



Review of Florida's Nursing Education Programs, 2016

at a glance

To address the nursing shortage in Florida, the 2009 Legislature modified how the Board of Nursing oversees nursing education programs. The intent of these modifications was to increase the number of nursing programs and qualified nurses in Florida.

Since the legislation took effect in July 2009, the number of nursing education programs has increased by 105%. Over time, not all programs have been able to meet the minimum average graduate licensure passage rate specified by law and some have been put on probation or terminated. These closures led to reductions between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years.

- The number of nursing student seats decreased by 16%.
- Enrollment in nursing programs decreased by 15%, with the greatest student decrease occurring in associate degree in nursing bridge programs.
- Nursing program retention rates increased 2%.
- The number of students graduating from nursing programs decreased by 12%.

To ensure program quality the law also requires that nursing education programs become accredited within five years of enrolling students; as of December 2016, 93 programs have achieved accreditation.

Most 2013-14 practical nursing program graduates (67%), associate degree graduates (80%), and bachelor's degree graduates (85%) were licensed and likely employed as a nurse in Florida in 2015.

Scope

The Legislature directed OPPAGA to conduct a series of annual reviews of the Board of Nursing's administration of the program approval and accountability processes for nursing programs through the year 2020.¹ This report addresses how nursing programs' capacity, enrollment, and student outcomes have changed since the previous academic year.² OPPAGA will issue a subsequent report on nursing licensure exam data for the 2016 calendar year, as this data was not available at the time of publication.³

Background

To ensure quality nursing practice, Ch. [464, Florida Statutes](#), establishes the Florida Board of Nursing and grants the board authority to adopt rules, discipline nurses who violate regulations, and approve and monitor nursing education programs.⁴ In 2009, the Legislature modified the processes for approving and terminating nursing education programs and specified these processes in statute.⁵

¹ Chapters [2009-168](#), [2010-37](#), and [2014-92](#), *Laws of Florida*.

² See prior related OPPAGA reports on OPPAGA's [website](#).

³ For more information, refer to *Approximately 42% of Nursing Programs Had Licensure Exam Passage Rates Below the Required Legislative Standard in 2015*, OPPAGA [Report No.16-05](#), July 2016.

⁴ New programs submit an application, fees, and supporting documents to the board office, which then reviews the application for any errors or

deficiencies. Upon the receipt of a complete application, board staff places the program's application on the Board of Nursing's agenda for approval. The board monitors approved nursing programs by reviewing their students' scores on the National Council of State Boards of Nursing's National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX).

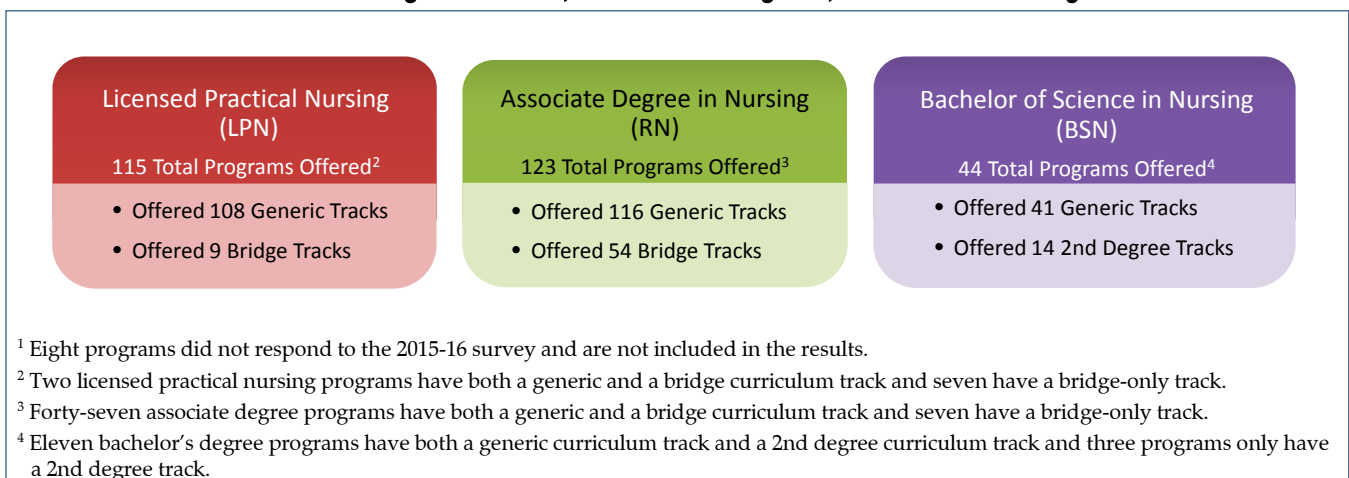
⁵ Chapter [2009-168](#), *Laws of Florida*.

The 2014 Legislature made additional revisions in Florida law related to nursing programs. For example, the revisions limited a program’s exam passage rate to only include first-time test takers within six months after graduation.⁶ They also required that nursing programs that enrolled students before July 1, 2014, be accredited by no later than July 2019 and all other programs to be accredited within five years after enrolling the first students.⁷ The 2014 law also allows the Florida Board of Nursing to extend a program’s probationary status for one additional year if the program demonstrates adequate progress toward the graduate passage rate goal by meeting a majority of the benchmarks established in the remediation plan.⁸

We surveyed 402 nursing education programs that were open at some point during academic year 2015-16 in Florida to obtain information on their programs for the 2015-16 academic year; 282 programs responded to our survey and had students enrolled.⁹ As shown in Exhibit 1, these included 115 programs that offered a licensed practical nursing certificate, 123 programs that offered an associate degree in nursing, and 44 programs that offered a bachelor’s degree in nursing. Many of these programs offered both a generic curriculum (also called a track) for students with no medical experience and a bridge curriculum, which is an expedited program for students with nursing licenses or previous medical experience.¹⁰

Exhibit 1

During the 2015-16 Academic Year, 282 Florida Nursing Education Programs That Responded to Our Survey Offered Licensed Practical Nursing Certificates, Associate’s Degrees, and Bachelor’s Degrees¹



Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs and analysis.

⁶ Previously, there was no requirement to only include graduates who took the exam within six months of their graduation date.

⁷ Programs must be accredited by a specialized nursing accrediting agency that is nationally recognized by the United States Secretary of Education.

⁸ The law requires approved nursing programs to have a minimum graduate licensure exam passage rate. If a program’s passage rate falls 10% below the national average for two consecutive calendar years, it is placed on probation, and must submit a remediation plan and increase its passage rate so that it equals or exceeds the required passage rate within the timeframes specified in s. 464.019 (5)(a)(3), *F.S.*

⁹ In the 2015-16 academic year, there were 402 open nursing programs, of which 78 had no student enrollment, 8 did not respond to our survey, and 35 nursing programs closed during the year and could not be reached to confirm whether they had any students enrolled during any part of the academic year. In addition, one program that was not open during academic year 2015-16 responded to our survey because it had graduates for that year.

¹⁰ Section [464.019, F.S.](#), does not differentiate between bridge and generic curriculum tracks. In addition, the Florida Board of Nursing does not make a distinction between generic, bridge, or accelerated tracks.

These nursing programs were offered by public school districts, Florida colleges, state universities, private institutions licensed by the Commission for Independent Education, and private institutions that are members of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF). In addition, state law authorizes Pensacola Christian College to offer a bachelor of science in nursing degree.¹¹

Findings

How many new nursing programs did the board approve, and how is the board monitoring programs?¹²

Since the 2009 law took effect, the Board of Nursing approved 303 new nursing programs. With approvals, terminations, and closures, the total number of nursing programs in the state has increased from 171 to 350 (105%) since 2009. In 2016, there were 42 nursing programs on probation and the board terminated 13 programs for failure to meet the statutory requirements.

Overall, the number of nursing programs has increased by 105% since the 2009 law took effect.¹³ As of December 2016, there were 350 open nursing programs statewide, compared to 171 open prior to July 2009.^{14, 15} This represents a 105% increase in the number of nursing education programs since the statutory changes took effect. However, the total number of programs between calendar years 2015 and 2016 decreased by 19 (369 to 350).

The Board of Nursing approved 303 programs since the 2009 law took effect. As shown in Exhibit 2, all but 20 of the programs that applied since the law took effect have been approved.

During calendar year 2016, the board considered 35 new nursing program applications and approved 34. The one program was denied because it lacked appropriate clinical training sites. Thirty of the 34 newly approved programs in 2016 were offered by private institutions licensed by the Commission for Independent Education, and 4 were offered by members of the ICUF.

¹¹ Section [1005.06\(1\)\(e\)](#), F.S.

¹² The answer to this question is based on all currently open programs (i.e., accredited, approved, or probationary) as of December 2016, which includes some programs that had no enrollment.

¹³ OPPAGA [Report No. 15-04](#) revised the method used to calculate the percentage increase of new nursing programs since the new law took effect. In addition, it revised information presented in Exhibit 2 to remove five programs that were duplicated. Therefore, these figures should not be compared to similar data

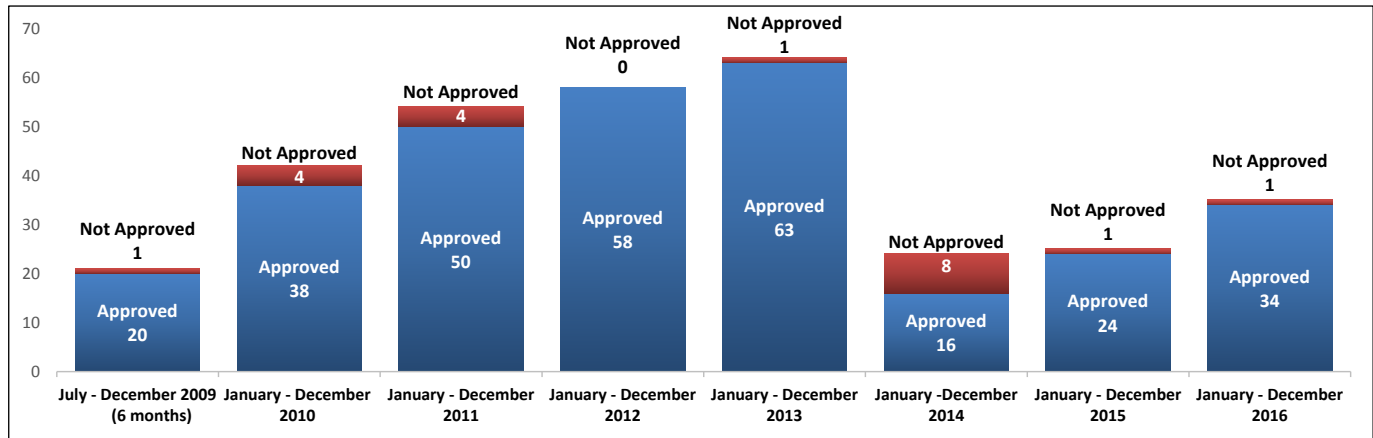
presented in OPPAGA reports published before 2015.

¹⁴ There were 171 open nursing education programs prior to the statutory changes. Of these, 27 were closed and 9 had been terminated as of December 2016, resulting in 135 programs open prior to the law taking effect that were still open at the end of 2016.

¹⁵ There were 303 nursing programs approved since the law took effect. As of December 2016, 21 of these programs have been terminated and 67 have closed voluntarily, resulting in 215 programs that were approved since the law took effect that were still open at the end of 2016.

Exhibit 2

Since the 2009 Law Took Effect, 303 of the 323 Nursing Programs That Applied Were Approved¹



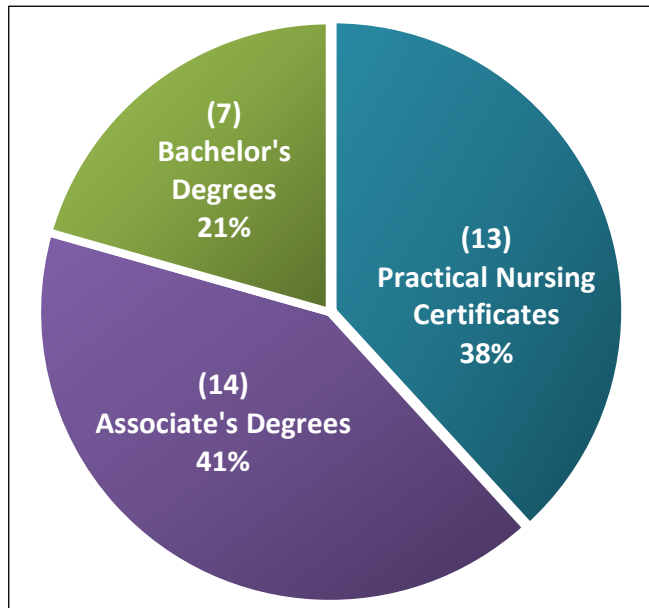
¹ Of the 303 programs approved since the statutory changes took effect, 88 were closed or terminated as of December 2016.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Board of Nursing data.

As shown in Exhibit 3, 7 of the new programs approved in 2016 award bachelor’s degrees, 14 award associate’s degrees, and 13 award practical nursing certificates.

Exhibit 3

The Board of Nursing Approved 34 Nursing Programs in 2016



Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Board of Nursing data.

Not all programs have been able to meet the minimum average graduate licensure passage rate specified by law and some have been put on probation or terminated. The law requires approved nursing programs to have a minimum average graduate licensure exam passage rate.¹⁶ If a program’s average passage rate falls 10 percentage points or more below the national average for two consecutive calendar years, it is placed on probation and must submit a corrective action plan. If a program fails to meet the statutory requirement after one year of probation, the board may terminate the program.¹⁷

¹⁶ Section 464.019, F.S.

¹⁷ In addition, the board now terminates programs that have no graduates who take the National Council Licensure Examination

in the calendar year that immediately follows their placement on probation. However, programs can appeal these termination decisions and request a one-year extension of probation.

During 2016, a total of 42 nursing programs were on probation (34 of these programs were created since 2009).¹⁸ Of these 42, 13 were placed on probation in 2016, 17 had been on probation in 2015, and 12 were on probation prior to 2015.¹⁹ Nine of the 42 on probation were subsequently terminated in 2016.

In total in 2016, the Board of Nursing terminated 13 programs and 37 nursing programs voluntarily closed, resulting in a total reduction of 50 nursing programs.²⁰ Twenty-two of the 50 programs were on probation immediately prior to termination or closing. Of the remaining programs, 12 had National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) passage rates that were below the national average in at least one of the past two years.

As of December 2016, 93 of the 350 nursing education programs in Florida were accredited. To improve program quality, the 2014 Legislature revised Florida law to require that all nursing education programs that enrolled students before July 1, 2014, be accredited by July 1, 2019; all other programs must be accredited within five years of first enrolling students.²¹ At the end of 2016, 93 nursing education programs had the accreditation required by Florida statutes: 40 bachelor's degree programs, 43 associate degree programs, and 10 practical nursing programs were accredited.

How have nursing programs' capacity, enrollment, and student outcomes changed since the prior year?

Reflecting the decline in nursing education programs, from 2014-15 to 2015-16, the number of seats available for qualified students and the number of students enrolled in the programs both decreased. During this period, student retention rates increased slightly and the number of students graduating from nursing programs decreased. Most graduates were licensed and likely employed as nurses in Florida, although the percentage employed varied by type of program.

The number of seats available in nursing education programs and the number of admitted students who subsequently enrolled both decreased. As shown in Exhibit 4, during the past academic year, from 2014-15 to 2015-16, the number of seats decreased by 8,404, or 16%.²² During this period there were decreases in all of the capacity measures, i.e., applications received, qualified applicants, students admitted and students admitted who enrolled. These decreases, shown in Exhibit 4, appear to be largely due to an increase in program closures and terminations and a subsequent decrease in the number of nursing programs.

¹⁸ Sixteen practical nursing programs, 25 associate degree in nursing programs and 1 bachelor degree in nursing were on probation at some time during calendar year 2016.

¹⁹ Twelve of the programs that were on probation prior to and during part of 2016 voluntarily closed in 2016.

²⁰ There were 13 programs placed on probation in 2016, of which 9 were on probation immediately prior to being terminated; and 4

were terminated for failure to submit their annual report to board.

²¹ Programs must be accredited by a specialized nursing accrediting agency that is nationally recognized by the United States Secretary of Education.

²² Florida law allows existing programs to increase their number of available seats without board approval.

Exhibit 4

Program Seats, Students Admitted, and Students Admitted Who Enrolled Decreased From 2014-15 to 2015-16¹

Capacity Measure	2013-14	2014-15 ²	2015-16	Percentage Change
				2014-15 to 2015-16
Seats	48,157	51,590	43,186	-16%
Applications Received	63,241	63,066	53,023	-16%
Qualified Applicants	42,468	42,014	37,214	-11%
Students Admitted	29,481	30,169	26,404	-12%
Students Admitted Who Enrolled	25,869	26,306	23,500	-11%

¹ Eight programs did not respond to the 2015-16 survey and are not included in the results.

² As part of the 2014-15 survey, programs were allowed to update their 2014-15 seats data. All other 2014-15 data is taken from last year’s report.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Exhibit 5

Total Student Enrollment in Nursing Programs Decreased Overall From 2014-15 to 2015-16

Curriculum Type	Enrollment ¹			Percentage Change
	2013-14	2014-15 ²	2015-16	2014-15 to 2015-16
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Generic	7,487	7,464	6,063	-19%
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Bridge	295	111	142	28%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Generic	20,603	21,567	17,611	-18%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Bridge	4,398	4,306	3,045	-29%
Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing – Generic	6,446	8,115	7,998	-1%
Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing – 2nd Degree	987	1,203	1,370	14%
Total	40,216	42,766	36,229	-15%

¹ Eight programs did not respond to the 2015-16 survey and are not included in the results.

² As part of the 2015-16 survey, some nursing programs updated enrollment numbers reported in 2014-15. All 2013-14 data is taken from last year’s report.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Total student enrollment in nursing programs decreased overall from 2014-15 to 2015-16. Since 2008-09, overall student enrollment in nursing education programs has increased by 54%. However, as shown in Exhibit 5, from 2014-15 to 2015-16 overall enrollment in the programs decreased by 6,537 students (-15%). This decrease is primarily due to program closures and terminations, with 38 fewer programs reporting enrollment in 2015-16 than in 2014-15. During this period, the bachelor’s 2nd degree experienced an increase in student enrollment of 167 students, or 14%.

In contrast, enrollment in each of the remaining four curriculum types declined. Student

enrollment in associate degree of nursing bridge programs had the largest decrease, from 4,306 students to 3,045 students (-29%). In addition, enrollment in the practical degree in nursing generic curriculum decreased by 19% and the associate degree in nursing generic curriculum decreased by 18%.

The total percentage of students retained in nursing programs increased slightly. Retention rates measure whether newly enrolled students persist in or complete their educational program a year later. We assessed retention in each type of nursing program using the cohort of students who entered the programs in calendar years 2014 and 2015.²³

²³ Nursing programs admit students throughout the year, with several programs admitting students multiple times per year. We

requested each nursing program to select a cohort of students for calendar years 2014 and 2015, and report to us the outcomes of these students over a one-year period.

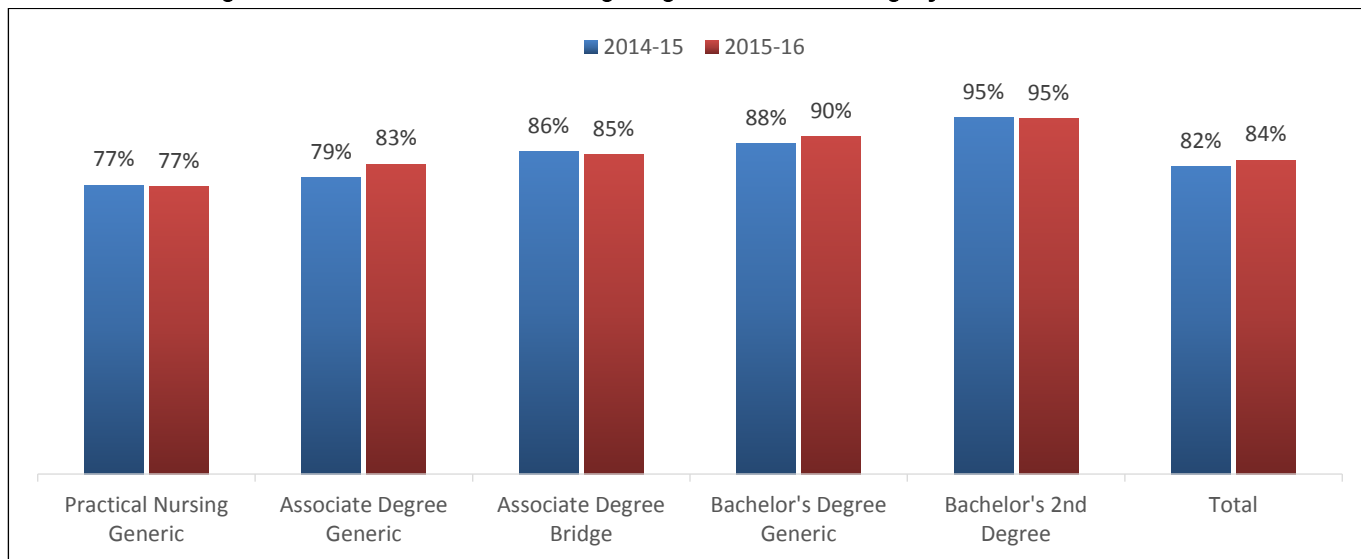
The resulting retention rates varied among program and curriculum types, with a slight increase overall. As shown in Exhibit 6, the one-year retention rates remained the same for two curriculum types—practical generic and bachelor’s 2nd degree curriculum—and increased in two curriculum types—associate degree

nursing generic programs (4%) and bachelor’s generic degree in nursing programs (2%).

The associate degree bridge program had a small decrease of 1%). Appendix A provides additional details on the retention rates for nursing programs.

Exhibit 6

The Total Percentage of Students Retained in Nursing Programs Increased Slightly in 2015-16^{1,2}



¹ Eight programs did not respond to the 2015-16 survey and are not included in the results.

² This data does not include the practical nursing (bridge curriculum) programs.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Overall, the number of students graduating from nursing programs decreased from 2014-15 to 2015-16. Lengths of time for completing nursing programs generally range from one to four years, depending on curriculum. For example, a licensed practical nursing program is a one-year program, the associate degree in nursing is a two-year program, and the bachelor’s degree in nursing is a four-year program.

Since 2008-09, the overall number of students graduating from nursing education programs has increased by 26%. However, as shown in Exhibit 7, from 2014-15 to 2015-16, the overall

number of nursing program graduates decreased by 12%.²⁴ The largest decrease, 19%, was experienced among practical nursing generic programs. The associate degree in nursing bridge programs decreased by 16%, the practical nursing bridge programs by almost 14%, and the associate degree in nursing generic programs had a 13% decrease. During this period, the number of students graduating did increase for two program types, with the largest percentage increase (16%) occurring among bachelor's 2nd degree programs.

²⁴ Other factors may affect the graduation rate of students. Factors

for which OPPAGA could not control includes students’ economic stability, cost of programs, and curriculum changes.

Exhibit 7

The Overall Number of Students Graduating From Nursing Programs Decreased From 2014-15 to 2015-16

Curriculum Type	Graduates ¹			Percentage Change
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2014-15 to 2015-16
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Generic	3,897	3,635	2,935	-19%
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Bridge	103	71	61	-14%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Generic	6,992	7,921	6,917	-13%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Bridge	2,368	2,009	1,697	-16%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – Generic	2,015	2,399	2,414	1%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – 2nd Degree	600	586	682	16%
Total	15,975	16,621	14,706	-12%

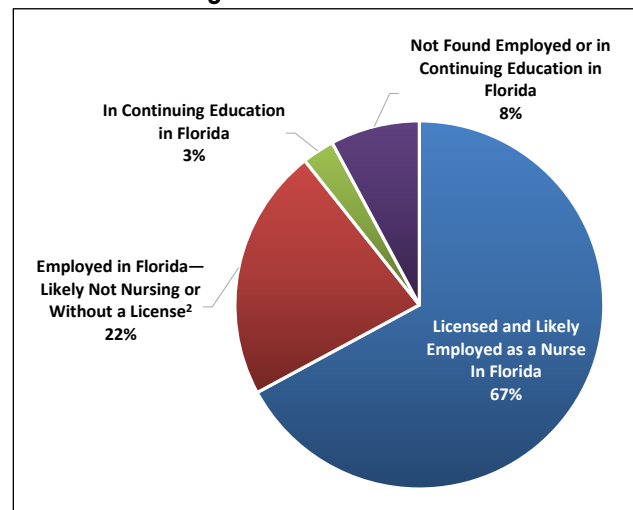
¹ Eight programs did not respond to the 2015-16 survey and are not included in the results.
 Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Most nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed as a nurse in Florida. The Legislature’s modifications to nursing education programs were intended to address the nursing shortage by increasing program capacity to graduate more nurses, in the hope that they would work in Florida. Most (78%) of 2013-14 nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed in Florida in nursing in 2015, with variation among practical (67%), associate degree (80%), and bachelor degree (85%) graduates. (See Appendix B for more detail on graduate employment.)

Most practical nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed as a nurse in Florida. As shown in Exhibit 8, we found that 67% of the 2013-14 practical nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed in a nursing-related field in 2015.^{25, 26} Approximately 22% of these graduates were employed in a field other than nursing or did not have an active nursing license, while 8% were not found employed in Florida. The remaining 3% of graduates were found enrolled in continuing education.

Exhibit 8

Most 2013-14 Graduates of Practical Nursing Programs Were Licensed and Likely Employed in Florida in Nursing-Related Fields in 2015¹



¹ The Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) data used in this analysis shows whether nurses were employed in a nursing-related industry in 2015 but did not specify that they were employed as nurses.

² Forty-four percent of these individuals with an LPN degree were employed in Florida in a health-related field but did not have a nursing license.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of data from the Florida Departments of Health and Education.

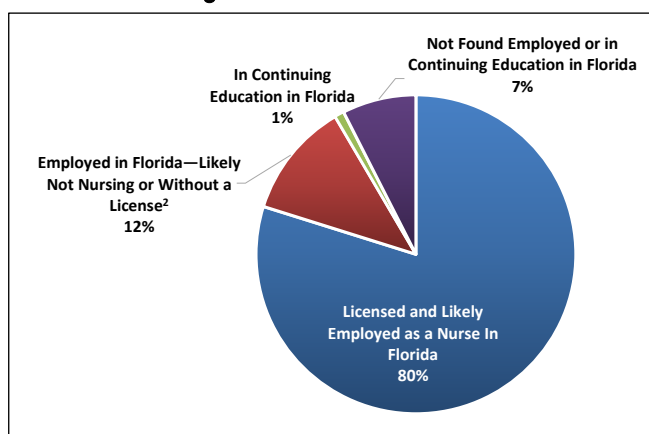
²⁵ The analyses in Exhibits 8, 9, and 10 show outcomes for all nursing program graduates that applied for licensure. These analyses are based on licensure data from the Florida Department of Health and unemployment insurance and continuing education data from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP). The data about graduations used in these analyses were obtained from information reported by license applicants, not from our survey. Therefore, it does not include graduates from Florida nursing programs who did not apply for nursing licensure in Florida, and the numbers of graduates reported in the analyses is not the same as the numbers from the survey shown in Exhibit 7. The percentage of graduates who did not apply for licensure cannot be accurately

determined from existing data because eight nursing programs did not respond to our survey. Our prior analysis of these data suggest that a very small percentage of graduates do not apply for licensure in Florida.

²⁶ The FETPIP data shows whether people who applied for licensure in Florida are employed in a nursing-related industry but it does not specify that they are employed as nurses. Nursing-related industries include hospitals, doctors’ offices, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and other patient-care facilities. Nursing-related industries may also include educational programs that teach health care or health care insurance industries.

Most associate degree in nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed as a nurse in Florida. As shown in Exhibit 9, 80% of the 2013-14 associate degree in nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed in a nursing-related field in 2015. Approximately 12% of graduates were employed in a field other than nursing or did not have an active nursing license, while 7% were not found employed in Florida. The remaining 1% of graduates were found in continuing education.

Exhibit 9
Most 2013-14 Graduates of Associate Degree Programs Were Licensed and Likely Employed in Florida in Nursing-Related Fields in 2015¹



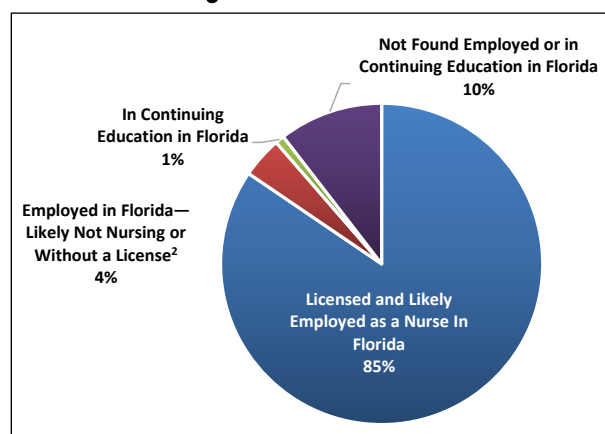
¹ The FETPIP data used in this analysis shows whether nurses were employed in a nursing-related industry but did not specify that they were employed as nurses.

² Over half (51%) of these individuals with an ADN degree were employed in Florida in a health-related field but did not have a nursing license.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of licensure data from the Florida Department of Health, and unemployment insurance and continuing education data from FETPIP at the Florida Department of Education.

Most bachelor's degree in nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed as a nurse in Florida. As shown in Exhibit 10, 85% of 2013-14 bachelor's degree in nursing program graduates were licensed and likely employed in a nursing-related field in 2015. Approximately 4% of graduates were employed in a field other than nursing or did not have an active nursing license, while 10% were not found employed in Florida. The remaining 1% of graduates were found in continuing education.

Exhibit 10
Most 2013-14 Graduates of Bachelor's Degree Programs Were Licensed and Likely Employed in Florida in Nursing-Related Fields in 2015¹



¹ The FETPIP data used in this analysis shows whether nurses were employed in a nursing-related industry but did not specify that they were employed as nurses.

² Forty percent of these individuals with a BSN degree were employed in Florida in a health-related field but did not have a nursing license.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of licensure data from the Florida Department of Health, and unemployment insurance and continuing education data from FETPIP at the Florida Department of Education.

Appendix A

Retention of Florida Nursing Education Programs

Exhibit A-1 shows the number of new students enrolled in each type of nursing program who entered the programs in 2014 and 2015 and the percentage of students retained (i.e., still enrolled in the programs a year later). To calculate retention, for each cohort of newly enrolled students we added the number of students who graduated and the number of students who were still enrolled a year later and divided by the number of total newly enrolled students. Overall, the retention rate for students who entered in 2015 was greater than the rate for those who entered in 2014. Retention rate changes varied by program type.

Exhibit A-1

The Percentage of Students Retained in Nursing Programs Increased in 2015 as in the Prior Year^{1,2}

Curriculum Type	Students Entering in 2014 (Status as of 2015)		Students Entering in 2015 ³ (Status as of 2016)	
	Total New Students Enrolled	Percentage Retained	Total New Students Enrolled	Percentage Retained
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Generic	2,394	77%	2,089	77%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Generic	6,352	79%	5,168	83%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Bridge	1,863	86%	1,280	85%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – Generic	2,237	88%	2,197	90%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – 2nd Degree	460	95%	456	95%
Total	13,306	82%	11,190	84%

¹ Nursing programs admit students throughout the year, with several programs admitting students multiple times per year. We requested each nursing program to select a cohort of students for 2014 and 2015 and report to us the outcomes of these students over a one-year period.

² This data does not include the practical nursing (bridge curriculum) programs.

³ Eight programs did not respond to the 2015-16 survey and are not included in the results.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

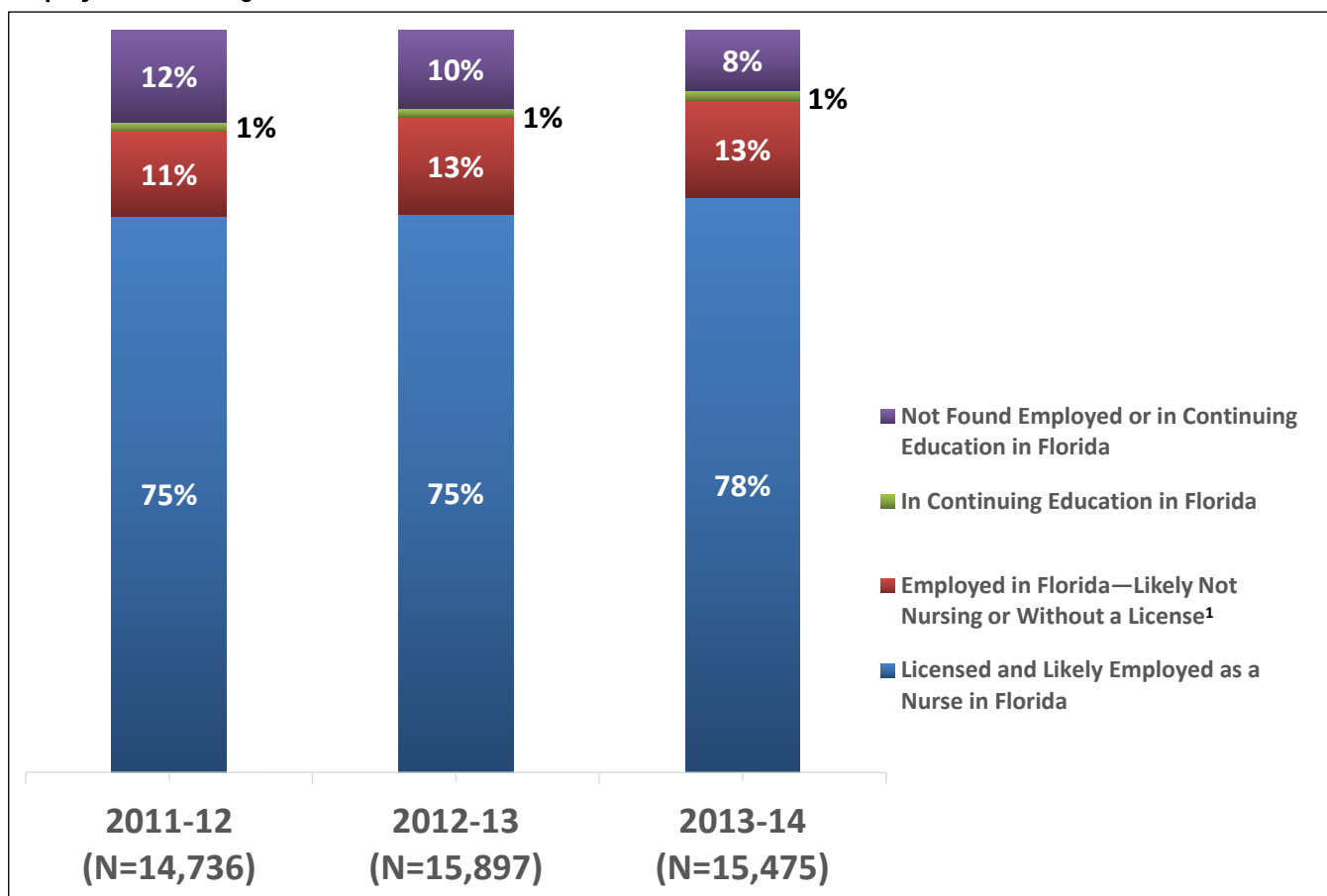
Appendix B

Employment Outcomes of Florida Nursing Education Program Graduates

Exhibit B-1 shows the percentages of Florida undergraduate nursing program graduates for academic years 2011-12 through 2013-14 who were employed in a nursing-related field as of 2015. The data showed that most individuals who graduated from a Florida nursing program were licensed and employed in nursing-related fields in Florida. For example, 78% of 2013-14 graduates were licensed and likely employed in a nursing-related field in Florida in 2015. To conduct this analysis we examined licensure and employment data for people who graduated from a Florida undergraduate nursing program in academic years 2011-12 through 2013-14 and applied for licensure. We used Florida Department of Health licensure data to determine whether these graduates were licensed in 2015 and used Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) unemployment insurance data to determine if they were likely employed in a nursing-related field in Florida in 2015.

Exhibit B-1

Most Graduates of Florida Nursing Programs From 2011-12 Through 2013-14 Were Licensed and Likely Employed in Nursing-Related Fields in 2015



¹ In 2013-14, nearly half (48%) of these individuals were employed in Florida in a health-related field without a license.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of licensure data from the Florida Department of Health, and unemployment insurance and continuing education data from FETPIP at the Florida Department of Education.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



OPPAGA provides performance and accountability information about Florida government in several ways.

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Project conducted by Sean Millard, Justin Graham, Anastasia Prokos, and William Howard
David D. Summers (850/717-0555), Staff Director, Education Policy Area
R. Philip Twogood, Coordinator