

WHAT PROSPECTIVE

# NURSING STUDENTS

NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE AACN ESSENTIALS



American Association  
of Colleges of Nursing

*The Voice of Academic Nursing*

Preparing practice-ready nurses to thrive across all healthcare settings is a top priority for academic nursing. In April 2021, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) announced a new model and framework for preparing nurses, which is outlined in *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education*. This landmark document delineates the expected competencies of graduates from baccalaureate, master's, and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs using a competency-based approach to nursing education.



## WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION (CBE)?

AACN defines competency-based education as “a system of instruction, assessment, feedback, self-reflection, and academic reporting that is based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, self-perceptions, and skills expected of them as they progress through their education.”

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CBE?

- **Student-centered learning:** CBE puts you at the center of the learning process, making you responsible for your own education and development.
- **Inclusive education:** CBE promotes equity by catering to the diverse needs of learners from different backgrounds and with varying learning styles.
- **Individualized learning:** CBE uses focused feedback from multiple assessors and methods, helping you connect your learning experiences to your development as a nurse.
- **Clear expectations:** CBE clarifies faculty expectations regarding your development and performance, encouraging you to take responsibility for your own learning.
- **Real-world relevance:** CBE ties curriculum and coursework to life and professional expectations, preparing you for success in the nursing profession.
- **Enhanced faculty-student relationship:** CBE promotes a richer relationship between faculty and students, with faculty acting as coaches and mentors to support your growth.
- **Collaborative learning:** CBE fosters a collaborative community as you work with faculty and preceptors who share common goals and expectations for your development.
- **Practice-readiness:** CBE will help to ensure that you are practice-ready and able to transition smoothly into the workforce.
- **Personal growth:** CBE encourages internal motivation, collaboration, and continuous learning as you develop into a highly competent nursing professional.

## PROSPECTIVE STUDENT QUESTIONS

### What are the AACN Essentials, and how do they impact my nursing education?

The AACN *Essentials* are standards of nursing education that include a set of core competencies that every nursing graduate should possess. These competencies cover various aspects of nursing practice, including leadership, teamwork, communication, diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as addressing the latest healthcare trends, technologies, and patient needs.

### How do they ensure a high-quality nursing education that prepares me for the workforce?

The *Essentials* call for transitioning to competency-based education (CBE), which focuses on your ability to demonstrate specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This approach prepares you to be a practice-ready nurse, easing your transition into the profession.

### How do the Essentials address the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in both nursing education and the nursing profession?

The *Essentials* address DEI by promoting a culture that values and respects the uniqueness of each individual. Today's nursing curriculum encourages the development of cultural competence, understanding of social determinants of health, and the importance of addressing healthcare disparities. This focus prepares you to provide equitable care to diverse patient populations.

## PROSPECTIVE STUDENT QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

### How does this tie into my clinical experience?

CBE ensures that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes you acquire in the classroom are applied and developed further during your clinical rotations. This approach emphasizes hands-on experience in various healthcare settings to reinforce your learning and skill building.

### How will this best prepare me for practice?

CBE promotes the integration of theoretical knowledge and clinical experience, enhancing your critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities. As a result, you become a well-rounded, practice-ready nurse who can adapt to the dynamic and evolving healthcare environment.

### How can I prepare for this type of education?

To prepare for competency-based education, you may want to develop stronger time management and critical thinking skills, read the *AACN Essentials*, and embrace a growth mindset open to feedback. Ultimately, as a student, you are responsible for your learning, with faculty providing frequent and focused feedback and support.

### Will competency-based education change course offerings? Can this education be completed online?

CBE may not drastically change course offerings but will adapt teaching methods and assessments. Nursing programs may offer a mix of online and in-person experiences, with hands-on clinical components requiring in-person participation.

### How does the nursing curriculum integrate the latest healthcare trends, technologies, and patient needs to best prepare me for real-world nursing practice?

Curricula based on the *AACN Essentials* will develop the core competencies needed for you to thrive as a professional nurse. These competencies are regularly updated to address the changing healthcare landscape, emerging trends, and evolving patient needs. CBE also requires close academic-practice collaboration, which provides experiential learning and assessment methods that will best prepare you to provide care across settings with diverse populations.

### How will the incorporation of CBE in the curriculum benefit my learning experience and professional growth?

CBE puts you at the center of the learning process. CBE focuses on your ability to demonstrate specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills, fostering a more personalized and effective learning experience.

### Will competency-based education affect my preparation for the NCLEX licensing exam?

New nurse graduates with the competencies outlined in the *Essentials* will be well-prepared to sit for the Next Generation NCLEX exam. CBE better prepares graduates with the critical thinking and judgment skills needed to pass the licensing exam and succeed in the profession.





# THE ESSENTIALS

For more information on the *AACN Essentials*, strategies for engaging practice partners, and approaches to moving to CBE, visit:

[www.aacnnursing.org/Essentials](http://www.aacnnursing.org/Essentials)



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