

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Findings from the Annual Survey of Schools of Nursing Academic Year 2008-2009

Students Are Increasingly Diverse

Lack of Educational Capacity Still Stymies Enrollment Growth

Since the 1950s, the NLN has conducted an annual survey of all nursing programs in the United States to gather key statistics. This article reports on findings from the annual survey administered from October to December 2009. Because of a shift in the NLN's research timetable last year, two surveys were conducted in 2009. This second survey obtained statistics on the 2008-2009 academic year. To supplement this synopsis, a comprehensive set of tables and figures is available in a variety of easy-to-use electronic formats at the NLN DataView™ website (www.nln.org/research/slides).

Minority Student Enrollment Climbs After a period of slow growth, the percentage of minority students enrolled in basic RN programs showed a very healthy increase in 2008-2009, bringing the representation of all minorities, except Hispanics, to levels on par with those seen among US college students (Figure 1). All racial-ethnic categories experienced a bump in enrollment, with the growth in enrollment of traditionally underrepresented Hispanic students particularly notable. However, Hispanic students comprise only 7 percent of all prelicensure nursing students and remain the most underrepresented of all minorities in nursing education. In contrast, Hispanics represent 12 percent of all 4-year college students.

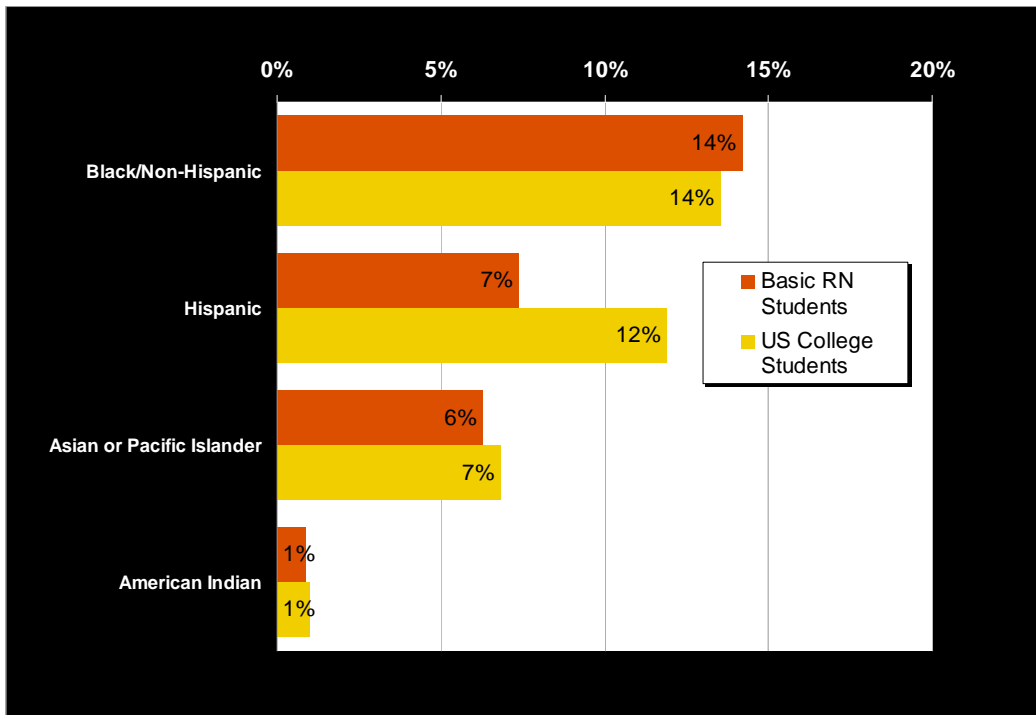


Figure 1. Percentage of Minority Students Enrolled in Basic RN Programs and in All US Degree-Granting Institutions, 2008-2009

Student diversity is relatively consistent across prelicensure program types. BSN and ADN programs enrolled minority students at similar rates, about 28 percent each. LPN/LVN and diploma programs had the largest proportion of minority students in 2008-2009, with 35 percent of their students of minority backgrounds. And while postlicensure programs were slightly less diverse, no program type reported a minority student population of less than 20 percent in 2008-2009. In fact, almost one quarter of the nation's RN-BSN and master's students were minorities, as were 20 percent of doctoral students.

Age Varies by Program Type Given widespread concern about the advanced age of newly licensed RNs limiting their tenure in practice, it is notable that only about one in three prelicensure RN students was over age 30 last year. However, these data point to a more complex picture. In fact, students enrolled in baccalaureate programs in 2008-2009 were significantly younger than the general four-year college student population. Only 14 percent of BSN students were reported to be over age 30, compared with almost 22 percent of four-year college students. By contrast, at 49 percent, the proportion of ADN students over 30 vastly exceeds the percentage of over-30 students in US two-year colleges, where only about one in four students are 30 or over.

As Economy Contracts, More Men Enter Nursing The percentage of men enrolled in basic nursing programs reached a high in 2008-2009 at 13.8 percent. This event hews to a pattern seen since the 1970s in which men enter nursing education in larger numbers during periods of economic recession. However, this advance may be short lived. In the last two post-recessionary periods, the gains in male enrollment were lost as labor market conditions shifted and men sought employment opportunities elsewhere.

Capacity Continues to Fall Short of Demand as Recession Halts Expansion For the second year in a row, the nation saw nearly no growth in the number of prelicensure nursing programs. In 2008-2009, the number of diploma programs was stable at 69, and ADN and BSN programs showed only tiny net gains: eight for ADN programs and two for BSN programs.

Almost 40 percent of all qualified applications to basic RN programs were turned away in 2008-2009 (Figure 2). ADN programs -- concentrated in public institutions, which see applications rise more sharply during recessions -- rejected 45 percent of qualified applications, while BSN and diploma programs denied admission to 28 and 23 percent of qualified applications, respectively.

The likelihood of qualified candidates being denied entrance was notably lower for postlicensure programs. Doctoral and master's programs turned away 18 and 13 percent of qualified applications, respectively, and RN-BSN programs declined admission to a mere 3 percent of those who were qualified.

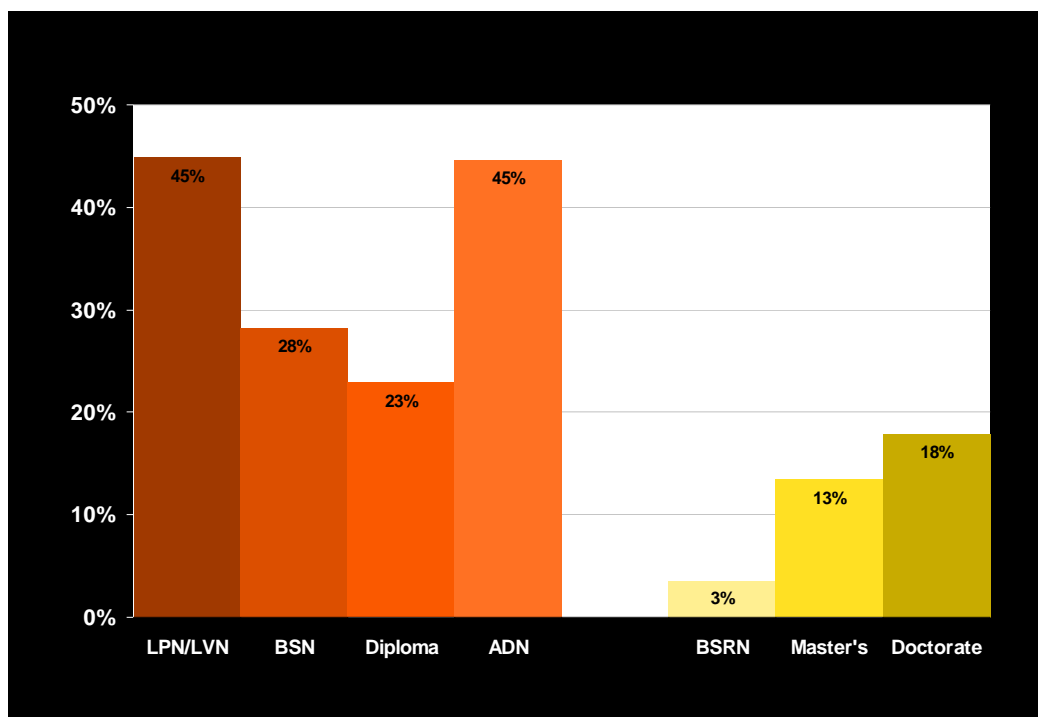


Figure 2. Percentage of Qualified Applications Not Accepted by Program Type, 2008-2009

Selectivity Levels Reflect Highly Competitive Admissions Also reflecting growing competition in 2008-2009 were heightened levels of selectivity of prelicensure RN programs. The selectivity rate — also known as the acceptance rate -- represents the percentage of applicants offered admission in a given year. Experts generally categorize institutions as *highly selective* if they admit fewer than half their applicants. The highly selective category grew from 62 percent to 67 percent for ADN programs, and from 39 to 43 percent for BSN programs, indicating that this trend reflects general unmet demand, rather than a recessionary migration of students toward public institutions. By contrast, just 15 percent of master's and 13 percent of doctoral programs accepted fewer than 50 percent of applicants.

Yield Rates, Already High, Continue to Grow Adding to the evidence of overstretched capacity is the extraordinarily high percentage of accepted candidates who go on to matriculate in nursing education programs. By contrast to four-year colleges and universities in the United States, which matriculate, on average, only 45 percent of admitted applicants each year, nursing programs typically enroll almost double that percentage. In fact, the yield rate among prelicensure RN programs climbed for the fourth consecutive year to a near-term high of 88 percent in 2008-2009. ADN programs contributed to this increase; these program enrolled a stunning 95 percent of those who were accepted. Similar rates are seen in nursing across all program types, with LPN/LVN programs also showing yield rates averaging 94 percent.

Faculty Shortage and Lack of Clinical Placements Impede Expansion For the second consecutive year, deans and directors of postlicensure programs cited the faculty shortage as the primary obstacle to expanding programs to accommodate additional students. And while a lack of clinical practice settings continues to be a major issue for prelicensure programs — cited by 42 percent of ADN programs, 32 percent of BSN programs, and 38 percent of LPN nursing programs -- there was a notable increase across all program types in the percentage of programs that reported that the faculty shortage was the obstacle to expansion this year (Figure 3).

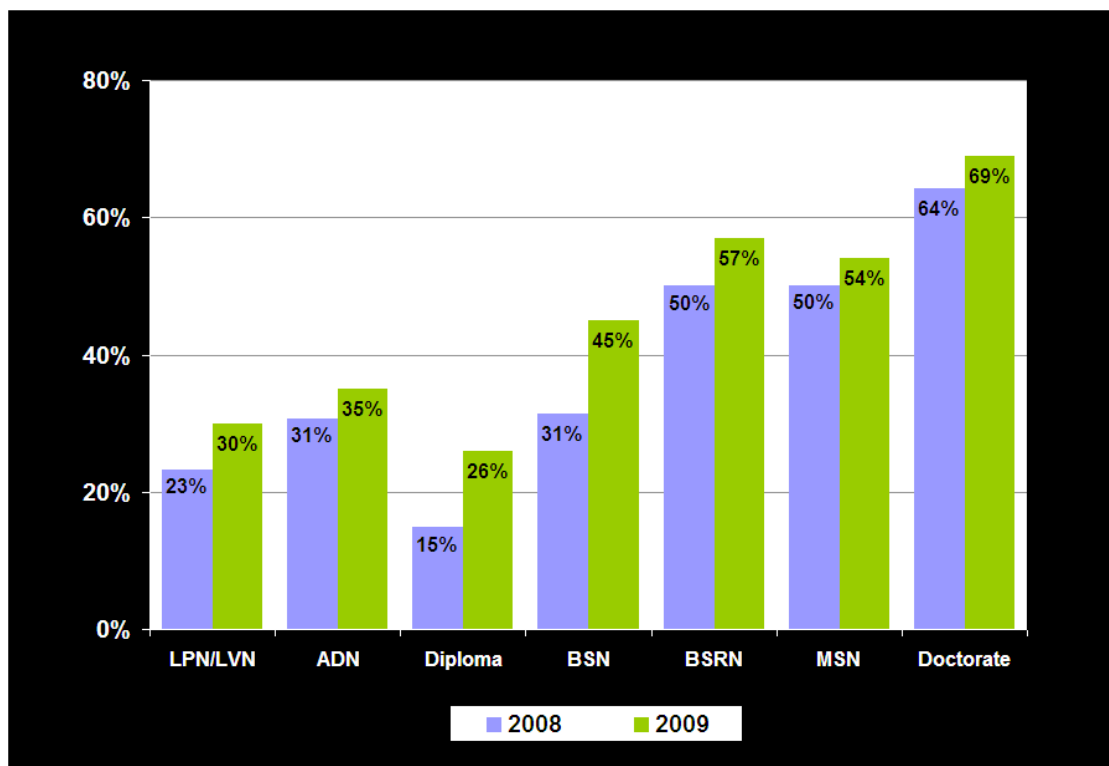


Figure 3. Lack of Faculty Is Main Obstacle to Expanding Admissions, 2008 and 2009

As always, please keep an eye on the NLN DataView website for more data from the NLN. This dataset was made possible as a result of the generous support of all those nursing colleagues who contribute data each year to the NLN's Annual Survey of Schools of Nursing. The NLN is extremely grateful to all those who contributed their time and energy to make this effort a success.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCE:

US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2009
