

NEBRASKA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
& CENTER FOR NURSING

STUDENT NURSE INTERNSHIP INITIATIVE TOOLKIT



Introduction

As for many healthcare facilities around the nation, healthcare workforce shortages in Nebraska are a real problem. According to the American Hospital Association in 2021, the United States will have a shortage of 124,000 physicians by 2033. Compounded further by a shortage of at least 200,000 nurses per year, and shortages of allied health care and behavioral health providers (American Hospital Association, 2021).

Nebraska is in the midst of a health care workforce crisis. According to the Nebraska Center for Nursing, Nebraska will experience a workforce shortage of 5,435 nurses by 2025. Seventy-three of Nebraska's 93 counties have less than the national average ratio of registered nurses to patients. Sixty-six of Nebraska's counties have been deemed medically underserved. Nine counties in Nebraska have no registered nurses. Recruitment and retention of health professionals has long been a persistent challenge for rural providers. The nursing shortage is representative of a larger shortage of health professionals. This program will expose students to all the various and unique health professions throughout Nebraska.

As national health care continues to produce new and innovative ways to fill these needs, the state of Nebraska chooses to lead this movement. The Nebraska Hospital Association (NHA), in collaboration with our member hospitals and health care entities, has created the Healthcare Experience Enhancement Committee. This committee was charged with creating a workforce toolkit, providing ideas, examples, and real-life solutions to this complex issue.

Working through this process the Healthcare Experience Enhancement Committee created the Healthcare Internship Program Toolkit. The Healthcare Internship Program is specific to student nurses currently enrolled in an accredited nursing program within Nebraska.

The goal is to use this program as a model, which can be expanded to include all allied health program students under one consistent delivery method. A consistent model will streamline processes and allow for collaborative delivery across several professions and education programs.

This toolkit:

- Shares experiences and barriers.
- Offers information for other members who wish to begin similar programs.
- Provides contacts and other valuable resource information within the state.
- Delivers alternative methods to building relationships with students to help retain them within the facility.

Background of Work

The Committee began its work by researching the terms used in student experiences. These terms are further defined in this toolkit. After careful review of how the use of these terms impacts students' experience and ability for funding for academic pursuits, the Committee commits to the use of 'Internship' to describe this program and stresses these should be paid experiences.

Terms & General Education



Apprenticeship

According to Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 29.4, "Registered Apprenticeship is a national training system that combines paid learning on the job and related technical and theoretical instruction in a skilled occupation."

An apprentice occupation is specified by industry and must:

- Involve skills learned in a practical way through a structured, systematic program of on-the-job supervised learning
- Be clearly identified and commonly recognized throughout the industry
- Involve progressive attainment of manual, mechanical, or technical skills and knowledge, in accordance with the industry standard for the occupation
- Require the completion of at least two thousand hours of on-the-job learning
- Require related instruction to supplement the on-the-job learning
- Generally, lasts 1–3 years

Internship

An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional workplace setting (across in-person, remote, or hybrid modalities) (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2023).

An internship is a significant recruiting mechanism for employers. Internships aspects include:

- A focus on entry-level general work experience
- A learning experience with a real-world opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom
- Not using interns as replacements for staff
- The internship can be paid or unpaid and may not necessarily lead to a full-time job with the facility

Externship

A temporary training program in a workplace, especially one offered to students as part of a course of study (Oxford, 2024).

- Like an internship, however, in an externship, you are not expected to do work during the work arrangement with the facility. Instead, the individual is observing the work roles and responsibilities
- Typically lasts 1–6 weeks (US Department of Labor, 2024) (National Society of Collegiate Scholars, 2024)

Benefits of Internship / Externships / Apprenticeships

While the creation and participation in any internship experience takes time and energy, there are benefits for all who participate in such programs.

Student Benefits:

- *Beneficial Scheduling:* Facilities and managers work with the students to support needed hours and give them the opportunity to experience the positions, roles and duties.
- *Pay Rates:* Many facilities that participate in the mentioned programs pay their students. This financial aspect makes working within a facility a bonus for many of the students who must also work full-time jobs during schooling. For facilities who do not pay, there are many other ways in which the facility financially assists the students (meals, housing, etc.).
- Increases the students' knowledge, technical and soft skills (based on level of education and licensure/certification) including:

Knowledge and Skills (Didactic & Psychomotor)	Soft Skills (Affective)
Performing patient assessments	Patience
Taking patient histories	Compassion
Measuring vitals	Teamwork
Giving injections	Communication
Understanding hospital terminology	Ability to remain calm
Interacting with patients	Critical thinking
Transporting patients	Empathy
Customer service skills	Conflict resolution
Therapeutic communication	Flexibility (Nursing Journal, 2023)

- Exposure to areas of interest.
- Increased confidence.

Facility Benefit:

- Building student relationships. In every example within the state, these relationships have led to some type of employment for the students.
- Working with the students, you understand the pre-professional's strengths and weaknesses, along with how they will work within your team prior to any employment.
- According to research, internship programs enabled a pass rate of 96% for NCLEX-RN on the first attempt. Additionally, 82% of participants were retained at the hospitals, resulting in a hospital savings for onboarding of \$216,993. Students reported increased role satisfaction with the program (Journal of Professional Nursing, 2021).

NHA Recommendations on Internships

Student Nurse Internship Programs: Nebraska (LB 227)

The Nebraska Hospital Association in collaboration with the Nebraska Center for Nursing has developed nursing internship programs that, in conjunction with the Nebraska Health Careers Pipeline program, work to retain students in the nursing program, the College Credit Model and the Non-College Credit Model. These programs will provide for onboarding requirements through industry badging and healthcare challenges, which align with the practice setting. The Healthcare Experience Enhancement Committee selected the term Healthcare Internship Program as it most closely aligns with several aspects of the program including, student time, time commitments, financial application, and other features within the program. Regardless of the model that is used, each one requires communication and coordination with the health care institution and educational institution.



College Credit Model (Academic Center is the facility)

The college credit model uses the college institution as the oversight to the model. This model type is tied to a four-credit class provided by the institution, so hour requirements will depend on the number of hours needed for the credits. Other aspects of this model include:

- Facility to pay faculty as supervision to the internship.
- Grant funds administered by the NHA will subsidize a portion of the tuition as funding is available.
- Hour requirements are set by the educational institution.
- Most likely to take place during the summer.
- Scope of practice is defined by the college.
- Length of internship is set by the college. Based on the time of year in coordination with other educational opportunities, internship time may vary depending on institutional requirements and resources.
- May be a requirement for graduation from specific programs.
- Engages with health care facilities to secure placement and learning opportunities/settings.



Non-College Credit Model (Health care setting is the facility)

This model type uses the health care facility to provide oversight to the internship. The non-college credit model is not tied to any for-credit class and uses the resources of the facility to facilitate the program. Aspects of this model include:

- No college credit available.
- Supervision provided by the facility.
- Hours are set by the facility. Suggested at least 15 hours per week.
- Facility can pay supervision.
- Students are compensated for their time. This amount is determined by the facility.
- Scope of practice is defined by the certification/licensure of the individual along with policy by the facility.
- Length of time is set by the facility. NHA recommends paid internships lasting 3-12 months and can be renewable while enrolled in an accredited Nebraska nursing program.
- Engage in collaboration with academic institutions to ensure the competency level of student nurse intern. placement and learning opportunities/settings.

Design Concepts

- Identify areas and human capital within the organization that can support the mentoring of an intern(s).
- Consider the length of time an intern may be aligned with your organization.
- Develop assessments and outcomes for student intern and regularly evaluate.
- Decide on an hourly wage or tuition assistance to be included in recruitment materials.

Recruitment and Delivery (based on credit or non-credit model)

- Advertise for interns with Nebraska Nursing Deans and Directors, academic institutions, and current clinical students located in your facility.
- Use a consistent internship application.
- Onboard intern to prepare them for successful integration in your facility through the use of industry badging and healthcare challenges.
- Consider the use of the NHA Internship Student Guide and assessment tools.
- Commit to considering the conversion of the intern into a paid staff member upon graduation and passing NCLEX-RN.

Historical Information / Best Practices

Student Engagement Programs in Nebraska

Several NHA Member Hospitals are currently participating in, or have engaged in, a variety of student experiences. The use of apprenticeship, internship, and externship have been used broadly to describe these experiences. To date, there are no registered apprenticeships in nursing in Nebraska. Through these programs, best practices and challenges have been identified and shared below.

Best Practices:

- No matter the size of the facility and resources, engaging students at the collegiate level is possible.
- Engagement with the students is a key factor in retaining them as a full-time employee after graduation.
- Different programs work in different facilities. Be acutely aware of the ability of the facility regarding patient load, student capacity and student type.
- Each facility must make decisions regarding the financial aspects of such a program. Not only the overhead costs, but also the payment of the student, and potential payment types.
- While not all facilities can implement a full internship program, any opportunity to get students into the facility and to become a part of the culture will aid in the recruitment of that student.
- As with any new program, be prepared to adjust as needed.
- Communication with all the involved parties is paramount. This includes scheduling, job roles, and responsibilities. Involved parties can also include students, mentors, department managers, facility leadership, educators, and others.
- Stay in contact with the student and keep them in the loop with how they are doing as they progress with coursework.
- Establish specific offices/departments that can aid and support the growth within academic and education.
- Increased the ability to retain and hire externs/interns/apprentices.
- The use of mentors helps to guide the student through the program.

Challenges:

- Modification of application requirements based on needs and student type.
- Modifications of program requirement policies.
- Growing pains with a new program.
- COVID limited the ability to continue these programs.
- Budget constraints limit the ability to provide paid opportunities.
- Staff turnover (frontline staff as well as key stakeholders and nursing leadership).
- Getting people to apply.
- High-demand/low-volume areas required setting priorities for learner placement and the need to implement priority systems regularly.
- Inconsistency of the format across the state causing confusion for students, faculty, and clinical agencies.

Financial Models:

Within programs offered in Nebraska, there are aspects of financial reimbursement/compensation to the student for their time. While no one model of financial reimbursement works for all, below are several examples seen throughout the state.

- **Tuition assistance:** This model has the facility assisting to pay for schooling as the intern/extern/apprentice participates within the professional program.
- **Tuition reimbursement:** This model involves the facility compensating the student in the form of paying for tuition. This can be paid during or after the internship/externship program is active, but after the student has completed the stated courses. Some facilities will tie the reimbursement back to the factor of the student returning to the facility for full-time employment upon completion of their professional program. Facilities can also reimburse portions of tuition as compared to the full cost.
- **Loan Forgiveness:** Similar to reimbursement, in this case the facility will pay for a portion or the entire cost of the professional program. This is always tied back to returning to employment at the facility for an amount of time.

Related Healthcare Education/Recruitment within Nebraska

The Nebraska Health Careers Pipeline:

The Nebraska Health Careers Pipeline Initiative created a standardized Health Career Pipeline curriculum in grades 3–12 in schools across Nebraska. The goal was to create a pathway, so more students are inclined and prepared to select a health focus when they graduate from high school.

- Developed a hands-on, health care career exploration curriculum specific to grades 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12.
- Collaborate with schools, hospitals, clinics, and long-term care facilities.
- Work with health care facilities to create engaging, real-life exploration experiences.
- Ensure curriculum is specific to the different demographics across Nebraska.
- Summer Camps: These camps, typically for middle school through high school students, allow the students to interact with healthcare professionals. Variation in duration from a few days to a week, these camps allow the students to experience multiple professions quickly.
- Contact Dr. Stacey Ocander, socander@nebraskahospitals.org.

Additional Examples of Programming:

Hospital-based Student Engagement Programs

Student shadow: This allows students of various ages (typically high school through college) to follow and observe “a day in the life” of various professions. These opportunities can vary in time from one day to semesters. The goal is to allow the students to see what a professional sees in a normal day to day routine.

Related Healthcare Education/Recruitment Nationally

Mississippi Externship Program:

- The Mississippi Student Nurse Externship Program is an 8-to-10-week program during the summer for nursing students to enhance learning skills under the supervision of experienced RNs in a healthcare setting to earn college credit. This is only eligible for nursing students who have completed one year of clinical courses in an approved school. This is meant to be a learning tool for nursing students and a recruitment opportunity for the hospital. The nursing externs work under the supervision of the preceptor. The preceptors are chosen based on their professional practice, ability to teach, and other skills. The goal of this program is to provide the students with opportunities to enhance their skills and competencies along with preparing them for the full-time responsibility of employment. For more information, please contact Mississippi Hospital Association or visit the website: <https://www.mhanet.org/Online/Online/MCQW/Workforce.aspx>

Appendix

Program Examples & Resources

LB227: Student Nurse Internship Initiative

Project Overview:

We are excited to propose a collaborative project aimed at bringing the NHA and CFN Collaborative Innovative Approach to increase and retain the number of nursing students in the pipeline. NHA and its members are excited to offer nursing students the opportunity to secure a paid internship within an NHA member organization, while attending nursing school.

According to Curran (2023), a hospital-based nursing school internship is described as:

“A nurse intern is a healthcare professional who is still in training. They work under the supervision of a registered nurse, providing direct patient care and performing various clinical tasks. Nurse interns are typically nursing students who are looking for hands-on experience in a hospital or medical facility.

As a nurse intern the responsibilities may vary depending on the facility and the specific program. However, some common duties may include taking vital signs, administering medication, dressing wounds, and assisting patients with daily activities. They may also be responsible for documentation, patient education, and communicating with other healthcare professionals.

Nurse internships are a great opportunity for nursing students to gain practical experience and develop their skills in a real-world setting. It allows them to apply the knowledge they have learned in the classroom to real patients and work alongside experienced nurses”.

Moreover, nurse internships may improve their chances of getting hired after graduation, as many hospitals and medical facilities prefer to hire candidates with prior experience.

Jefferson Community Health & Life: Multi-Discipline Apprenticeship Program

The Jefferson Community Health & Life Apprenticeship Program seeks apprentices for careers in nursing, radiology, laboratory, speech therapy and other health care careers. For those accepted into the program and completing courses toward a degree, Jefferson Community Health & Life will cover up to 100 percent of school tuition, books, and fees after other scholarships are applied. For those accepted into the program, a mentor will be provided. The mentor will be a current Jefferson Community Health & Life employee in the apprentice’s field of study. If an apprentice needs additional help, a tutor will be arranged with the school (Jefferson Community Health & Life 2024).

This program by Jefferson Community Health & Life is slightly different than others as it is open to those who are not necessarily in a health professional school. The requirement is the applicant must be a high school graduate, be interested in health care, and be working or agree to work at Jefferson Community Health & Life. There is a requirement to the facility post-completion of their professional degree/license. That commitment is dependent on the educational costs covered by the facility.

If interested in the program or if you have any questions, you may contact Jefferson Community Health & Life or visit the following site: <https://www.jchealthandlife.org/jchl-continues-apprenticeship-program/>

Columbus Community Hospital: Nursing Internship Program

Applicants for the Nurse Internship Program will be vetted through a multidisciplinary selection committee. Potential applicants are identified through partnerships with high schools, colleges and through CCH employees.

Four tracks have been developed to meet the various needs of potential candidates — BSN students, ADN students, accelerated BSN students and CNAs who desire to be nurses.

The RN Internship Program of Columbus Community Hospital started in 2022. Applications are due by March 31 and October 31 each year. Additional applicants may be added to the cohort as qualified individuals apply.

CCH will cover up to 75% of school tuition, books, and fees (after scholarships and grants), up to \$20,000.

A formal coach will be provided to the intern through CCH. The coaches will be registered nurses who have completed mentor training.

RN interns will be encouraged to choose an area of specialty at the end of their first year of nursing school for those in a community college program, or third year for those in a BSN program. They will receive a coach in their area of interest.

Relationships are one of the primary reasons individuals leave a position or choose to stay in a position. Pairing the intern with a unit before graduation would provide that relationship and sense of belonging.

The RN Internship Coordinator will serve as supervisor and manager of the interns.

Following graduation and passing boards, loan forgiveness will be as follows:

2 years for \$1–\$5,000; 3 years for \$5,001–\$10,000, 4 years for \$10,001–\$15,000, and 5 years for \$15,000–\$20,000 based on full-time employment. Less than 24 hr./week loan repayment is the remaining balance.

While the program is not new, Columbus is constantly working on how to better their program. Future additional outcome measures that will be included as the program progresses includes:

- Graduation rates/NCLEX passing rates
- Years of service/interns
- Years of services following commitment
- Job placement of RN Interns
- Percent of RN Interns that fulfill organizational commitment

RN Internship Program Requirements:

- Completion of RN Internship Application, Interview, Hiring Requirements
- Must be employed by CCH
- Accepted into a Nursing Program
- Work a of minimum 24 hours per month
- Weekly check-ins with a coach
- Provide documentation of final grades per semester
- Complete externship the summer prior to the final year of nursing school
- Will be eligible to receive Stipend of \$2400 (beginning of final year of school, after first semester and after second semester – successful completion of courses “C” or better)
- CCH will cover up to 75% of school tuition, books, and fees (after scholarships & grants) and up to lifetime expense of \$20,000
- Interns will not be eligible for a recruitment bonus
- Successful completion of NCLEX
- LPN, if applicable
- RN/ADN, RN/BSN

If interested in the program or if you have any questions, you may contact Columbus Community Hospital or visit the following site:

<https://www.columbushosp.org/careers/student-central/scholarships/student-nurse-intern>

Regional West: Nursing Externship/Internship Program

The nursing externship did exist at Regional West until 2020, during COVID, wherein nurses had an opportunity to work with nursing leaders and on different floors prior to interviewing. Pre-covid, Regional West also had a paid internship opportunity to allow students selected in the program to work in various areas of the hospital to gain knowledge and experience. Through this program, Regional West was able to hire most of their externs and interns. This program has also allowed Regional West to open the door for future candidates to return to their hometown of Scottsbluff and the surrounding area and pursue medical careers once they complete their college coursework.

*While their externship is not currently active, Regional West does continue to have an active job shadow program but does not have paid experience currently.

Cozad Community Hospital: Multi-Discipline Apprenticeship Program

Cozad Community Hospital hosts an internship that ranges from 1 week to 12 weeks. To help the interns, the hospital provides free meals for these students and when applicable provides free housing. Numerous employees have been prior interns or friends of interns who gained valuable experiences from this program.

Children's Nebraska: Multi-Discipline Apprenticeship/Internship/Externship Program

Children's Nebraska partners with approximately 90+ universities and colleges each year to provide academic rotations to 2,200 – 2,800 unique learners per year. These learners include short-term shadows, students engaged in higher education programs, residents, and fellows. Children's also supports internships/externships/preceptorships both paid and unpaid, depending on the needs and their ability to support the request. Children's Nebraska has consistently supported the graduation requirements of learners in all health care professions, clinical and non-clinical, as the region's leader in dedicated pediatric care.

If interested in the program or if you have any questions, you may contact Children's Nebraska or visit the following site: www.childrensnebraska.org and select the "Professional Education" dropdown menu.

Antelope Memorial Hospital: Nursing Externship Program

The Antelope Memorial Hospital externship is through local community colleges. This externship typically welcomes 1-2 nursing students their senior year to come on site. They are paired with a seasoned RN and work under them.

Resources

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Contact Us:

+1 (402) 742-8140
www.nebraskahospitals.org