

EDITORIAL

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**Nursing as a Profession: Is There Any Question?**

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The Trump administration's U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED, 2025) announced in late November that only 11 *professional degrees* would be recognized for the purposes of higher limits available for education loans. Nursing was not included in this list. Students seeking professional degrees can borrow up to \$200,000 vs. \$100,000 limits for other graduate degrees. I actually first heard about this issue when I was out for an early December breakfast with a group of friends at Apple Hills café, high on top of a hill in upstate NY. There was only one other nurse in the group of about 15 *pool pals*. It was the talk of the breakfast, what did I (and the other retired nurse) think about this announcement? They thought of nurses as professionals, why would the government single out nurses as non-professionals? This perspective most likely came from media coverage (Burke, 2025) with the headline "Trump administration says nursing isn't a professional degree amid new limits on loans".

Nursing does have several graduate level degrees including Masters of Science (MS), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) & Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Of these the DNP is considered the professional clinical practice degree and is often about twice as expensive per semester as the PhD or research degree.

Nurses can also pursue advanced practice roles at the graduate or post graduate level: Nurse Practitioner (NP), Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), or Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs). Additionally, graduate educated nurses become nurse educators, administrators, public health nurses, nurse informaticists, those that work on public policy. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) note that the DNP prepares nurses at the highest level of nursing practice to use evidence from research to improve care outcomes. The PhD prepared nurse is at the highest level of nursing science and conducts research to advance the science of nursing (AACN, n.d.).

The question of nursing as a profession has been going on since the early 1900's. The Institute of Medicine and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation future of nursing report (2011) and National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (2021) identify nursing as the largest profession in health care. However, there is still debate about nursing being a profession in the academic literature (Drevdahl et al., 2025) that has nothing to do with educational funding. The article states "There is a general agreement that a profession is an occupation that includes an established body of knowledge, requires thorough education and training, self-governs through accreditation and licensure, has an established code of ethics, has authority over its clients, values

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service to society...” (p. 100). The article looks at both US and international nursing standards. The biggest concern seems to be that there is a fractured picture in the main components of nursing that mark a profession. For example, self-governance includes control through professional organizations, licensure, accreditation, and educational requirements. It is not that nursing does not have these elements; rather there are multiple professional organization, accrediting bodies, and licensing is at the state level in the US.

I personally see nursing as a profession, it is broad and can lead to multiple paths. Drevdahl and colleagues (2025) are correct that there is not just one organization, accrediting body, or type of licensing or credentialing is not probable. However, I would argue that the elements of a profession are there and it makes sense that such a large profession, both in numbers and roles can successfully self-govern through multiple sources.

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