

# NURSING, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.) WITH A CONCENTRATION IN BIOBEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

The VCU School of Nursing Doctor of philosophy program in nursing prepares scholars to develop knowledge in the discipline of nursing to become teacher-scholars or pioneering researchers committed to the highest ideals of nursing excellence. The program examines knowledge development in nursing through an understanding of the impact of a wide range of historical influences on the discipline and through analysis of how emerging societal issues influence knowledge development. Knowledge in the humanities and social sciences and an understanding of knowledge development in other disciplines is viewed as foundational to a full understanding of knowledge development in nursing. Methodologic competency (i.e., knowledge of research designs, methodologies and tools) is also essential to a full understanding of the scope, range and path of knowledge development and the relevance to nursing practice.

The online Ph.D. program includes a combination of online courses and on-campus immersions each semester to offer students a dynamic, interactive learning experience that will prepare them to become nurse scholars and scientists. This format is designed to expand the Ph.D. program's reach to a wider range of highly motivated, independent students who aspire to become scholars, make a significant difference in the field of nursing and study with nationally recognized nurse scientists.

## Student learning outcomes

Graduates will be able to:

- Synthesize and critically appraise extant knowledge and theory
- Design, conduct and disseminate theoretically sound research that is relevant, rigorous, culturally competent and consistent with standards of scientific integrity
- Lead and collaborate in team science to develop knowledge that enhances health in ways that reflect nursing's unique perspective
- Communicate effectively to the scientific community, policy-makers and the public through appropriate scholarly mechanisms

## VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs

The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the **Graduate School website** and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as

published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the [academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students](#).

## Degree candidacy requirements

A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master's or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student's graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student's faculty regarding the student's academic achievements and the student's readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the [academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements](#).

## Graduation requirements

As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the [academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements](#).

## Other information

VCU School of Nursing Student Policy and Information handbooks (<http://nursing.vcu.edu/about-us/resources/>) are located on the school's website.

Our international and non-native English-speaking students bring different perspectives and new thinking to our nursing programs. To ensure that all incoming student are prepared for the school's academic rigor, all international applicants and non-native English speaking applicants without a degree from a U.S. high school, college or university must provide additional information with their applications according to the English language proficiency guidelines on the program admission tab.

Visit the [School of Nursing website for application instructions \(http://nursing.vcu.edu/admission/application-instructions/phd/\)](http://nursing.vcu.edu/admission/application-instructions/phd/).

## Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
Ph.D.	Fall	Rolling admissions	

**Note:** [No admissions test is required for this program.](#)

To be considered for admission to the School of Nursing, applicants must:

- a. Be eligible for readmission or be in good standing at the last college or university attended
- b. Meet general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements/>)
- c. Submit a complete application with all required materials to the School of Nursing
- d. Have an earned baccalaureate and/or a master's degree, one of which must be in nursing from an accredited nursing school (e.g. ACEN, CCNE, CNEA) (Graduates of international nursing schools and applicants who have studied outside of the U.S. are required to provide a course-by-course external credential evaluation from a VCU-recognized professional evaluator. The professional evaluation may not be older than two years at the time of application.)
- e. Have completed a minimum of three credit hours in statistics with a minimum grade of B
- f. Have a current, unrestricted R.N. license from a U.S. state or territory at the time admissions application is submitted (Applicants without an R.N. license in the U.S. should consult with **CGFNS International** and the **Virginia Board of Nursing** (<https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/nursing/>) for the steps needed to obtain a Virginia R.N. license.)
- g. Provide additional information with the application according to the English language proficiency guidelines for applicants who are international or non-native English speakers without a degree from a U.S. high school, college or university (Additional information can be found on the 'Required materials' tab of the **VCU International Admissions website** (<https://www.vcu.edu/admissions/apply/international/undergraduate-applicants/>).
- h. Complete a personal interview

## Degree requirements

A minimum of 58 graduate credit hours are required for the Ph.D. in Nursing program. Students entering the B.S.-to-Ph.D. option will complete an additional nine credits of course work for a total of 67 credits.

In addition to general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info/>), a candidate for the doctoral degree in nursing must be recommended by the faculty and must:

- a. Meet academic requirements of the Graduate School
- b. Complete all requirements for the prescribed curriculum within eight calendar years of the first registration for course work to be credited toward the degree
- c. Earn a minimum grade of B or pass grade in all nursing courses
- d. Earn a minimum cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in all work presented for graduation
- e. Conform to School of Nursing policies in respect to pass/fail grading for course work or thesis study

The degree will be granted only after all requirements have been fulfilled, all fees to the university have been paid and electronic copies of the dissertation have been submitted. Degrees are not granted in absentia unless written request is made to the dean and permission is granted.

## Curriculum requirement

### For students entering with a baccalaureate degree

Course	Title	Hours
<b>Post-baccalaureate entry prerequisites</b>		
NURS 512	Foundations for Evidence-based Advanced Practice	3
NURS 610	Health Information and Emerging Health Care Technologies	3
Elective: Select course(s) designed to support the area of study.		3
<b>Core courses</b>		
NURS 638	Health Policy Leadership and Advocacy	3
NURS 700	Scientific Integrity: Responsible Conduct of Research	1
NURS 701	Statistical Methods for Nursing Research	3
NURS 702	Advanced Statistical Concepts for Nursing Research	3
NURS 703	Philosophy of Human Sciences	3
NURS 704	Analysis and Construction of Theory for Nursing Research	3
NURS 707	Scholarly Writing	3
NURS 725	Synthesis and Emerging Trends in Scientific Inquiry	3
NURS 770	Quantitative Research	3
NURS 772	Qualitative Research	3
NURS 797	Practicum in Nursing Research	3
<b>Research methods courses</b>		
Select methods courses from any subject area with adviser approval. <sup>1</sup>		6
<b>Concentration courses</b>		
NURS 720	Foundations of Biobehavioral Research	3
NURS 721	Advanced Concepts in Biobehavioral Research	3
<b>Electives</b>		
Select course(s) designed to support the area of study. <sup>1</sup>		3
<b>Dissertation</b>		
NURS 898	Dissertation	12
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>67</b>

<sup>1</sup>

Of the six credits of methods courses and three credits of electives, a minimum of three credits must be taken in a discipline other than nursing. Electives must be approved by the student's adviser.

**The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 67.**

### For students entering with a master's degree

Course	Title	Hours
<b>Core courses</b>		
NURS 638	Health Policy Leadership and Advocacy	3
NURS 700	Scientific Integrity: Responsible Conduct of Research	1

NURS 701	Statistical Methods for Nursing Research	3
NURS 702	Advanced Statistical Concepts for Nursing Research	3
NURS 703	Philosophy of Human Sciences	3
NURS 704	Analysis and Construction of Theory for Nursing Research	3
NURS 707	Scholarly Writing	3
NURS 725	Synthesis and Emerging Trends in Scientific Inquiry	3
NURS 770	Quantitative Research	3
NURS 772	Qualitative Research	3
NURS 797	Practicum in Nursing Research	3
<b>Research methods courses</b>		
Select methods courses from any subject area with adviser approval. <sup>1</sup>		6
<b>Concentration courses</b>		
NURS 720	Foundations of Biobehavioral Research	3
NURS 721	Advanced Concepts in Biobehavioral Research	3
<b>Electives</b>		
Select course(s) designed to support the area of study. <sup>1</sup>		3
<b>Dissertation</b>		
NURS 898	Dissertation	12
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>58</b>

1

Of the six credits of methods courses and three credits of electives, a minimum of three credits must be taken in a discipline other than nursing. Electives must be approved by the student's adviser.

**The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 58.**

## Comprehensive examination requirements

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to test synthesis of foundational knowledge in preparation for launching a program of scholarship as a beginning scientist. Three knowledge domains are critical: a) theory and philosophy, b) qualitative and c) quantitative methodological approaches. The student's area of study is incorporated into these three domains. The comprehensive exam consists of two components, a written and an oral component, both of which must be passed. The oral exam will be conducted with the student either in person or via video conference.

## Dissertation requirements

The student must conduct a substantial independent investigation and prepare a dissertation reporting the results of this research and analyzing its significance in relation to existing scientific knowledge. Satisfactory completion of the comprehensive examination and a satisfactory oral defense of the dissertation proposal are required prior to commencement of actual work outlined in the proposal. Once approved, the dissertation proposal is similar to a formal contract between the student and dissertation committee about the nature of the dissertation.

The dissertation committee must consist of a minimum of four members. A member of the graduate faculty of the School of Nursing who has an

established program of research and prior experience on dissertation committees must chair a student's dissertation committee. Other committee members must include one faculty member from the student's focus area and one member from outside the School of Nursing. The dissertation committee is approved by the associate dean for academic programs in the School of Nursing. An oral defense of the dissertation is conducted by the student's dissertation committee. The student is responsible for preparing the dissertation in accordance with the most current version of the Graduate School Thesis and Dissertation Manual (<http://graduate.vcu.edu/media/graduate-school/docs/pdf/ThesisandDissertationManualUPDATED5-18-16.pdf>).

### Contact

Jo Lynne W. Robins, Ph.D., RN, ANP-BC, CHTP, AHN-C  
Associate professor and graduate program director  
[jwrobins@vcu.edu](mailto:jwrobins@vcu.edu)  
(804) 828-0776

### Additional contact

Fonda Neal  
Educational program coordinator for doctoral programs  
[fneal@vcu.edu](mailto:fneal@vcu.edu)  
(804) 828-0836

**Program website:** [nursing.vcu.edu/programs/phd](http://nursing.vcu.edu/programs/phd) (<http://nursing.vcu.edu/programs/phd/>)