues facing their patients. The BSN nurse needs to understand the system within which he/she provides care to be certain the patient receives high quality care. Those who have completed an approved program are eligible to take the national written licensing exam, which is administered by each state. All states require licensing. See <http://careers.stateuniversity.com/pages/496/Registered-Nurse.html>. Simmons College offers an 18 month program for individuals with a prior degree after completing pre-requisites, as well as 2 and 3 yr part-time options. We also have a traditional undergraduate BSN program. **Simmons College offers a B.S.N. program via the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS); application and information can be obtained by contacting the Office of Undergraduate Admission at 617-521-2051 or ugadm@simmons.edu.**

Advanced Practice Nurses – Some R.N.s choose to become Advanced Practice Nurses. There are four categories of such nurses: nurse-practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, Certified Nurse Midwives, and Certified Registered Nurse-Anesthetists. See <http://careers.stateuniversity.com/pages/496/Registered-Nurse.html> **Simmons College through the School of Health Sciences (SHS) offers a program leading to nurse practitioner. See details below.**

Nurse Practitioners (N.P.s) – Nurse Practitioners hold a master's degree in advanced practice nursing. They have earned N.P. status by successfully passing the national N.P. exam. The N.P. provides extensive patient care based on his/her specialty area of practice. N.P.s assess patients by completing a history and physical exam and by ordering appropriate diagnostic tests. After assessing this data, N.P.s can prescribe medications and other interventions such as physical therapy or a referral to a specialist. If you have wondered about how the role of the physician assistant differs from the N.P., there are a few notable considerations. The primary difference between the role of the N.P. and the P.A. is one of independence and autonomy: the P.A. works under a physician's license whereas N.P.s have their own license. The scope of practice is regulated by each state's Board of Nursing. Many states permit autonomous practice while some require collaboration with M.D.s. **SHS offers M.S. programs which provide the foundation for N.P. status.**

EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION FOR NURSING

Bachelor's Degree Programs (including Simmons)

Educational preparation for nursing varies by the type of position desired, the nature of the specialty, and the health care setting. Nurse training (the former accepted term used in hospitals) was initially provided in hospitals, which awarded diplomas or certificates before the profession transitioned to an educational pathway in colleges and universities.

While hospitals still offer short-term seminars in certain areas specific to their setting, the most common pathway now for nurse preparation is the completion of a formal degree-granting program.

The educational path to become a registered nurse (R.N.) is via an associate's or bachelor's degree and the successful passing of an examination developed by the National Council of Licensure Examination (NCLEX) – the NCLEX examination for Registered Nurses (R.N.).

Individuals interested in earning a B.S.N. (which provides the foundation for students to take the R.N.-registered nurse-licensing exam) would apply either to an undergraduate program from high school or as a transfer student from one college/university to another. At Simmons, there are various options (mentioned above) to do this. **Information about the B.S.N. is available at the Office of Undergraduate Admission (617-521-2051) or at ugadm@simmons.edu** Simmons does not offer associate degrees.

For individuals who already have a bachelor's degree in a discipline other than nursing, some institutions now offer such candidates the option of a second bachelor's degree, which is a "fast-tracked" or "accelerated" degree after 12-18 months of study depending on the individual's prior degree of preparation AND the institution's general academic requirements – (for example, a required liberal arts core). Such "fast-tracked" second-degree students can then become R.N.s if they pass the NCLEX-RN exam. As indicated above, at the undergraduate level, **Simmons offers a few these options; information can be obtained by contacting the Office of Undergraduate Admission at 617-521-2051 or ugadm@simmons.edu**.

Master's Degrees Programs (including Simmons)

At the graduate level in nursing (master's degrees, post-master's certificates and doctoral degrees) there are several pathways, depending on a student's prior educational background; every college or university offers different programs and tracks (concentrations). Nearly all graduate nursing programs require a research project as part of the graduate curriculum which demonstrates the student's ability to complete scholarly work of publishable quality.

This fact sheet addresses these programs, but not specific tracks, which are numerous, and include adult primary health care (with additional focus on gerontology or occupational health), parent-child primary health care (with further concentrations such as special needs, school health) or family primary health care.

Common MS Pathways and Application Criteria (including Simmons)

R.N. to M.S. – For individuals who have diplomas or certificates from the former hospital system, or an associate’s degree and a R.N. license. Candidates for this entryway must possess a current R.N. license in the state of the institution to which they wish to apply, and work experience in a health care setting. Some universities and colleges require a certain number of years of work experience in order to apply to a master’s program. Recent completion of courses in statistics and health assessment and standardized test scores usually are required. **At Simmons, the GRE is not required but statistics and a health assessment course are required (within 10 years prior to the application deadline) to apply to all graduate nursing programs; TOEFL is required for non-native speakers of English, who did not earn a bachelor’s or master’s degree at a regionally accredited U.S. post-secondary institution. Moreover, if the candidate earned an associate’s degree in the U.S., the institution must have been accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.**

Since most applicants to this pathway have been working as R.N.s, the most important factors considered for admission are the candidate’s prior academic preparation, work experience, and the quality of the recommendations. However, the emphasis can vary by program and institution; some institutions place more emphasis on test scores and prior academic performance. A common expectation is that applicants have a 3.0 G.P.A. in prior nursing courses as well as in the overall undergraduate record. In addition, institutions look for indications that the candidate can write and communicate clearly – including in shorthand due to the pace of work environments! **At Simmons, a 3.0 G.P.A. in nursing courses and the overall G.P.A. is required; work experience and relevant references are very important.**

B.S.N. to M.S. – For individuals with bachelor’s degrees in nursing and a R.N. license. Applicants must hold a bachelor’s degree in nursing from a regionally accredited U.S. college or university, and a current R.N. license in the state of the institution to which they wish to apply. **As is true for the R.N. to M.S. route indicated above, a recent course in statistics (within 10 years prior to the application deadline) is required at Simmons. At Simmons, GRE is not required and TOEFL is only required for non-native speakers of English, who did not earn a bachelor’s or master’s degree from a regionally accredited U.S. post-secondary institution. The application and admission criteria are the same as indicated above for the R.N. to M.S. route.**

B.S. /B.A. to M.S. (DIRECT ENTRY) -- For individuals with a bachelor’s degree in a discipline other than nursing. This is the most popular and fastest growing program to prepare for masters degreed nursing. This program has no common name; indeed, each university or college refers to it differently: **direct entry nursing, accelerated nursing, or generic master’s nursing.** The first portion of such a master’s program prepares the student in basic nursing knowledge and skills in order to take the NCLEX (R.N.) exam.

The DE (Direct Entry) program at Simmons is offered through SHS; upon successful completion of the program, students “directly enter” the nursing profession. It is important to note that some institutions offer both the B.S.N. and M.S. degrees upon completion of the requisite curriculum, while others only offer the M.S. This variation in practice is determined by institutional policy. **Simmons College offers a M.S. not a B.S.N. upon completion of the Direct Entry nursing program since Simmons is an all female institution at the undergraduate level (and thus, males cannot be awarded a BS degree) but SHS is coeducational at the graduate nursing level.**

The key difference in the second bachelor's in nursing or accelerated bachelor's degree and the direct entry master's degree is that while both degree programs provide a path to the R.N., only the master's program provides the foundation/qualifications for N.P. (Nurse Practitioner) status.

Nationwide, admission has become very competitive for Direct Entry type graduate nursing program due to limitations in faculty size and clinical rotation sites. Boston area nursing programs have experienced a significant increase in applications over the past four years – in some cases, 400 applications for 30 places.

Typically, such nursing programs require 2-3 years of full-time study, and longer if the student decides to reduce enrollment to part-time after taking the R.N. exam. Essentially, this type of program condenses the theoretical foundation and clinical experience achieved by individuals who followed a nursing curriculum (four years for a B.S.N. and two years for the M.S.) into three years for someone with no prior nursing focus.

The Direct Entry (DE) program at Simmons always begins each year in late June/early July and not in September or January. The first 18 months of the DE program requires full-time enrollment; the program can be completed on a full-time basis in 3 years (94 credit hours). After the first 18 months, students will take the R.N. exam, if successful (we have had a 100% first-time pass rate) will then be able to work. Some students choose to work and finish the program on a part-time basis, after earning the R.N., which lengthens the duration of the program but provides invaluable practical experience.

Applicants must hold a bachelor's degree in any academic discipline other than nursing from a regionally accredited U.S. institution or postsecondary institution abroad which is recognized by the Ministry of Education in the home country. No specific undergraduate major is required. The beauty of this type of program is that students bring a wide variety of prior academic foundations, skill sets, and experiences: ranging from undergraduate degrees in business administration to theater, Peace Corp experience, or working as a research technician.

Most, but not all institutions require certain prerequisite courses in order to apply to this program. Again, each institution has different requirements; there is no single set of required courses for all colleges offering this option.

VERY IMPORTANT: SHS requires a series of prerequisite courses (which must be completed within ten years prior to the application deadline) at a regionally accredited U.S. college/university; audit/pass/fail grades, IB, AP or CLEP scores/courses do not fulfill these requirements. It is also important to know that if courses were offered on a quarter system, two quarters of any one course may be needed to equate to a semester system. SHS cannot review individual transcripts to determine if the appropriate courses have been completed due to the difficulty in determining equivalencies based only on course titles. If you have concerns about a particular course that you have taken or wish to take at another institution, you must submit a course syllabus (course content, textbook used, assignments, course duration; please do not send a description which only provides a general overview of the course). Allow 10-15 business days for this evaluation. Requests for an evaluation for a course you wish to reenroll in within a few days cannot be honored. SHS does not evaluate prerequisite courses for admission to any undergraduate nursing programs, specifically the accelerated 18 month or B.S.N. programs. To determine if your courses fulfill our graduate requirements, contact the SHS Office of Admission at 617-521-2605, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., eastern standard time.

GRE is not required as part of the application process. TOEFL is required for applicants whose first language is not English and who did not graduate at the bachelor's or master's level from a regionally accredited U.S. college or university or a post secondary institution abroad which is recognized by the Ministry of Education in the host country in English-speaking countries only. TOEFL scores must be within 2 years prior to the application deadline. The Simmons TOEFL code is 3761.

Prerequisite courses for the DE program and the undergraduate nursing programs are not the same—the undergraduate nursing requirements also include certain “core” courses as part of the undergraduate “modes,” necessary for the receipt of all bachelor's degrees at Simmons College. In other words, at the undergraduate level, other courses may be required before taking the prerequisites. Contact the Office of Undergraduate Admission concerning this issue at 617-521-2051 or ugadm@simmons.edu.

Direct Entry (DE) prerequisites:

- One year of human anatomy and physiology with labs (equal to 2 semesters)
- One half-year of organic chemistry with a lab (equal to one semester)
- One half-year of inorganic chemistry with a lab (equal to one semester)
- One half-year of microbiology with a lab (equal to one semester)
- One half-year of statistics (equal to one semester)
- One half-year of developmental psychology: birth to death content (equal to one semester)

An individual may apply to the Simmons DE program having completed all prerequisite courses, is in the process of taking such courses or plans to take them in the summer prior to the first graduate nursing course in late June/early July. Final grades for all summer course **must** be received in the SHS Office of Admission no later August 1, if not taken at Simmons through SHS.

IMPORTANT: applicants are highly encouraged to take as many prerequisites before applying so that the Admission Committee can determine their foundation in science courses. Individuals may complete these courses at other regionally accredited post-secondary institutions. Before registering for such classes, it is important that students confirm with the SHS Office of Admission (617-521-2605, shs@simmons.edu) that course content meets our requirements. Course syllabi (not just descriptions) may be needed; 10-15 business days are needed to evaluate such courses.

Individuals may also take the prerequisite courses at Simmons in the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS). Such courses are offered during the day during the academic year. Interested individuals should contact the Office of Undergraduate Admission at 617-521-2052 or ugadm@simmons.edu about such courses.

Alternatively, students can apply to the DE program; receive provisional admission and take missing prerequisite courses in the summer via the intensive summer science cluster offered by SHS. **NOTE:** these are NOT the same undergraduate course offered through the undergraduate College of Arts & Sciences during the academic year, rather, specific courses designed for DE students. Under provisional admission, grades of “B” or better in remaining prerequisite courses are required in each course in order to proceed in the DE program. If not, offers of admission will be withdrawn, although students will be enrolled in the first graduate nursing course in the summer. It is due to this timing that SHS recommends that students complete as many prerequisites before applying for admission.

The DE program is the most competitive of all SHS programs. Applications are closely reviewed for a variety of factors. The expected prerequisite GPA and the overall GPA (for all colleges attended, including failed or repeated courses) is 3.0. See the SHS Admission Profile on the web site for information about the most recently accepted DE class at <http://www.simmons.edu/shs/admission/profile.shtml>.

The DE nursing pathway is a professional program, so, it is important that recommenders are carefully selected. References should speak to the candidate's ability to handle rigorous graduate work and have the stamina/caring needed to assist individuals in medical need.

The academic quality and rigor of the institution(s) the applicant previously attended can also be a factor. Since leadership, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are important elements in becoming an effective advanced primary care nurse, there should be evidence of such attributes in the application. While paid or volunteer experience in a health care setting is not required at SHS, students who have these would have an advantage in the admission process.

Finally, while some programs require an interview before or during the application process, **SHS does not require an interview and unfortunately cannot accommodate every request for an individual informational interview with the one faculty member who is available to meet with students** (since interviews are not required, they would not be evaluative and will have no bearing on the admission decision). Students who do schedule an interview are strongly encouraged to review the SHS website before the interview. **Please call if it is impossible to keep the appointment. Due to the time required to schedule such interviews, if an individual does not appear for the appointed time or does not call in advance to cancel the interview, this will be noted in the student's application** Attendance at one of SHS campus information sessions is highly recommended. Register online at <http://www.simmons.edu/shs/admission/register.php>.

More information about the Direct Entry program and curriculum can be found at <http://www.simmons.edu/shs/nursing/degrees/de.html>.

The application deadline for the Direct Entry nursing program is February 1, for entry in the summer. All admission decisions will be sent as a group after the deadline date. There is no Early Decision or rolling decision option at SHS. **All application materials must be received in one envelope.**

The DE application can be found at <http://www.simmons.edu/shs/docs/DEApp20101Final.pdf>

Post-master's Degree Programs (including Simmons)

C.A.G.S. (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study) – This is a highly recognized educational credential for individuals who hold a master's degree in nursing. This program provides advanced course work and a practicum or internship in various specialty areas. **At Simmons, depending upon the applicant's certification and experience, the program credit hour requirement ranges from 18 to 31 credit hours; the program can be completed in 3 academic semesters on a part-time basis. Applicants must have a 3.0 G.P.A. in nursing courses and an overall G.P.A. of 3.0. GRE is not required. Interested individuals should apply to SHS for this program.**

Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) - Major professional nursing associations - the National League for Nursing, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, and the American Nurses Association – have expressed great concern about the lack of support for graduate-level nursing education. This failure to invest in Master’s and doctoral education for nurses has created a shortage of qualified nurse-educators to carry on nursing education at a high level for the next generation.

In 2004, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) presented a Roadmap for a new degree – a Doctor of Nursing Practice, or DNP. The AACN adopted a goal that such a program should be in place by 2015. This new degree, the DNP, is designed for people in clinical practice who will eventually transition to administration, organizational management and policy development. The program will prepare students with a blend of clinical, organizational, economic, and leadership skills.

While the Ph.D. and Doctor of Nursing Science (DNSc) are research-intensive, the DNP degree is practice-focused. The DNP graduate will seek leadership roles in health care organizations, legislative staff, and policy institutes. The DNP degree, in short, is intended to have a focus all its own; it will not replace the Ph.D., Ed.D. DNSc or the Master’s in nursing degree.

Rather, the DNP embodies a vision for the future of specialty nurse education; it represents a practice-focused doctoral education. The M.S. in nursing will probably transition to a degree for advanced generalists. The DNP is similar to the Pharm.D. and DPT (Doctor of Physical Therapy) which are professional level clinical degrees.

There are different entry points for the DNP. Candidates holding master’s degrees, follow individualized curriculums based on education, experience, and choice of specialization. A candidate who enters the program with a baccalaureate degree in nursing or another field will require a more comprehensive and longer program of study, including more clinical experiences.

The long-term benefits of acquiring specialized expertise and advanced skill sets via the DNP provide an advantage both to the student (who gains a wider range of opportunities for employment), and society (which gains a corps of nurses with a better understanding of our health care system, and how nursing can contribute to it).

At Simmons, the DNP is a post-masters program and is offered in hybrid format-online and campus attendance two week-ends each semester. Applicants should submit all application materials to SHS.

The focus of the Simmons DNP is professional practice leadership. The program will develop nursing leaders who will improve health care outcomes in clinical practice, research and management. **Applicants must have a M.S. in nursing or a related field with a 3.5 overall G.P.A. from a regionally accredited U.S. post-secondary institution. Applicants must have completed a statistics course with a grade of “B” or better. within 5 years prior to the application deadline. Additionally, applicants must have a current nursing license. A minimum of two years fulltime professional practice is required for applicants desiring advanced standing status. For the clinical research track, applicants must have board certification in an advanced practice specialty.**

FUTURE EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN NURSING

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos083.htm#outlook> nurses represent the largest segment of workers in the health care field. Employment in nursing is projected to grow “much faster than average,” i.e., by 27%, between 2004 and 2014. Indeed, “registered nurses are expected to create the second largest number of new jobs, in all occupations,” through 2014. This trend reflects changes in the population (aging); changes in technology (more advances which allow more illnesses to be treated); and, imminently, an anticipated number of retirements in both the clinical and educational settings. None of these trends is expected to change any time soon.

EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS IN NURSING

Employment options for all nursing specialties vary by employment setting, but in hospitals a significant need exists in oncology, geriatrics, rehabilitation, and outpatient surgery. To fill the large number of nursing vacancies, some hospitals (depending upon region) are offering signing bonuses, flexible work schedules, child care, and tuition reimbursement for further education. Additionally, many healthcare facilities offer online bidding to fill open shifts allowing nurses to fill open slots at premium wages.

Other employment sites for nursing include hospices, community clinics, physician offices, public health departments, government agencies, the military and acute care centers. Two other healthcare settings will share in the increase in employment opportunities: nursing care facilities and home health care.

A substantial increase is expected in employment in nursing homes, since an increasing number of elderly will require long-term care. Hospitals discharge patients as soon as possible because of financial or business constraints thus generating more admissions to nursing facilities. In particular, job growth is expected in units offering rehabilitation for patients with Alzheimer’s, stroke, and heart problems. Nursing jobs in home health care will also increase rapidly in response to consumer and health provider preference for care in the home, and advances that make it possible to implement and monitor more sophisticated treatments in the home.