

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Findings from the Annual Survey of Schools of Nursing Academic Year 2009-2010

#### *NLN Data Show Both Progress and Challenges in Meeting IOM Objectives*

This executive summary describes findings from the NLN's Annual Survey of Schools of Nursing, administered from October to December 2010. While a core strength of the Annual Survey is its long-term trend data, which allow scholars to track fluctuations in key educational statistics since as early as the 1950s, new topics and analyses are also introduced on occasion to capture and assess emerging issues in nursing education. The recent release of the [IOM's report](#) on the Future of Nursing represents such an opportunity.

*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](#).*

Not surprisingly, as it seeks to reshape the nursing workforce, virtually every transformation recommended by the IOM pivots upon one or many concomitant transformations within the established framework of nursing education. The report's call to *increase the diversity of the workforce* necessitates the recruitment of a more diverse student body into the nation's nursing education programs. Similarly, achievement of *higher levels of education and training* necessitates facilitating transitions between entry-level and postlicensure degree programs and expanding educational capacity by recruiting and retaining more nurses with advanced degrees into faculty roles.

Findings from the NLN Annual Survey provide data to shed light on both these issues. While the IOM report does not identify a shortage of educational capacity as a major concern, the NLN Annual Survey continues to find that there is tremendous competition for entry into nursing education programs as well as a great deal of unmet demand. Understanding trends in admissions into nursing programs and framing those trends within the broader context of systemic change in health care and higher education are primary objectives of this report.

**Hispanics Still Underrepresented Among Basic RN Students** In the aggregate, the percentage of minority students enrolled in prelicensure RN programs has remained close to 28 percent with just minor variation since 2002. In 2010 slightly under 27 percent of prelicensure RN students were members of a minority group, compared with almost 37 percent of the US population to whom they will eventually provide care. *However, these national level statistics belie some crucial distinctions.* For example, about 12 percent of nursing education students at all levels of nursing education are African American – a level of representation that is commensurate with the proportion of African Americans in the US population. And at slightly under one percent, the fraction of American Indians enrolled are similarly representative.

By comparison with other racial-ethnic groups, Hispanics are dramatically underrepresented among nursing students. Whereas about 16 percent of the US population was Hispanic in 2010, among associate degree students only half those percentages (7.6 percent) were Hispanic. Moreover, NLN data find that the percentage of Hispanic students shrinks as one looks up the ladder of educational advancement: Hispanics comprise just 6 percent of those enrolled in BSN programs, 5 percent in RN-to-BSN programs, 4 percent in master's programs, and a mere 3 percent of our nation's doctoral students. Given the dramatic underrepresentation of Hispanics among graduate-prepared nurses, it is not surprising that the most recent

NLN nurse faculty census found that Hispanics are also underrepresented among nurse faculty – just 3 percent of full-time and 5 percent of part-time nurse educators are Hispanic.

These findings are particularly concerning given the US Census Bureau’s population projections. While the fraction of the US population that is American Indian and African American is expected to remain stable over the next four decades, by 2050 the percentage of Americans of Hispanic origin is projected to double to over 30 percent.

Underscoring the variability of the landscape wrought by immigrant diversity, though Asians comprise 5 percent of the US population, they are slightly overrepresented among BSN and MSN students, where they constitute 7 and 6 percent respectively. However, they are underrepresented within ADN and RN-to-BSN programs. And though Asians make up almost 6 percent of all academic faculty in the United States, they comprise just 3 percent of nurse faculty.

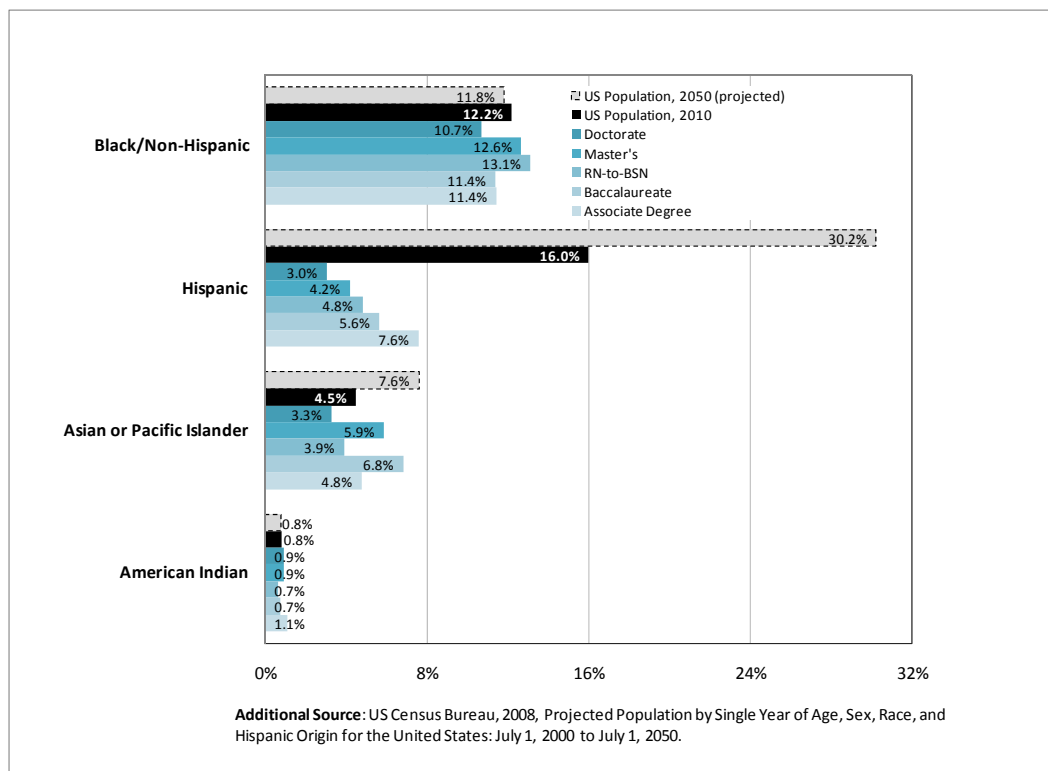


Figure 1. Percentage of Minorities in the US Population (2010 and projected 2050) and Enrolled in Nursing Programs in 2010 by Race and Nursing Program Type

**Percentage of Younger Students Grows; Male Enrollment Stable** In recent years a trend toward later entry into the nursing profession and the consequent increase in the average age of full-time employed nurses have been two of the factors contributing to projections of an acute national nursing shortage by 2025. In this context, it is hopeful to find that the recent trend toward late entry into nursing appears to be on the wane. One third of basic RN students were over 30 in 2010 compared to just a quarter of US undergraduates, reflecting a considerable age difference. However, the percentage of students 30 and over enrolled in all three types of prelicensure RN programs has declined measurably in recent years. Whereas 21 percent of baccalaureate students were over 30 in 2003, that fraction dropped to just 15 percent in 2010 – a level well below that seen among US undergraduates. And while at 42 percent the percentage of ADN

students over 30 is much higher, that figure represents an 8 percent decline in the size of the over-30 category since it peaked in 2007.

Males comprised approximately 13 percent of students across all program types in 2010. Within prelicensure RN programs specifically, the percentage of male students rose steadily over the past seven years from a near-term low of 10 percent in 2003 to 14 percent last year, settling at 13 percent in 2010. That said, male underrepresentation in nursing continues to represent a very significant missed opportunity to expand both the diversity and magnitude of the US nursing workforce.

**Demand for Nursing Education Continues to Outstrip Supply as Faculty Shortage and Lack of Clinical Placements Impede Expansion** The overall systemic capacity of prelicensure nursing education continues to fall well short of demand. Fully 42 percent of all qualified applications to basic RN programs were met with rejection in 2010. Associate degree programs – primarily in public institutions – receive higher numbers of applications than their counterparts. Those programs rejected 46 percent of qualified applications, compared with 37 percent of BSN programs and 21 percent of diploma programs. Notably, the nation’s PN programs turned away 40 percent of qualified applications. By contrast, postlicensure programs turned away fewer qualified candidates. RN-to-BSN programs rejected a mere 3 percent of qualified applications, whereas MSN and doctorate programs turned away 16 and 18 percent, respectively.

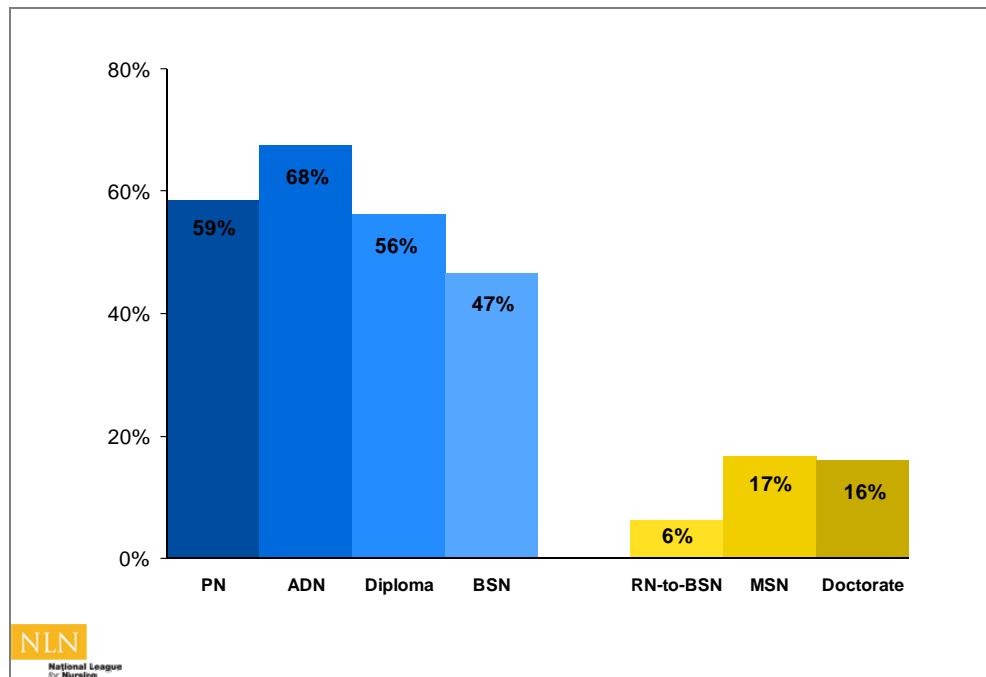


Figure 2. Percentage of Programs that Are Highly Selective by Program Type, 2010

Indicating that in many areas the shortage of spots has grown even more acute, the percentage of programs that were highly selective – i.e., accepted fewer than 50 percent of applications – continued to climb upward in 2010. More than two thirds (68 percent) of associate degree programs were highly selective in 2010, an increase of 6 percent over two years. And while ADN programs do tend to accept a smaller percentage of applications due to their tendency to be located in more affordable public institutions, baccalaureate programs are also increasingly categorized as highly selective, with 47 percent receiving that designation in 2010 compared to just 39 percent in 2008.

Moreover, yield rates – that is, the percentage of accepted applicants who go on to enroll – remain extraordinarily high among both pre- and postlicensure programs. According to this classic indicator of the competitiveness of college admissions, a stunning 94 percent of all applicants accepted into ADN programs, and 93 percent of those accepted in PN programs, went on to enroll in 2010. Yield rates among the other program types were nearly as high averaging 89 percent for RN-to-BSN programs; 86 percent for diploma, MSN, and doctoral programs; and 84 percent for BSN programs.

Despite an ongoing shortage of nursing educational capacity in the nation overall, there is indication that in some areas the demand for entry has fallen over the past two years. The percentage of programs reporting at least one unfilled seat rose sharply across all program types between 2008 and 2009 as the economic recession took hold. That level stabilized in 2010 with approximately one in five diploma, BSN, and doctoral programs reporting unfilled seats. Slightly smaller percentages of ADN and MSN programs (15 percent) reported spots remaining vacant, as did 13 percent of RN-to-BSN programs.

Given the persistence of high levels of unmet demand for spots in nursing education programs, it is useful to consider which factors impede the expansion of educational capacity. Those factors vary considerably by program type. A shortage of faculty continues to be the cited most frequently as the main obstacle to expansion by RN-to-BSN and doctoral programs – indicated by 47 and 53 percent, respectively. By contrast, prelicensure programs are more likely to point to a lack of available clinical placement settings as the primary obstacle to expanding admissions. Diploma programs were uniquely constrained by a lack of classroom space, identified by 44 percent of deans as the primary bottleneck impeding efforts to expand.

**For Postgraduate Programs, High Tuition Crimps Student Recruitment. Lack of Qualified Students Constrains Basic Program Enrollment** Although the fraction of programs unable to fill seats remains relatively small, as we consider how to make efficient use of available resources, it is useful to consider the impediments to recruiting students into those programs. The percentage of programs reporting that affordability or high tuition was the main obstacle to recruiting additional students rose sharply for all program types except PN and doctorate between 2008 and 2009. While that trend moderated for some types of programs in 2010, approximately one third of all graduate programs continued to cite affordability as the key impediment to filling all enrollment vacancies. By contrast, affordability was considered the main constraint to student recruitment by only about 20 percent of PN, diploma, and BSN programs, and by just 13 percent of ADN programs. Among prelicensure programs a lack of qualified students was overwhelmingly considered the key constraint to filling all enrollment slots in 2010. A dearth of qualified students was cited by approximately half of all PN and ADN programs, and by more than 40 percent of diploma and BSN programs.

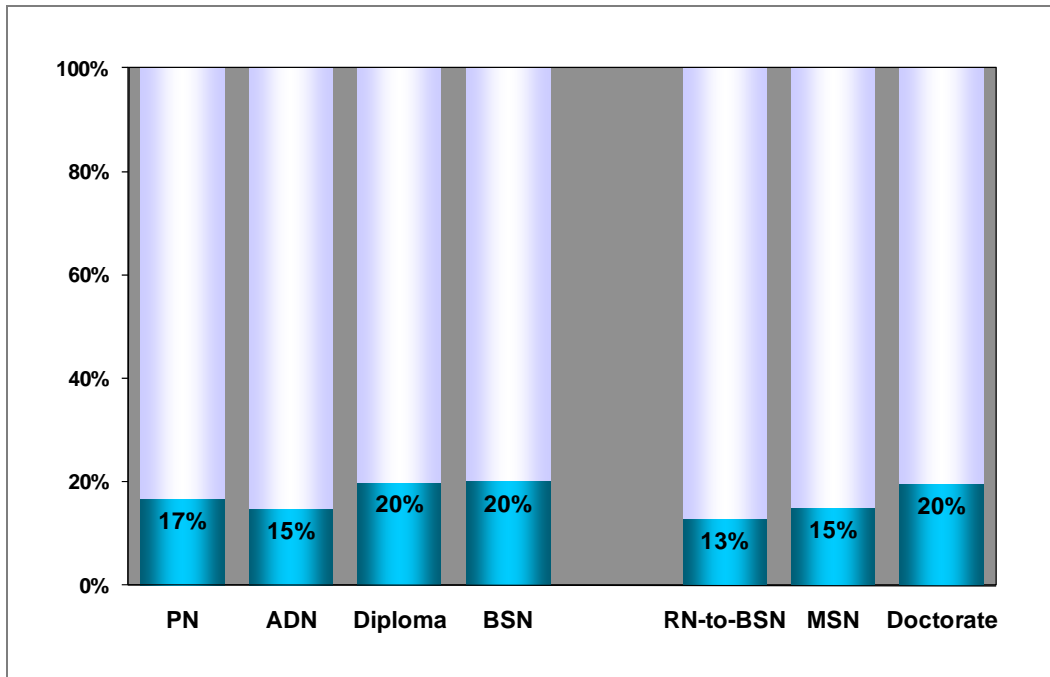


Figure 3. Percentage of Programs with Unfilled Openings by Program Type, 2010

As the rapidly changing US health care system creates new demands and opportunities for nursing, it is also generating the need for more considered and nuanced research and data analysis. With the generous contributions of the thousands of schools of nursing across that respond to the *Annual Survey* each year, the NLN endeavors to produce data sources that will allow us to make the most informed decisions possible as we confront these new challenges and opportunities. 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, 2009 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010