What are the pathways to nursing?

WWU does NOT offer a traditional nursing major, but as a Western student you can pursue any bachelor’s degree while taking the necessary prerequisite courses for entry into a pre-licensure nursing program. Choose a major that best fits your goals and interests, while considering financial constraints.

The two most common paths to nursing school WWU students take are 1) pursuing a major at Western and graduating with a bachelor’s degree before transferring to a pre-licensure nursing program, or 2) completing only prerequisite courses here before transferring to a pre-licensure nursing program. Students may choose to seek their Registered Nurse (RN) credentials through completing an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), or a direct-entry Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) or Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Note that by 2020 it is recommended that 80% of all nurses hold a BSN degree.

Requirements for programs vary, so it is important to review the admissions information closely for schools you are interested in. The WA State Nursing Commission website has a list of approved programs available here: https://tinyurl.com/NursingPrograms. (As you are doing your research, note that “direct-entry” is a program designed for those without a nursing background or degree.

Core Courses

Prerequisites vary depending on whether you are applying to nursing school after completing a bachelor’s degree. Regardless of your major, prerequisite courses expected by most schools include

COMMUNICATIONS
- 5 credits English Composition (UW requires an additional writing intensive course)
- 5 credits Communications

QUANTITATIVE/SYMBOLIC REASONING
- 5 credits of statistics (MATH 240)

HUMANITIES & FINE ARTS (likely waived if you complete a bachelor’s degree)
- 10 credits of humanities (Sociology, Anthropology, etc).
- 15 credits of visual, literary and performing arts (history, music, literature, etc).

SOCIAL SCIENCES
- 5 credits of Introduction to Psychology (PSY 101)
- 5 credits of Lifespan Psychology (PSY 230)

NATURAL SCIENCES
- 5 credits of General Biology (BIOL 101 or BIOL 204/205)
- 5 credits of Microbiology (BIOL 245)
- 5 credits of Chemistry (CHEM 161)
- 5 credits of Organic Chemistry (CHEM 251)
- 10 credits of Anatomy & Physiology (BIO 348/349)
- 5 credits of Nutrition (HLED 350)

Keep informed
- WWU students may join the Advisor’s Pre-nursing Listserv. To join, e-mail Anna.Tognazzini@wwu.edu with the following SUBJECT information: Pre-nursing listserv, Last name, First name, WWU student number, and major (if declared).
- A list of nursing programs can be found here: www.aacn.nche.edu/students/nursing-program-search.
Notes

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP): Check with targeted schools whether they recognize AP as college-earned credit. Not all do. It is better to view any earned credits as qualifying to enroll in upper-division courses rather than as “testing out” of prerequisites.

DECLARING A MAJOR: Departments vary in how to declare majors. Behavioral Neuroscience, Biology, Chemistry, and others allow students to declare as a “pre-major” while taking their specified prerequisites. Some majors require a specific GPA in certain courses. Declare early, even as a “pre-major”, to help shorten your time to degree. While working on any pre-major content, explore many disciplines to keep your options open.

ACCESS TO CLASSES: High demand exists for upper-division courses, especially in the sciences. Many departments grant enrollment priority to students declared in specific majors over those seeking enrollment for professional school purposes. Registration access procedures for courses can change, and departments generally provide updates via their websites and email notifications, or by checking with the department’s program coordinator.

REPEATING/DROPPING COURSES: When you repeat a course, only your most recent grade is used when Western calculates your GPA. However, the class still shows up on your transcript. Although some students think that repeating a course will help them get into professional schools, this is almost always untrue. Medical schools will take into account ALL college-level coursework when performing their own calculation of your GPA, and this will include any courses you have repeated at Western. Still, in some circumstances it may be appropriate to repeat a course so talk to an advisor to be sure. Also, dropping a course can have an impact on eligibility for financial aid, scholarships, and athletic participation so consider your options carefully and speak with an advisor before making a decision.

SHADOWING: Students should gain shadowing experience with a nurse, and will likely need an RN to write a letter of recommendation. Discuss your shadowing options with Pre-healthcare advisors.

VOLUNTEERING/HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE: The more experience you have working with people in a healthcare setting the stronger your application will be (some programs require it). Becoming certified as a Nursing Assistant (CNA) is one way to show your commitment to nursing and allows you to work with patients before applying to nursing school.

Additional Resources

WWU Allied Health Advising: www.wwu.edu/alliedhealth
WWU Pre-health Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/wwuprehealth/
Association of Colleges of Nursing: www.aacn.nche.edu
Washington State Nursing Commission approved programs: https://tinyurl.com/NursingPrograms
Explore Health Careers: www.explorehealthcareers.org

Pre-Healthcare Advising Events

Typical programming events offered by Pre-Healthcare Advising include (but are not limited to):

Fall:
Health Professional & Grad School Info Fair, October 18 in MAC gym
Winter Registration Walk-in Advising: Nov 14 and Nov 15, 12-2 in BI 415

Winter:
Kaplan-sponsored practice GRE in late January/February
Spring Registration Walk-in Advising: Feb 27 and 28, 12-2 in BI 415

Spring:
The Healthcare Professional School Application: A session overviewing the process
Fall Registration Walk-in Advising: May 15 and 16, 12-2 in BI 415

This document is for preliminary advising purposes only. Contact Advising for Pre-Healthcare Professions for updates and changes.