

BSN Learning Pathways Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a BSN Learning Pathway?

Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) Learning Pathways are structured educational programs designed to help nursing graduates transition into specialized areas of practice, such as Emergency or Perioperative Nursing, immediately after graduation. These specialties require additional education and training, which has historically posed a barrier to entry for new graduate RNs. To address this, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills, in collaboration with Post-Secondary Institutions (e.g., Douglas College) and Health Authorities in British Columbia (e.g., Vancouver Coastal Health or Fraser Health Authority), have developed Learning Pathways available throughout the province.

Learning Pathways usually involve Employed Student Nursing (ESN) opportunities, additional course work provided by an academic institution or through the Health Authority, additional clinical experiences, and potential for employment opportunities after graduation. In some cases, students will receive full or partial certification in that Specialty area (e.g. Emergency).

2. Which Learning Pathways are currently offered at Douglas College?

Douglas College offers a variety of Learning Pathways to support nurses in advancing their practice:

- **Emergency Nursing:** Focused on preparing student nurses for high-pressure, acute care environments.
- **Perioperative Nursing:** Preparing student nurses to provide care before, during, and after surgical procedures.
- **Burns Trauma and High Acuity (BTHA):** Preparing student nurses to care for patients with complex injuries and critical conditions, often requiring specialized support in acute care settings.

In Development

- **Rural Nursing:** Supporting student nurses in delivering comprehensive care in remote or underserved areas.
- **Child/Adolescent Mental Health:** Focuses on preparing student nurses to address the unique needs of young individuals with mental health challenges.
- **Adult Mental Health:** Equipping student nurses to support adults dealing with a range of mental health conditions, emphasizing therapeutic approaches and crisis intervention.

3. How do Learning Pathways work?

Douglas College BSN faculty and Health Authority leadership collaborate to create a smooth and supportive process for students pursuing specialized nursing practice. The goal is to provide comprehensive education, training, employment opportunities, and a safe, structured transition into specialty nursing areas.

While each Learning Pathway is slightly different, most follow a similar structure:

- **Pre-entry Opportunities:** Students may engage in shadow shifts or Employed Student Nursing (ESN) roles early in the program. These experiences help them acclimate to the fast-paced environment of specialty nursing units and determine if they are an area of interest for the student.
- **Coursework and Training:** Elective and theory courses are offered either within the BSN program or through external options, depending on the Learning Pathway.
- **Final Preceptorship:** Students complete a supervised clinical preceptorship to consolidate their knowledge and gain hands-on experience. Some longer Learning Pathways include paid new graduate training lines to ensure all requirements are met.
- **Transition to Practice:** After successfully completing the pathway, and if both the Unit leadership and students agree, students may be offered a new graduate transition line if they choose to pursue employment in their specialty area.

Students may choose to exit a Learning Pathway at any time; however, consultation with the preceptorship instructor and the Douglas College Learning Pathways Coordinators is strongly recommended to ensure appropriate planning.

4. Who is Eligible to apply for a Learning Pathway?

All BSN students are eligible to apply for a learning pathway. However, eligibility requires students to consistently demonstrate their competencies at the appropriate semester level. Students are encouraged to thoughtfully reflect on their personal goals, life commitments, and available support systems to assess their readiness for advanced learning within the program. This reflection will help ensure they are fully prepared to undertake the challenges and opportunities offered by the learning pathway.

5. When do I apply for a Learning Pathway?

The expression of interest for a Learning Pathway occurs in Semester 4, as part of the preceptorship requests. However, expressing your interest early can be highly beneficial. Early identification allows faculty to provide additional support, such as facilitating shadow shifts, Employed Student Nursing (ESN) opportunities, or guidance in selecting relevant electives.

If you're interested in pursuing a Learning Pathway, consider discussing your goals with the Learning Community Coordinator and the Learning Pathways Coordinators as early as possible. They can help guide you through the process and ensure you are well-prepared when applications open.

6. How do I apply to a Learning Pathway?

Semester 1-3: Early Preparation

- **Inform Clinical and Lab Instructors:** Share your Learning Pathway aspirations with your instructors. This allows them to provide tailored feedback to help you achieve your goals. Attend Learning Pathway information sessions and arrange an informal chat with the Learning Pathways Coordinators.
- **Select Relevant Electives:** Choose your nursing elective in a course related to the Learning Pathway specialty you're interested in (electives can be taken later in the program).
- **Participate in Skills Development Opportunities:** Take advantage of workshops, refresher lab sessions, and open lab times throughout the school year to refine your skills and build confidence.
- **Apply for ESN Positions related to your Specialty area of interests:** Select the unit, or similar unit to where you would like to pursue a Learning Pathway. Inform the Learning Pathway Coordinators of your ESN application to allow collaboration with the Health Authority.

Semester 4: Formal Expression Interest

- **Preceptorship Info Session:** Attend the Semester 4 preceptorship info session for detailed information about Learning Pathway opportunities.
- **Preceptorship Requests:** Indicate your interest in a Learning Pathway as one of your areas of focus when submitting preceptorship requests.
- **Placement and Learning Pathways Coordination:** The Placement and Learning Pathways Coordinators will collect data on student interest and available Learning Pathway seats through the Health Authorities.

Part A: Douglas College Application Process (Semester 5)

1. **Notification of Availability:** Interested students will be informed if Learning Pathway opportunities in their desired area are expected to be available in the following semester.
2. **Secure Instructor Support:** Obtain references from at least two BSN instructors (one must be your Semester 5 clinical instructor). Prior to submitting their names, ensure you have obtained permission and support from these instructors. You will provide names of the instructors who will be sent a survey to complete.

3. **Application Review:** The Learning Pathways Coordinators, in consultation with BSN faculty and leadership, will review applications and determine eligibility to proceed to the next phase.
4. **Communication with Applicants:** By the end of Semester 5, eligible students will be informed if they meet requirements and if their name will be forwarded to the Health Authority for consideration. All students will receive written communication of the outcome.

Part B: Health Authority Application Process

1. **Health Authority Submission:** The names of eligible students will be forwarded to the Health Authority.
2. **Application and Interview:** Students will complete the Health Authority's application and interview process for the Learning Pathway seat.
3. **Communication with Applicants:** Students will be informed by the Health Authority of the outcome of their Health Authority application and given information on next steps.
4. **What are the benefits of pursuing a Learning Pathway?**

A Learning Pathway may not be the best fit for every student, but for those aspiring to work in specialty nursing areas, it offers some advantages. Here are some key benefits:

- **Direct Entry into Specialty Nursing:** Learning Pathways provide a structured route to fast-track into specialty areas, allowing students to gain focused education, training, and clinical experience during their undergraduate BSN program. This reduces the need for additional post-graduate education and training in many cases.
- **HA Sponsorship:** In some Learning Pathways, HA's will sponsor students, reducing potential costs for additional training and experience. Please note that some HA's require a guaranteed return of service following graduation for Sponsorship.
- **Enhanced Employment Opportunities:** Upon successful completion of an LP and determination of a good fit, students may receive offers for New Graduate Employment in their chosen specialty area. This streamlines the transition from student to professional nurse in high-demand fields.
- **Professional Growth and Mentorship:** Learning Pathways allow students to work closely with experienced mentors, gain early exposure to specialized practice, and build the skills and confidence needed for complex care settings.

If you're passionate about pursuing a specialty nursing career, a Learning Pathway could be an excellent opportunity to achieve your goals while maximizing your time and resources during your BSN program.

5. What are the disadvantages of taking a Learning Pathway.

While Learning Pathways offer many benefits, they may not be the best fit for every student. Here are some potential disadvantages to consider:

- **Increased Workload:** Learning Pathway students typically face a heavier academic and clinical workload, including additional tasks, assignments and, in some cases, longer preceptorships. Balancing the demands of a Learning Pathway with other life responsibilities can be challenging.
- **Certification Limitations:** Some Learning Pathways do not offer certification. For Learning Pathways like Emergency Nursing, certification may be available but could extend beyond the preceptorship course, requiring continued education post-graduation.
- **Suitability and Readiness:** Learning Pathways require students to assess their current knowledge, skills, and competence critically. They may not be ideal for students who need more foundational experience or prefer to start their careers as generalist nurses before specializing.
- **Time Commitment:** Learning Pathways demand significant time and energy, which might conflict with personal goals, family obligations, or other life stressors.

For many students, completing the BSN program as a generalist nurse, gaining experience as an RN, and later applying for a specialty program through their employer is a more manageable and appealing path to specialization.

Tips for Success:

- Consult with your instructors, advisors, and the Learning Pathways Coordinators to evaluate whether a Learning Pathway aligns with your goals and readiness.
- Consider strategies to manage the workload, such as time management, support systems, and accessing available resources.
- Discuss with your support system and family to ensure you will be able to manage the additional requirements.

Making an informed decision is key to ensuring a successful and fulfilling nursing career, whether through a Learning Pathways or another stream.

More Information:

Contact the Health Sciences Learning Pathways Coordinators for more information.

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