



WGU News – For Immediate Release

WGU Tackles America’s Nursing Shortage: Expands Nursing Prelicensure Program to 8 New States

Michael O. Leavitt School of Health to yield more than 4,800 new nursing graduates by 2027

SALT LAKE CITY, UT (Nov. 8, 2023) – Western Governors University’s (WGU) Michael O. Leavitt School of Health (LSH), announced today the expansion of the [Bachelor of Science in Nursing \(Prelicensure\)](#) program to eight states – Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee – to help students start their career in the nursing industry. The accredited degree program is now available in 19 states and expects to add more than 4,800 new nursing graduates to the workforce by 2027 to tackle the nursing shortage in the United States.

The [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) projects more than 200,000 openings for R.N. workers for each year through 2031, when nurse retirements and workforce exits are factored into the number of nurses needed in the United States. With the concept of meeting students where they are, WGU is expanding the Prelicensure degree program and establishing nursing simulation labs while also partnering with healthcare employers in communities for training sites and clinical faculty and staff.

“WGU is expanding the nursing Prelicensure degree program to address the critical nursing shortage in our country. We are actively working to close the opportunity gap for the non-traditional, working, underserved, and marginalized students who aspire to join the industry by meeting them in their communities,” said Keith Smith, LSH Senior Vice President. “This expansion will promote workforce inclusivity, positively impact the lives of our students, and benefit the health system of the communities, especially rural communities, where diversity is key to improving patient outcomes.”

The Leavitt School of Health, named in honor of the former governor of Utah and the former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, launched its [first](#) phase of Prelicensure program expansion in March 2023. The program is also available in these 11 states: Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, and Utah. More than 1,800 students are currently enrolled in the program and more than 1,800 have successfully graduated.

The university’s program expansion comes in effect when the country is struggling with the dilemma of a nursing shortage versus scarcity of resources to produce more trained and educated individuals. According to the [American Association of Colleges of Nursing](#), more than 90,000 qualified students in the U.S. were turned away from nursing programs in 2021 because of a multitude of reasons, including the lack of infrastructure and faculty.

“We are removing barriers that prevent access to nursing degrees and growing the pipeline of well-qualified, competent nurses ready to join the workforce. Our hybrid model of online coursework coupled with on-the-ground experiential learning is opening the doors for many first-time students,” said Kimberly Kelly-Cortez, LSH Interim Vice President and Dean, College of Nursing. “Our wraparound student support services ease the burden of expenses incurred during the practical components of the program to help the students get through successfully.”

With no prerequisites for enrollment, this hybrid program is approximately 60 percent online, with the remaining 40 percent as hands-on clinical and lab time. Students complete multiple clinical rotations in hospitals and community-based settings for each clinical course and attain the degree that prepares them for the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) R.N. licensing exam. Over the last five years, WGU’s first-time NCLEX-RN average pass rate has been 90.82 percent, markedly higher than the national average of all BSN programs as reported by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN).

As a recent WGU Prelicensure graduate from Texas, Alexis Presas, said, “This is my first bachelor’s degree, and I believe WGU’s high-quality nursing education mingled with flexibility and affordability have prepared me well to join the healthcare industry. I leaned on the school’s faculty for expertise on the nuances of the field as well as information regarding new opportunities. The program’s clinical experience has increased my understanding about the intensive care unit and boosted my confidence to serve the ICU patients in the future.”

The [National Council of State Boards of Nursing](#) states that approximately 100,000 registered nurses left the workforce since the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 600,000 intend to leave by 2027 because of stress, burnout, and retirement. Because nurses are leaving the field, increasing access, removing barriers, and expanding innovative, high-quality health and nursing education programs are prime LSH goals.

The WGU Prelicensure program is steadily expanding throughout the country with the university actively establishing nursing labs and clinical spaces for in-person clinical and lab rotations. The university launched its first nursing simulation lab in Houston in 2019 and opened a new facility in [Salt Lake City, Utah](#), on October 13th, with more labs scheduled to launch next year. Click [here](#) to read more about the program specifics.

About Michael O. Leavitt School of Health (LSH): The school, named in [honor](#) of the former governor of Utah and former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, was established in 2006 with the mission to make a difference in the fields of healthcare, nursing, and higher education through [competency-based](#) education. LSH has educated 2 percent of the nation’s registered nurses, representing more than 170,000 jobs in the healthcare industry, according to the [Utah Foundation Research Brief](#). More than 20,000 students are currently enrolled at LSH and more than 100,000 have successfully graduated. Learn more at [Leavitt School of Health \(wgu.edu\)](#).

About Western Governors University (WGU): A nonprofit, online university established in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors with a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable higher education, WGU now serves more than 158,000 students nationwide and has nearly 340,000 graduates in all 50 states. Driving innovation as the nation’s leading competency-based university, WGU has been recognized by the White House, state leaders, employers, and students as a model that works in postsecondary education. In less

than 30 years, the university has become a leading influence in changing the lives of individuals and families, and preparing the workforce needed in today's rapidly evolving economy. WGU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, has been named one of Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies, and has been featured on NPR, NBC Nightly News and CNN and in The New York Times. Learn more at wgu.edu and wgu.edu/impact.

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