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# The University of North Carolina

## Nursing Report

### 2014

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The University of North Carolina  
General Administration

April 2015

## Executive Summary

Educating North Carolina's nursing workforce continues to be a hallmark of the University of North Carolina (UNC) and UNC institutions are constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of the healthcare industry. Highlights of the success of UNC institutions in nursing education include the following:

- Since Fall 2010, overall **enrollment** in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral nursing degree programs has grown from 4,851 to 6,319 (+30%).
  - Undergraduate nursing enrollment increased from 3,219 to 4,630 (+44%).
  - Master's nursing enrollment decreased slightly from 1,516 to 1,438 (-5%).
  - Doctoral nursing enrollment increased from 116 to 251 (+116%).
- Since 2009-10, the total **degrees conferred** for nursing graduates at all levels increased from 2,208 to 2,663 (+21%).
  - The number of BSN degrees grew from 1,795 to 2,106 (+17%).
  - The number of master's degrees grew from 401 to 541 (+35%).
  - The number of doctoral degrees in nursing increased slightly from 12 to 16 (+33%).
- In calendar year 2014, a total of 1,061 UNC nursing students took the nursing exam (NCLEX-RN) for the first time and 975 passed (92%).
- One campus did not meet the Board of Governors' NCLEX-RN exam passing rate standard (scoring at least 85% for first-time writers for two consecutive years) and updates on this campus' improvement efforts are included in this report.
- UNC institutions are training nursing professionals throughout North Carolina by increasing enrollments, improving curriculum, and expanding degree offerings to reflect industry trends.

## Introduction

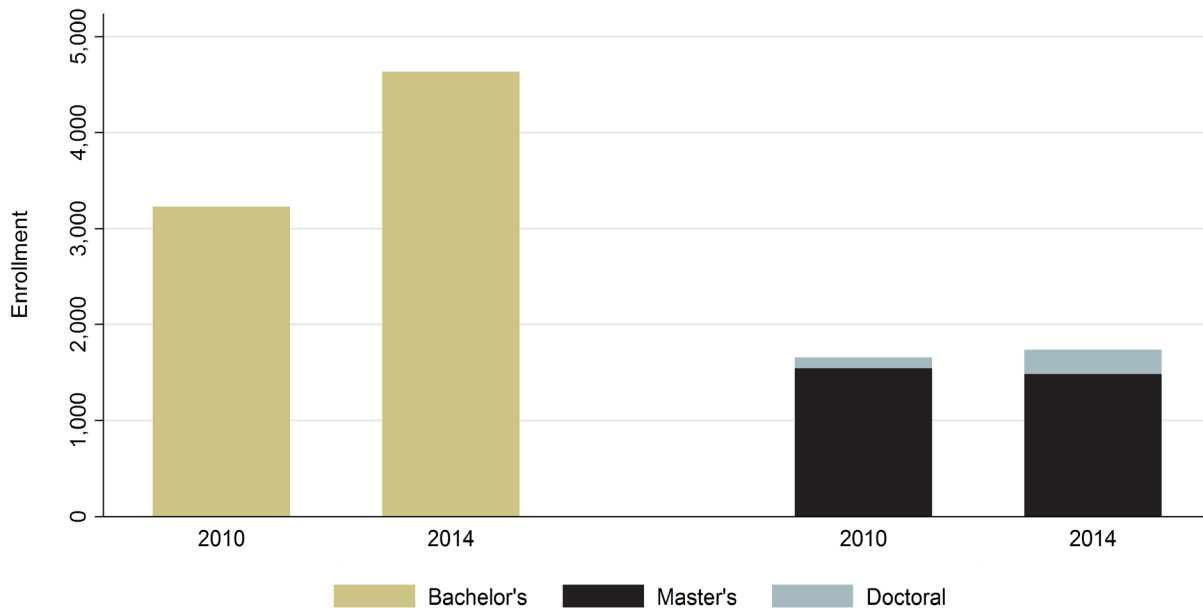
Nursing education continues to be a cornerstone of UNC's commitment to serve North Carolinians and UNC institutions and programs constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of the healthcare industry. When reviewing all major indicators of program success (enrollment, degrees conferred, and examination results), UNC's nursing programs operate effectively to prepare their students for professional success. Over the past five years, enrollment has increased across all nursing programs by 30%, the number of degrees conferred has increased by 21%, and in 2014, students taking the national nursing licensure exam (NCLEX-RN) had a 92% first-time passing rate. Nearly all of the UNC nursing programs performed well on the state nursing exam, with just one campus falling below the BOG's rigorous passing rate standards of at least 85% for two consecutive years.

As the provision of healthcare becomes increasingly complex, UNC institutions have responded by increasing capacity to prepare registered nurses and advanced practice nurses. Consistent with the UNC strategic plan, *Our Time, Our Future*, and in line with national nursing education trends, six campuses were approved by the Board of Governors (BOG) in Fall 2013 to develop practice-focused doctorate programs (DNPs) that have already begun to enroll students.

## UNC Nursing Enrollment

Over the past five years, undergraduate enrollment in nursing programs at UNC campuses has continued to grow with baccalaureate enrollment increasing by 44%. During this time, master's-level enrollment decreased slightly by 5% and doctoral enrollment increased 116%. These changes can be seen in Figure 1 and the data are presented in Appendix A.

Figure 1: UNC Nursing Enrollment, Fall 2010 and Fall 2014

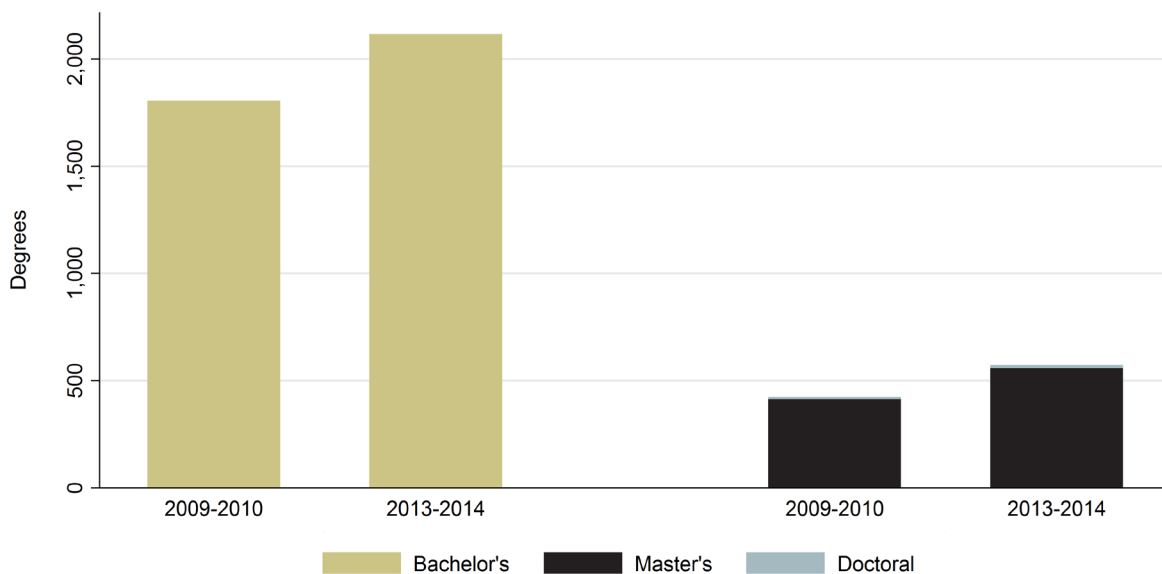


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- Since Fall 2010, overall enrollment in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral nursing degree programs has grown from 4,851 to 6,319 (+30%).
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## UNC Degrees Conferred

Increasing the nursing degrees produced was central to the 2004 recommendations issued by both the North Carolina Institute of Medicine and the UNC BOG Committee on the Future of Nursing. Not only has UNC been able to meet these demands, but our institutions and programs have sustained this growth and continued to increase degree production. Overall, nursing degrees continued their upward trend, with total degrees conferred by UNC nursing programs increasing 21% over five years. Full data by degree type and campus for the past five years are included in Appendix B.

Figure 2: *UNC Nursing Degrees Conferred, 2009-10 and 2013-14*



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- Since 2009-10, the total degrees conferred for nursing graduates at all levels increased from 2,208 to 2,663 (+21%).
    - The number of BSN degrees grew from 1,795 to 2,106 (+17%).
    - The number of master's degrees grew from 401 to 541 (+35%).
    - The number of doctoral degrees in nursing increased slightly from 12 to 16 (+33%).
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## Nursing Examination Passing Rate Standards

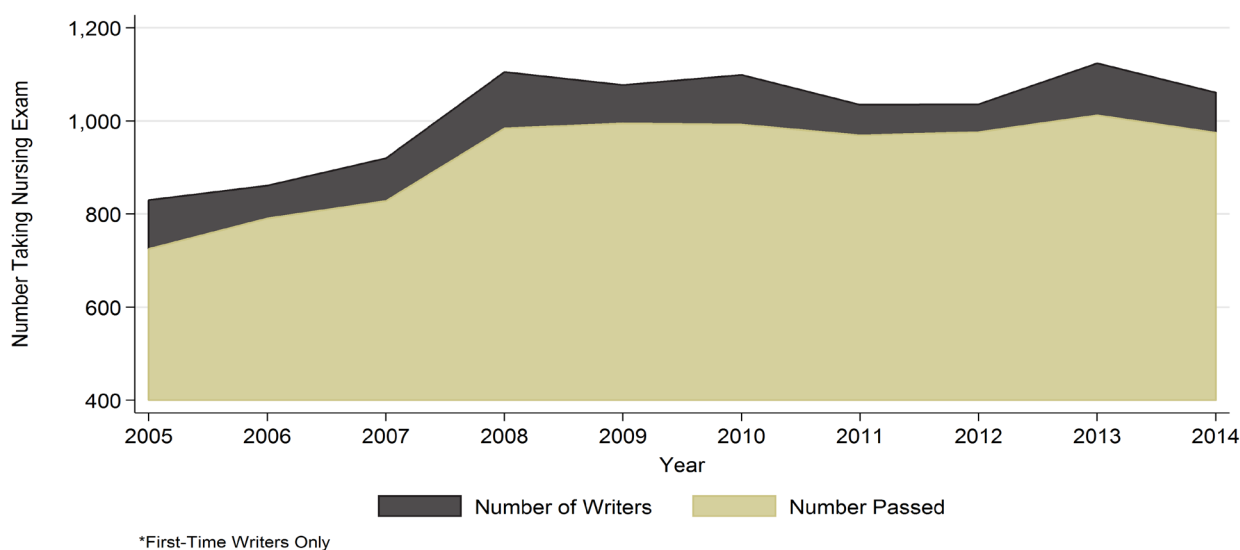
### UNC Examination Standards

In May 1990, the University of North Carolina Board of Governors (BOG) adopted UNC Policy 400.1.7, which included performance standards for UNC nursing programs. This policy states, in part, that the UNC President will initiate a review of any nursing program that does achieve an annual NCLEX-RN passing rate of 85% for first-time writers for two consecutive years. Additionally, if a nursing program has a NCLEX-RN passing rate of less than 75% for first-time writers for two consecutive years, the President will ask the Board to initiate the termination of the program. The BOG's 85% passing rate standard for the NCLEX-RN exam exceeds the state's Board of Nursing standards (see the next section for detail on Board of Nursing standards).

In calendar year 2014, 1,061 UNC nursing program graduates sat for the NCLEX-RN exam and 975 passed for a passing rate of 92%: higher than the state-wide passing rate of 88% (see Figures 3-5 for UNC results and Appendix C for detailed data).

Two UNC campuses has passing rates below 85% for 2014. Winston-Salem State University had a 84% passing rate but no penalties are called for at this time due to this single-year dip in scores. They are aware of the need to improve their results in 2015 to avoid penalties. The other campus falling below 85% was North Carolina A&T State University (NC A&T). Due to numerous efforts to restructure and improve their curriculum, retention, and success of nursing students, along with a comprehensive review conducted in the second half of 2014 by a BOG-appointed working group, no new BOG reviews or sanctions are being initiated as a result of their 2014 NCLEX-RN pass rates. Further details regarding their progress are discussed later in this report.

Figure 3: *Number of Students Taking & Passing Nursing Exam, 2005 through 2014*



- 1,061 UNC students took the nursing exam for the first time and 975 passed (92%).

Figure 4: *UNC Nursing Examinations, Percent Passing 2013 and 2014*

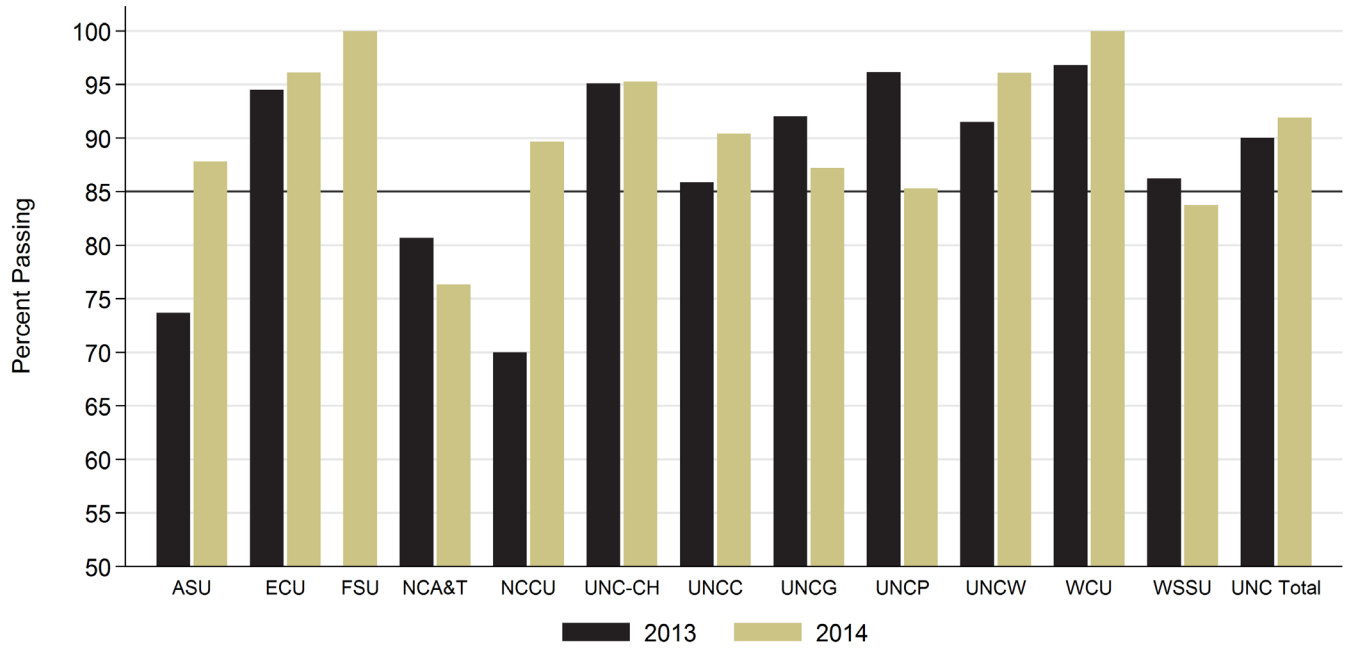
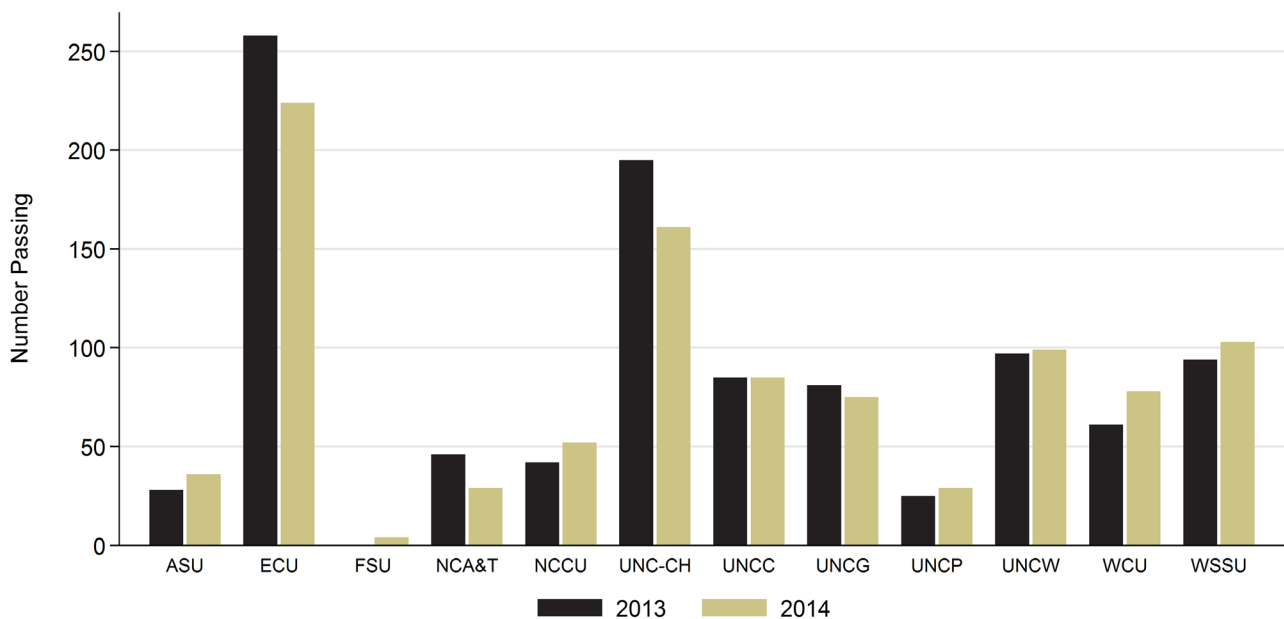


Figure 5: *UNC Nursing Examinations, Number Passing 2013 and 2014*



## North Carolina Board of Nursing Examination Standards

The NC Board of Nursing requires that a nursing program's NCLEX-RN three-year average be at least 95% of the national passing rate in order to remain in good standing. The NCLEX-RN three-year average national pass rate for 2012-2014 is 85%. Thus, to meet the NC Board of Nursing standards, UNC nursing programs must achieve a three-year average minimum pass rate of 81% (95% of the national rate).

If a nursing program falls below the Board of Nursing standards, it will be asked to submit a written improvement plan aimed at increasing the program's overall performance. If the program does not improve after three consecutive years, the Board of Nursing changes their status to Public Warning and conducts a focused review of the program. When a program demonstrates significant improvement in their performance, they can be returned to Full Approval status.<sup>1</sup>

At their January 2015 meeting, the Board of Nursing placed NC A&T on Public Warning Status due to a three-year average pass rate of 80%, which fell below the minimum pass rate of 81%. The Board of Nursing has requested an improvement plan and a site visit to monitor status of the program.

## Corrective Actions at UNC Institutions

### North Carolina A&T State University

During 2014, the BOG Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs convened a team to conduct an in-depth review of the School of Nursing at NC A&T. This was a result of the 2014 Nursing Report presented at the April 2014 BOG meeting that discussed the institution's low-performance on the NCLEX-RN exam over multiple years. During that April 2014 meeting, the BOG Committee voted to suspend new admissions to the BSN program after 2014 and called for a full review of the program.

The review team met several times during the second half of 2014, reviewed a multitude of data, and conducted a site visit to NC A&T. They presented these recommendations to the BOG Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs in December 2014 and they were approved. The team's recommendations for the nursing program included:

- Continuing the suspension of new admissions into the traditional BSN program and teach-out existing students unless the first-time pass rates on the NCLEX-RN exam in 2014, 2015, or 2016 meets or exceeds the BOG

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<sup>1</sup> Significant improvement is demonstrated by achieving one of the following: The current year passing rate meeting or exceeding 95% of the current year national passing rate or a three-year average passing rate that is at or above 90% of the national three-year average passing rate.



- standards. If this goal is met, the admissions suspension would be lifted.
- Increasing recruitment for the accelerated BSN program and admit at least 30 students by 2019-2020.
  - Increasing recruitment for the RN-to-BSN program.
  - Continuing the evaluation of the nursing program's finances as the proposed changes take place.

Additionally, the review team presented key thresholds for monitoring the NCLEX-RN pass rates for the nursing program through 2016. The report recommended that if the pass rate was less than 85% but equal to or greater than 75% (referring to the UNC BOG standards mentioned earlier in this report), then the enrollment suspension would remain in place and the calendar year 2015 pass rates would be evaluated to monitor progress. Specifically, the recommendations state:

1. If the pass rate is equal to or greater than the UNC BOG policy standard (using the Board's standard as of the date of the 2016 UNC Nursing report), the enrollment suspension will be lifted immediately and the relevant Board policy will be applied moving forward.
2. If the pass rate is less than 75%, the traditional BSN program will be terminated and a teach-out plan will be implemented for the remaining traditional BSN students.
3. If the pass rate is less than the UNC BOG policy standard but greater than or equal to 75%, the enrollment suspension will be maintained and the NCLEX-RN pass rate for calendar year 2016 will be re-evaluated.

If further monitoring is necessary, then one of two options exercised based on NC A&T graduates who take the NCLEX-RN exam in calendar year 2016:

1. If the pass rate is equal to or greater than the UNC BOG policy standard, the enrollment suspension will be lifted immediately and the relevant Board policy will be applied moving forward.
2. If the pass rate is less than the UNC BOG policy standard, the traditional BSN program will be terminated.

With an NCLEX-RN passing rate of 76% in 2014, NC A&T's nursing program will continue to suspend enrollments and will, along with UNC-GA, continue to monitor the passing rates of their students during calendar year 2015. NC A&T's School of Nursing is diligently working to advance student success, comply with the recommendations made by the review team, and achieve the standards set by the BOG and the North Carolina Board of Nursing.

## **Fayetteville State University**

In 2009, FSU's Chancellor suspended new enrollment in the nursing program due to low NCLEX-RN passing rates. The 27 students enrolled at the time of this corrective action graduated in 2010 with a 100% passing rate. President Ross, in consultation with the Educational Planning Committee, endorsed FSU's request to the Board of Nursing to restart their nursing program in 2011 with smaller class sizes (25-30) and a commitment to improve quality and student preparedness. FSU enrolled new students in 2011 and the full cohort of program graduates will be taking the NCLEX-RN exam in 2015. Four graduates took the NCLEX-RN exam in 2014 and all four passed. UNC-GA will continue to review the program's progress and report results as they become available.

## **Expanding Nursing Education at UNC**

### **Doctorate of Nursing Practice**

As health care provision becomes more complex and fast-paced, the nursing profession is recognizing the need for more advanced education for providers to meet the industry demands and train the next generation of nursing professionals. As with pharmacy, physical therapy, psychology, medicine and audiology, nursing is adopting a practice-focused doctorate as the appropriate level of graduate education for many advanced-practice registered nurses. The doctor of nursing practice (DNP) prepares nurses for direct clinical practice and for executive roles in areas that support clinical practice, such as administration, organizational leadership, academics, and health policy.

In February 2013, six UNC institutions were approved to offer new DNP degree programs: ECU, UNC-CH, UNCG, WSSU, and a consortium involving UNCC and WCU. Five of these campuses began offering courses in Fall 2013 to newly enrolled students and UNCG will begin enrolling students in Fall 2015. This effort will produce new advanced-practice registered nurses and expand the knowledge and skills of existing ones to serve the people and students of North Carolina.

### **Statewide Articulation Agreement on Nursing Programs**

As part of UNC's ongoing efforts to remain at the forefront of nursing practice and education while serving the needs of students, the BOG approved a statewide articulation agreement between UNC and the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) at their February 2015 meeting. This agreement provides a clearer and more consistent pathway from the Associates Degree in Nursing (ADN) to the Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN). There are 55 community colleges in North Carolina that offer the ADN and 11 UNC institutions that currently offer RN-to-BSN post-licensure com-

pletion programs and this agreement creates a uniform pathway to facilitate transfer of credits and overcome barriers nurses have encountered in attempting to apply, enroll, and participate in RN-to-BSN programs.

By defining a clear curriculum and plan for transfer of credit, the agreement assures that students who successfully complete an ADN degree from an NCCCS institution would be awarded at least 58 semester credits upon admission to a BSN completion program and would receive an additional 30-34 semester credits from their ADN coursework upon successful completion of one or two university-level nursing courses. Thus, nurses would receive a total of 88-92 semester credits from their ADN degree towards the BSN under this agreement throughout the UNC system.

To further monitor and improve the transfer articulation process, an RN-to-BSN Transfer Committee composed of representatives from both NCCCS and UNC will be appointed under the terms of the articulation agreement to monitor implementation of the agreement and recommend changes as needed. This agreement has been reviewed and endorsed by all affected community colleges and universities and will serve to strengthen North Carolina as a leader in the nursing field.

## Meeting North Carolina's Demand for Nurses

The demand for nurses varies across the country, as areas with higher mean ages will likely see a greater demand for nurses over the next twenty years. North Carolina is projected to be one region that will see an increased need for healthcare providers as the demand for healthcare increases and large portions of the nursing profession retire.<sup>2</sup> Not only will more nurses be needed, but changes in training will need to reflect changes in the provision of medical care. Currently, the majority of nurses with at least a bachelor's degree are trained to serve in hospital settings, but more nurses will need to work in regional and community settings as policy and legislative changes change the model for healthcare provision. UNC institutions continue to play a vital role in providing highly trained nurses and making necessary adjustments in curriculum and programs to meet the needs of the healthcare industry.

While UNC institutions are not the only source of nursing graduates in North Carolina, the 2,106 BSN graduates produced in 2013-14 are a tremendous boost to the state's economy and the healthcare sector. These graduates fill nursing openings across the country, but most importantly, provide skilled nurses throughout the varied regions of North Carolina. A recent employment search on the North Carolina Department of Commerce's online portal, NC Works, showed more than 6,100 total nursing jobs open throughout the state for nurses with bachelors of science in nursing (BSN) degrees.<sup>3</sup> The North Carolina counties with the greatest number of these employment opportunities are among the most populous in the state and they have UNC nursing programs located

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2 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013). Economic and employment projections: 2012-2022. Available at: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.toc.htm>

3 Search conducted at [www.ncworks.gov](http://www.ncworks.gov) in March 2015

within or immediately adjacent to their county borders. Some of North Carolina's rural counties, however, have the lowest nurse-to-population ratio in the state and are not able to draw many nurses to their counties for long-term employment.<sup>4</sup>

The issues of access, opportunity, training, and shifting needs are struggles facing every actor in the healthcare sector: this is not solely an issue in North Carolina or solely an issue for the nursing field. But as healthcare continues to evolve to meet the needs of a changing and growing population, UNC nursing programs are committed to remaining at the forefront of the field in preparing nursing professionals at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels.

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4 Data provided by the Program on Health Workforce Research & Policy at The Cecil B. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, UNC-Chapel Hill to UNC General Administration during a nursing program review. <http://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/hp/>

APPENDIX N  
Appendix A

Nursing Enrollment: Fall 2010 through Fall 2014

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bachelor's	ASU	53	143	179	266	280
	ECU	614	635	673	679	706
	FSU	36	109	252	374	500
	NCA&T	93	154	119	106	96
	NCCU	102	130	143	116	89
	UNC-CH	376	379	331	282	276
	UNCC	269	314	322	315	316
	UNCG	405	326	337	319	362
	UNCP	93	95	134	153	151
	UNCW	252	280	269	299	548
	WCU	241	188	334	380	441
	WSSU	685	598	841	920	865
	UNC Total	3,219	3,351	3,934	4,209	4,630

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Master's	ECU	491	504	533	508	412
	UNC-CH	238	274	272	242	215
	UNCC	219	224	219	213	211
	UNCG	296	309	297	280	221
	UNCP	-	-	-	19	22
	UNCW	75	64	72	90	103
	WCU	101	106	99	105	139
	WSSU	96	111	105	115	115
	UNC Total	1,516	1,592	1,597	1,572	1,438

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Doctoral	ECU	29	28	30	49	103
	UNC-CH	55	45	41	58	88
	UNCC	-	-	-	6	11
	UNCG	32	33	33	31	35
	WCU	-	-	-	6	9
	WSSU	-	-	-	7	5
	UNC Total	116	106	104	157	251

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
All Programs	Bachelor's	3,219	3,351	3,934	4,209	4,630
	Master's	1,516	1,592	1,597	1,572	1,438
	Doctoral	116	106	104	157	251
	UNC Total	4,851	5,049	5,635	5,938	6,319

APPENDIX N  
Appendix B

Degrees Conferred in Nursing Programs: 2009-10 through 2013-14

		2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Bachelor's	ASU	43	17	44	54	97
	ECU	283	272	284	300	310
	FSU	34	9	43	75	83
	NCA&T	53	48	34	55	41
	NCCU	48	63	48	82	57
	UNC-CH	246	222	227	222	169
	UNCC	205	183	223	193	219
	UNCG	164	148	145	143	154
	UNCP	34	38	41	42	57
	UNCW	102	113	139	141	126
	WCU	106	136	120	138	181
	WSSU	477	552	469	526	612
UNC Total		1,795	1,801	1,817	1,971	2,106

		2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Master's	ECU	110	143	129	145	151
	UNC-CH	61	63	101	106	107
	UNCC	53	76	64	70	75
	UNCG	87	101	90	98	101
	UNCW	2	23	17	13	22
	WCU	28	32	34	45	36
	WSSU	60	32	43	39	49
UNC Total		401	470	478	516	541

		2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Doctoral	ECU	3	3	4	6	4
	UNC-CH	5	6	16	7	6
	UNCG	4	8	6	7	6
UNC Total		12	17	26	20	16

		2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
All Programs	Bachelor's	1,795	1,801	1,817	1,971	2,106
	Master's	401	470	478	516	541
	Doctoral	12	17	26	20	16
	UNC Total	2,208	2,288	2,321	2,507	2,663

APPENDIX N  
Appendix C

**UNC Nursing Examination (NCLEX-RN) Results: 2005 to 2014 (First-Time Writers Only)**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Appalachian State</b>										
# of Writers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	38	41
# Passed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	28	36
% Passed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100%	74%	88%
<b>East Carolina</b>										
# of Writers	181	194	220	248	257	268	255	252	273	233
# Passed	170	192	209	237	248	260	246	242	258	224
% Passed	94%	99%	95%	96%	96%	97%	96%	96%	95%	96%
<b>Fayetteville State</b>										
# of Writers	-	-	22	61	40	27	-	-	-	4
# Passed	-	-	14	24	35	27	-	-	-	4
% Passed	-	-	64%	39%	88%	100%	-	-	-	100%
<b>N.C. A&amp;T</b>										
# of Writers	67	54	51	54	57	54	47	55	57	38
# Passed	46	37	43	49	50	33	35	45	46	29
% Passed	69%	69%	84%	91%	88%	61%	74%	82%	81%	76%
<b>N.C. Central</b>										
# of Writers	40	38	43	40	55	47	53	42	60	58
# Passed	26	31	39	36	48	38	43	39	42	52
% Passed	65%	82%	91%	90%	87%	81%	81%	93%	70%	90%
<b>UNC-Chapel Hill</b>										
# of Writers	160	155	178	187	179	220	190	179	205	169
# Passed	150	152	166	182	174	209	183	173	195	161
% Passed	94%	98%	93%	97%	97%	95%	96%	97%	95%	95%
<b>UNC-Charlotte</b>										
# of Writers	88	87	58	90	102	110	105	105	99	94
# Passed	68	84	55	82	82	93	97	88	85	85
% Passed	77%	97%	95%	91%	80%	85%	92%	84%	86%	90%
<b>UNC-Greensboro</b>										
# of Writers	87	86	84	93	91	88	85	92	88	86
# Passed	81	80	77	83	86	75	81	89	81	75
% Passed	93%	93%	92%	89%	95%	85%	95%	97%	92%	87%
<b>UNC-Pembroke</b>										
# of Writers	-	-	37	30	41	20	19	23	26	34
# Passed	-	-	25	24	36	19	19	23	25	29
% Passed	-	-	68%	80%	88%	95%	100%	100%	96%	85%
<b>UNC-Wilmington</b>										
# of Writers	53	70	69	100	81	96	80	106	106	103
# Passed	50	67	61	90	75	85	75	102	97	99
% Passed	94%	96%	88%	90%	93%	89%	94%	96%	92%	96%
<b>Western Carolina</b>										
# of Writers	41	55	53	54	58	58	80	43	63	78
# Passed	36	47	41	50	55	57	78	43	61	78
% Passed	88%	85%	77%	93%	95%	98%	98%	100%	97%	100%
<b>Winston-Salem</b>										
# of Writers	113	122	105	148	116	111	121	119	109	123
# Passed	98	101	98	127	106	96	112	112	94	103
% Passed	87%	83%	93%	86%	91%	86%	93%	94%	86%	84%
<b>Total UNC Writers</b>										
# of Writers	830	861	920	1,105	1,077	1,099	1,035	1,036	1,124	1,061
# Passed	725	791	828	984	995	992	969	976	1,012	975
% Passed	87%	92%	90%	89%	92%	90%	94%	94%	90%	92%

Source: North Carolina Board of Nursing (<http://www.ncbon.com/dcp/i/news-resources-data-requests-statistics-statistics-for-nclex>)