

## **Developing Education and Professional Goals**

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NURS 401: Introduction to Professional Development for Baccalaureate Nursing

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I have been working as a registered nurse since 2018, however my journey in nursing began back in 2014. I had just moved home to Frederick, MD from South Carolina, where I had been living for several years after graduating college. I had been primarily working in the restaurant industry after having graduated from Coastal Carolina University with a Bachelor's degree in Communication and a Minor in Journalism. During college I changed majors several times, and admittedly ended up graduating without a clear career goal in mind. So in 2014, after a few enjoyable post-graduate years living at the beach with some of my closest friends, I decided to move home and get my life together.

Upon moving home to Maryland in 2014, I hadn't set my sights on a career in healthcare just yet. I shopped my resume around to a variety of jobs in different industries, and eventually came to the realization that I wasn't passionate about my current resume or the jobs which I was seeking. I remembered a thought that occurred to me when I was a teenager about EMT's, and how I could see myself volunteering as an EMT one day. So I decided in the fall of 2014 that I would enroll in an EMT certification program. In the spring of 2015 I began taking EMT certification courses at a local community college, and I also enrolled in chemistry and biology. Becoming a student again at 25 years old turned out to be more rewarding than I could have imagined. I found myself fully engaged with learning again, and a new motivation was inside me pushing me to succeed. For the first time in my adult life, I was feeling a tremendous amount of satisfaction through success in academics.

I graduated from my EMT program in the fall of 2015 and began volunteer work at a local fire station. My EMT career was brief, however, as I felt compelled to continue my education in healthcare. The coursework in my EMT program provided a small foundational knowledge in anatomy and physiology, and I wanted to continue to build on that education. Also, I found that I didn't identify with the fire station work culture as much as I had thought I

would. I decided then that I would pursue a career in nursing. I met with an advisor at my local community college and worked towards completing the remaining courses needed to apply. I received my acceptance letter to the Frederick Community College ADN program and began classes in the fall of 2016.

I graduated from Frederick Community College and received my ADN in the spring of 2018. My first nursing job was on a cardiac telemetry unit. It was a busy unit and my first year was challenging as I was gaining confidence as a new nurse. Most patient care assignments involved 5 to 6 patients, so time management was necessary in order to survive a busy shift. I decided to start pursuing my BSN in the fall of 2019, and enrolled in Frostburg University's online BSN program part time. That would be the only semester that I completed at Frostburg however, as several life events occurred that fall and I decided to take the following spring semester off. As it turns out, the following spring would become the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. I began floating to the ICU to help the understaffed nurses, and I absolutely loved it. I became a staff ICU nurse in June of 2020, and while my new adventures in nursing brought great new experiences, my BSN dreams sat on the back burner for several years.

Over the next several years I continued to work as an ICU nurse, and was trained in rapid response at my hospital as well. I was gaining great experience and learning more with every shift. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the hospital wasn't requiring nurses to acquire a BSN as staffing needs were desperate at the time. Thus, I had not put in much thought into my BSN. It was not until I left the hospital where I worked as a staff ICU nurse to pursue travel nursing that my goals shifted back toward obtaining my BSN. As a travel nurse, I worked in a hospital primarily staffed by travel nurses. Many of these nurses were very experienced, well-trained, and were good resources for the unit. Some of the other nurses lacked experience, or were new to ICU nursing. The orientation for a travel nursing is typically 2 shifts, and then you are released onto the unit. Because of the variety of experience among travel staff and the short orientation period, I noticed a decrease in the quality of care and unit standards compared to when I was working on a full-time staff unit. It was discouraging to say the least,

but it also made me realize that I had not invested in my own nursing education for quite some time. After two travel contracts I decided to retake ownership in my nursing career and education, and I applied to ODU's online BSN program.

Now that I am on my second attempt at completing my BSN degree, I have every intention of completing it. Setting goals early is important to keep me on track in this process. I started a new job as a staff nurse in the CVICU at Inova Fairfax Medical Campus, and signed a contract to complete my BSN within two years. One of my goals in ODU's BSN program is to complete my BSN program in one year. I met with an advisor last spring, and was able to transfer a large amount of credits to the program due to my previous coursework at Coastal Carolina. In order to receive my BSN I will need 11 credits total. So I will be taking three courses this fall, spring, and summer, and will complete the BSN in the Fall of 2024. It will take a lot of work and time management, but I feel this is an attainable goal. Another goal of mine is to obtain a 4.0 GPA on the remaining 11 credits needed to graduate. I plan to continue my education beyond a BSN, and I want to make my application as competitive as possible. I know that this will take hard work over the next year, and even if I fall short of a 4.0 I will no doubt be proud of the end result if I put in the dedication and commitment over the next few semesters.

After completion of my BSN program my plan is to apply to CRNA school. CRNA school has always been a dream of mine, as I feel it is the culmination of the compassionate care learned in nursing and the cutting edge of medical science. If I am able to achieve the two goals in my BSN program as outlined above, I will be able to begin the application process to CRNA programs. I realize that this is a highly desired, highly competitive field within nursing. It will be challenging for me because my previous undergraduate GPA wasn't exceptionally great. My ADN GPA is also not the best, as I had to work full time during that curriculum and struggled at times. However, I learned and grew during that process into the student I am today. If I can show that in an interview, I will hopefully find the right program. I recently obtained my CCRN certification as well, and will likely take the GRE at some point this year. I

will also need to rely heavily on my writing skills, so I plan to hone that skill during my time at ODU. My goal is to improve my writing skills overall. I want to become more familiar with tools and practices used to manage time and reduce stress during the writing process. Some of these have been outlined in this course, and I hope to use these strategies to achieve the highest level of success in my writing.

Self assessment has been a big part of my journey in nursing, and it will be a big part of my success in the BSN program. I feel that one of my strengths is my motivation to succeed. I have been able to succeed in nursing school, albeit with less than desirable end results, and now this year will be my chance to prove to myself that I am able to complete my degree at a high level. Another strength of mine is that I am not afraid to ask for help or assistance from others. Nursing has taught me first-hand that the greatest outcomes can come from early identification of the need for help, and seeking it when it is necessary. If I can identify a weakness of mine, it would be time management. While I am working hard to improve this skill, I acknowledge it as a skill deficit of mine. I hope to see an improvement in my time management skills over the course of my BSN curriculum. Self-care and resilience will be crucial to my success as well, and I will continue to lean heavily on my support system as I am fortunate enough to have a good one.

While this next year will no doubt be a challenging one, I am excited to reach the finish line. With each new challenge I am reconnecting to the 25 year-old version of myself in a chemistry 101 class, and remembering the immense satisfaction felt seeing my hard work pay off. Looking back on my academic career in nursing, I am able to distinguish moments of great success from opportunities for improvement. By putting forth a conscious effort to improve time management skills and using the resources around me to succeed, I will accomplish my goals in the BSN program.