Fast Facts for the Student Nurse

Nursing Student Success in a Nutshell

Susan Stabler-Haas

SPRINGER PUBLISHING COMPANY
FAST FACTS FOR THE
STUDENT NURSE
About the Author

Susan Stabler-Haas, MSN, RN, CS, LMFT, is a registered nurse who has taught in diploma, associate, baccalaureate, RN-to-BSN, and second-degree nursing programs for more than 25 years. She has worked with students both in the classroom and at clinical sites. She currently teaches medical-surgical clinical nursing to senior baccalaureate students at West Chester University (West Chester, PA). She is the co-author of *Fast Facts for the Clinical Nursing Instructor* and has published articles on psychiatric nursing, relationship-based care, legal issues in nursing, and fundamentals of nursing. She has conducted research on the use of mindfulness-based stress reduction by nursing students.

Ms. Stabler-Haas is a diploma graduate of the Lankenau Hospital School of Nursing and holds both a baccalaureate and a master’s degree in Nursing from Villanova University. Additionally, her education includes completion of a post-master’s advanced practice program at the University of Pennsylvania. She has worked as a nurse and nurse-manager in the areas of critical care, medical-surgical, occupational health, and cardiac rehabilitation. Ms. Stabler-Haas is also a Clinical Nurse Specialist in adult psychiatric and mental health, and is a licensed marriage and family therapist.
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When I heard Susan Stabler-Haas was writing a book to guide student nurses through the adventure that is nursing school, I was thrilled. Susan has an impressive array of clinical and nurse education experience, including a position as nurse manager in a medical intensive care unit, as a psychiatric clinical nurse specialist, and as an assistant professor of nursing and clinical instructor at West Chester University. As the “door is always open” professor with hands-on, diversified, and bedside experience, Susan Stabler-Haas is the perfect resource to assist students through the nursing school journey, knowledgeable on what it takes to succeed. As a recent graduate of nursing at West Chester University, I was fortunate enough to have benefited from Susan’s guidance, understanding, and supportive mentoring as she offered her sound advice on studying, test taking, clinical success, and finding a job. Knowing how her guidance was a personal catalyst for success, the compilation of her expertise into a clear and concise guide will be an invaluable tool for future student nurses.

I vividly remember those times in nursing school, up to my ears in exams, term papers, and clinical reports, and feeling a loss of direction, blurred expectations, and the vague idea of “success” far away. I remember fingering through pages and pages of notes from lectures and feeling overwhelmed. How could there only be 50 questions on the next exam with this seemingly endless information? How can I study all of this?
I remember reading the project assignment for the dreaded term paper and pondering, what are the professors looking for? What is significant and relevant? Or the anxiety of starting clinicals, trying to finish the mandatory tasks but unsure of how to take advantage of the hands-on experience. I also remember the realization, as a college student, of how training for this job affected people’s lives in a significant way and the necessary embrace of this new responsibility. I remember my feelings being shared by other students around me as these concerns proved to be universal in the transition to student nurse. Luckily, I had Susan as a member of my personal journey, assisting me through the challenge and guiding me through these unknown waters.

Nursing school is a unique and rewarding experience with new and distinct challenges. Navigating these challenges without guidance and attempting to “figure it out” alone as school progresses can hinder a student’s potential. From lectures to clinical experiences, studying the dignified profession of nursing takes commitment, dedication, and a desire to succeed. Utilizing guidance in the form of this book can be highly beneficial for students who aspire to be professional nurses and bridges the desire with success in the classroom and clinical field. There are limited comprehensive resources available for nursing students such as this book, which includes chapters on classroom and clinical tips, working, and finding a job.

Take advantage of this book. Read it, highlight it, underline it, and study it. By using the information provided, you can feel in control of your nursing school experience, evolving into that capable nursing student of whom you can be proud. Nursing school is not easy, but being prepared and navigating through the numerous facets of curriculum and expectations with insider tips from a knowledgeable nursing school professor will surely set you up for success.

Laura Giambattista, RN, BSN
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It had been a day like any other in the life of a seventh grader. My night had been unremarkable as well. But as I settled into bed and pulled the covers up around me, an event would occur that would one day help shape my professional life. While waiting for sleep to come, I heard the lonely and faraway cry of an ambulance. I listened as it crept closer and closer – slowly at first but then flying past my window like a Halloween ghost. I listened as its intense and mournful wail was gradually overcome by the returning stillness of the night. The ambulance had not stopped at my house, but it had managed to plant a seed in the imagination of a 12-year-old girl as it hurried by. To myself, I said, “I wonder what it would be like to be a nurse and help those who are sick.”

It is curious how the most innocuous of events or the most casual of encounters can put us on a career path with no warning to ourselves and little notice by others. What made you interested in nursing as a career? Perhaps a family member or adult you admire worked as a nurse. Maybe you or someone close to you was a hospital patient, and you were intrigued by the nurses who constantly moved in and out of the room. You may have even read stories about how these wonderful and at times heroic individuals effectively combine the science of health care with the art of healing in the interest of making their patients well again. As noted in Chapter 8, “Today’s nurse
is in constant motion, shuttling back and forth between the technical aspects of nursing practice and the human aspects of nursing care. There are few other professions that require their practitioners to be so adept in so many different ways. As a nurse, you can treat, educate, console, bathe, and medicate a patient all within the same day."

Now poised to begin your life’s work, you may have recently entered nursing school or are considering the possibility of becoming a nursing student. This book has been written especially for you. Its purpose is to acquaint you with the demands and rewards of both an education and a career as a nurse. Think of this book as a map of sorts that is intended to prepare you for the realities you will encounter as you embark upon your career journey. By knowing what to expect, you will be in a better position to navigate the sometimes turbulent and sometimes tranquil seas that now separate you from a nursing license.

You should first understand the perspective from which this book has been created. It is not the product of statistical research. Rather, it is a personal blend of informed observation, practical advice, and helpful hints from my experience as a staff medical-surgical nurse, a rehab nurse, an industrial nurse, a nurse manager in a critical care unit of a major urban hospital, a nurse psychotherapist, a nursing instructor in associate, diploma, and second-degree programs, a university assistant professor – and, yes, my own vivid recollections of having once been a student nurse myself. This book also represents experiences drawn from more than a thousand nursing students whom I have taught over the years. Many examples in this book are their stories, and the section at the end of each part entitled “In Student Nurses’ Own Words…” are the real words of my former students.

I hope that this book will be your companion as you move through your nursing education program and eventually into your own nursing role. I also hope that it helps you to sustain
your own mental and physical health as you progress toward your professional goal.

Finally, it is my fondest hope that you will find nursing to be both professionally and personally fulfilling, just like the girl who heard the ambulance race by her window so many years ago.
I would like to thank the many students whom I have had the privilege of teaching throughout my career. It is their diligence and commitment to succeed in the nursing profession that have provided the inspiration for this book. In particular, I would like to recognize two former students—Laura Giambattista, RN, BSN (who wrote the Foreword) and Kelly Dulik, RN (who provided added insight regarding the nursing student perspective).

In addition, I must pay homage to my own mentors who have helped to shape my future in the nursing profession, especially Lee Camera, Lynn Garonski, Sally Russo, and Susan Slaninka.

Of course, no acknowledgment is complete without recognizing the invaluable support of my family and friends, whose encouragement has sustained me in my quest for success as a nurse, teacher, and author. Last, thank you to my husband Joe, whose kind wisdom and suggestions added immeasurable value to this book.
Your New Life as a Student Nurse
Now That Your Journey Has Begun

INTRODUCTION

A career in nursing is a journey that begins with information gathering and planning on the part of the student nurse.

In this chapter, you will learn:

1. That a career in nursing requires careful preparation.
2. About the public’s perception of the nursing profession.
3. About the “typical” nursing student.

A CAREER IN NURSING REQUIRES CAREFUL PREPARATION

Think back to your last vacation. Was it fun? Did you relax? Was it everything that you hoped it would be? If so, chances are that your vacation’s success was the result of careful planning—where to stay, what to pack, and, most important, how to get there.
In a larger sense, the mechanics of planning a career are similar to those involved in planning a vacation. Like those glossy brochures touting the many treasures and pleasures to be found from Las Vegas to London and from Madrid to Macao, a wide array of careers has beckoned to you. After carefully considering those options, you have decided that nursing is the profession that best reflects your personal values and ambitions.

**THE PUBLIC’S PERCEPTION OF THE NURSING PROFESSION**

Congratulations on making a great career choice! A 2010 Gallup poll has again found nursing to be the profession most trusted by the general public. Since becoming a part of this survey in 1999, nursing has been rated the most trusted profession every year with the exception of 2001, when firefighters took the top spot. The public’s trust in nurses is well placed. In addition to being caregivers, nurses are often advocates for their patients, doing what they can to help them successfully navigate the health care system. It is a trust that can be traced back to the battlefield and the contributions of nursing icons such as Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton. Chances are, however, that you were drawn to the profession by an individual who is not famous—one whose skill and dedication kindled a passion within you strong enough to illuminate your ultimate career path.

**THE TYPICAL NURSING STUDENT**

The typical nursing student is no longer typical. Once she was almost exclusively a young white female, but that is changing. In 1990, minority enrollment in basic registered nursing
programs was 16%; this nearly doubled to 29% by 2008–2009. Similarly, male participation has doubled as well, from a level of 6% in 1988 to about 12% today. The next threshold to be crossed is age. The advent of second-degree programs to accommodate career changers interested in nursing will no doubt begin to raise the average age of the nursing student as well.

**FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL**

- A career in nursing requires careful preparation.
- Nursing is continually rated as society’s most respected profession.
- The profile of the typical nursing student is evolving to become more inclusive of males, minorities, and older program participants.