

Doctoral Programs Admissions Application Workshop Q&A

Eligibility, Applying and Admissions Statistics

Q: Can the application fee be waived?

The fee is collected by the School of Graduate Studies so we are not able to waive it. If you anticipate difficulty paying this fee, this is something you can discuss with your prospective supervisor.

Q: What kinds of nursing experience would be best suited for each program?

Are you moving toward a career as a research scientist or tenure stream academic? Is research going to be the focus of your career? Most students who enter the PhD program are focused on the generation of new research evidence. Competitive applicants to our PhD program normally have significant research experience and scholarly outputs (e.g., published journal articles and presentations at conferences), as those are markers for future success as a PhD student engaged in research. There is no specific number of publications/presentations required – it is okay to be novice. What we want to see is some research experience in the area of your proposed doctoral work. This shows progression in your area of expertise and would strengthen your application.

If your focus is on implementation science (putting research into practice) and continuing your training in leadership in either nursing education or healthcare, then our DN program is for you! The DN is designed for nurses in leadership roles who want to enter senior-level leadership roles in nursing education, policy, professional associations, executive roles in healthcare leadership, and more. Applicants must have a minimum of 2 years of formal healthcare leadership experience or advanced nursing education teaching experience (e.g. clinical or operations leadership, health systems leadership, professor position). From an admissions standpoint, we are looking for alignment between your potential topic of interest and your experience. Your application will be stronger if you have experience in the topic you are considering for the DN.



Q: I did a course-based MN. Is there anything I need to do before applying to the PhD or DN program?

Many of our doctoral students come from course-based Master's programs. To be competitive for acceptance to our PhD program, we do look for research experience (e.g. Research Assistant roles, research positions, scholarly outputs such as peer-reviewed publications and presentations). For the DN program, we are looking for engagement in leadership activities (e.g. quality improvement projects, guest lectures, commentaries, textbook chapters) and evidence of scholarship activities (e.g. presentations, publications) that align with your area of interest and that would prepare you for our program. You don't have to have completed a thesis-based master's to be eligible to apply to our doctoral programs! Applicants should ensure they have some research experience. If not through a Master's program, then through work or volunteer roles.

Q: How refined should your research question be at the time of application?

When you are first thinking of applying, you will need a topic of interest and some ideas about the type of question you would want to address with your doctoral work. You will also want to ask yourself some of the following questions: Is this a DN project or a PhD project? Am I applying to the right program?

Ensure that your proposed research or project fits well with the expertise of your proposed supervisor. For PhD applicants, look closely at the research projects your supervisor is currently engaged in. There are often research assistantship opportunities and it would be beneficial if you could be paid for doing research connected to your thesis. If you have already met with potential supervisors, you have likely already had these types of discussions because they are also evaluating if they are a good fit for you.

You might have set ideas coming in but be open to refining these ideas. For the application, you will want to include background and rationale for your area of interest, the state of science/research in this area currently, and why it is important for you to address this question. Sometimes we see very broad topic areas described in the applications and these need to be refined to something smaller and more feasible for a thesis project. This refinement can happen with the consultation of your proposed supervisor as you develop your application.

Q: What's the threshold for research? E.g. a certain number of presentations?

We do not have a set threshold or number of research papers/presentations that we are looking for. When applying to either the PhD or DN program, we want you to demonstrate that

you have an area of interest and have some experience with research (PhD) or leadership activities (DN) in this area. It is okay to acknowledge that you are a novice in that area, but you will want to demonstrate that you are building on those experiences and show how you want your career to focus in this area of research or leadership. It is also important to give context to what you have on your CV (e.g., if you are part of a committee, what is your role on the committee?). We review applications holistically and take all aspects of your application into consideration, including your academics, clinical experience, research and leadership experience, proposed project focus, and alignment with your proposed supervisor when determining if you would be a good fit for our program.

Q: How will my application be affected if I do not provide a GRE score or English language proficiency result?

We do not require GRE scores. Our language requirements are set by U of T's School of Graduate Studies (SGS) English Language Proficiency (ELP) requirements which you can find here: <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/future-students/admission-application-requirements/english-language-proficiency-testing/>.

Q: I have English scores that are lower than IELTS 7.0, what do I do?

English requirements are set by U of T's School of Graduate Studies (SGS) so we don't have any flexibility here. You cannot apply until you meet this requirement. You can retake the test, but hold off on applying or starting an application until you meet this requirement.

Q: Are there international students or alumni from Asia, including South Korea? Both our DN and PhD programs are open to international students. We receive applications and admit students from all over the world, including Asia (and Europe, North America, South America, Africa).

U of T has a long history of welcoming international students from all over the world. Our [Centre for International Experience \(CIE\)](#) has immigration advisors, programming for individuals transitioning to studying/living in Canada, and programs for those who are new to the city and looking for information on how to find healthcare, housing, transportation, and experiencing your first winter in Canada. U of T also offers courses specifically designed for international students on how to engage in academic discussion and dialogue in Canada and covers norms, presentation styles, and how to interact with supervisors.

In our faculty, we have many international students and they act as an important network for each other. PhD students have work stations on site so that you have space to work alongside

your peers. Our [Graduate Nurses Student Society \(GNSS\)](#) also holds events to facilitate networking, socializing, and building a network if you are new to Toronto or Canada.

Q: When is the application deadline?

The deadline to apply is April 30, 2025 but we do rolling admissions so if you have a supervisor in place and apply sooner, you will hear back sooner and can start planning. The Admissions Committee meets in February, end of March, and early May to review applications.

Q: How many students are admitted yearly?

Each year the Ministry of Education assigns us a seat allocation for each of our programs. Last year they assigned us 9 seats for DN and 10 for PhD. We anticipate the assignment will be similar this coming year.

Q: If I apply to and get in but for some reason can't start that year, do I need to apply again or can I defer?

Applicants are admitted with the general understanding that they will start the program in the Fall semester of the year they are admitted. Deferrals are granted sparingly and are normally reserved for exceptional circumstances such as sudden and major illness or immigration issues that make it impossible for the student to begin the program as planned. Deferrals reduce the number of seats available for next year's applicants (which becomes an issue of fairness). If you find that you need to request a deferral, speak to your supervisor and contact us at connect.nursing@utoronto.ca so that we can take your request to the Doctoral Programs Director and Associate Dean Academic.

Please note that there is no penalty for declining an offer of admission and reapplying at a future date.

Letter of Intent and CV

Q: What do I put on my CV?

There is no page limit so please provide as much detail as possible. Your CV should be in a logical order where we can find things by headings, so there is no need to get creative with visuals. The information is the key part, and you will want key details to be identifiable by the Admissions Committee.

Use the categories below when developing your CV. If a particular heading does not apply, you may leave it out.

- Academic education (post-secondary degrees, diplomas, certificates)
- Continuing education & certification (including workshops, professional development)
- Awards and honours (e.g. practice awards from employing organization, bursaries, scholarships)
- Professional employment
- Peer-reviewed presentations / publications / research (e.g. workshops, conferences, journal references)
- Current membership in professional organizations
- Committees (e.g. work-related, professional)
- Clinical / administrative / practice innovations (please provide brief descriptions or examples)
- Research involvement (please provide a brief description of projects and role and/or your involvement and role in research-oriented organizations)
- Relevant volunteer activities

Please spell out any acronyms you might use in your CV. If you are on any committees, please provide context to what your committee is responsible for and what your role is. For professional employment, please be sure to provide details about your role and any other important context.

When you reach out to referees, be sure to give them a copy of your CV so they can speak to these things as well (e.g. your impact on a committee, your roles, etc.). We want to see alignment between what your CV says, what your referees say, and why you want to be in the program.

Q: Where do I discuss my research alignment with my supervisor in my personal statement?

Your statement is broken down into separate questions in the “Academic Research and Career Plans Essay” section. Here is a preview of the questions:

1. State the research questions or a specific area that interests you and why it needs to be researched (~1000 words)
2. Discuss your interest in and preparation for PhD studies in nursing (~250 words)
3. Describe how your personal background and life experiences contributed to your research interests and to your decision to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Toronto (~250 words)

4. Outline your career plans and discuss how doctoral education is relevant to your professional goals, and your area of research interest within the nursing profession (~250)
5. Discuss why you think the program at the University of Toronto is a good fit for you given your interests and plans (~250 words).
6. Describe your plan to balance the demands of the full time PhD program (course work, thesis/research, TAs) with personal and work commitments (~250 words).

It would make most sense to address your research alignment in Question 1. This is where you will flesh out your link to your supervisor. Your proposed research and supervisor can align in several ways. For example, content expertise, similar research interests (i.e. types of questions they address), methodological framework (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods). Your supervisor doesn't necessarily have to match based on content alone.

You can ask yourself: Why this supervisor? Why this program? You want to make sure you make that link. If your proposed supervisor is an expert at U of T in this topic, explain your alignment and how they will help you achieve the goals of your research.

For PhD, please provide all details and highlight any research work and involvement you have. For DN, be sure to highlight leadership experience. Job title alone doesn't necessarily help us understand your role and responsibilities.

Supervisors

Q: How do I find a supervisor and what if I can't find one?

You cannot apply to our program until you have a supervisor in place. After you go through the pre-screening process (to do this, email connect.nursing@utoronto.ca) Student Services will connect you with the Doctoral Programs Director to talk about supervision. Please be aware that it may not be possible to find a supervisory match. If that is the case, you may need to broaden your search to include other universities or hold off on applying until the supervisor you want to work with has the capacity to take you.

Q: Is there an expectation that when we complete the application, we have already reached out and chatted with someone in the faculty about research interest? Looking at the list of faculty accepting students, how updated is this?

Applicants must be pre-screened prior to completing the application or reaching out to potential supervisors. Please email connect.nursing@utoronto.ca to be pre-screened. You

will need to provide us with your post-secondary transcripts, CV, proof of English facility, and potential supervisory matches and rationale. If you have already been pre-screened and are struggling to find a match, at that point we will consult with our Director of Doctoral Programs.

The list of faculty members who are accepting doctoral students changes throughout the application cycle as students match with supervisors. We can assist with the match-making process so you are not reaching out to people at random.

Q: Can I meet with a potential supervisor in person?

Please note that you must pass pre-screening before reaching out and meeting with potential supervisors (email connect.nursing@utoronto.ca to be pre-screened). Once you have passed the pre-screening, you can begin reaching out to potential supervisors by email. Please ensure that you are well-prepared when you contact supervisors. Read their publications. Outline your research plan and how it aligns with their research. Let them know that you have been pre-screened. Include ALL research experience and outputs and/or leadership in your CV.

Supervisors will generally set-up a telephone call or Zoom meeting for an initial discussion.

References

Q: What if I completed my Master’s degree over ten years ago? For example, some of us have professors who have retired since completing a master's degree in nursing. Are we required to take graduate level courses to have somebody provide academic references on our behalf? How do we navigate this?

This is a common situation especially once people have entered the workforce. You do not need to take a course just so you can get a reference!

We realize it is not always possible to get an academic reference years out of your master’s. In this case, applicants can provide a reference from someone they know professionally who can speak to their academic abilities (ability to carry out research and analysis, ability to express ideas in writing and orally, potential to master complex ideas, etc.). You might approach someone who taught you in a continuing education course, a senior figure in the nursing community whom you know through committee work or research work, etc.

Q: I am a professor and my academic references can be about both professional and academic practice. Should I ask my referee to specify their focus in the reference letter?

Yes, please ensure that your referees know what type of reference they will be providing (academic work vs. professional practice) so they can tailor their comments appropriately.

Q: Could I use a senior figure who isn't in nursing as my academic reference?

Yes! If they can speak to your work as an academic, this is fine.