Florida's Nursing Education Programs Continued to Expand in 2014

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 the modifications was to increase the number of nursing programs and qualified nurses in Florida.

Since the legislation took effect in July 2009, the Board of Nursing has approved 251 new nursing education programs, which has increased the total number of programs by 151%.

Between the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years,

- the number of nursing student seats increased by 4.4%;
- enrollment in nursing programs increased by 6.3%, with the greatest increase occurring in associate degree in nursing generic programs;
- nursing program retention rates decreased by 1.4%; and
- the number of students graduating from nursing programs increased by 4.8 %.

In addition, most 2011-12 practical nursing program graduates (61%) and registered nursing program graduates (81%) were likely employed as a licensed nurse in Florida.

Scope

The 2014 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 2014 calendar year, as this data was not available at the time of publication.

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.[3] In 2009, the Legislature modified the

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

[2] Prior related OPPAGA reports are *Board of Nursing Addressed Statutory Changes; Nursing Program Capacity Expanded in 2009-10*, OPPAGA Report No. 11-06, January 2011; *Florida's Nursing Education Programs Continued to Expand in 2011 with Significant Increases in Student Enrollment and Graduates*, OPPAGA Report No. 12-04, January 2012; *Florida's Nursing Education Programs Continued to Expand in 2012 with Increases in Program Capacity, Student Enrollment, and Graduates*, OPPAGA Report 13-03, January 2013; *Florida's Nursing Education Programs Continued to Expand in 2013, While Licensure Exams Passage Rates of New Programs Declined*, OPPAGA Report No. 14-03, January 2014.

[3] 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).

process for approving new nursing education programs by removing rulemaking authority from the Board of Nursing and specifying the nursing education program approval process in statute.[4] Florida nursing education programs offer practical nursing certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees. During the 2013-14 academic year, we surveyed nursing education programs in Florida to obtain information on their programs; 301 programs responded to our survey and had students enrolled.[5, 6] As shown in Exhibit 1, these included 129 programs that offered a licensed practical nursing certificate, 140 programs that offered an associate degree in nursing, and 32 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.[7]

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.[8, 9]

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[4] Chapter 2009-168, *Laws of Florida*.

[5] Indiana State University offers one of Florida's nursing education programs through a distance learning nursing program that awards a bachelor of science in nursing degree. At Indiana State University students must have a practical nursing certificate to be admitted. This program is not included in this total.

[6] In total 301 programs responded to our survey. This included 294 active programs and 7 programs that closed in 2014.
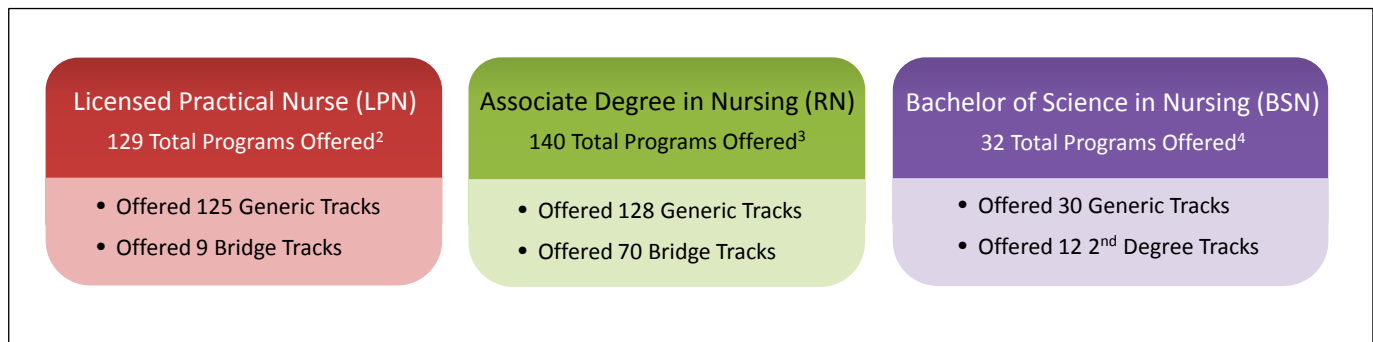
[7] Section 464.019, *F.S.*, does not differentiate between bridge and generic curriculum tracks. In addition, the Florida Board of Nursing does not make a distinction between generic, bridge, or accelerated tracks.

[8] Section 1005.06 (1) (e), *F.S.*

[9] Nursing education programs in Florida that hold specialized nursing accreditation by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) or by the Collegiate Commission on Nursing Education (CCNE) are not regulated by the Florida Board of Nursing.

Exhibit 1
During the 2013-14 Academic Year, Florida Nursing Education Programs We Surveyed Offered Practical Nursing Certificates, Associate's Degrees, and Bachelor's Degrees[1]

Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)	Associate Degree in Nursing (RN)	Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)
129 Total Programs Offered[2]	140 Total Programs Offered[3]	32 Total Programs Offered[4]
• Offered 125 Generic Tracks • Offered 9 Bridge Tracks	• Offered 128 Generic Tracks • Offered 70 Bridge Tracks	• Offered 30 Generic Tracks • Offered 12 2nd Degree Tracks

[1] Eleven programs did not respond to the 2013-14 survey and are not included in the results. Three of the eleven non-responsive programs were BSN programs.

[2] Five licensed practical nurse programs have both a generic and a bridge curriculum track and four have a bridge-only track.

[3] Fifty-eight associate degree programs have both a generic and a bridge curriculum track and 12 have a bridge-only track.

[4] Ten bachelor's degree programs have both a generic curriculum track and a second degree curriculum track and two programs only have a second degree track. In addition, Indiana State University is not included in these totals but has a distance bachelor's degree programs that admits Florida students.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs and analysis.

Findings

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

The 2009 law changed how nursing education programs are approved and monitored by the Board of Nursing. Since the law took effect, the number of new nursing programs has increased significantly. In addition, the 2009 law specified the criteria the board should follow for placing nursing programs on probationary status.

Overall, the number of new nursing programs has increased by 151% since the 2009 law went into effect. In 2014, there were 366 nursing programs statewide. Of these, 251 were approved since the statutory changes took effect (a 151% increase).[10, 11] As shown in Exhibit 2, all but 18 of the programs that applied since the law took effect have been approved.[12]

During calendar year 2014, the board considered 24 new nursing program applications and approved 16. Board staff reported that a likely reason for the decline in the applications this year is the limited clinical slots available for students to complete their education. Most (12 of 16) of the newly approved programs in 2014 were offered by private institutions licensed by the Commission for Independent Education, two were offered by school district technical centers, one was offered by a member of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF), and one was offered by a Florida College System institution.[13, 14]

Applications from eight programs were denied during the 2014 calendar year. Five applications were from the same postsecondary institution, and were denied because the institution had other nursing programs on probation.[15] An application from another institution was denied for the same reason. The two remaining applications were denied because of issues related to their clinical programs.[16]

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[10] In 2014, there were 366 active nursing education programs in Florida: 294 programs responded to our survey; 61 programs were not surveyed because they did not have students enrolled during the 2013-14 academic year; and 11 active programs did not respond to our survey. Seven additional programs were included in our survey results but closed in 2014 and thus were not counted among the active programs in 2014.

[11] A total of 29 nursing programs closed in 2014.

[12] Prior to the law taking effect, 17 of 18 nursing program applications were approved from January 2008 through June 2009.

[13] This is an unduplicated count of program applications and board approvals from January through December 2014. Programs may waive the committee's review of their application, or their applications may be denied.
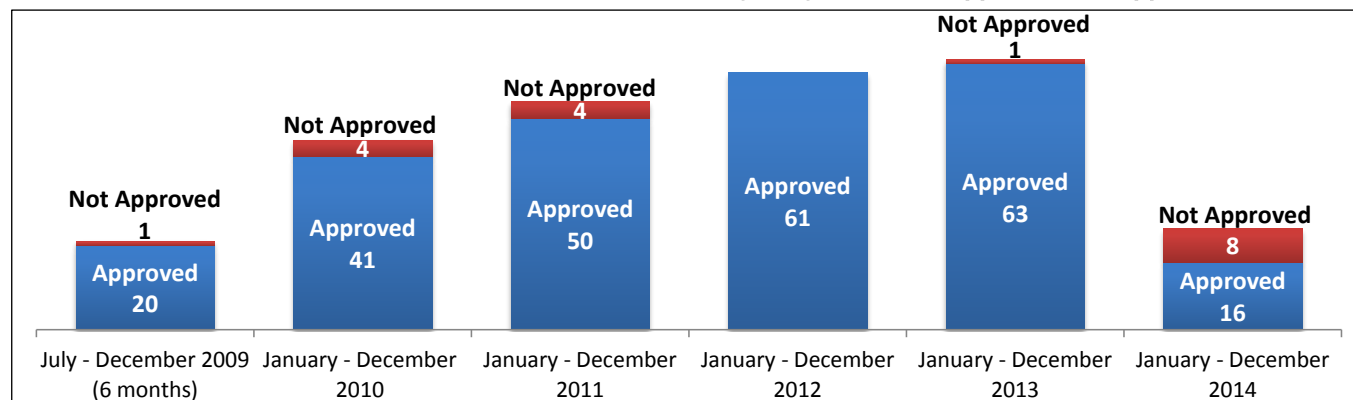
[14] Santa Fe College closed its practical nursing program in 2014 due to a change in its accreditation status. Santa Fe submitted an application for a new practical nursing program that was approved in August 2014.

[15] Section 464.019, *F.S.*

[16] One application was denied because its clinical program was out of the country and another was denied because it lacked sufficient clinical hours.
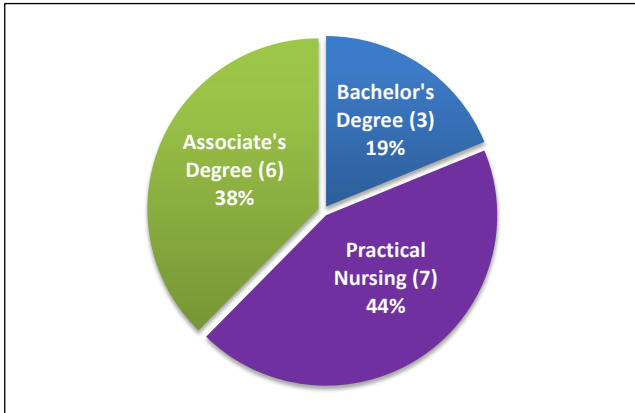
Exhibit 2
Since the 2009 Law Went Into Effect, 251 of the 269 Nursing Programs That Applied Were Approved

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Board of Nursing data.

As shown in Exhibit 3, six of the new programs approved in 2014 award associate's degrees and seven award practical nursing certificates. The three remaining programs award bachelor's degrees.

Exhibit 3
Most Nursing Programs Approved in 2014 Offer Practical Nursing Degrees

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Board of Nursing data.

In 2014, 43 (12%) of the 366 nursing programs in Florida were on probation. The law requires approved nursing programs to have a minimum average graduate licensure exam passage rate. If a program's average passage rate falls 10 percentage points below the national average for two consecutive calendar years, it is placed on probation, must submit a corrective action plan, and must increase its average passage rate within two years.[17, 18]

During 2014, a total of 43 nursing programs were on probation; 15 of them had been on probation in 2013.[19] If a program does not improve within two calendar years of being placed on probation, the board will close the program; the board may continue the probation for one more year if the program demonstrates adequate progress toward the graduate passage rate goal.[20]

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

Legislative changes to nursing program accountability processes were intended to increase the number and quality of nursing graduates in Florida by expanding the capacity of existing programs and creating new programs.

From 2012-13 to 2013-14, the number of seats available in nursing education programs for qualified students increased, as did all other capacity measures. As shown in Exhibit 4, the overall number of seats available for qualified students increased by 2,089, or 4.4%, from academic year 2012-13 to 2013-14.[21]

All other capacity measures also increased during the period. For instance, there was a 0.6% increase in the number of student applications received, a 3.2% increase in the number of qualified applicants, a 7% increase in students admitted, and an 8.2% increase in the number of students approved for admission who actually enrolled in nursing programs.

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[17] Section 464.019, *F.S.*, specifies that the first calendar year of scores the board could use was 2010. As a result, 2012 was the first year the board could place programs on probation using the criteria in law, based on calendar years 2010 and 2011.

[18] Twenty-two practical nursing and 21 associate degree in nursing programs were on probation.

[19] In 2013, there were 24 programs on probation; in 2014, 9 of these programs were closed and 15 were on probation for a second year.

[20] Section 464.019, *F.S.*

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

Exhibit 4
All Measures of Nursing Program Capacity Increased from 2012-13 to 2013-14[1]

Capacity Measure	2012-13	2013-14	Percentage Change
Seats[2]	47,279	49,368	4.4%
Applications Received	62,970	63,362	0.6%
Qualified Applicants	41,262	42,568	3.2%
Students Admitted	27,621	29,564	7.0%
Students Admitted Who Enrolled	23,981	25,952	8.2%

[1] Eleven programs did not respond to the 2013-14 survey and are not included in the results.

[2] As part of the 2013-14 survey, programs were allowed to update their 2012-13 seats data. All other 2012-13 data is taken from last year's report.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Total student enrollment in nursing programs increased overall from 2012-13 and 2013-14 but enrollment in some curriculum types declined. As shown in Exhibit 5, overall student enrollment in nursing programs grew by 2,448 students (6.3%) from 2012-13 to 2013-14. This increase is due to the addition of 34 new programs and the expansion of 130 existing programs. During the period, the associate degree in nursing generic curriculum and bachelor's degree in nursing generic curriculum programs both experienced an increase in student enrollment. The largest percentage increase in enrollment was in associate degree in nursing generic curriculum at 20.5%.

In contrast, enrollment in the remaining four curriculum types declined. The largest percentage decrease, 13.7%, occurred in the associate degree bridge program. In addition, enrollment in the practical nursing generic program decreased by 10.8%.

Exhibit 5
Student Enrollment Increased in Associate Degree-Generic and Bachelor's Degree-Generic Programs, but Decreased in Other Program Types from 2012-13 to 2013-14[1]

Curriculum Type	Enrollment[1]		Percentage Change
	2012-13[2]	2013-14	
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Generic	8,766	7,820	-10.8%
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Bridge	302	295	-2.3%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Generic	17,761	21,402	20.5%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Bridge	5,102	4,403	-13.7%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – Generic	5,835	6,358	9.0%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – 2nd Degree	925	861	-6.9%
Total	38,691	41,139	6.3%

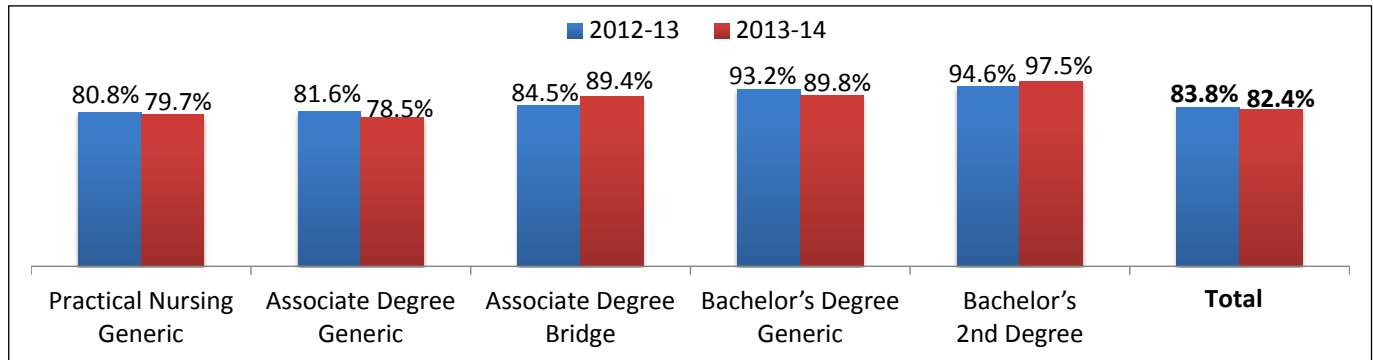[1] Eleven programs did not respond to the 2013-14 survey and are not included in the results.

[2] As part of the 2013-14 survey, some nursing programs updated enrollment numbers reported in 2012-13.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Exhibit 6
The Total Percentage of Students Retained in Nursing Programs Decreased Slightly in 2013-14[1,2]

[1] Eleven programs did not respond to the 2013-14 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.

The total percentage of students retained in nursing programs decreased slightly. Retention rates measure whether 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 2012-13 and 2013-14. To calculate retention, we added the number of graduates and the number of students still enrolled and divided by the number of newly enrolled students for each cohort.[22]

The resulting retention rates varied slightly among program types and curriculum types, with an overall decrease from 83.8% to 82.4%. As shown in Exhibit 6, the one-year retention rates decreased slightly for three curriculum types, with the largest percentage point decrease experienced among associate degree generic (3.1%) and bachelor's degree generic (3.4%) programs.

However, two program types had improved retention rates. The associate degree bridge program retention rate increased from 84.5% to 89.4%. In addition, the retention rate for bachelor's degree in nursing 2nd degree programs increased from 94.6% to 97.5%. Appendix A,

Exhibit A-1 provides additional details on the retention rates for nursing programs.

Overall, the number of students graduating from nursing programs increased from 2012-13 and 2013-14. 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.

As shown in Exhibit 7, overall, the number of students graduating from nursing programs increased by 4.8% from 2012-13 to 2013-14.[23] The number of students graduating increased during the period for four program types with the largest percentage increase (18.1%) occurring among bachelor's degree in nursing 2nd degree programs. In addition, associate degree in nursing bridge programs experienced a 13.2% increase in the number of graduates.

However, the number of graduates in the two practical nursing curriculum programs decreased from 2012-13 and 2013-14. The largest decrease, 41.5%, was experienced among practical nursing bridge programs. The practical nursing generic program decreased by 4.5%.

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[22] 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 2012-13 through 2013-14 and report to us the outcomes of these students over a one-year period.

[23] Other factors may affect the graduation rate of students. Factors for which OPPAGA could not control include students' economic stability, cost of programs, and curriculum changes.

Exhibit 7
The Overall Number of Students Graduating from Nursing Programs Increased from 2012-13 to 2013-14

Curriculum Type	Graduates[1]		Percentage Change
	2012-13	2013-14	
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Generic	4,101	3,916	-4.5%
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Bridge	176	103	-41.5%[2]
Associate Degree in Nursing – Generic	6,351	6,854	7.9%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Bridge	2,092	2,368	13.2%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – Generic	1,900	2,015	6.1%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – 2nd Degree	508	600	18.1%
Total	**15,128**	**15,856**	**4.8%**

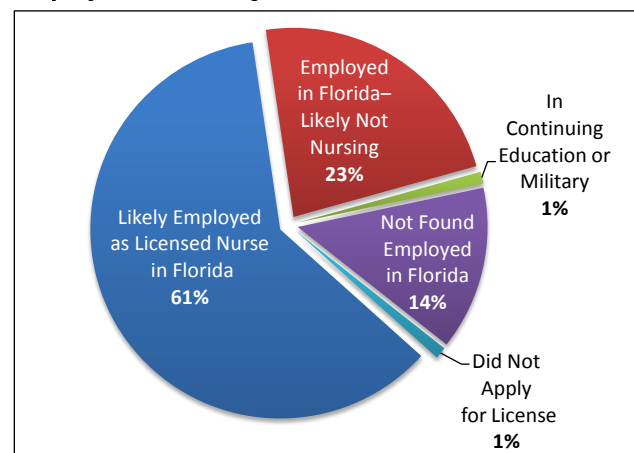[1] Eleven programs did not respond to the 2013-14 survey and are not included in the results.

[2] In 2013-14, one practical nursing-bridge program was non-operational, one did not respond to the survey, and four programs dropped their bridge curriculum track.

Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Most 2011-12 practical nursing program graduates (61%) were likely employed as a licensed nurse in Florida. We compared administrative and survey data to determine if students who graduated from a practical nursing (LPN) program in 2011-12 were employed in a nursing-related field in 2013.[24] We found that 61% of the practical nursing program graduates were licensed and employed in a nursing-related field. (See Exhibit 8.)[25, 26]

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[24] This analysis is based on licensure data from the Department of Health (DOH) and unemployment insurance data from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP). The DOH data includes students who graduated from a Florida licensed practical nurse program during school year 2011-12 and applied for licensure in Florida. Since it does not include students who did not apply for licensure in Florida, the denominator for this analysis is all LPN program graduates as shown in Exhibit 7. 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.

[25] The analyses in Exhibits 8 and 9 show outcomes for all nursing program graduates regardless of whether or not they sought licensure. Prior OPPAGA reports show outcomes for all nurses currently licensed in Florida.
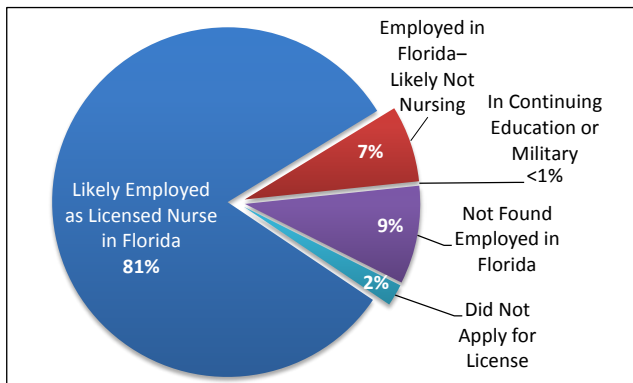
[26] Since there is no available data to identify people who graduated from these programs who did not seek nursing licensure in Florida, the difference between the number of graduates and the number of graduates who sought licensure in Florida provides our estimate of the number of people who graduated from a Florida nursing program who did not seek licensure in Florida. Our analysis shows that approximately 99% of Florida 2011-12 LPN nursing program graduates applied for licensure in Florida and 98% of RN program graduates applied for licensure.

Approximately 23% of 2011-12 graduates were employed in a field other than nursing while 14% were not found employed in Florida.

Exhibit 8
Most 2011-12 Graduates of LPN Programs Were Employed in Nursing-Related Fields in 2013[1]

[1] The FETPIP data used in this analysis shows whether nurses were employed in a nursing-related industry in 2013, but it did not specify that they were employed as nurses.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of licensure data from the Florida Department of Health; and unemployment insurance, continuing education, and military status data from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) at the Florida Department of Education.

Most 2011-12 registered nursing program graduates (81%) were likely employed as a licensed nurse in Florida. Registered nurses (RNs) may be graduates of associate degree and bachelor's degree nursing programs.[27] As of 2013, 81% of the associate or bachelor's nursing program graduates were licensed and employed in a nursing-related field. Approximately 7% of 2011-12 graduates were employed in a field other than nursing while 9% were not found employed in Florida. (See Exhibit 9.) Appendix B shows the percentages of Florida nursing program graduates (practical, associate degree and bachelor's degree) for school years 2008-09 through 2011-12 who were employed in a nursing-related field as of 2013.

Exhibit 9
Most 2011-12 Graduates of RN Programs Were Employed in Nursing-Related Fields in 2013[1, 2]

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

[2] Percentages do not add exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of licensure data from the Florida Department of Health; and unemployment insurance, continuing education, and military status data from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) at the Florida Department of Education.

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[27] This analysis is the same as the analysis conducted for Exhibit 8, except that it examines only at individuals who graduated from an associate or bachelor's degree nursing program.

Appendix A

Retention of Florida Nursing Education Programs

Nursing Program Student Retention

Exhibit A-1 shows the number of new students enrolled in each type of nursing program who entered the programs in 2012 and 2013 and the percentage of students retained (i.e., still enrolled in the programs a year later). To calculate retention, for each cohort we added the number of graduates and the number of students still enrolled and divided by the number of newly enrolled students. Overall, the retention rate for students who entered in 2013 was slightly lower than the rates for those who entered in 2012. However, retention rate changes varied by program type with two types experiencing increases and three experiencing decreases.

Exhibit A-1
The Percentage of Students Retained in Nursing Programs Decreased in 2013[1]

Curriculum Type	Students Entering in 2012 (Status as of 2013)		Students Entering in 2013[2] (Status as of 2014)	
	Total New Students Enrolled	Percentage Retained	Total New Students Enrolled	Percentage Retained
Practical Nursing (LPN) – Generic	2,976	80.8%	2,974	79.7%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Generic	6,532	81.6%	7,673	78.5%
Associate Degree in Nursing – Bridge	2,344	84.5%	2,144	89.4%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – Generic	1,693	93.2%	2,002	89.8%
Bachelor's Degree in Nursing – 2nd Degree	576	94.6%	551	97.5%
Total	14,121	83.8%	15,344	82.4%

[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 2012 and 2013 and report to us the outcomes of these students over a one-year period.

[2] Eleven programs did not respond to the 2013-14 survey and are not included in the results.

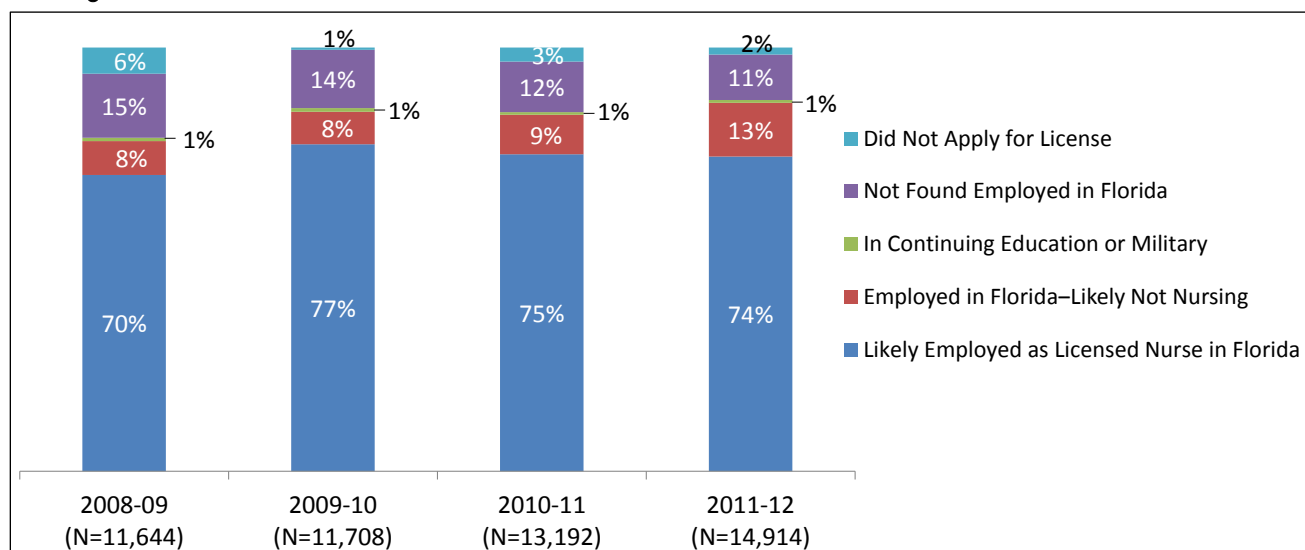Source: OPPAGA survey of nursing education programs.

Appendix B

Employment Outcomes of Florida Nursing Education Program Graduates

Exhibit B-1 shows the percentages of Florida undergraduate nursing program graduates for school years 2008-09 through 2011-12 who were employed in a nursing-related field as of 2013. The data showed that most individuals who graduated from a Florida nursing program were licensed and employed in nursing-related fields in Florida.[28] For example, 74% of 2011-12 graduates were licensed and employed in a nursing-related field in Florida in 2013. The number of Florida undergraduate nursing program graduates was determined by surveying all Florida nursing programs. (See Exhibit 7.) To determine how many graduates were licensed and employed in nursing fields in Florida, we obtained data on individuals who applied for a nursing license in Florida (practical nursing or professional nursing) who graduated from a Florida undergraduate nursing program in school years 2008-09 through 2011-12. We matched these individuals to Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) unemployment insurance data to determine if they were employed in nursing-related fields in Florida.[29]

Exhibit B-1
Most Graduates of Florida Nursing Programs from 2008-09 through 2011-12 Were Employed in Nursing-Related Fields in 2013[1]

Legend:
- Did Not Apply for License
- Not Found Employed in Florida
- In Continuing Education or Military
- Employed in Florida–Likely Not Nursing
- Likely Employed as Licensed Nurse in Florida

X-axis categories:
- 2008-09 (N=11,644)
- 2009-10 (N=11,708)
- 2010-11 (N=13,192)
- 2011-12 (N=14,914)

[1] Percentages do not add exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of licensure data from the Florida Department of Health; and unemployment insurance, continuing education, and military status data from the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) at the Florida Department of Education.

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[28] The analysis in Exhibit B-1 shows outcomes for all nursing program graduates regardless of whether they sought licensure. Prior OPPAGA reports show outcomes for all nurses currently licensed in Florida.

[29] Since there is no available data to identify people who graduated from these programs who did not seek nursing licensure in Florida, the difference between the number of graduates (from the surveys) and the number of graduates who sought licensure in Florida (from Department of Health licensure data) provides our estimate of the number of people who graduated from a Florida nursing program who did not seek licensure in Florida. Our analysis shows that statewide between 94% and 99% of Florida undergraduate nursing program graduates applied for LPN or RN licensure in Florida. The higher percentage of 2008-09 graduates shown as not having applied for licensure (6%) is likely due to greater imprecision in the data for this year.

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

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