

How to Survive & Maybe Even Love Nursing School

A Guide **for** Students
by Students

Third Edition

By Kelli S. Dunham, RN, BSN



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Foreword

I think we can all agree that preparing for, attending, and successfully completing a rigorous program of study in nursing school is a challenge that will not soon be forgotten by anyone who bravely undertakes it. It's probably one of the most difficult things you'll do in your life, but it promises to be a highly rewarding experience if you approach it methodically, energetically, and in a focused manner. And—as this book shows—by lightening up just a bit.

In *How to Survive and Maybe Even Love Nursing School!*, Kelli Dunham, a registered nurse who is currently a student in an MSN program, has gathered a rich collection of ideas and facts that will help you prepare for and survive this positively life-changing experience. Kelli shows that if you use a focused approach, you'll be able to find the one nursing school that's right for you, and once you've found it, you'll have a richer and more fulfilling educational experience.

Nursing students (and prospective nursing students) need practical tips, resources, and information to help them succeed in school, and Kelli Dunham's first-person account provides these with an immediacy that you don't get elsewhere. What's more, she delivers with a humorous, breezy style enriched by numerous personal stories contributed by many of the 300 students and faculty members she interviewed for the book.

How to Survive and Maybe Even Love Nursing School! gives hard-hitting advice on choosing and getting into a nursing school, finances and financial aid, the importance of time (and life) management, dealing with information overload and stress, forming study habits that streamline the learning experience, study skills and resources, test taking, being a nontraditional (older, gay/lesbian, male) student, handling clinical rotations, preparing for and taking the NCLEX, licensure, issues and trends in nursing, and finding and landing that perfect job. The chapters and appendix offer up-to-the minute resource lists of additional readings and useful Web sites, which Kelli has reviewed personally.

I urge all prospective and current nursing students to read this informative, helpful, and interesting book, as it contains a wealth of information that will enrich many aspects of your learning journey. Kelli has broken new ground in explicating the unique nursing school experience.

After reading the many first-person anecdotes from nursing students in *How to Survive and Maybe Even Love Nursing School!*, I can't resist offering a handy hint of my own for a nightly study routine. The

night after your first class, read over your notes from that day. The second night, read your notes from days 1 and 2. The third night, read your notes from days 1, 2, and 3. And so on. This sounds like a tremendous commitment of time and energy, but it's so easy because, as you read over your notes, you begin to integrate them and memorize them. Each succeeding night, you'll need less and less time to read your earlier notes. By the end of the semester, you've just about memorized every word. It worked for me!

Going to nursing school can be a hectic and frustrating experience, but take time occasionally to pause and reflect on the reasons why you chose nursing as your life's work. Among these, I hope, is a strong desire to serve others—or else I doubt many of you will be able to persevere when the going gets tough. Serving as an instrument through which healing can occur is truly a blessing. As an aspiring nurse, you have announced to the world that you feel you have the courage to do the often difficult work of healing. If you find on your journey that you are going through a dark night of the soul, remember that nursing offers the caregiver and the patient the wonderful opportunity to be inspired with the healing breath of God! That, dear friends, is very, very precious.

Paula Schneider, RN, MPH, editor of Healing Hearts (Vista Publications), a collection of true and inspiring stories written by nurses from all over the world about special patients who have touched their lives forever. She is also a hospice nurse.

Introduction

Who am I and why am I writing this book?

Before I started nursing school, I lived in Haiti, Oklahoma City, southeastern Ohio, Miami, and Harlem. I worked as a hospice volunteer, legal assistant/interpreter for an organization assisting Haitian refugees, and night manager at a homeless shelter. I was even a Roman Catholic nun in training for 11 arduous months. After 10 relatively happy but exhausting years, I realized I wanted a career instead of just a succession of jobs.

I went to nursing school when I was nearly 30 and found myself welcomed by the friendly folks at (then) MCP-Hahnemann University. I got my associate's degree, and then my BSN from MCP-Hahnemann (now Drexel University) and have worked as a primary care nurse at a nurse-managed health center, as a nurse home visitor for the Nurse Family Partnership program, and as a consultant for various health-care publications.

I will readily admit that my reasons for becoming a nurse are half altruistic and half pragmatic. It's true that I want to work with other people to enable them to have long, happy, and fulfilling lives, but I also want to have a long, happy, and fulfilling life myself. I chose nursing because I felt that it would provide opportunities for both. Going to nursing school gave me an easily transferable skill set, a near-guarantee that I would always be able to find work in my chosen profession, and initials after my name that give me a little swell of pride every time I see them written, even now.

It was the influence of five nurse friends that ultimately helped me make the final decision to start nursing school. These friends are experienced nurses, and it is their advice that also got me through school. They displayed admirable patience when I'd call them the night before clinical and ask them—"just one more time"—about the procedure for suctioning a tracheostomy tube. They lent me everything from stethoscopes to textbooks. They dispensed freely their time, advice, and words of support. They had walked the same road I was walking and were able to point out the beautiful scenery (and the potential detours) along the way. Not everyone has the benefit of exposure to nurses like these when they are in school. My hope is that this book will be a resource that, like my five friends, makes the path through nursing school more productive and enjoyable for those who take it.

This book is meant to be a comprehensive guide to nursing school, so I've covered everything from completing your first admission application to getting your first job. In addition, because this book is

written from a student's perspective (more than 300 students provided input), I have been able to deal realistically with the nitty-gritty details of life as a nursing student. Are you worried about getting “grossed out” by something at clinical? Read Chapter 7 to see how other nursing students have handled this possibility. Do you always fall asleep when you read your textbooks? See Chapter 4 for tips on handling an overwhelming reading load. Bewildered or disgusted by the conditions you see in hospitals where you do your clinical rotations? Check out Chapter 9 to learn ways to advocate for a better system.

Another feature that developed out of my nursing school experience appears as “Profiles” scattered throughout the text. I can vividly remember mornings when I would sit on the side of my bed at 5:15 A.M. I knew I needed to get up and get dressed for clinical, but I nevertheless would spend several minutes staring blankly at my feet, wondering what on earth I was doing in nursing school. I've included these profiles for those moments when students need an inspiration infusion. Some of the individuals profiled have held traditional nursing positions in hospitals and branched out, so to speak, whereas others work in outpatient facilities, community nonprofit agencies, or even cyberspace. What they all have in common is a love for nursing and a desire to help the nursing profession fulfill its potential.

So you've decided to go to nursing school

If you're very far at all along in your nursing school career, probably at least one person has said to you: “Nursing school? Nursing school? Now why on earth would you want to do that?” This is annoying when the person is a significant other or friend, discouraging when it's a parent, but downright demoralizing when it's a nurse.

It's true, many people find nursing school stressful. You may wake up one night in the middle of your third semester and realize that you have again started sucking your thumb when you sleep, a habit you thought you gave up for good in the first grade.

It's true that many people find nursing school unbelievably time consuming. You may start to wonder what you did with all your free time when you were only raising children and working 50 hours a week.

It's true that there will be days when you will feel sleep deprived and nutrition deprived and sunlight deprived and fun deprived and self-esteem deprived.

But there also will be days when things will start to come together. There will be a moment when pharmacology and physiology will do a happy dance together in your brain, or when microbiology will

seem like the living science that it is, instead of just boring culture plates and senseless diagrams depicting viral replication. There will be days when you can bring comfort to a patient and, in so doing, comfort yourself.

It may feel daunting today, but you can do it. The path may seem long, rocky, and arduous, but there is an “RN” at the end.

You *can* do it. Let’s go.

Kelli S. Dunham

Reviewers

We express our appreciation to these individuals, nursing students and faculty, who helped make this book possible through serving as reviewers and contributing their advice.

Renee Bender, RN
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio

Debbie Crosby, BSN
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Tommy Duvall, RN, BSN, EMT
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing
Lubbock, Texas

Daniel Greene, RN, ASN
Three Rivers Community College
Norwich, Connecticut

Janet Henselder
Melville, New York

Judith K. Hovey, PhDc, MSN, RN
Assistant Professor
Oakland University School of Nursing
Rochester, Minnesota

Sandra Joyce, AD
Surry Community College
Dobson, North Carolina

Terrica Preast, BSN
Lewis-Clark State College
Lewiston, Idaho

Grace Saylor, RN, MSN
Nursing Instructor
York Technical College/USCL
Rock Hill, South Carolina

Louise Strauser, BA, AASN
Arkansas State University
State University, Arkansas

Melody Ward, AD, LPN
Kent State University East Liverpool Campus
East Liverpool, Ohio

Wayne Wheeler
Petersburg, Virginia

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chapter 1

**Yes, You Can Avoid:
Confusion, Acute, Related
to Multiple Choices**



chapter 1

Yes, You Can Avoid: Confusion, Acute, Related to Multiple Choices



A Student Speaks

“As an older student I had two main considerations. The first was the quality of education (could it get me through boards?). The second was the time it would take me to get a license and get a job. That’s what steered me away from a diploma school—I didn’t have the time to devote to the kind of regime they required.”

—Stan Brown, AD student, Georgia

“I never considered anything but a diploma program, and now that it is all said and done, I’m glad. I wanted clinical time, and lots of it. I have done more IMs, hung more IVs, and cleaned up more messes than any of my friends who went to other schools.”

—R. Ledorn, diploma graduate, Florida

“Why would anyone want to go to school for anything less than a BSN? You’ll end up having to go back anyway. I’ve learned so much from my classes, I can hardly imagine working as a nurse without them!”

—R.E., BSN student, Michigan



If you haven’t already encountered the AD-versus-BSN-versus-diploma school debate (a.k.a. the “entry level to practice” controversy), you will. I think of it as the *Family Feud* of nursing, and it invokes an interesting (if rather involved) sociological debate about the status of nursing as a profession.

It’s also pretty confusing. Have you ever tried to explain to someone who’s not familiar with the health sciences why there are three different ways to become a registered nurse? It’s not easy. The dialogue could go something like this:

(The scene is at a party, and Polly Patience, nursing student, is chatting with a new acquaintance.)

Polly: “So, after I finished my first year of nursing school—”

Acquaintance (interrupting): “Oh, hey, you must go to Our Lady of Thunder Hospital downtown! My mother’s great-aunt’s sister graduated from there. I hear their uniforms are really scary!”

Polly: “Oh, I don’t go there. I go to Big Name University.”

Acquaintance: (scratching head): “Big Name University. I didn’t even know they were a hospital.”

Polly: “They aren’t.”

Acquaintance (looking rather frightened): “Sheesh, well, I would hate to have you taking care of me if I were sick!” (Turns away, muttering to herself) “Good grief . . . a nurse who’s never been to a hospital!”

Polly: “No, wait, you see, I do my clinical education at a couple of different hospitals. I go to a university that has a 4-year program.”

Third person (joining in): “Oh, yeah, there’s a nursing program at the community college I go to. But why does it take you guys 4 years to get a 2-year degree?”

Polly: “Well, it’s not a 2-year degree. It’s a bachelor of science in nursing and—”

Acquaintances: “So the people who graduate from community college aren’t really registered nurses?”

Polly: “Oh, no, they are, but—”

Third person: “What about the people who go to hospital schools? They aren’t registered nurses?”

Polly: “No—I mean, yes, they are—I mean—”

(Polly’s listeners walk away, shaking their heads in bewilderment. Polly didn’t even get to the part about diploma, associate degree, and bachelor’s degree graduates all taking the same licensure test!)

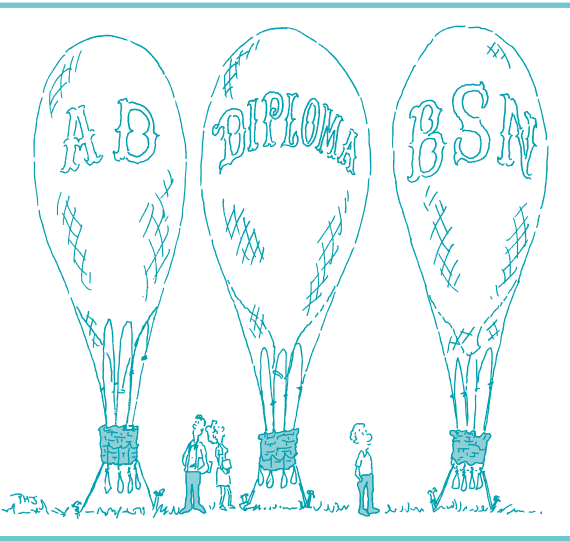
I approach this entire issue of entry level to practice with great trepidation because whatever I say, someone—possibly many people—will express a strong opinion about it. It has been discussed and argued about (and probably cried over) for years, so it’s not my intention to present a one-size-fits-all conclusion in this chapter. I found it telling that one of my early reviewers begged me not to “beat the dead AD-versus-BSN horse,” and I’m inclined to think she has a point. (*Note:* “beat a dead horse” is merely an expression; no animals, deceased or otherwise, were harmed in the writing of this book.)

This entry-level issue comes up on just about every nursing-related e-mail discussion group I participate in. Sometimes the exchanges are cordial and friendly, and sometimes they’re stunningly rude. They typically start by explaining the philosophical underpinnings of each participant’s argument but end up with each person swapping hospital horror stories of how they encountered an AD/diploma/BSN graduate who couldn’t flush an IV, write a decent care plan, communicate effectively with a patient, or whatever.

Choosing a program that fits your career objectives

Trying to “prove” what the entry level to practice should be by relating personal stories makes no sense. Most nurses can relate stories of incredibly skilled nurses who’ve graduated from the tiniest diploma programs in the

most pitiful hospitals, and we know of others who've graduated from respected programs in the most prestigious universities but couldn't tell a Hoyer patient lift from a horseshoe.



Perhaps a more important issue than “What nursing program is right for everyone?” is “What nursing program is right for you?” When I started interviewing students and new graduates for this book, I found that almost half didn't even consider entry level to practice as an issue when they were considering a program. They simply chose a school with a good reputation that would work with their budget, schedule, and academic resources.

Sara Searcy, who attended Darton College in Albany, Georgia, is one example. “I always knew in the back of my mind that I wanted to be a nurse,” Sara says. “The school I go to only offers an AD

option, so I will transfer after becoming an RN if I want to go further. I may go for a BSN, an MSN, or both after becoming an RN. Or I may work for a while and then go back to school. I am just going to play it by ear.”

Jill Hall, a new grad in California, replies similarly, “Local junior colleges offered economical programs close to home. Returning to school after 20 years, I was intimidated by anything bigger. I have grown since then, but I'm glad I made the choice because I need to get out and get a job as soon as possible. But I would love to get a BSN and MSN one day.”

K.L., a BSN student in Wisconsin, says she found “that there was a really good BSN program at a university 10 blocks from my house. Attending school there makes perfect sense!”

Perhaps if many of us were able to say, “Oh, goodness me, I have unlimited time and money and the freedom to pick up my two suitcases, a stethoscope, and my (low-maintenance) cat Fluffy, and move anywhere to pursue my RN,” this discussion might be more practical. But most of us are limited in some way by our time and our responsibilities in deciding whether or not we want to move to Snowsville in northern Montana just because that's the best nursing school in the region.

There are differences between programs and advantages and disadvantages of each route to the RN. I have included quotes from students that illustrate the most commonly named pros and cons and a short description of each type of program in the table “Students' thoughts about the programs they chose.” Although diploma school enrollments have been declining since the

Students' thoughts about the programs they chose

PROGRAM	PROS	CONS
<p>Diploma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 3-year program • Located in a hospital, most often in conjunction with a community college • Prepares nurses for staff positions in hospitals and other inpatient facilities 	<p>"The diploma school in my area is very inexpensive."</p> <p>"I know from high school that I am the type of student who needs a lot of one-on-one time. I heard that hospital schools offer that."</p> <p>"We have lots of clinical time. I'm quite comfortable on the hospital floor now."</p>	<p>"I sometimes feel that other nurses look down on us—like we are part of a dinosaur-age system."</p> <p>"It's hard to work during school because you spend so much time at clinical."</p> <p>"It's like we're living in a fishbowl because we spend so much time around the other students!"</p>
<p>Associate Degree (AD)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 2-year program • Usually located in a community college • Prepares nurses for staff positions in hospitals and other inpatient facilities 	<p>"Convenience—the community college I attend is 10 minutes' walk from my front door."</p> <p>"I already have a promise of a job when I graduate and they will pay 100% of my BSN courses. It's like getting 4 years of education for the price of 2."</p>	<p>"I'm afraid I won't be able to get a job anyplace else but a nursing home."</p> <p>"Now I have to go back to school to get my BSN. Ugh! Sometimes I wonder if it would have been easier to do it all at once."</p>
<p>Bachelor of Science (BSN) in Nursing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 4- to 5-year program • Located in colleges and universities • Prepares nurses for positions in inpatient and community settings 	<p>"It's easier to compete for a job—there are a million AD programs in my city and not that many places to work."</p> <p>"I'm ready to start graduate school anytime. Anytime I get the courage, that is!"</p>	<p>"I'm in debt up to my ears!"</p> <p>"I'm a sophomore and getting tired of theory classes. I just want to see a patient!"</p>

1980s, a few diploma schools still exist, so I am including them here. Students choosing diploma programs should be aware, however, that diploma schools are disappearing quickly and may not be a viable option in the future.

Ann B. Fives, a nursing educator with 25 years' experience who is now affiliated with Raritan Valley Community College in New Jersey, suggests that the choice of a program should be an individual one. "It should depend on the student, their age, their financial situation, and long-term plans. For the student just graduating from high school and who has financial support from parents, I strongly advise the BSN program either as a commuter student or live-away. For the newly divorced mom who's trying to support her children, manage a home, and attend school, I advise the ADN spread out over 3 to 4 years. I typically tell these students to take all related prerequisite courses before entering the clinical nursing portion." Melody Ward, an AD graduate from Ohio, adds, "[the need to] spread the curriculum out for the single mother is important. I witnessed many students trying to compress the curriculum into the proposed 2-year program, many carrying 20 credit hours a semester; many either became overwhelmed and dropped out or lost financial assistance due to a declining grade-point average."

The logical conclusion is to consider carefully how much time and money you can spend. Consider what you need from a program and what you want. Then, get as much education as you can afford.

Choosing a school

“ A Former Student Speaks

“I took a very indirect route to becoming a nurse. For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be one. I started in a 4-year program, but didn't like the school. For my second year, I transferred to a prenursing program knowing I would have to transfer again for years 3 and 4. I went to a very large, prestigious university for year 3. Thought I had it made. I didn't adapt to such a large school very well; there were so many distractions. I finished my third year there, but not in nursing. I returned

home and went to community college. I was much more focused there, with small classes and relatively small clinical groups, and I flourished. So, after 5 years of school I had an associate degree. I always knew I would continue, and I did when the time was right, and I graduated summa cum laude while working fulltime and having a family. My point is—know the school well before you go. The large, prestigious university was very impersonal and too big for me to focus. It may have a great name, but that doesn't matter if it doesn't work for you! The community college I thought I was too good for turned out to be the best education money could buy and was not nearly as expensive as the other schools."

—Pat Reilly, RN, nurse-educator, Easton (Pennsylvania)

Hospital Education Service 

Okay, so now you have some idea of what type of programs you'd like to investigate. What next? First, you'll probably want to check out one of the more comprehensive guides to nursing schools, so you can have a somewhat complete list of schools that are practical options for you. The best lists are on the Web, rather than books because the books become so quickly outdated. Keep in mind, though, that you might not find all the possible options of schools for you by looking through any one Web portal. You'll need to include a Google search to create a truly comprehensive list. After you've called, e-mailed, or written for some prospectuses and admission packages, you can narrow the field by doing some preliminary research about each school. Ask a high school guidance counselor (if there's one handy), pester your friends who are in nursing school already, surf the Web, and go to school recruitment fairs.

What should you be looking for? In general, you want a place where you can get the education that's best for you. The emphasis is on the YOU—not your mom, your uncle, or your spouse. You're looking for a school that meets your needs, and you know best what those needs are. In the words of Dr. Rosalee Seymour, a 30-year nursing education veteran at East Tennessee State University: "Look for FIT, FIT, FIT. If it does not fit you, look elsewhere. Fit can be social, political, financial, cultural, educational, or all these and more."

For some students this fit is obvious. “Choosing my school was not complicated,” says Jodi Hancock, a BSN student in Washington state. “It is best in the state, and it’s close to my home.” Some students might look for a school that will grant them credit for past courses; others might want a school with flexible clinical scheduling; still others may seek a school that’s noted for its positive community involvement. Remember, when choosing a school, according to Sandra Wolf, MSN student and nurse-manager, “Nothing is laid in stone. Be a consumer. Have high expectations of a program. Education is expensive, so ultimately, you must really want this.”

With the increased competition for spots in nursing programs, students have two ultimate fit considerations, namely, being able to get in, and being able to get in before retirement age.

Choosing a school size

Some students find that the size of a school is an important factor in their choice. This was true for Stan Brown: “I happened by chance to live within 30 miles of a school of nursing with the highest first-attempt pass rate for boards in the state (91% to 96% for the past 10 years). Also, it is a small school and the instructors really get to know and care about the students. There is a real sense of community among the staff, students, and their families. One of the advantages of a small school is its intimacy.” He adds, “I’m tickled about the whole thing.”

Pat Reilly, a nurse-educator whom we heard from earlier, agrees: “In my experience, some of the superacademic schools have so many students that the beginning nursing student gets lost in the shuffle. I also strongly recommend small- to moderate-sized schools. I hate being in a huge lecture hall with 125 nursing students.”

Larger schools may appeal to students for a variety of reasons. Some students may feel suffocated by the closeness of a smaller school. In addition, larger schools often have greater physical resources (e.g., more extensive library collections or a swimming pool) and may be able to provide greater access to certain opportunities, such as participating in research or being involved in intercollegiate athletics.

Another option is to choose a regional campus of a large university, which can provide you with the advantages of a bigger school (name recognition of school by employers, access to facilities) and the atmosphere of a smaller campus.

What to look for academically

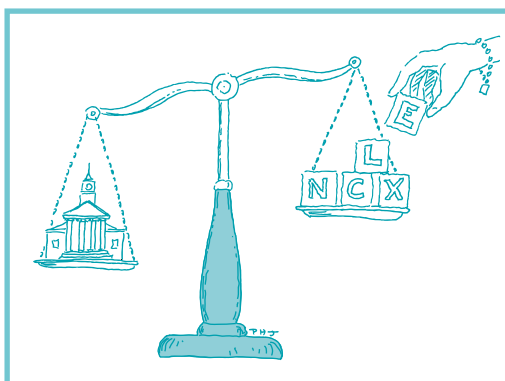
The first two academic indicators you’ll want to check out are whether the school is accredited by either the National League for Nursing Accrediting

Commission (NLNAC) or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and what the school's National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) pass rate is. When you ask for the NCLEX pass-rate figures, make sure they cover a 5- to 10-year period. NCLEX pass rates are only one indicator of a program's academic excellence. For example, the University of Dokawatchie, located in your state's capital, may admit only the most brilliant students, who might pass the NCLEX if they spent 2 or 4 years playing Ultimate Frisbee instead of studying. Your local community college may have a more open admissions policy, admitting students who need extra tutoring or more structured environments to make it through school. The two schools might have dissimilar pass rates, but you'd have to look at other factors to accurately judge the quality of their academic offerings.

One factor that affects a school's academic quality is class size. Make sure you inquire about faculty-to-student ratios for classroom and clinical instruction. Also ask about the typical class sizes for prerequisite and nursing courses. Smaller size usually means more individual attention and can be helpful at any stage in school, but it is not as essential in prerequisite courses and classroom nursing courses. It's more important in clinical rotations, however, because so much of clinical teaching is one-on-one with the instructor. The more students in your clinical group, the more you will be competing for the instructor's time and attention.

Ask if the school requires its faculty to practice, which can tip you off to how clinically current the instruction will be. This is paramount for clinical instructors, but it's also important for instructors mostly involved in classroom teaching. It's advantageous to learn the history of nursing from someone who has lived the history of nursing, but it loses a lot of its charm if your instructor hasn't kept clinically current and wants to spend a lot of lecture time covering the safety precautions to take when working with ether.

Don't forget to check into the school's general education classes, which can make a big difference in the quality of your nursing school experience. For example, I took an anatomy and physiology course during my first college experience some years before I entered nursing school. I didn't recall a single thing from that class except a strong dislike for the smell of pickled fetal pigs. Because my original anatomy and physiology class was so old, I had to retake it in nursing school. I groaned and moaned about this at first, but I was lucky: The class was team taught by three individuals who were extremely enthusiastic about their subject matter. All three had earned doctorates, and all were phenomenal at explaining



complicated physiological processes. Whenever I need to recall information about the effects of different electrolyte imbalances on the heart, I can close my eyes and see Dr. Kennedy flailing his arms about wildly as he demonstrated how “. . . the sodium rushes into the cardiac cells [flailing] and the potassium rushes out.” The class greatly increased my understanding of pathophysiology, and I would have missed out if I had been permitted to settle for my original anatomy and physiology class.

What to look for clinically

First, determine whether the school provides enough clinical rotation time. Next, find out whether there are enough varied clinical placements and whether you will be placed on units where you will get hands-on experience without being made to do so much “scut work” that you won’t have time to learn. It is good to learn how to stay on a schedule and how to take care of the needs of several patients, but if someone is always telling you to make up a bed for a new admission whenever there is a chance to try a new procedure, you ultimately will miss out on some valuable experiences. This probably is not something the school admissions office is going to know about, so be prepared to ask a current student about this if you make a campus visit.

The surge in nursing school admissions has created another, more common problem: decreased time spent in clinicals because of lack of access to clinical sites. Despite the valiant efforts of the human race to ruin our collective health (as evidenced by our propensity to eat Happy Meals and ride helmetless on motorcycles), the number of clinical sites is finite, and has not risen in concert with nursing school enrollment. Schools have started to get very creative with clinical scheduling, expanding the potential hours of clinical (e.g., using second or even third shift), using more community health sites, and (ugh) expanding the increasingly common but extremely obnoxious practice of having students from more than one school on the floor at a time. Query the official school person with whom you are in contact about how the school handles the demand for clinical sites, but also, again, inquire of a current student. Expanding to community clinical sites isn’t necessarily bad, because you may well get chances to develop skills that you wouldn’t in the inpatient setting. For example, if you score an afternoon at a flu clinic, you will get to do more intramuscular injections in a few hours than most students get to do their entire nursing school tenure. It’s the same thing with having a second shift clinical, where you may get to do PM care, or deal with an Alzheimer’s patient “sunsetting,” opportunities you would never have if you are out of the hospital every day by 2 p.m. If competition for clinical sites is a big problem in your community, you might want to consider looking for a school affiliated with a hospital. Often (although definitely not always) this helps with getting preference for choice clinical spots.

Try to find out whether or not the clinical instructors will be familiar with the units where your rotations will take place. This can be helpful or troublesome for students. Some students say that having instructors who were too “chummy” with the nurses on the clinical unit made it hard for the instructors to be objective if there was a staff/student conflict. I have experienced this problem myself. I’ve also been grateful, however, at times for an instructor who knew her way around enough to be able to help locate the linen closet if I couldn’t find a staff nurse and needed to change a bed in a hurry.

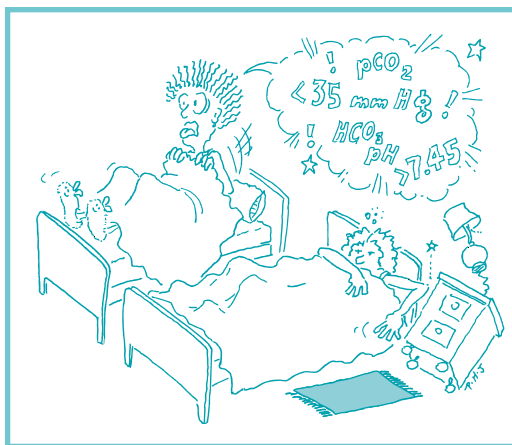
What to look for socially

If you’re a commuting student, you may think the school’s social climate doesn’t matter to you. But, like it or not, you will have social interaction with your classmates. It’s the nature of nursing school. If you’re going to be living on campus, the social climate becomes more important. If you’re a new grandmother and you don’t want to eat lunch every day surrounded by discussions of MySpace profiles, you’ll want to inquire about the age range of the students.

In addition, if you’re a male student or if you’re a member of a racial minority or a person with a same-sex or bisexual orientation, you may want to make a decision based at least partly on the diversity of the student body. (For more about this topic, see Chapters 6 and 7.) If a school is perfect for you in other ways, you might be able to rely on support from your family and friends if the student body is not as diverse as you would like. Because all nursing schools are not created equal when it comes to realizing that all nursing students are indeed created equal, it doesn’t hurt to check things out in advance.

If you’re staying on campus and want a roommate, ask if you can request a fellow student nurse for a roommate. There are pros and cons to this.

On the pro side: A nursing school classmate can be a ready-made study partner and is likely to appreciate that the evening before clinical is not a great time for an all-night Jell-O Pit Twister Marathon. He or she will understand what a “Code Brown” is and why you grind your teeth in your sleep and wake up screaming, “It must be respiratory alkalosis!” on the night before a big exam.



On the con side, the tension of two nursing students living in a small space may result in spontaneous combustion in the form of irritability, bickering, or plain ol' surliness. Also, if you room with a nursing student, you may find yourself seldom talking about anything other than classes, clinicals, and other school-related topics. You can mitigate this effect if you set up guidelines for “talking shop” (e.g., no discussing school-related stuff on weekends or after 9 p.m.) and establish a subtle verbal signal (I use the topic changer “so, what’s your favorite flower?” with my nursing friends) to redirect the conversation.

If you know that you tend to be superfocused and could use some distraction occasionally, perhaps a non-nursing major roommate might be a better choice for you. It might be nice to have an art history major around who makes you take a break and go visit the museums on Sunday afternoons instead of reviewing the bones of the inner ear for the 273rd time. A non-nursing school roommate also will remind you that projectile vomiting isn’t a subject that most people like to discuss at meals. This is something you and your nursing school buddies might well forget.

Making the most of your campus visit

If you live in the same area as the nursing schools you are considering, you probably will visit campuses at least once to complete paperwork or have an entrance interview. There are many benefits to spending some time on campus before you make your decision.

“I definitely recommend visiting the various campuses you’re interested in,” says Victoria Hunter, a nursing student in Ontario, Canada. “There are so many different choices to make that an important influence on your decision will be the reaction to the campus where you will be spending the next years. Programs can be nearly identical, but your personal response to the atmosphere of the school can help you decide where you will be most comfortable and happy.”

To learn more about the school’s academic offerings, Deborah L. Roush, a nursing educator at Valdosta State University in Georgia, suggests “interviewing faculty and students in and out of your major as well as hanging out in the library and computer labs to get a feel for the learning environment. Sit in on a class or two if the instructor does not object. Look at the technology used to teach and support learning.”

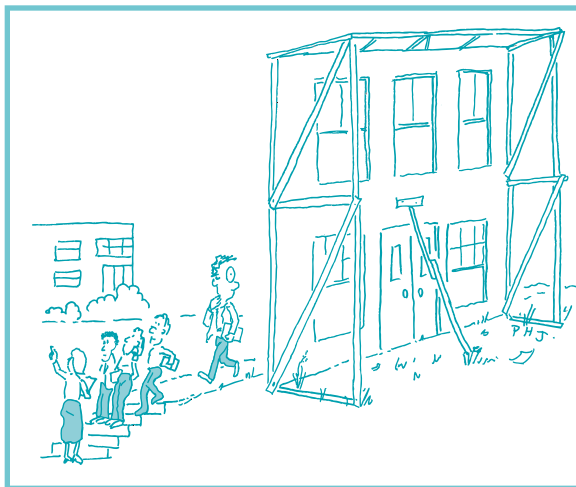
Take a guided tour of the school, but don’t let your research stop there. Aside from soaking up the general atmosphere, there is plenty of information you can obtain with a little private detective work. Talk with at least one current student, especially one who is not leading tours. The school generally is going to have its best, brightest, and most satisfied

customers out front. Maybe every student at the school is like your guide and has an IQ of 170, performs independent cellular research in his or her spare time, and loves the school more than life itself, but then again, maybe not. Sandy Wolf has another suggestion for self-directed sleuthing: “Make sure you notice the looks on the faces of the students and teachers.”

While you’re at it, take a peek at the school’s physical resources. A beautiful campus does not a nursing school make. However, if you are going to be spending a lot of time on campus and the sight of duck ponds and waterfalls, for instance, is important to you, by all means make that a factor in your choice of school.

You’ll also want to check out the availability of computer labs, supervised nursing skill labs, and the quality of the offerings at the library. Also check how far the school is from the sites where you will be doing your clinical. This is particularly important if you will be relying on public transportation, rides from good-hearted fellow students, or your own two feet to get you there.

Finally, if you are going to be living on campus, check how close the school is to shopping, groceries, laundry, churches, and recreational opportunities. When you’ve passed your blood pressure return demonstration, you aren’t going to want to take three subways, a bus, and a dogsled to the nearest place to celebrate.



Online options

If attending school, even as a commuter student, presents a hardship to you, you may want to consider taking some online classes. You can’t—of course—take clinicals online (hmm, unless they design some kind of interface using YouTube to check vital signs) but there are a few schools that allow you to take all of your prerequisite classes online and then participate in clinical experiences at health-care facilities near to you.

If the idea of an electronic “correspondence course” turns you off, be assured that online options usually are much more sophisticated than the correspondence courses in the olden days. For example, when I was living in Haiti, I tried to take a Shakespeare class by correspondence. It required me to complete a series of dry, uninspired assignments, and I found I

couldn't finish it no matter how hard I tried. I even forced myself to carry around a copy of the textbook in my backpack every day as a motivator until I finished it. More than 10 years later, I still haven't finished that course, although I long ago stopped carrying the book around. I recently took a Principles of Health Promotion class offered through the Web for my RN-to-BSN program. It was tough and demanding, but I learned a great deal because it provided greater interaction and quicker feedback than I got in the traditional paper-based correspondence class. Not to mention that I finished it in less than a decade!

The advantages to taking online courses are obvious. For starters, you can participate in class discussions while wearing your pajamas, and you can fit your school schedule to your life schedule instead of the other way around. There also are some drawbacks. In an online class, you can't see nonverbal cues during discussions, and some material may be more difficult to grasp without the benefit of classroom structure. Web courses can work for you, however, if you are a self-directed learner.

Getting in

“A Student Speaks

“I am so sick of forms! Application forms! Reference forms! Forms for financial aid! Is nursing school going to require as much paperwork as getting into nursing school?”

—*J.W., AD student, Pennsylvania*”

After you get all the school information in the mail but before you put pen to paper, take the time to organize your efforts. Compile a fact file of information on your achievements, activities, academic background, and work experience so that you can make sure you provide uniform information on each application. (*Hint:* You can use this file later if your self-esteem starts to fail halfway through nursing school and to prepare your resume when you graduate.)

Filling out those %#*!! forms

In the olden days, paper applications traditionally were time-consuming, annoying, redundant, and discouraging. Now that most applications are

completed electronically, the process is . . . Actually it's still annoying, and perhaps discouraging, but not always so redundant.

Many nursing schools require an essay or personal statement with their applications. In some schools with particularly competitive admissions (where, for example, most students have a very high GPA) the essay will be the single determining factor in getting an interview. The greater the number of applicants for a given number of spots, the more memorable you'll need your essay to be. The best way to be really memorable is to really be yourself. Explain why you are particularly interested in nursing and connect it with your current life, work, or volunteer experience. Don't mention your standardized test scores or grade point average, even if it is the highest attained by any mammal. The essay is supposed to demonstrate that you are a (cliché alert) well-rounded person, mentioning the scores implies that you are all work and no fun (a recipe for dullness and burnout). Reference the school's mission statement (hint: it's on the Web site), if you can do it without seeming hokey or trite or ridiculous. If you can't do that, then at least retain a general sense of what the school considers important and present yourself in a way that demonstrates you'll fit in just fine. For example, a certain Ivy League nursing school in a large city where I once lived is well-known for its research/scientific emphasis. They've even held debates where the "entry level to practice" degree debate centered on the idea that floor nurses needed a master's degree. If you were going to apply to this unnamed school, you wouldn't want to use words like "angel of mercy" or even "caring," at least not without a healthy dose of talk about "patient outcomes" and "scientific nursing process." So if you know an alumnus of the school, or a current student, ask for some tips. If you're really stuck, go to your local super-sized bookstore, buy some overpriced coffee, and cruise the college and reference shelves. They usually will have several decent books that can provide ideas for application essays. (One suggested title is included in the Resources section in this chapter.)

When you're choosing people to write your recommendations, pay close attention to what the school is requesting. Don't have your childhood friends, relatives, or pets recommend you unless for some reason the school specifically asks for such. Make sure the persons filling out the form can speak to your abilities in the areas of critical thinking, leadership, and science. Also, it doesn't hurt to slip them a list of the great things you've done and the awards and honors you've received. Sure, you want their responses to sound spontaneous, but they can't be expected to produce from memory an annotated list of all of your wonderful attributes.

The traditional etiquette you've learned about courting the people who are taking the time to write recommendations goes a long way. I know you already know this, but don't forget to thank them—and don't forget to provide the stamp. I can say from personal experience that recommendations almost always look better if you send them right out; don't get them

from the reference writer, then leave them crammed in the bottom of your book bag for a month before you send them.

Handling interviews

The simplest way to ace an interview is to be well prepared. As MSN student Diane Langton suggests, “Reflect on what your goals are, and how you plan to meet your goals. Think about what any obstacles may be and how you plan to tackle them. Also know your strengths and your weaknesses.” To that I would add: buy a navy-blue suit (take a trip to the thrift store if need be) and wear it.

Nervousness can be a formidable foe in interviews, making it hard for us to present our best selves. It helps to remember that the interviewer is probably at least a little nervous, too. The person on the other side of that desk was hired to make sure the school offers the greatest opportunities to the best students, who will also make the best nurses. That’s not an easy task. Keep that in mind, and the experience might not be so intimidating. Perhaps there are some sadistic interviewers out there who just want to see you sweat, but would you really want to go to that kind of school anyway?

Remember, the interview is not only about the school evaluating you, but also about you evaluating the school. Only one of the schools I applied to required an interview, and the interviewer spent 10 minutes of our time together speaking ill of the other schools I had applied to. When I made my final decision, the interviewer’s unprofessional behavior was a significant factor in my deciding not to attend the school she worked for. The way the interviewer treats you can provide a clue as to how the school treats students in general. If you are kept waiting for a long time, if the tone of the questions or the interview itself is adversarial, or if there seems to be a lot of disorganization or confusion in the interview process, this may raise a red flag that says “keep looking.”

An interview can also be a place to address issues such as a lower than you’d like grade point average, test scores, gaps in employment, etc. If you have what seems to be a blemish on your record, be prepared to explain what happened, what you learned, and what you would do differently now.

Transferring credits

Of all the students I talked to for this book, none had any problems transferring their credits. This may say more about the good planning skills of nursing students (as most of the transfers were preplanned) than about the ease (or lack thereof) with which nursing school credits can be shuffled back and forth from one school to another.

Prerequisite classes, such as English, are the most easily transferable classes. It is a good idea to keep the syllabi and basic course information for each class you take, in case you later decide to transfer, and the school you are going to questions the course. It is not unheard of for schools with 4-year bachelor's programs to categorically refuse to grant transfer credit for science classes, such as anatomy and physiology or chemistry, that were taken at a community college. It is always good to inquire ahead, and get the information in writing if possible, before taking any classes you hope to transfer into the school where you will take your main nursing courses.

Transferring nursing classes can be difficult. Some schools grant credit for a similar-level course (e.g., Nursing 101) in the same type of program, especially if the program the credits are coming from is a known entity to the program that is receiving the credits. Many schools do not accept any transferred nursing classes, however, unless they have a preexisting agreement with the originating school. Other schools require students to petition for courses to be accepted in lieu of other courses. The petition often must include verification of acceptable completion and a copy of the course syllabus describing objectives, clinical experience, and lecture topics. Alternatively, some schools allow transfer students or students who already have experience in health care (e.g., LPNs or paramedics) to test out of beginning nursing classes.

If you are going to an AD program and plan on getting your BSN, ask the AD school about any articulation agreements it has with schools with RN-to-BSN programs. Although you would think that an RN-to-BSN program automatically would accept credits students obtained while working on their RN, this is not always the case. An articulation agreement ensures that the core classes you take toward your RN will be counted as equivalent classes in the RN-to-BSN program, saving you time, money, and heartache later on.

Some students report difficulty in transferring credits from diploma schools. One way to decrease the risk of transfer credit being denied for courses you take at a diploma school is to choose a school that has a cooperative agreement with a community college. Many diploma schools now have these agreements, which result in graduates being granted an associate's degree from the community college and a diploma in nursing from the diploma school.

Not getting in

The number of applicants to nursing school has increased dramatically in the last few years, while the number of available student slots has not. This situation has made it increasingly difficult to get into nursing school. Community colleges especially have to turn down many qualified applicants or

Help! I'm Trying to Get into Nursing School!

Waitlisted? Refused entry? The nursing shortage (and even more so, the nurse-educator shortage) has resulted in many more applicants than schools currently can handle, and many students—even students with solid academic records—are being waitlisted or refused admission. Here's what some students are doing to strengthen their application before applying again or to use their time productively while waitlisted.

"I'm working hard and saving money so I won't have to work while I'm in school."

"I'm taking all my prerequisites, so when I get ready for my nursing classes I'll be able to concentrate on them."

"I'm doing a year with Americorps, serving at a community clinic as an outreach worker. I don't get paid much, but I am learning a lot about public health. Plus I'll get a pretty decent postcommitment scholarship."

"I'm learning Spanish and concentrating on Spanish for health care providers."

"I got my LPN so I could work while I was waiting. And guess what? My employer is picking up the tab for all my RN classes! Score!"

"I got my CNA, and I'm working in a hospital. I know I'll feel more at home during clinicals than students who don't have this experience."

"I'm doing volunteer work at a local hospital. I'm enjoying it and hopefully it will increase my chances of getting in when I reapply next year."

"I'm reading through a friend's old NCLEX review books. I figure any head start on studying I can get will be a help."

"I am getting a BFA and applying to the accelerated nursing program that the local university offers."

"I am volunteering at a nursing camp that the school offers for high school kids (I am way older than high school age myself)."

"I am retaking my prerequisite courses to get better grades and help boot me up the list."

"I am saving money so that I can apply to the more expensive liberal arts school in town and not have to worry about the community college waiting list."

Finally, it's an urban legend that every school has a long waiting list. Some schools don't even maintain a waiting list at all and instead require students to reapply from year to year. For a list of schools without a waitlist, check out www.discovernursing.com.

maintain huge waiting lists. If you have been turned down or are waitlisted, it's undoubtedly frustrating, but hang in there! Keep connected with the nursing community and don't give up your dream. The RN after your name will be all that more meaningful because of the added effort you had to make just to get in. And before I launch into a chorus of "Climb Every Mountain," I'll remind you there are lots of other students in your situation. Some of their ideas of what to do while waiting are collected in the box "Help! I'm trying to get into nursing school!"

Counting the cost

“ A Student Speaks

"I was never in debt until I went to nursing school, a fact of which I am very proud. Now I owe over \$8000. It's a little depressing, but I know there is a difference between good debt and bad debt. I owe a lot of money now, but it doesn't begin to compare with the education I have."

—D.D., AD student, Pennsylvania

Discovering the real costs of attendance

Nursing school tuition is not cheap, but the costs of nursing school go way beyond the cost of tuition. Most nursing schools assess many additional fees, not all of which are well advertised, so they can come along when you least expect, and can least afford, them. "I was very surprised by the costs of attendance like lab fees and uniforms. It is amazing the fees they can come up with! I think they have someone thinking of new fees every

year,” says Jessica Wheeler, a BSN student from Connecticut. If you can, avoid sticker shock by asking the bursar’s office for a complete fee list when you go to register, and make sure you include fees when comparing school costs.

Another significant first-year expense is outfitting yourself for clinical. Some schools require students to have supplemental malpractice insurance, which often has to be obtained from a specified vendor. As for uniforms, some reasonable schools allow you to wear commercially available scrubs as a uniform. You can shop around, mail order, or get hand-me-downs from other students to save some cash. At my school, we were required to buy our pants, a smock top, name pin, shirt, lab coat, and goggles from the company that had a contract with the school. The bill was more than \$300, and the quality of what we got was very poor. If I had known how flimsy the products were, I would have balked. *Moral:* Do some independent research before you buy school equipment.

Aside from direct costs, being in school can put a dent in your finances in other ways. Some students told me they spent more than \$250 on photocopies alone during a 2-year program. In addition, if there are times when you are going to be studying instead of working, you’ll need to figure in that loss of income as part of what going to school will cost you.

This is where commuting time becomes a significant cost factor. Time spent commuting is time wasted because it can’t be used easily for studying and (unless you have a rather innovative job) can’t be used to earn money either. When you consider such things as the extra costs of babysitters, lunches, and gas for and wear and tear on your car, a community college located half a county away from you might end up being more expensive than a 4-year program right across the road.

Unless your name is Thurston Howell III, going to school undoubtedly will change your financial situation. You may need to change substantially your consumer habits. This can be scary and rewarding. Some students (returning students especially) told me they used this time of decreased financial solvency to—in the words of one student—“realize there were lots of things



I didn't actually need: cable TV, a new pair of shoes every few weeks, and every electronic gadget I saw advertised." For helpful tips on decreasing expenses, check out the resources for simple living at the end of this chapter.

Think about: governmental financial aid

To help you meet the costs of your nursing education, the federal and state governments dispense many forms of financial aid. Some, such as Pell grants, are outright gifts from your Uncle Sam, but Uncle has some others, such as Stafford and Perkins loans, that you have to pay back. Each of the states has financial aid programs, too. The key to getting any or all of these forms of financial help is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The accent is on "federal," but many states use this document as a starting point as well. The FAFSA is about eight pages long and can be filed electronically through the federal Department of Education's Web site (see the Resources section at the end of this chapter). You can theoretically print it out, fill it in (yes, on actual paper), and send it (yes, from the post office with a stamp) but that just gives the government one more chance to lose it. Seriously, do it online. The FAFSA asks all sorts of personal questions, like what your income is, what assets you have, the name of your first pet (no, not really), and much more. The nice thing about the FAFSA is that if you don't change your address between school years, the Feds will send you a renewal application the next year with most of the information already filled out for you. All you have to do is check it for accuracy and send it back in.

After your FAFSA is processed, you will get an e-mail with instructions on how to print out an important piece of paper called the Student Aid Report (SAR). Make sure you check this as soon as you get it and correct any errors you find because the SAR is the magical document that helps determine what governmental financial aid you will get.

At this point, individual schools have their own procedures (the Feds will have sent an electronic copy of your SAR to the schools you indicated on your application), so check with your school's financial aid office. The most common next step is taken by the school, which sends you a letter outlining the anticipated financial aid you will receive. This offer may not be the final word on how much aid you will receive (especially if your financial situation changes drastically after you apply for aid), but it can be useful for comparing offers from different schools. Even if you think you will not be eligible for federal aid, it's still worthwhile to fill out a FAFSA because many schools use the information in it to determine eligibility for school-sponsored scholarships.

In addition, in response to the nursing shortage, the federal government's Bureau of Health Professions administers many different programs to help nursing students with money for school or help new graduates repay their loans. These programs change frequently, and the funding source seems to ebb and flow, so for the most up-to-date information, check out the Bureau of Health Professions' Web site; the URL is included in the Resources section of this chapter.

Think about: nongovernmental financial aid

If the government decides you don't need much financial help (e.g., if you're an independent student who's been working for several years or a traditional-age student with two working parents who own their home) and you can't pay for school on your own, don't give up hope. There are many nongovernmental sources that can help.

One common form of nongovernmental assistance is employee tuition reimbursement. If you can get it, this setup is almost ideal. What could be better than your boss paying so you can go to school free? This is a common perk for hospital employees and is sometimes available through the union rather than the institution. But even if you work at the zoo or for the circus, make sure to ask around your workplace about help with tuition. Even if there is no plan set in stone, perhaps your boss will feel some sympathy and make a personal grant to your school fund.

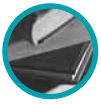
Nursing organizations are another source of scholarships for nursing students. The National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) awards scholarships to members and nonmembers, and most state NSNA chapters offer scholarships. The National League for Nursing, in addition to sponsoring its own scholarships, distributes a reference guide to scholarships for nursing students.

Also, don't forget to check out some of the free online scholarship search sites listed in the Resources section. If you do even a 30-second scan of these sites, you will realize that there is a scholarship for nearly everyone. Do you have hazel eyes? A tattoo of a dolphin on your left shoulder? Was your paternal great-grandfather a conscientious objector during the Civil War? There may well be a scholarship for you. Beware, however, of most fee-based scholarship search services (the same information is available free through many other sources) or organizations that offer "scholarships" that you have to secure with a deposit or by giving them your credit card number. The purpose of these scholarship scams is not to help you find more money for school but rather separate you from the money you already have. You can get more information about scholarship scams or report a scammer through the Federal Trade Commission's Scholarship Scam Hotline (1-877-FTC-HELP).

The school you are applying to probably also has its own scholarship program. Ask at the financial aid office about this and inquire directly at the school of nursing because there may be scholarships that only nursing students are eligible for and that the financial aid office may forget to tell you about.

Finally, ask, ask, ask. Ask everyone you know if they have heard of any local scholarships. Work it into conversations at your kids' Little League games, e-mail all your friends (and some of your enemies), and, in general, make a nuisance of yourself. Don't be shy—it's for a good cause!

Resources



Web sites

All Nursing Schools

www.allnursingschools.com

This is the most comprehensive guide to nursing schools that I've seen, and the price is certainly right (yup, it's free). A nice added feature: you can click on a school's name and be taken to a simple form you can fill out to request written information about their programs.

Bureau of Health Professions Division of Health Careers Diversity and Development

bhpr.hrsa.gov/dsa

Get the 4-1-1 on how the Bureau of Health Professions can help you pay for school.

Choose Nursing

www.choosenursing.com

This is a nursing recruitment site that includes information about Canadian nursing schools, financial aid possibilities, and nursing as a career. Includes materials about promoting nursing as a career choice for young people and a student nurse online journal.

Connecticut College Admissions Essays That Worked

www.conncoll.edu/admissions/essays/index.html

If you are trying to get into school and are really stuck for how to write your essay, check out this site. It's a site called "Admissions Essays That Worked," and it contains . . . admissions essays that worked. You can peruse these essays to get some ideas of what other students have done to write their way into school, including explaining their personal life philosophy as it relates to the Muppets.

Copy Kat

www.copykat.com

If you like to eat out (or especially if your kids like to eat out) but your budget doesn't allow too many options, peruse this site for the recipes of well-known restaurant foods and drinks. Perhaps you don't want your homemade tacos to taste like they came from a

fast-food restaurant, but your kids might! I tried the Girl Scout cookies look-alike with my niece and nephew, and they said they couldn't taste the difference (although they said the Copy Kat cookies looked ugly). You can search by name of establishment, type of food, dish name, dietary restrictions, or level of difficulty. Don't miss the discussion forums and the recipe for uncooked Chex mix!

Discover Nursing

www.discovernursing.com

This site is sponsored by Johnson and Johnson, a corporate entity definitely doing their part to relieve the nursing shortage. You can search here for relevant scholarships or download the whole list as a PDF file. The site also takes you through a guided search to help you narrow down scholarships available to you. A searchable database of more than 1400 nursing programs and a helpful glossary are included.

Dollar Stretcher

www.stretcher.com

This is an easy-to-use, quick-loading, and comprehensive site with lots of time-saving and money-saving tips. You can sign up for a money-saving newsletter; find recipes; and read about how to avoid consumer scams, reduce credit card debt, and even build your own log cabin.

Ecampus.com

www.ecampus.com

On this site, you can buy textbooks at up to 75% off the list price. To find the text you're looking for, you can search by subject (medical, science, history, etc.) or by author, title, or keyword. You can sell your textbooks back here too, just enter the ISBN and they'll tell you what they're paying for that title.

EStudent Loan

www.estudentloan.com

This is a site to search for loans from different (sponsored) lenders, so it's not a comprehensive database, but it is useful for comparing loan terms and rates.

FastWeb Scholarship Searching Service

www.fastweb.com

This site provides free, customizable searching for scholarship information. Basically, you enter information about yourself, and they tell

you what's out there for you. It's quick and easy, and they'll update you by e-mail about any new promising scholarships. They also added a search for colleges and a college-matching service.

National Student Nurses' Association

www.nсна.org

You can download and print applications for NSNA scholarships from this site. Some scholarships are reserved for members only, but many can be given to any eligible nursing student. You have to be a nursing student for at least 1 year to apply for these scholarships.

Office of Student Financial Assistance at the U.S. Department of Education

www.fafsa.ed.gov

You can download and print out the FAFSA forms here as well as a comprehensive student guide to financial aid.

Peterson's College Guides

www.petersons.com

Peterson's of the *Peterson's College Guides* maintains this site. There is a wealth of information available here: a handy e-application feature, ways to compare colleges and college costs, and (no shock) a link to their bookstore, where you can buy Peterson titles. They also have a separate but related Web site called *collegequest.com*. After you answer a series of questions to register, you can access a simple, easy-to-read guide to financial aid.

Sallie Mae Financial Help Site

www.salliemae.com

Features interactive calculators to help families project future college prices and figure their expected family contribution.

Simple Living Network

www.simpleliving.net

Get out from under the burden of being only a "consumer"! I love, love, love this Web site. It's stuffed full of information about how to create (as they say) conscious, simple, healthy, and restorative living and, yup, that can save you money. Start with the "web of simplicity" area if this is your first exposure to the art of simple living.

Xap

www.xap.com

Xap provides information about colleges and college life. This site also provides an excellent school search function for easy comparison

of facts about each college at a glance, including admissions, size, majors offered, student life, transfer admissions, and resources available for students with learning disabilities. They also have a college-matching wizard; self-assessment resources; and the ACT, SAT, and FAFSA numbers of each school posted in one central area. Xap also provides online application service for more than 700 schools.



Books

Coburn, Karen (1997). **Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years.** New York: Harper Collins.

This book is written to your parents, but you might want to check it out, too. It details the transitions that traditional college-age kids go through (apparently it's not just about buying your first toaster) and relates the transitions to developmental stages.

Georges, Christopher (1995). **100 Successful College Application Essays.** New York: Mentor Books.

This book provides examples of unique college essays and gives suggestions for writing your own. It's easy to read and comprehensive.

Hanson, Jennifer (2002). **The Real Freshman Handbook: A Totally Honest Guide to Life on Campus.** New York: Houghton Mifflin.

This book assumes that a college freshman is of traditional college age and lives on campus; if this is true of you, it might be worth checking this book out. Content includes suggested packing lists for making your dorm room comfy, tips on picking a roommate, maintaining safety on campus, and even issues other books in this genre don't address (e.g., how to help a friend who has overdosed on drugs or is severely depressed).

Leider, Anna, and Leider, Robert (2000). **Don't Miss Out: The Ambitious Student's Guide to Financial Aid.** Alexandria, VA: Octameron Associates.

This is an annual guide to financial aid. You also can check out their Web site at www.octameron.com.

Longacre, Doris (1980). **Living More with Less.** Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.

This is a classic about simple (read: cheap) living, as exemplified by the Christian tradition of the Mennonite Church. Longacre includes lots of information on keeping down expenses while saving the earth and making it better for all its inhabitants. There are loads of practical hints, which make for interesting reading even if you can't imagine doing them yourself. It includes sections on clothes, homes, transportation and travel, celebrations, recipes, eating together, and the philosophical underpinnings of simple living.