

Trends Upward and Trends Downward Reflecting A Changing Job Market for New Nursing Graduates

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Each year, the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) conducts an annual survey of all its recent past members on their employment successes as Registered Nurses (RNs), along with questions that capture the job market and hospital trends from the job seekers' perspectives. Now in its eighth year of consecutive data collection of new RN graduates, the NSNA annual report gives us a fresh look at today's job market and probes for insights related to education and health care trends with prior year data. The findings this year show trends in finding jobs and hospital opportunities. The reported challenges for entry-level RN positions from early years may be easing in some areas, and education choices of graduates are coupled with the health care employers' preferences who have heeded the call of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) 2010 report – *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*.

The trends in this year's data on education and employment success in 2015 continue to bring rays of sunshine in the overall national picture, although caution should always be taken with overgeneralizing when regional differences continue to exist. Although all trends are upward, graduates continue to report challenges in finding employment in some regions, and the hiring preferences of BSN graduates over associate degree graduates remain among the respondents' angriest commentaries. But these new nurses continue to report that they are thinking about the future



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and seeking continuing education beyond the associate degree as well as other advanced degrees in nursing for their careers. What continues to exist, however, is the high loan debt that new nurses, like other college graduates, take with them beyond graduation. This needs to be taken into account with the overall landscape about employment.

In September 2015, approximately four to six months following spring graduations, NSNA collected data from 6,051 new RN graduates. Data were cleaned to reflect only those who had reported employment ("yes" or "no") (n=5,596) and graduated in Spring or Summer 2015 and Winter 2014. As in previous years, most of the respondents graduated in Spring and Summer 2015 (80%). Surveys were completed by students from all types of RN programs: baccalaureate degree (47%), associate degree (34%), diploma (4%), accelerated BSN (13%), and other (2%). In response to the nursing program schools, 58% were from public schools, 21% were from private schools, and 12% were from private proprietary (for-profit) schools.

At the time of the survey, with the reduced sample of those who responded to the employment question ("yes" or "no"), 95% reported that they passed the NCLEX exam (n=5,243). To understand when job acceptance for these new grad-

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Percentages are rounded. The convenience sample of nursing students who are members of the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) responded to the survey via SurveyMonkey® indicated that Spring 2015 was their graduation date. Total number of emails sent (42,757) minus opt-outs (968) and bounced emails (2,247) yielded a return of n=6,051 (partial and complete) (15% return).

uates might be occurring most rapidly – from unemployed to employed as an RN – it appears that all the new graduates’ success in employment is trending upward from 71% (Summer 2015) to 94% (Spring 2015) (see Table 1). When asked if they have an RN position, 84% (up 6% from last year) said “yes” with a continuously upward trend in all regions over the prior years. By program type, the data revealed that 88% of the baccalaureate graduates, 81% of the associate degree graduates, 86% of accelerated BSN graduates, and 86% of Clinical Nurse Leaders all trended upward for employment. Only the master’s degree (pre-licensure) (73%) trended down 17% from last year (see Table 2).

When the question, “Are you currently employed as an RN?” was broken down by region of the United States, the “yes” responses ranged from 77% to 89% nationally, with all regions trending upward. Regional employment trends over the past two years of the survey indicate a gradual increase in employment successes with the West and Northeast upward trend steeper than the South and Central data (see Figure 1). This positive and overall trend since 2009 suggests a changing landscape of employment nationally, but regional lower employment differences still exist on the two populated coasts (Northeast and West) than the middle and south regions. Employment success can also be tracked to programs in the survey related to public (85%), private (non-profit) (86%), and private (proprietary, for-profit) schools (82%); all significantly increased from last year (6%, 8%, and 8% respectively) ($p < .05$). There is, however, a significant difference in employment success between private for-profit and private schools (95% confidence, $p < .05$), although not compared to public schools.

For those respondents who are employed as an RN, 91% (up from 86% last year) reported full-time work and 7% (down from 11% last year) are part-time. This year, 44% (up from 38% last year and 42% the year before) reported working night shift. Thirty-nine percent (up from 31% last year) were hired before they graduated, and 63% (up from 56% last year) reported getting the job they wanted, with little difference from the previous year. In response to the statement that “best describes your acceptance of your current RN position,” 27% said it was their dream job (up from 24%) and 4% said it was the only offer they got (down from 7%). Similar responses from last year included: 43% took the job to gain experience to get dream job; 10% had other opportunities, but it was the best opportunity; 7% stated most jobs required at least a year experience, so they took what they could get; 3% said this position is close to home, which is a priority; for 2%, the job offered the shift that the respondent wanted to work; and 1% had a contractual

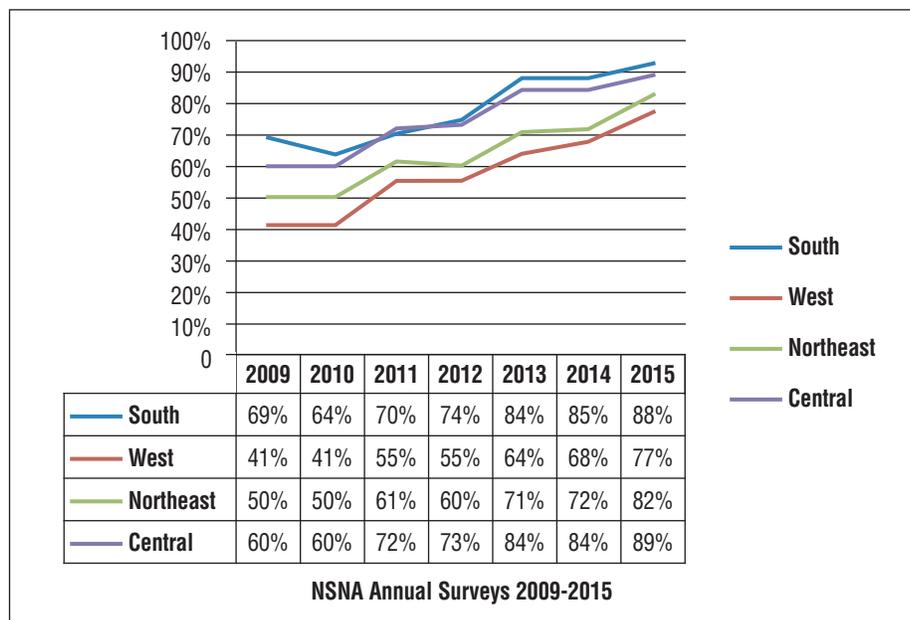
Table 1.
Employment (All) Trajectory Following Graduation Dates

Employed as an RN?	2012 Survey	2013 Survey	2014 Survey	2015 Survey
> 6 Months (Graduated Winter)	86% (56)	87% (1,048)	88% (1,130)	94% (846)
> 4 Months (Graduated Spring)	71% (2,194)	76% (2,158)	78% (3,026)	85% (2,249)
> 1 Month (Graduated Summer)	51% (411)	56% (378)	62% (621)	71% (542)

Table 2.
New Graduate Employment as RNs by Types of Program (Spring Graduation)

Currently Employed as an RN	2012	2013	2014	2015
Types of Programs				
Associate Degree (ADN)	61% (966)	72% (1,316)	72% (1,013)	81% (708)
BSN Pre-licensure	72% (1,364)	81% (1,686)	82% (1,698)	88% (1,296)
Accelerated BSN Program	58% (218)	69% (386)	81% (204)	86% (163)
Master’s Degree (Pre-licensure)	61% (27)	84% (36)	90% (17)	73% (11)
Clinical Nurse Leader Master’s (Pre-licensure)	50% (13)	89% (25)	83% (10)	86% (12)

Figure 1.
Percentage of New Graduates Employed by Region



obligation. All of these trends upward and downward reflect a different job market for these new graduates and impact on all aspects of being hired, including relocation responses: 83% this year found jobs in their own community similar to last year, and 5% this year had to relocate to get a position (down 3% from last year).

NSNA Annual Surveys 2009-2015

New graduates from 2015 who responded to the trends questions on the survey (n=5,596) reported results that reflect upward and downward trends in searching for jobs supporting the employment data. For example, downward trends or stable data that are good for new hires:

- Employers filling positions with experienced RNs (59%) (down 13% from last year);
- Older RNs are not retiring (45%) (down 17% from last year);
- Too many new graduates are flooding the market (37%) (down 18% from last year and 4% from the prior year);
- Hiring BSN graduates over associate degree graduates (70%) (down 4% from last year and 2% from the prior year);
- RNs working full-time are also working in other RN positions part-time (56%);
- Hiring per diem nurses without benefits (44%) (down 7% from last year);
- Nurses who were formerly working part-time are now working full-time (21%) (down 8% from last year and 6% from the prior year);
- Hiring freezes (11%) (down 16% from last year);
- Hospitals discontinuing new graduate orientation (11%) and residency programs (6%) (both down 10% and 6% respectfully from last year);
- Hospitals are closing departments (14%) (down 6% from last year);
- RNs are being laid off (5%) (down 5% from last year);
- Schools are not aware about the job market or have told students there are plenty of jobs for new grads (61%) and 13% believe they were misled about the nursing shortage (down 38% and 8%, respectfully from last year).

One strong indication is the response to “there is no general nursing shortage in (my) geographic area (45%),” which is down 12% from last year and 17% from the prior year. Likewise, upward trends that suggest more positive job opportunities for new graduates include:

- Hospitals are hiring travel and agency nurses (56%) (up 6% from last year);
- Long-term care facilities are hiring new graduates (52%);
- Hospitals are creating residency programs (62%) (up 13% from last year);

Table 3.
Education Plans Following Graduation: Highest Degree Planned

2015 Earned Degree	BSN	Masters Degree in Nursing	Doctorate in Nursing Practice (DNP)	Doctorate (PhD)	Unsure
Associate’s Degree	22%	45%	16%	3%	12%
Baccalaureate Degree	7%	37%	30%	9%	16%

- Sub-acute facilities are hiring new graduates (41%) (up 6% from last year);
- Home care and community health agencies are hiring new graduates (34%).

An important continuing trend to be noted from previous years is the apparent employer preference of BSN graduates over ADN graduates and rising employment for accelerated bachelors (pre-licensure) noted by respondents and evident in comparisons. By groups, ADN graduates reported working as an RN up 6% from last year (82%), while BSN graduates also reported a 5% increase of 87% employed (continuing up from previous years). One continuing trend is the new graduates’ frequency of reporting continuing with their education. In fact, 35% of ADN graduates reported that they were currently enrolled in school. These graduates seem to continue to desire advancing their education as the job market has eased, coupled with the preferences that is still apparent for baccalaureate-prepared nurses.

Plans to Advance Education

Results from the survey related to education reflected additional new trends. For all new graduates who responded, only 7% reported that they have no plans to return to school for another degree, 2% less than last year. However, of those who said “yes,” 15% were currently enrolled (Fall 2015) and more than half (60%) were enrolled or plan to be enrolled within the next two years. Aspirations for doctoral degrees were also similar for all the graduates compared to last year; 26% plan to achieve a DNP (down 4%) and 7% plan going on for the PhD (down 1%). These are different by types of degree earned (see Table 3).

Financial Impact on New Graduates Continues

With the current economic issues facing college graduates today, the survey asked new graduates about how they financed their education. All respondents who answered (4,284) reported

having financial aid or student loans (74%, up 4% from last year) to pay for school. When analyzed by BSN and ADN graduates only, there were several areas of differences in debt (see Figure 2) and how the students financed their education (see Figure 3). For example, fewer BSN students had “no debt” than ADN students, and more BSN students had debt over \$40,000 – as high as \$100,000 – than ADN students. In addition, almost twice as many BSN students reported scholarships than ADN students, and almost twice as many ADN students reported working full-time.

In the aggregate of all graduates, only 22% reported parents paying tuition and only 4% were helped by GI Bill (up 1% from last year). Scholarships trended up 4% from last year to 42%. The amount of debt from student loans remains similar from last year: 42% of graduates owe between \$10,000 and \$50,000, and 17% owe between \$50,000 and \$100,000. When asked about the programs they selected, 63% stated it was their first choice, 13% not their first choice, 11% stated it was the only program they could get into immediately without a waiting list, and 7% stated it was the only program they could afford. Most troubling related to student loan debt is that one third of the graduates (35%) answered that they “did not know” their current interest rate (up 3% from last year) and 28% (up 2% from last year) did not know if their loans were fixed or variable interest. These are characteristic of the real challenges that all college students must deal with in finding employment to reduce debt they will carry for years after graduation. Although nursing graduates’ debt appears to be less troubling than for some other college graduates, their earning potential and delay related to finding employment weigh heavily on them with a financial impact on the hopes of advancing their education.

Discussion

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), employment of registered nurses is projected to grow

Figure 2.
Loan Debt

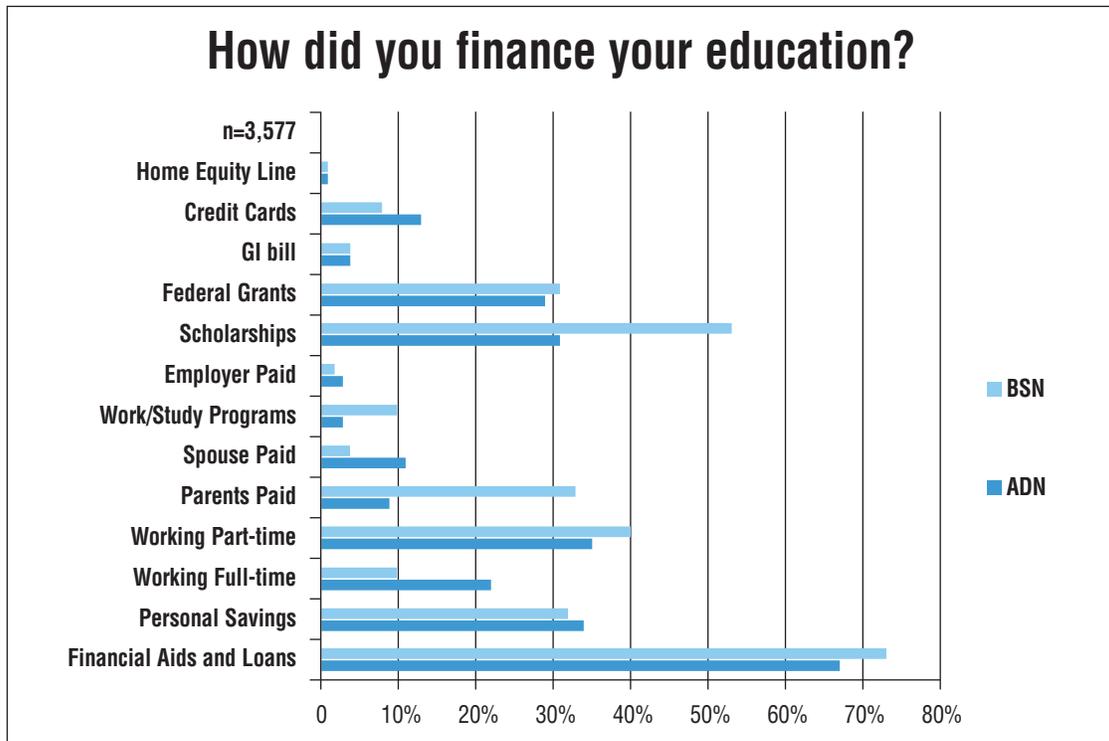
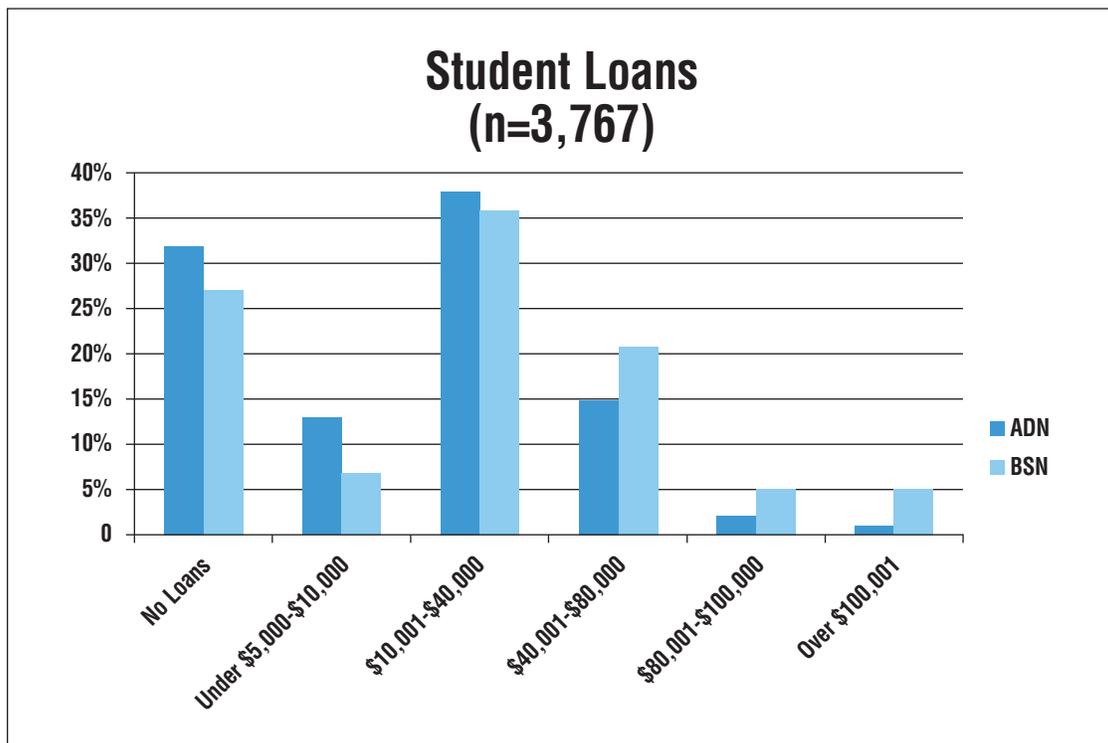


Figure 3.
Financing Education



16% from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Growth will occur for a number of reasons, including an increased emphasis on preventive care; growing rates of chronic conditions, such as diabetes and obesity; and demand for healthcare services from the baby-boom population, as they live longer and more active lives. Graduating nursing students are entering a job market today that appears to be more absorbent than in prior years, although regional differences in the West and Northeast in this data continue to track lower and slower.

In a recent study reported by Buerhaus, Auerbach, and Staiger (2016), market forces, health reform, and the 2010 IOM report appear to be transforming the educational composition of the nursing workforce. There is a continuing increase in the number of nurses graduating with baccalaureate degrees and a similar increase in the number of nurses pursuing graduate education. Data from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) show that the number of BSN graduates has continued to accelerate while the number of RNs receiving associate degrees has leveled off in the past few years. Some of the forces affecting this trend include that hospitals are showing hiring preferences for baccalaureate-prepared nurses, the growing number of nursing education programs moving associate degree nurses to baccalaureate and even graduate

degrees, and the perception of questionable marketability of future graduates without BSN degrees (Buerhaus et al., 2016). The early initiatives to increase the proportion of graduates with baccalaureate degrees had less impact than it seems to be doing now, with expected growth in new roles for nurses associated with health reform changes and the impact of the IOM report. The annual NSNA survey has continued to report the trends in hiring and this year, the survey reflects the changing job-seeking experiences of new graduates.

The data that indicate growth in nursing education reported by Buerhaus and colleagues (2014) can also be seen in these results when taking into account the speed of new graduates launching their plans for nursing education. What is not taken into account, however, and should be part of the complete conversation about nursing education, is the amount of loan debt accumulated by new nursing graduates today that they carry into their first jobs, which can potentially impact their additional education. Although graduates from nursing programs fare better than the average graduating student with a college education in obtaining employment (Feeg & Mancino, 2014), the loan debt they carry is similar and the job market is still a critical first step into the world of work. When times are tough and returning to school is an option, the hopes of a future job that will bring better earnings is the

light at the end of the tunnel of more debt. The brighter possibilities that have stimulated nurses to advance their education suggest that changes in nursing education to increase the readiness of graduates to capitalize on new opportunities are a good sign. The growing number of RN-to-BSN programs, coupled with the changes related to health reform over the past few years, has strongly supported the educational progression of the nursing workforce. The employment trends this year are moving in an upward direction and suggest that nurses who can earn a wage to pay off debt will be poised for the next step in advancing their careers. **DN**

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NSNA 2016 MidYear Conference

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This update from nursing's regulatory body includes information about the National Simulation Study, Transition into Practice, and more. Enjoy networking and breakfast with colleagues.

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This workshop identifies the major highlights of the 2016 MidYear Conference and the role of the consultant and advisor at the conference.

Faculty-Student Mentorship: Preparing the Next Generation of Nurses for the "Real World"

This session will include how to work as a mentor with diverse students while they are in school and after graduation. This session is also a primer for faculty who are volunteers in the Career Development Center.

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This interactive session features representatives from NSNA chapters to share ideas and strategies for chapter success.

Master Clinical Teaching: A 'SAFETY' Approach to Student Success

Innovative teaching strategies to increase student success in the clinical area.

For more information about the MidYear Career Planning Conference and visiting Kansas City, visit www.nсна.org or contact nsna@nsna.org.

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Pump Up Your Career in the Paris of the Plains at the NSNA MidYear Conference

**November 10-13, 2016 Kansas City, Missouri
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Diana J. Mason

Please mark your calendar for the 34th Annual NSNA MidYear Career Planning Conference, November 10-13, 2016, at the Sheraton Kansas City Hotel at Crown Center. Career planning and leadership development are the foundation for the conference, which includes a 9-hour NCLEX Review Course; a keynote address presented by Diana J. Mason, PhD, RN, FAAN; plenary session, "A Culture of Safety: Beginning with the Basics, Nurses' Role in Infection Prevention and Control"; two panels with presentations by nurses in a variety of specialty practice settings; as well as work-

shops, roundtables, and many professional development programs. In addition, in preparation for the NSNA Code of Ethics revision, Roundtable Discussions are planned to engage students and faculty in this process. The three parts of the NSNA Code of Ethics are: the Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, the Code of Professional Conduct, and the Code of Academic and Clinical Conduct. The goal is to have the document ready for consideration and adoption at the 2017 NSNA House of Delegates in Dallas, TX, April 5-8, 2017.

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