

Employment of New Nurse Graduates and Employer Preferences for Baccalaureate-Prepared Nurses

In August 2021, AACN conducted its 12th online survey of nursing schools offering entry-level baccalaureate and master's programs in the U.S. to better assess the experience of new graduates in finding employment. For the 11th consecutive year, AACN asked schools to identify if employers in their region were requiring or preferring that new Registered Nurse (RN) hires have at least a baccalaureate degree in nursing. A brief online survey was developed to solicit information from 784 deans of nursing schools offering baccalaureate and/or graduate programs. A total of 645 valid responses were received, generating an 82.3% response rate.

The Employment of New Nurse Graduates

Regional reports suggest that some nursing school graduates are having difficulty finding employment, which prompted AACN to take action to quantify these claims. Two questions were asked in the August survey about the employment of new graduates from entry-level baccalaureate and master's programs:

- What percentage of 2020 graduates from your nursing programs had job offers at the time of graduation?
- What percentage of 2020 graduates from your nursing programs had job offers within 4-6 months after graduation?

Job Offers at Graduation

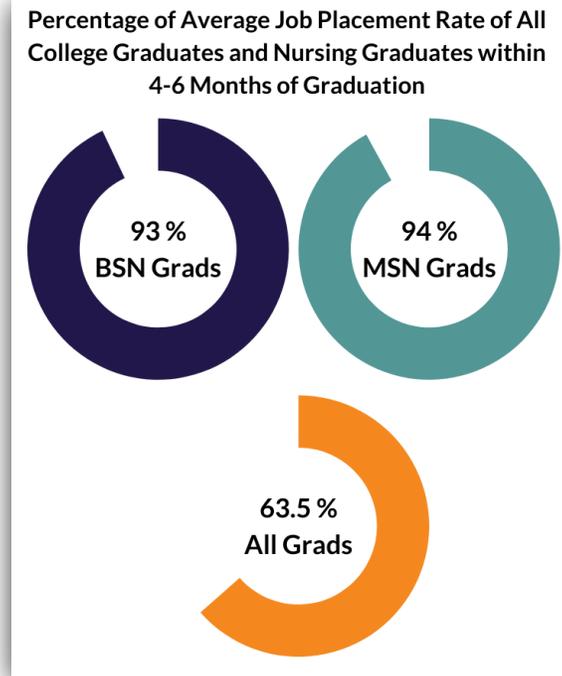
Of the 645 schools that responded to the survey, 556 (86.2%) reported having an entry-level baccalaureate program (BSN) and 78 (12.1%) had an entry-level master's program (MSN) for which employment data for new graduates were available. The survey found that the average job offer rate at the time of graduation was 76% for new BSN graduates and 75% for entry-level MSN graduates. By comparison, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) conducted a national survey of 529,000 new college graduates across disciplines in 2018 and found that 58.7% of new graduates had a job offer at the time of graduation.

Looking closer at the AACN data, the survey found little variation in the average rate of job offers at the time of graduation by institutional type (e.g. large vs. small school; public vs. private school; doctoral degree-granting vs. non-doctoral). However, there is some variability by region of the country. For new BSN graduates, the job offer rate for schools in the South is 84% followed by 78% in the Midwest, 66% in the North Atlantic, and 60% in the West. This rate is generally similar for entry-level MSN graduates: 78% in the South, 78% in the Midwest, 73% in the West, and 65% in the North Atlantic. These findings indicate that employment of new graduates from entry-level nursing programs is more challenging in different regions of the country.

Job Placement 4-6 Months After Graduation

With respect to job offers for new graduates 4–6 months after the completion of their programs, the survey found this rate to be 93% for entry-level BSN and 94% for MSN graduates. Once again, the survey found little variation based on school type and institutional characteristics. The job offer rate for BSN graduates did vary slightly by region, from, 94% in the South, 95% in the Midwest, 92% in the North Atlantic, and 86% in the West. For entry-level MSN program graduates, the job offer rate at 4-6 months post- graduation ranged from 93% in the South, 96% in the Midwest, 97% in the North Atlantic, and 89% in the West.

In a survey of 361 schools, NACE found that within 6 months of graduation, 63.5% of baccalaureate graduates from the Class of 2018 were employed part-time or full-time.



Employer Preference for New Nurses with Baccalaureate-Level Preparation

Again this year, AACN asked nursing schools if employers in their region were requiring or indicating a preference for hiring new nurses with a bachelor's degree in nursing. A significant body of research shows that nurses with baccalaureate level preparation are linked to better patient outcomes, including lower mortality and failure-to-rescue rates. With the Institute of Medicine (2010) calling for 80% of the nursing workforce to hold at least a bachelor's degree by 2020, moving to prepare nurses at this level has become a national priority.

Based on completed responses from 645 schools of nursing, 40.6% of hospitals and other healthcare settings are requiring new hires to have a bachelor's degree in nursing, while 77.4% of employers are expressing a strong preference for BSN program graduates.

Clearly, healthcare settings nationwide are seeing a difference in nursing practice based on the level of education and are making hiring decisions to enhance the quality of care available to patients. For more background information on this issue, see AACN's fact sheet on the Impact of Education on Nursing Practice, which may be downloaded at www.aacnnursing.org/news-information/fact-sheets/impact-of-education. Complete survey information and data tables are available to AACN member schools and stakeholders by contacting Data Coordinator Jenny Keyt at 202-463-6930, ext. 244 or jkeyt@aacnnursing.org.

References

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National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2019, October). *First Destinations for The College Class of 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2019/publication/free-report/first-destinations-for-the-class-of-2018.pdf>