

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO
CRNA SCHOOL
ADMISSIONS

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The Insider's Guide to CRNA School Admissions Review

FORWARD from a CRNA

As our nation's health care system is currently under a massive restructuring, one thing remains in the forefront; human beings will always need health care in one fashion or another. Thus, it stands to reason there will always be a need for professional health care providers. These providers can span from nurses to neurosurgeons and everything in between. No matter the career path, they all have one thing in common; they had to start somewhere. The Insider's Guide to CRNA School Admissions is a superb guide in getting you started on the pathway to becoming a nurse anesthetist.

This guide provides context that allows perspective students - from high school to nursing school - to navigate the best educational and financial roads to becoming a CRNA. It gives helpful insights along the way on how to study, where to look for financial help, where to work for the best experience before applying to CRNA school and much, much more.

The Insider's Guide to CRNA School Admissions is written so as not to waste a busy student's time. This guide really does most of the research work for you. It is precisely written as to only give pertinent information that will help you make the right decisions on your journey to becoming a CRNA. Even those who've earned a low GPA are shown how to improve their scores enough to be eligible for CRNA school entrance.

The Insider's Guide to CRNA School Admissions brings under one cover all the information you will need to make an informed and intelligent decision on a lifetime career as a CRNA. Whether you decide becoming a CRNA is for you or not, the information in this guide is beneficial in giving you a blue print in how to find the right career.

Sincerely,

Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

P.S. As an RN of over 22 years and a CRNA of just over four years, I would encourage you to continue this worthwhile effort you're putting in to becoming a CRNA. Nurse Anesthesia is a very rewarding career and although I waited till later in my career to become a CRNA, I'm glad I made the choice to pursue it.

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BONUS – 8 Creative Ways to Pay for CRNA School

CHAPTER 1

School – Pre CRNA



How to Prepare as a High School or Undergraduate Student

Not yet an RN? Here's how to prepare for a career as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist while you're still in school. If you've already finished your BSN, go ahead and skip this section.

While in high school...

The most important thing you can do when you're in high school is to do well in math and science (chemistry especially - statistics is really the only math class you need to do well in and you won't take that until college). Once you're in college, keep your GPA above a 3.0 and keep your science classes above a 3.0 as well. If you can pull it off, try to get no less than a cumulative GPA of 3.5.

Volunteer your time at a local hospital

Tip from a CRNA:

"If you are serious about going into the medical profession, it's important that you know exactly what you are getting into, and learn as much as possible about the culture of the hospital setting. It will also expose you to specific medical terms and procedures that will create a baseline of knowledge and experience which will help you later in your career."

Observe an operating room

"If you are already fairly confident that the hospital environment is where you want to be, then I encourage you to spend some time observing in an area of interest in a hospital. You can see firsthand how the different departments work and decide if this is for you. This is the perfect opportunity to see if bodily fluids (such as blood, etc.) bother you or time spent in the operating room would be something of interest to you."

Become a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant)

“Once you’ve graduated high school and you’re looking for a way to pay your way through nursing school and gain valuable experience, consider becoming a CNA. You will need to take a 10-12 week course (length of course may vary depending on your state). If you are in nursing school, some hospitals will allow this experience in lieu of a CNA course.

CNAs do some of the “grunt work” involved in patient care, but they can also garner a lot of learning and hands on practice. They can actually perform CPR on patients who have coded, and some are trained to draw blood. Some hospitals even allow CNA’s who are in nursing school to place foleys in patients, which is one of the many skills an RN has to have in practice. Most can do other sterile procedures such as simple dressing changes. CNA experience gained while going to nursing school is invaluable. The learned lessons are carried with them into their professional career. I speak from experience since I started out in a CNA role while going through nursing school”

-Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Get hired as a Registered Nurse

Having a job at the hospital will also help you when you are looking for a new graduate nursing job. Most often, the people who get hired are those who worked in the hospital as students or during their preceptorship.

Keep in mind that you may not have the luxury of getting hired straight into an ICU – you may have to start out on a medical surgical floor and work there for a while before you get transferred into the ICU. This may cost you extra time on your path to become a CRNA.

Once you have six months’ or more experience, you can get hired (almost) anywhere, but getting hired in a hospital that’s willing to spend that money to train you right now is the tricky part.

Make sure that it's the right career path for you

Because of the high salaries that nurse anesthesia offers, many people are drawn to this career. While it's important to set financial goals for yourself and leverage your time at work, you need to make sure you are both interested in and well suited to become a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist.

I encourage you to browse the web and learn as much about the career as you can. It is better that you spend a little extra time in this step before you commit yourself and your time to become something that may or may not suit your personality and personal strengths. Also, try and meet a CRNA and talk to them about their career. Ask as many questions as you can to see if this will be a good fit for you.

Character traits of a successful CRNA

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Vigilant | Willing to accept criticism | Decision maker |
| Accepts responsibility for actions | High level of commitment | Successfully trouble shoots to resolve problems |
| Ethical | Observant | Assimilates information |
| Honest | Overachiever | Focuses on tasks |
| Humble | "Type A" / OCD / in control | Concentrates well |
| Recognizes limitations | Team player | Prioritizes well |
| Careful | Comprehends instructions | Works well under stress |
| Has integrity | Utilizes critical thinking skills | Has developed safe and effective methods of coping with stress |
| Learns from mistakes | Utilizes successful communications skills | (exercise, games, etc.) |
| Willing to be taught | Uses good judgment | |
| Willing to learn | | |

Do you make the cut?

Many program directors have these qualities in mind when they interview applicants.

It's up to you to make sure the right traits shine through.

Be the overachiever you were born to be.

Learn from the mistakes of others.

How to Choose a Nursing Program

When you're looking at schools for nursing, you need to understand accreditation. This will become very important when you want to apply to grad school. To say it simply, I've known of RNs who wanted to get accepted into a program right away, so they chose a non-accredited nursing school (unfortunately, they do exist) and their ADN degree was not accepted as legitimate by the BSN programs they applied to. Unfortunately, these programs do allow you to take the NCLEX and become a licensed RN, but they do not allow you to move up the education ladder.

These non-accredited nursing programs are state approved, but not nationally approved, which means that within your state, you can practice as an RN, but once you decide to move and get an RN license in another state, or else transfer your educational credits to a major university, you will run into some major trouble. The lure of these programs is that they're much easier to get into (can't imagine why...), but they will limit what you can do professionally to such a great extent that it's just not worth it. More than that, many hospitals won't even hire nurses unless they graduate from a nationally accredited school, despite the fact that they passed the NCLEX. If you want to learn more about this, type "non-accredited nursing school" into Google and read some of the forum comments of those who had to learn the hard way.

There are two major types of accreditation: Regional and National

There are six regional accrediting associations in the United States, governing over the six regions of the country. Regional accreditation is very broad, and generally offers accreditation to colleges and universities that offer a well-rounded education.

National accreditation, on the other hand, is generally given to schools that offer a specialized or technically oriented curriculum. In nursing, this means that one nursing program can be accurately compared to another nursing program, rather than comparing a nursing program with a liberal arts program.

In most other disciplines, regional accreditation is the preferred type (state colleges and universities are all regionally accredited), and credits earned from a regionally accredited institution easily transfer to any other school. Conversely, credits earned from a nationally accredited college or university are not always transferable to a regionally accredited school.

In the nursing community, however, national accreditation is preferred, by either the NLNAC (National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission) or by the CCNE (Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education). Some CRNA schools, for instance, will ONLY accept students who earned their bachelor's degree from a CCNE or NLNAC accredited school (eliminating graduates from regional schools from even applying).

If you already have a nursing degree from a regionally accredited nursing program, don't lose heart. Most advanced practice programs will accept you.

National Accreditation: NLNAC vs. CCNE

With that established, it becomes a decision of whether or not to attend a school accredited by NLNAC or CCNE. Keep in mind that either will allow you entrance into a BSN, MSN or DNP program. Both are highly respected in the nursing community.

Just so you know the difference between the two, NLNAC supports a diversity of institutional missions, while the CCNE has a strong mission to move the nursing profession to BSN entry (eliminating the ADN).

Online Schools for Nursing

Many people wonder if online schools for nursing are legitimate, and if an online nursing degree is accepted among the medical community.

To be fair, they are legitimate, and many are accredited through either the CCNE or NLNAC, making them technically good choices. Just keep in mind that though they offer a decent degree, some employers or masters/doctorate level nursing programs do not look highly upon for-profit schools. On the other hand, there are many current CRNA students who obtained their BSN from an online school, such as University of Phoenix.

However, if you don't have a nearby school to attend, your safest bet is to obtain an online nursing degree through a brick and mortar school that offers an online nursing degree (such as the University of Texas at Arlington, which also has great tuition rates).

When speaking to admissions committees about your nursing degree, you'll find that while some don't look highly upon a purely online degree, others will recognize the school's esteemed accreditation, and see that your degree is valid.

RN to BSN online

Since it's likely that you have already obtained your RN license, I will give you several sites that I would use if I were choosing an RN to BSN online program.

Search by state to find **ACEN accredited** (Accreditation Committee for education in Nursing) programs: ACENursing.net

Search by state to find **CCNE accredited** nursing programs: aacn.nche.edu

Find info about online schools for nursing, including tuition cost and student reviews: GuideToOnlineSchools.com

Another helpful site that basically does the same thing is: OnlineDegreeReviews.org

For general information about online schools for nursing, visit: AllNursingSchools.com

Here's a helpful AllNurses.com thread about RN to BSN online programs. Just beware that the thread is LONG! AllNurses.com

GPA – 3.0 or Better

A minimum cumulative undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or better is one of the standard CRNA school requirements. A few schools will let you in with a 2.75, assuming you have higher marks in other areas and there's not a lot of competition for spots in the program that year.

Many programs will also require a 3.0 in the sciences and/or in your BSN program, and/or in the last 60 units of your education.

The average GPA of students who are accepted into CRNA schools ranges from 3.3 – 3.7. In fact, here is a breakdown of scores:

Top: 3.75

Average: 3.5

Below Average: 3.3 or lower

Pray for a Miracle: 3.0 or less



Note: If you're applying to a highly competitive school, such as WFUBMC (Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center) or VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University), you'll need a top score to be looked at. Their average GPA for entering SRNAs is around 3.75. If you want to go to a top school, you'll need top scores. If you have a GPA that's below average, it may not be worth your effort to apply to a top school.

If you have a below average GPA, do not despair! There are things you can do to make it up.

The most common scenario I see is someone who bombs their undergrad GPA due to partying and not taking school seriously; then at some point they "grow up" and decide to do something with their lives. This same student goes back to school, and completes their BSN with a 3.8 GPA. However, their overall GPA ends up at a 3.2 since things are averaged out for the cumulative GPA calculation.

This applicant is looked at in a much better light than the applicant who has a reverse scenario (great GPA all along until they hit the science courses when their GPA starts dipping into "C" territory). When you do poorly in science classes, or other recent course work, it really looks bad to the admissions committee.

If you are this applicant and want to be given a chance, you'll need to prove yourself by taking a few (science) grad level courses and acing them. Find which classes are recommended in Chapter 8.

Tip from a CRNA:

“If you are really serious about becoming a CRNA, and you are sure your GPA is too low to be accepted into CRNA school, consider getting a graduate degree in nursing. This is not to say getting an MSN is going to be easy, but if you get accepted and keep your grades high, you may have a better shot at CRNA school.

Keep a very high GPA in these graduate courses and it will look great to the admissions committee for CRNA school. It shows them you can succeed in a graduate school setting. Also, some of your core classes may transfer such as graduate statistics and graduate research courses. Be sure to check with your school to see which courses can transfer.”

- Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

CHAPTER 2

Cost of CRNA School Application



Application Expenses

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| NCLEX Fee | \$200 |
| Organization Dues | |
| AACN | \$78 annually |
| ENA | \$115 - 136 annually (depending on where you live) |
| Certification Fees | |
| CCRN | \$230: \$230 for AACN members or \$335 for nonmembers. If joining AACN at the time of CCRN application, the fee is \$308 (\$230 CCRN exam fee + \$78 AACN annual membership fee). |
| GRE Fee | \$195 |
| Application Fee | \$120: \$0-\$120 per CRNA program you apply to. Average cost is \$61. In addition, any school you apply to that is affiliated with a university will require an additional application fee to the school itself. This also will be an average cost of about \$60, making it \$120 per school, on average. |
| Transcripts | \$90: You'll need transcripts from every school you've attended to be sent to the CRNA schools you're applying for. Average cost of \$10 per transcript per school – add a \$20 fee to ship priority. If you attended 3 schools and are meeting a deadline, that's \$90 just for one school. |
| Interview Attire | \$535: \$400 for a suit, \$80 for shoes, \$30 for a shirt, \$25 accessory (tie/ scarf/ jewelry) for professional attire to wear to each interview. Clearly, it's possible to spend more than this, but the admissions committee will be looking to see that you're dressed appropriately, not that you're wearing name brand clothing. |
| Transportation expenses | \$700: This is the transportation cost to interview at one school. It entirely depends on how far away from home you're interviewing, but in the event you have to fly, rent a car and get a hotel, this is roughly what it would cost. |
| RN Licensure | \$150 Per state license (fees vary by state). If you are moving out of state for your program, you will need to apply for "licensure by endorsement" in the state or states you will be practicing in during your clinical term. |

GRAND TOTAL

\$4233: Assuming that you applied to and were invited to interview at three schools and had to pay for airfare and hotel for each of them. Clearly, most of these expenses are optional, and what you spend on these categories may be very different from what I've listed. This is meant to give you a rough estimate of expenses you may have, and is in no way a definitive list.

CHAPTER 3:

The Study Tip You'll Never Forget

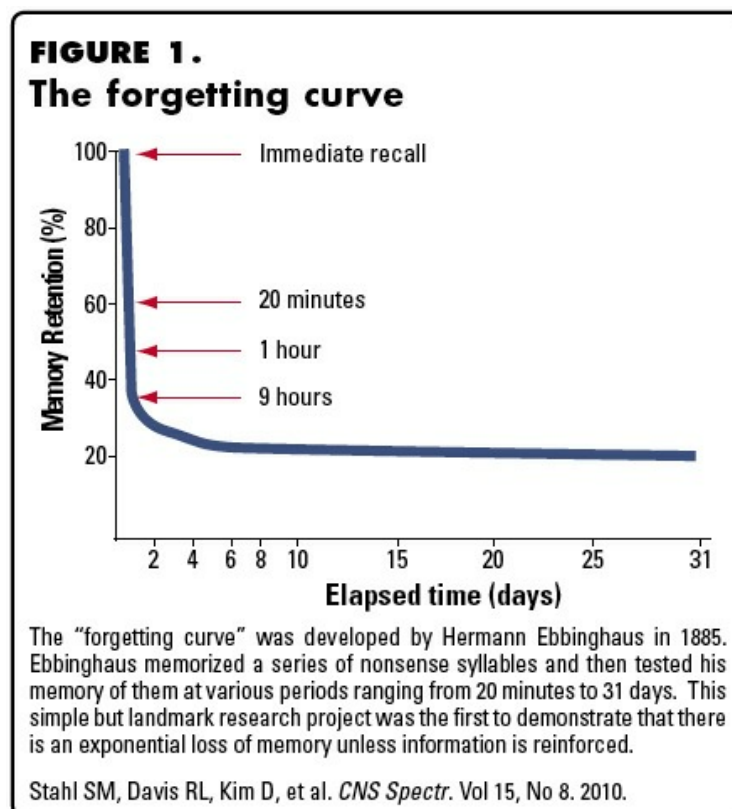


Spaced Repetition System (SRS)

This system is so revolutionary, that if you use it, you will not have to worry about forgetting important information. If you follow the system I am about to lay out for you, you will sail through your GRE prep, CCRN prep, ace the clinical questions during your CRNA interview, and ultimately, pass the CRNA boards with flying colors. You'll spend less total time studying for your tests during CRNA school. You'll also remember these concepts for the rest of your life, while your classmates will have to cram before every test day just to bring back to mind things they had already mastered at one point, but have now completely forgotten. You'll find that when you use this system, your stress level before important exams will greatly decrease.

What is Spaced Repetition?

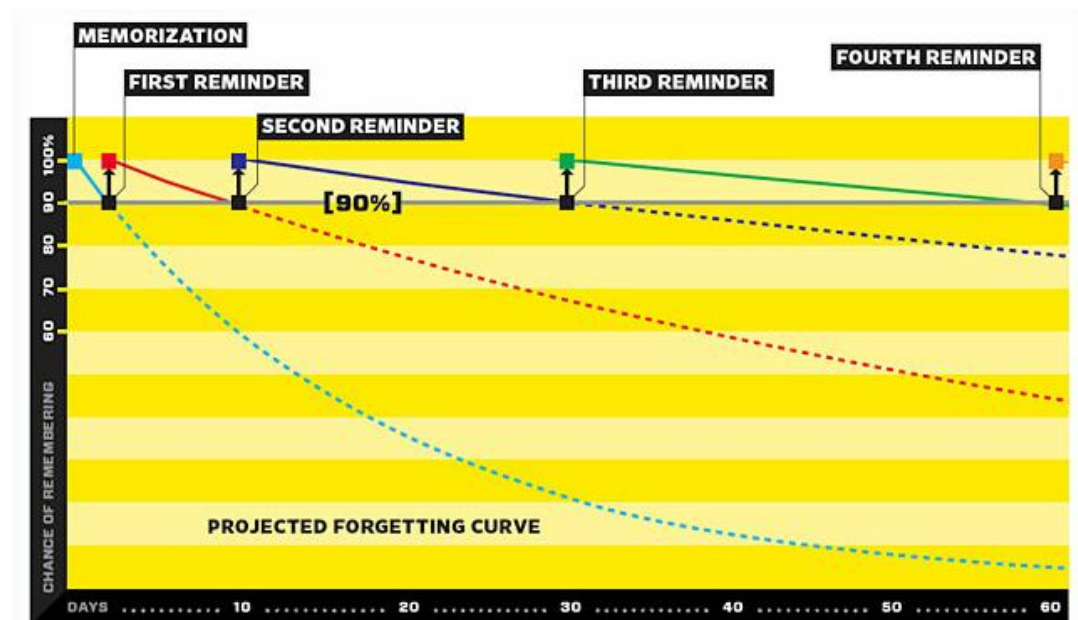
The most popular FREE application of this system is Anki (meaning "memory work" or "learning by heart" in Japanese). It's basically a system of flashcards set to an advanced algorithm. This algorithm will allow you to review only the flashcards which you are close to forgetting. See Figure 1 below, which shows how our minds will forget information unless we review that information shortly after learning it.



Why You Should Use Spaced Repetition

Most people study by cramming; and while that works well short term, it is the worst way to study if you want to maintain a long term memory of the information you are attempting to master. With the spaced repetition system, you will spend an estimated five minutes of time (ever) reviewing every one fact you attempt to put to memory. By spacing out the review of each fact you are trying to learn, you ensure that you spend less total time committing that fact to memory, and that you retain it in your memory for life.

The chart below illustrates how the reviews are spaced. You will see that according to this chart, you will be prompted to review each card when there is a 90% chance that you will still remember the information. This is ideal, as it allows for the optimal imprinting of the fact on your memory.



Another factor in the system that contributes to stronger memories is the constant testing that is innate to using flashcards. Studies show that being tested on information is a much more effective method of committing the information to memory than just reviewing or reading the information. Flashcards allow you to test yourself with every piece of information you're attempting to learn.

When to Use Spaced Repetition

You should use this system when you have at least five days before you need to recall the information you're learning. Any less than that, and you're better off cramming (at least in the short term). You should also only use this system for information that is truly important to you, and that you want to remember for life. The rule of thumb is that if you will spend more than five minutes (in a lifetime) looking up a piece of information, it is worth committing to memory.

How to Use Spaced Repetition

You can use this system on any mobile device, which is really handy, because it means you can take your studying with you wherever you go. If you have a smart phone, you can go through your flashcards at a time of day when you otherwise wouldn't have enough sustained concentration to do any "real" studying.

It's important that you've already "learned" the information before you put it on a flashcard – the flashcards are only there to help you remember a concept you already understand, and are not an effective means of helping you understand a concept in the first place.

Only put ONE fact on each card. Trust me on this. Trying to remember more than one fact at a time gets sloppy.

Why Doesn't Everyone Use This System?

Why is spaced repetition so unpopular? Why do people who have tried it once never try it again? The reality is that even though cramming isn't effective long term, it works if you have a test tomorrow. By cramming, you're trading a strong memory now for a weak memory later. With spaced repetition, in contrast, you allow your memory of the information to weaken slightly so that upon your next review, it will be strengthened to a much greater degree.

The other reason it is not more commonly used is that there is a wide misconception of its effectiveness. Here is a study that illustrates my point from Kornell 2009's study of GRE vocab¹:

Kornell, N. (2009, January 19). *Optimising Learning Using Flashcards: Spacing Is More*. Retrieved from William Sites: <http://sites.williams.edu/nk2/files/2011/08/Kornell.2009b.pdf>

¹ Kornell, N. (n.d.). Williams Sites. sites.williams.edu. Retrieved April 7, 2017, from <http://sites.williams.edu/nk2/files/2011/08>

Across experiments, *spacing* was more effective than massing (cramming) for 90% of the participants, yet after the first study session, 72% of the participants believed that massing had been more effective than spacing... When they do consider spacing, they often exhibit the illusion that massed study is more effective than spaced study, even when the reverse is true (Dunlosky & Nelson, 1994; Kornell & Bjork, 2008a; Simon & Bjork, 2008a; Simon & Bjork, 2001; Zechmeister & Shaughnessy, 1980).

So in summary, even people who have used the system do not perceive the benefits. Just keep in mind that because the benefits are long term, they will be hard to truly realize until a lot of time has passed after using the system. In contrast, the personal cost to you in self-control and daily study is very real and immediate.

The last reason that some may be dissuaded from using Anki is that there is a learning curve with it. It will take some time to learn the best way to make flashcards and get the feel for how to make the system work best for you.

Why You Should Try It

We all know that to truly learn a concept, you need to build upon concepts you've already mastered. Using a spaced repetition system allows you to master concepts for life, and thus gives you mental building blocks which you can continue to use throughout your CRNA career and with any other endeavor you choose to master.

Resources

Overview of SRS: <http://lifeinthefastlane.com/2011/11/learning-by-spaced-repetition/>

Research with supporting evidence of this system:

<http://www.gwern.net/Spaced%20repetition>

To install Anki on all devices:

http://www.hockinternational.com/download/Anki_instructions.pdf

Sources for Flashcards: FlashCardExchange.com, StudyStack.com, Anki deck, Mnemosyne, Flashcarddb

CHAPTER 4:

Critical Care & ICU Experience

Everything you Need to Know to Make the Most of the ICU



How to Get Into the ICU as a New Grad

If you are not yet an RN, you may be wondering how to gain experience in an ICU. Ideally, you would be hired into an ICU right out of nursing school. This does happen occasionally (I'm sure you'll hear about the fortunate soul if you're active on nursing forums).

In order to get hired straight into the ICU, you need to either know someone in the ICU you're seeking to be hired in, or happen to apply to a hospital that is desperate for ICU nurses which simultaneously has a very small applicant pool (I promise you, if you are applying as a new grad and are up against ANYONE who has more experience than you do, you will not be picked for this position – unless, as I stated before, you know someone. And even then, they'd have to *really* like you).

Your best bet is to get hired onto a medical surgical floor, or any floor where they're willing to hire and train new graduates. Work there for six months to a year, and when you feel as though you've mastered that floor, ask to be transferred to an ICU. It is also important that you apply to hospitals that have a large ICU, as experience as an ICU RN in a large hospital is always preferred.

Tip from a CRNA:

“To make this transfer happen, you'll want to get to know the other RNs in the ICU, particularly those in power (managers, charge nurses, seasoned ICU nurses). Here are some of my suggestions:

- 1. Be nice and informative when giving or getting a report on a patient***
- 2. Help the ICU RN get the patients settled into his/her new room as soon as the patient arrives to your floor.***
- 3. Show your interest in the patient's diagnosis/disease process***
- 4. Ask pertinent questions regarding care given and to be given***
- 5. Ask if you can shadow an ICU RN***
- 6. Learn ICU Standards of Care (go to the AACN web site). Learn all you can about IV drips, ventilators, etc. and ask pertinent questions”***

-Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Does ICU orientation count towards the one year minimum requirement?

The rule of thumb in most schools is that they will count any experience in which you are the primary caregiver for your patient load. So for example, when you are initially orienting, you will often be shadowing an experienced ICU nurse and helping out when possible. This experience will not count. However, at some point (usually after a few weeks), they will let you be primarily responsible for the patient(s) while an experienced nurse is watching over you. This experience *will* count.

ICU experience is the last item on my list of things to do. How much experience should I have before I apply?

Five to ten years ago, you could have theoretically applied with only three months of ICU experience, which would mean a full year of experience by the time the program began. In fact, I know of a girl who was accepted to a top school with only 3 months experience at the time of application, but that was several years ago.

The truth is, the more ICU experience you have, or the better that experience is, the more prepared you are for CRNA school. So, if you have little critical care experience, or experience from a small hospital, you will be less prepared for CRNA school.

Tip from a CRNA:

“In fact, there is a trend now creeping up where CRNA schools are wanting a minimum of 2 years’ experience to be competitive. **DO NOT TELL THEM YOU ARE WANTING TO WORK IN ICU WITH THE HOPES OF GOING TO CRNA SCHOOL***** Unless the unit is hopelessly desperate, they will flat out not hire you. They do not intend to spend the resources or the money to train someone who will for sure leave in a year or two. I would not advocate a lie, but I would NOT volunteer that information. I’ve known ICU managers who specifically said they will not hire RN’s if their plans are to go to CRNA school.”***

-Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Get the RIGHT Critical Care Experience

All nurse anesthetist schools require at least one year of recent RN experience in an adult critical care unit. However, most applicants you're competing with will have 2-7 years of experience in a critical care unit and 4-10 years as an RN.

Some CRNA schools have certain ICU units that they prefer (usually surgical and cardiovascular). Other schools aren't as concerned with the unit you worked in as much as they are the type of experience you had, and the level of comprehension you have walked away with.

What is the best type of ICU experience to prepare you for CRNA school?

Tip from a CRNA:

"It is important the type of ICU experience one has when applying to CRNA school. CVICU/CCU is very common. The main goal is having the knowledge and experience of not only handling critically ill patients, but hanging, titrating and sometimes mixing drugs such as Neosynepherine, Nitroglycerin, Dopamine, Dobutamine and others. Also, an RN is most likely to gain firsthand experience in learning to read wave forms of PA lines, Art lines, Wedge Pressures etc. My advice to the RN's who are working in these settings with a goal of going to CRNA school is to assist the physician in placing these lines. The more experience you have helping with placement, learning wave forms, watching how difficult placements are overcome, the more comfortable you are in learning how to place them in CRNA school."

– Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Each practice area brings its own advantages in terms of nurse preparation. And consider that each CRNA school may have its own preference for the type of ICU experience they consider the best for your preparation of CRNA school.

This section is mostly taken from the WFUBMC website, with some portions taken from other CRNA school FAQ pages:

As a CRNA student, **you will care for patients who are neonatal to 100 years old**, and you will have to be equally comfortable with many aspects: drug dosing, age-related factors, etc. for each age level. A neonatal ICU nurse will find great comfort adapting to pediatric anesthesia,

while the former coronary care unit nurse will have a breeze in evaluating ECG and stress test results prior to cardiac surgery.

Having said this, the majority of your patients will be adults, so even though experience in the NICU or PICU will always help, it should be balanced by **at least one year of adult ICU**.

Fortunately, nurse anesthetist schools will do their best to help you bridge the gaps between your past experience and the broader set of responsibilities you will face as a CRNA.

No one area is perfect in terms of previous experience, although a **surgical ICU** will give you familiarity with many aspects of anesthesia care, anesthetic medications, postoperative complications, etc.

If you are considering a job change to better prepare for nurse anesthetist school, you might consider changing areas as well to **give yourself a broader experience base**. For example, if you are in a small surgical ICU and you are going to move to a larger ICU to get more diverse experience, consider going to a medical ICU to increase both your breadth and depth of experience.

It is always best to gain your experience in a large ICU. In fact, **1-2 years in a large ICU is probably better than 10 years of experience in a in a small ICU**. The reason is that large intensive care units offer more experience in the following areas (and these things are critical to your success in nurse anesthesia school):

- Dynamic and independent decision making
- Continuous ECG monitoring
- Invasive lines (such as pulmonary artery, central venous, and arterial catheters)
- Vasoactive infusions
- Ventilator support
- Life threatening pathophysiology

If, by the time you apply, you will only have experience in one area, the following types of experience will give you the best starting point as an SRNA:

- MICU (Medical Intensive Care Unit)
- CICU (Cardiac ICU)
- SICU (Surgical ICU)
- Cardiothoracic surgery ICU
- Neuro ICU
- CCU (Coronary Care Unit)

- TICU (Trauma ICU)

These types of experiences are great as supporting experience, but will most likely not work as your primary experience:

- PICU (Pediatric ICU)
- NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)
- ER (Emergency Room) experience from a Level One Trauma Center
- Burn Unit

Though all experience as an RN is helpful, experience in these units is *almost* never accepted as meeting the one year requirement of nurse anesthetist schools:

- OR (Operating Room)
- PACU (Post Anesthesia Care Unit)
- Cardiac Step-down
- Telemetry
- ER (Emergency Room)
- Obstetrics

Make your Critical Care Experience Count

Though it's important to do your best in every job you have, it is especially important that while you are working in the ICU, you make every effort to be the best nurse you can be.

- Ask your charge nurse to give you the most difficult patients
- When you come across a new process or procedure, don't be content to perform it with a passing score – go home and do some research so that you can perform the procedure with more competence the next time
- Take every opportunity to learn and master the procedures
- Ask to be a preceptor
- Take on a leadership role by becoming a charge nurse
- Provide in-service education to your colleagues on an anesthesia related topic, like muscle relaxants. This will demonstrate your ability and motivation
- Be thinking about who will be writing your letters of recommendation and make sure you go the extra mile to establish a positive rapport with them
- If your hospital doesn't see a wide variety of critical patients, expand your knowledge by doing research on those procedures not offered by your hospital

When it comes time to interview, these are the extra steps that will make a difference. The admissions committee is looking for students who stand out – those who go above and beyond in all they do and exemplify excellence. These small but thoughtful actions will be noticed and set you apart from the rest of the applicants.

CHAPTER 5

CRNA Shadow Experience



Shadow a CRNA before you commit yourself to this path

This is the first step before you do any serious footwork to become a CRNA. Before you go through the time intensive next steps on your path to become a CRNA, it's important that you know for CERTAIN that this is the right career choice for you. It's still not too late to turn back.

Unfortunately, I have heard stories of people graduating from CRNA school, beginning their career and wishing they had chosen a different one. I heard of a man who worked 10 years toward this goal, got through a full year of the didactic training and chose to drop out three weeks into his clinical experience because it wasn't what he expected.

Recommended shadow time

As soon as you're able, shadow a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist for a *minimum* of one day. I recommend shadowing multiple CRNAs for a cumulative total of 40 hours, as this will give you a very broad exposure to different cases and experiences. It will also prevent you from making a false judgment on this career based on one good or bad experience. If you're unable to find a CRNA to shadow, it is acceptable to shadow an anesthesiologist instead; but a CRNA should be your first choice.

Benefits of shadow experience

This shadow experience will give you an advantage over other applicants. Even if this is not a requirement at the CRNA school you intend on going to, the shadow experience will be priceless for you. The truth is that very few schools actually require shadow experience, but all of them look favorably upon an applicant who has gone out of their way to gain this experience. Also, most schools will ask you if you shadowed a CRNA during the interview. It's the type of question you'd hate to have to say no to.

When you shadow a CRNA

During your shadow experience, it is important that you establish a good rapport with the CRNA. Ask intelligent questions and be attentive. Some schools require that one of your references is from a CRNA, so you'll want to make a good impression.

You should also ask them about the CRNA program they graduated from. If they still know anyone there (program director, etc.), and if you're interested in applying to the program they graduated from, ask them if they would be willing to send an email to the school and have them watch for your application. This could play an important role in getting you an interview, as the school highly regards the opinions of its graduates.

Also be sure to document your entire experience. Write out the events of the day in as much detail as you can. This will be a great reference to you when you're preparing for your CRNA school interview, as you can be sure the question will come up. You will want to have all the details on the tip of your tongue. It will also help as you prepare your personal essay.

CHAPTER 6

Organizations & Certifications



Organizations

There are two primary organizations you should join: AACN and ENA.

AACN – American Association of Critical Care Nurses

The cost to join the AACN is \$78 per year, but having the membership will save you \$27 when you go to get your CCRN certification. In addition, members receive free unlimited continuing education credits and access to award-winning publications, including the peer-reviewed *American Journal of Critical Care* and *Critical Care Nurse*, popular monthly magazine *AACN Bold Voices* and a weekly electronic newsletter. They're available to all members in print and digital formats. Membership also makes you eligible for AACN-sponsored scholarships.

ENA – Emergency Nurse Association

When you become a member of ENA, you'll get a subscription to *ENA Connection*, the *Journal of Emergency Nursing*, and the ENA Newsline. Also, those who have been members for a full 12 months are eligible for many grants and scholarships. There are scholarships available for the RN-BSN student and many more for the BSN-MSN or DNP student ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000 in grant awards. Besides that, belonging to the organization will look good on your curriculum vitae and make you eligible for ENA-sponsored scholarships.

Certifications

There are three certifications you MUST have, and many more that you really SHOULD have. We'll begin with the ones you must have.

Must Have Certifications

1. BLS (Basic Life Support)
2. ACLS (Advanced Cardiac Life Support)
3. PALS (Pediatric Advanced Life Support)

Most hospitals will require you to have these certifications before you begin working as an RN, so it's likely that you already have these. In most cases, your hospital will pay for these certifications. Just be sure that you keep the actual certification card, as you will need to submit a copy of each card with your application.

Become a BLS, ACLS, or PALS instructor

Any step you take to demonstrate your leadership ability will be a step in the right direction toward becoming a CRNA. To become an AHA (American Heart Association) instructor, go to onlineaha.org and follow their instructions. You'll need to take a 2-3 hour online course, addend an Instructor course, and be monitored by faculty while you teach your first class. The cost to become a teacher is \$30-35 per specialty.

Highly Recommended Certifications

Having additional certifications will set you apart from other applicants (very few applicants will have these), and will offer a tie-breaking advantage if you and another applicant have everything else equal. These certifications show that you're willing to go the extra mile and take your professional advancement seriously.

CCRN – Critical Care Registered Nurse



CCRN / Critical Care Registered Nurse @ aacn.org is the #1 certification recommended for ICU nurses. This certification is currently required by 20% of CRNA programs and is recommended by another 30% of programs. This certification is becoming more important to admissions committees. A few years ago, it was only required by 10% of programs and recommended by an additional 20%.

If you only obtain one certification, (in addition to those previously mentioned) it should be your CCRN. Not only will taking your CCRN make you a more desirable ICU nurse, but it will offer you a chance to study and master the key concepts and procedures in the ICU. Many of the questions that will be on your CCRN exam will also be asked during your interview.

So when you're evaluating this certification and judging whether or not it is worth your time, consider that by completing this certification, you are gaining mastery of the very topics that are critical for your success as a CRNA.

You're not just going through this hassle so that you'll "look good" to the admissions committee, you're actually gaining a foundation of knowledge (through studying for the exam), as well as cementing the knowledge you've already learned (by being tested on it – remember from chapter 3 that testing actually creates more solid memories and will cause you to remember information much more effectively than just studying it).



***Note:** Of all the activities you could partake of in preparation of the application process, I would say this one activity is the most productive, because it allows you to accomplish so many goals at once.*

About the CCRN

This information is taken directly from AACN.Org² CCRN Exam Handbook, February 2017

The CCRN exam is a 3-hour test consisting of 150 multiple-choice items. Of the 150 items, 125 are scored and 25 are used to gather statistical data on item performance for future exams.

- Of each exam, **80%** focuses on **Clinical Judgment**
- The remaining **20%** covers **Professional Caring and Ethical Practice**.

Here is a more specific breakdown of topics covered. You can find this breakdown, as well as sample questions, and an even more detailed breakdown of topics in the certification exam handbook on the aacn.org website.

- 18% Cardiovascular
- 17% Pulmonary
- 20% Endocrine/ Hematology/ Gastrointestinal/ Renal/ Integumentary
- 13% Musculoskeletal/ Neurology/ Psychosocial
- 14% Multisystem
- 20% Professional Caring and Ethical Practice

Study Materials

The amount of time you need to spend studying will directly correlate with the type of ICU you are currently working in. If you are in a large ICU with a large variety of patient populations, you may need to study less total time than if you work in a small ICU where you don't get a wide array of experiences or patient populations. The test was built to test ICU knowledge, so the more experience you've had in the ICU, the more familiar you should be with the overall content of the exam. Having said that, it is still a very difficult exam and you will need to devote a great deal of time preparing for it. With much preparation, 70% of first-time test takers are able to pass the CCRN the first time.

Remember from Chapter 3 that the most helpful type of study or review you can do is to test yourself on information that you already know, preferably using a spaced repetition system (Anki). Much of the review material out there is in the form of lengthy, text-heavy books that are entirely too daunting. Reading them through will do you no good. If you decide to use a

² American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. (n.d.). *American Association of Critical-Care Nurses*. Retrieved February 12, 2017, from <http://aacn.org>

large textbook, skim it for information that directly relates to the topics listed in the certification exam handbook, then translate the information into flashcards (with one fact per flashcard) that you can readily use to drill yourself until you've learned the information.

CCRN Review Cram DVD or CD by Laura Gasparis Vonfrolio

"Highly recommend Dr. Gasparis Vonfrolio! She is very entertaining and informative. She actually makes it fun to learn. I give her Review DVDs credit for me passing the CEN and the CCRN. EXCELLENT!"

-Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Just make sure you get a recent copy, as it reflects the most recent version of the CCRN skills to study.

Sub Specialty Certifications

CMC Cardiac Medicine Certification or

CSC Cardiac Surgery Certification

Once you have completed your CCRN, you may now obtain a subspecialty certification. Very few applicants will have these sub-certifications, so having them will definitely cause you to stand out. On the other hand, few people have them because they are not entirely necessary.



For this reason, I only recommend these subspecialty certifications to applicants who really are on the low end in all of the major areas: GPA hovering between a 3.0 to 3.3; GRE score at or below the 50th percentile; ICU experience in a small hospital or only one year experience in critical care.

Basically, a strong applicant will shine in so many ways that a subspecialty certification will be a non-issue. It will NEVER hurt a strong application, but won't sway it too heavily either. However, it could be just the thing to cause the "less desirable" applicant to stand out and be selected for an interview because of his or her tenacity to go the extra mile and make up for other areas of lower performance.

The type of subspecialty certification you test for depends on which department of the ICU you work in.

Other Certifications

If you are currently working in an Emergency Department, I recommend you obtain: **TNCC**: Trauma Nursing Core Course certification (ENA.org)

CEN: Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCENCertifications.org) and the:

CCRN: Discussed in depth in last chapter

If you're working in a neonatal ICU, I recommend you obtain the **NRP**: Neonatal Resuscitation Program certification (NRPCertification.com).

If you work in the ED, PACU or OR, I recommend you obtain your **CSRN** Certified Sedation Registered Nurse (SedationCertification.Com).

Another useful certification is the **IABP**: Intra-Aortic Balloon Pump. It's a very specialized certification for RNs in a coronary or cardiac critical care unit. If you work in a unit that sees enough IABP patients to warrant certification, definitely go for it.

These other certifications in and of themselves are not the goal. That is to say that any one of these certifications is not better than the next (with the exception of IABP). The true goal is to show the admissions committee that you go above and beyond the call of duty; you take your career seriously, and you outshine all other candidates who come from a similar clinical background.

Update Your Curriculum Vitae and Stay Organized

As you join organizations and earn certifications, you should add these things to your curriculum vitae. This practice will help you remain mindful of your end goal, and will spark ideas of other accomplishments you may be able to tackle before you're ready to apply. You should also keep these certifications and all membership documents together in a folder so that when it comes time to apply, you have everything you need in one place.

CHAPTER 7:

Get Published

Getting your professional work published in a major nursing magazine or journal is a hallmark of leadership and will highlight your advanced knowledge of nursing. The overall principle here is that you want to show you are a leader in the nursing community.

Ideally, you would want to have your work published in a large nursing journal that has high impact, but every effort you make to get published will be of value (assuming your work is quality and has substance).

Here is a list of journals/magazines to consider submitting your work to:

American Association of Critical Care Nurses publications:

- Critical Care Nurse
- The American Journal of Critical Care
- Advanced Critical Care
- Bold Voices

ENA (Emergency Nursing Association) publications:

- Journal of Emergency Nursing
- ENA Connection

Other Publications

- Nursing 2017
- Intensive and Critical Care Nursing
- Critical Care Nursing Quarterly
- Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing

CHAPTER 8:

Tackling the GRE



About the GRE

Importance of the GRE

In most cases, the GRE isn't a huge factor in CRNA school acceptance. The majority of schools require that your scores are average (50th percentile) or better, and some will even accept scores that are in the 30th percentile (use the CRNA School Searchable Database³ to find schools that allow lower scores).

The GRE is really just a method of weeding out students who would have a hard time in grad school. If the admissions committee has other reasons to believe that you'd make a good CRNA student, they'll often overlook a low GRE score.

To determine how important GRE scores are to the schools you are applying to, check their FAQs. They will usually let you know how much weight they place on GRE scores.

Target Scores

Those programs that require the GRE often look for a combined score of 297 (new version) or 1000 (old version). They're also looking to see that your scores are pretty well balanced between sections. What I mean is that if you score in the 90th percentile in the quantitative section and only 20th percentile in the verbal ability assessment, it may raise a few red flags about your aptitude for the program. You should really score at least average or above in each section.

MAT vs. GRE

Roughly 10% of schools will accept the MAT in place of the GRE, so I will briefly describe both, just to be thorough. Keep in mind though that most schools who give you the option prefer that you take the GRE.

The **GRE** (Graduate Record Examination) involves advanced math and is known for being much more difficult. It requires more preparation and study. The majority of CRNA programs (exactly

³ CRNA School Searchable Database. (n.d.). *CRNA Schools*. Retrieved April 5, 2017, from <http://www.all-crna-schools.com/crna-school-search.html>

71%) require that you take the GRE (although some of those will waive the requirement if certain criteria are met: GPA over a certain point, you hold a graduate degree, etc.).

The **MAT** (Miller Analogies Test) involves more language skills, is generally more cost effective and convenient to take, and is known for being the "easier" test.

3 Steps to GRE Success

Step One: Determine your baseline score

Before you spend a penny on GRE study materials or spend one moment studying, determine your baseline score by downloading the FREE PowerPrep GRE software directly from the GRE site, **ets.org**. You are allowed to take the practice test two times, so I recommend taking it once to determine your baseline score, and then again once you feel you have adequately prepared. Most test takers report that the score they got on their practice test matched their actual score on the GRE.

Step Two: Determine if you should take the GRE

Reasons NOT to take the GRE:

- 1) If you are a poor test taker and score well below a cumulative of 290 (56th percentile), it may not be worth your time to study for the GRE. The goal is to learn how to become a CRNA, not to become a master of taking the GRE. There are 33 CRNA programs which do not require the GRE.
- 2) Another reason you may choose not to take the test is if it is not required by the schools you plan on applying to. Taking the test can require significant prep time and a certain level of anxiety; so if it's not necessary, you may be better off not taking it.
- 3) You may choose to take the MAT instead. It is typically recognized as an "easier" test than the GRE and is currently accepted instead of the GRE at 14 CRNA programs. With the majority of these 14 schools, a score of 390 or better is required / recommended.

Reasons TO take the GRE:

- 1) If you excel at test taking, or your baseline score is at or above a 295, it's definitely worth taking the test. It would open up the number of schools you can apply to, and would be an asset to your application packet.
- 2) Take it as a precautionary measure. If your plan of getting accepted to certain schools falls through and you end up needing to apply elsewhere, having the test out of the way can definitely save you some last minute stress.

Step 3: GRE – Prepare to Test!

Please only continue reading this section if you've decided to take the GRE.

Score Reporting

When you go to take the test, you'll be given the opportunity to report your score to as many as four graduate schools for FREE. If you take the computerized test, it only takes 10-15 days to process your scores and send them to the schools of your choice (4-6 weeks for the paper test). The vast majority of test centers in the US use the computerized GRE test. There is an additional \$25 charge for every school after the first four that you wish to report to.

Cost

The cost to take the GRE – Revised General Test is **\$160**

Scores

| <i>% of Test Takers Scoring Lower than Selected Scaled Scores</i> | | | <i>% of Test Takers Scoring Lower than Selected Score</i> | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Scaled Score | Verbal Reasoning | Quantitative Reasoning | Score | Analytical Writing |
| 170 | 99 | 99 | 6.0 | 99 |
| 165 | 95 | 92 | 5.5 | 96 |
| 160 | 83 | 81 | 5.0 | 92 |
| 155 | 65 | 64 | 4.5 | 73 |
| 150 | 44 | 43 | 4.0 | 49 |
| 145 | 24 | 23 | 3.5 | 30 |

Once you've taken the practice test and know where your score falls within the range, set a goal for yourself with the score you would like to achieve and begin studying accordingly. As with anything in life that you tackle; you'll want to give this test your best effort, but don't lose sleep over it. There are more important things to spend your time on than mastering the GRE. I've known of many CRNA hopefuls who were accepted into programs with GRE scores that were less than competitive.

Test Format and Sections

You will be given 3 hours and 45 minutes to complete the GRE. There are six sections, one of which is an unidentified/un-scored section. The Analytical Writing section will always be first.

The **Analytical Writing** section measures your ability to articulate complex ideas effectively, support your ideas with relevant reasons and examples and sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion.

The **Verbal Reasoning** section measures your ability to understand what you read and how you apply your reasoning skills.

The **Quantitative Reasoning** has an emphasis on data interpretation and real-life scenarios. You'll be given an on-screen calculator and will be judged on your ability to reason through and analyze quantitative information.

How to prepare for the GRE using ANKI

Your first option for study materials is to use the materials freely offered by ETS.org. This will give you a good idea of the types of questions that will be asked, etc.

However, if you want the BEST study preparation, I highly recommend **ANKI**. Review your flashcards on your desktop in the morning and on your phone while eating lunch.

One of the advantages of using Anki is that you have access to user generated flashcards – saving you tons of time from having to make them yourself – and trust me; since the GRE is such a widely administered test, you'll have tons of quality flashcards to choose from. For more info on this system, please refer to Chapter 3.

On Test Day

There are a host of rules and regulations you must abide by when taking the GRE. You'll need to bring proper ID for the test and show up early – this is one of those times that being even 5 minutes late may cost you \$200 – you will not be admitted if you're late and you will not get a refund. Also make sure you read up on the specific guidelines you must follow at your designated test center, as failure to comply may result in you being asked to leave the testing center – another mistake that is non-refundable.

Retaking the Test

You can take the GRE revised General Test (computer-based and paper-based) **only once every 30 days**, and no more than **five times** within any continuous rolling 12-month period. This applies even if you canceled your scores on a test taken previously.

Is it worthwhile to re-take the GRE? Not always. Each university has a different policy on how they view multiple scores. Some schools will average the two, some will take the best performance of each section, and others take both scores into account, paying close attention to improvement in scores.

Keep in mind that some people do not see an improvement when they re-take the GRE. Sometimes, people actually score worse the second time around. There is no guarantee that your second score will be better, so if your first score was average or better, it may be in your best interest to keep the score you have.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, you may be required to re-take the GRE if your scores are more than five years old, as ETS.Org will only hold your scores for that period of time.

For More Info on the GRE

Bear in mind that this section on the GRE is only a brief overview. For more detailed information, please go to [ETS.org](https://ets.org).

CHAPTER 9

Graduate Courses



When to Take a Graduate Course

There are two reasons to take a graduate course

The first reason is if you have a GPA lower than 3.5. If this is the case, you may want to take a graduate level course to prove to the admissions committee that you are scholastically capable of a graduate program. In this case, you would take the course before you apply and your primary purpose would be to strengthen your application.

The second reason to take a graduate course is to lighten your scholastic burden by taking as many grad level classes (usually no more than three) after you've been accepted to the program and before the program begins.

Which course/courses should you take?

If you do plan on taking one or more graduate level courses, you should first look through the curriculum of the schools you plan on applying to. Most programs have at least three general graduate courses that you could take without being admitted into the nurse anesthesia program. These are the courses you should take in advance.

Before you take any classes, just make sure that they will transfer to the program you ultimately hope to gain admittance to.

If you're not sure where you would like to apply, here is a list of classes to consider:

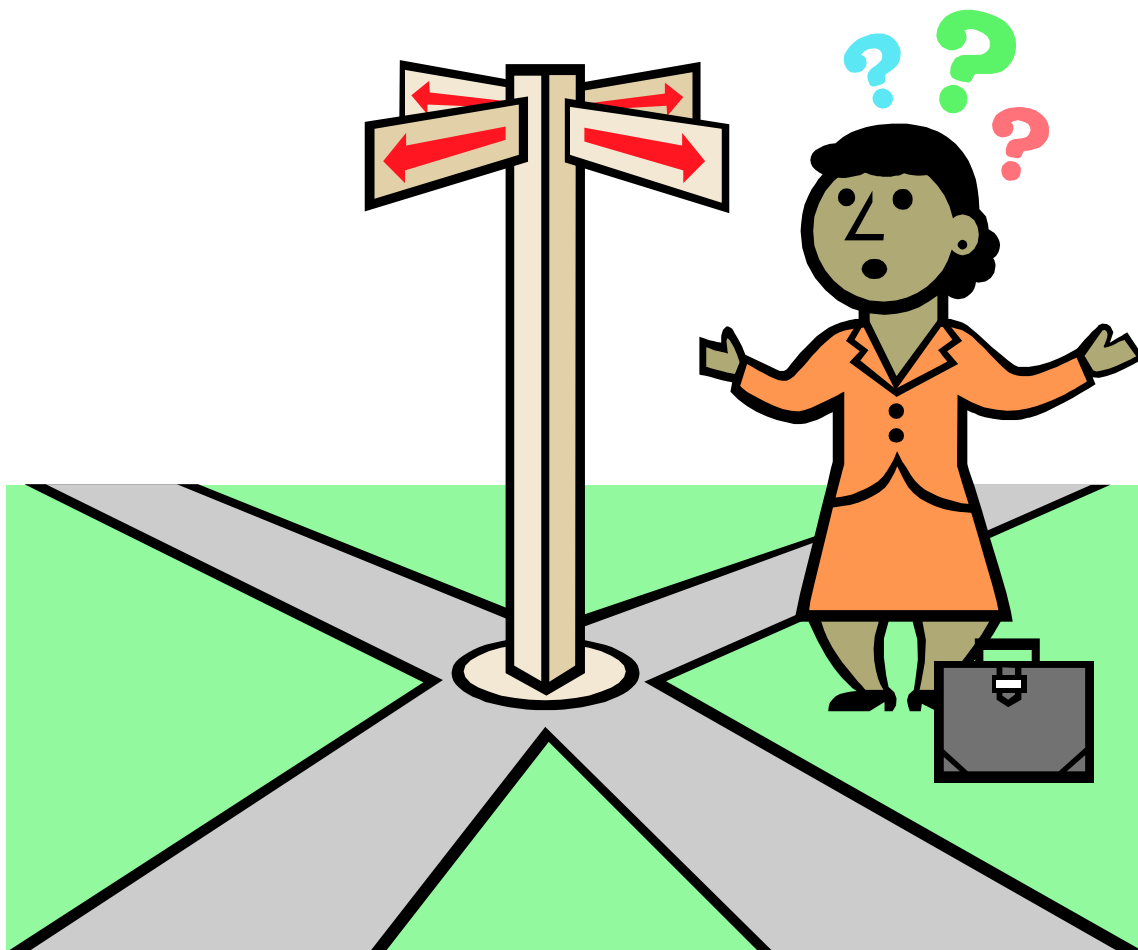
- Chemistry
- Advanced Physiology
- Pathophysiology
- Pharmacology
- Research in Nursing
- Law, Policy and Economics of Healthcare

Just be sure that whichever class you choose to take, you ace! A poor score at this point would do much more harm than good.

CHAPTER 10:

How to Choose

The Right CRNA School



Where to Apply?

Choosing a CRNA school can be an overwhelming decision, but there are often factors that will narrow down your choices for you. I strongly recommend that you utilize the **CRNA School Searchable Database** to help you in your decision making process. But first, there are many questions you need to answer during this phase.

- Measure schools by their case load / clinical experience
- How strong of an applicant are you?
- How many of the requirements have you met so far?
- What are your top priorities in a school?
- Which degree do you want? Masters or DNP?

In this chapter, we will look at these factors and work through them until you have better clarity about which direction you should go and what is most important to you.

How many schools should you apply to?

Some people automatically assume that it's better to apply to more schools than less; because the more schools you apply to, the greater your odds of acceptance. This isn't necessarily true. Keep in mind that each application involves a LOT of work on your part, as well as expense, so you don't want to just go blanketing applications everywhere and hope for the best. It's better to choose two schools – three at the most, that you *really* want to go to and do everything humanly possible to get into those schools.

If you are a very strong applicant

You may want to time your applications as close together as possible. This way, if you get an interview in both or all three of the schools you apply to, and are invited to attend, you will have the time to choose which school you like the best. It puts you in a position of power.

If you are not a very strong applicant

It may be best to stagger your applications, though this isn't always possible (depending on when the application deadlines fall). What I mean is that it's best to focus on one application at a time.

Put all of your energy into that one school, get your documents in ahead of the deadline, and go the extra mile to impress that one school. Going the extra mile means extra time, and if you're applying to more than one school at a time, your focus will be divided and neither application will be as strong.

How to Effectively Evaluate a School

I spent years advising applicants NOT to look at school rank. I offered this advice because the US News and World Report ranks are based entirely on opinion and are of very little value.

Eventually, I grew tired of offering that advice. So... at All-CRNA-Schools.com, we did something about it. We created our own ranking system, and I strongly encourage you to use this system when evaluating schools.

We wanted something completely objective that any rational, data-loving person would appreciate. We wanted the schools to rank themselves, based on how their students performed.

We used the following three metrics when evaluating schools:

First-time pass rate = "how well can they teach?"

Attrition rate = "is the level of difficulty manageable by the average student?"

Anesthesia hours + anesthesia cases = "will I feel competent when I graduate?"

All three categories are weighted evenly in the calculation

Go to <http://www.all-crna-schools.com/schools-by-rank2/> to find current school ranks.

Minimum number of cases?

According to the latest standards from COA (Council of Accreditation) the minimum number of required cases is 550. This sounds like a small amount of cases; however, they require a certain number of each type of case to fulfill this requirement to ensure a graduate meets "minimal competency". I would assume anyone reading this book wants to be way more than "minimally competent". COA also makes a recommended amount of cases, which is 650 and includes doing more cases in every category.

If you utilize the Searchable Database, you will quickly see that while some schools offer the exact minimum recommended number (650), other schools go above and beyond, allowing students to participate in 2500 cases (that's 4Xs more!). The average number of cases is 791, so you should apply to a school that at least reaches that mark.

A Well Rounded Graduate

The goal of every student should be to become a well-rounded graduate. This means performing a solid number of every case type so that upon graduation you can feel confident enough to go out and perform this case without the need for additional support. The fact is some schools (newer ones especially) have reputations for graduating students that are not up to par upon graduation. Since you are investing tens of thousands of dollars into a school to make you a CRNA, you want to choose the school that makes you into a stellar CRNA!

Types of Cases

There are a variety of cases an anesthetist will run into in the field. Therefore, the recommendations COA provides are divided into: physical status, special cases, position categories, anatomical categories, and different methods of anesthesia, pharmacological agents, and various clinical procedures.

Physical status cases involve the rankings of patient status. There are five classifications that each varies greatly in difficulty and planning of your anesthetic. These cases start off at a class I case, which would be a patient with no comorbidities who is healthy. It goes up from there. The sicker the patient, the higher their rating will be. The required number of cases COA suggests is a minimum of 200 cases of classes III and IV.

Special cases involve the geriatric population (those greater than age 65) and also the pediatric population, which includes those 12 years of age and under. These cases require advanced planning and are often challenging to someone who has not had a sufficient amount of training. Also, there are traumatic and emergency cases that are required, outpatient cases, and obstetrical cases. A good school will provide you with more than just the minimum required amount of each of these specialty cases.

The **anatomical categories** section includes **patient positioning**. One part of the anesthetist's job is to ensure the patient is properly positioned. Most cases will be supine, yet there are some that are prone, lithotomy, lateral, and even sitting. Therefore, a requirement is set that one be proficient at these cases. By doing a sufficient number of these cases in clinicals, you will be able to tackle these cases once you are on your own without much worry.

Anatomical categories include **cases involving different areas of the body**. Why sub divide this section? Well, simply put, you need to ensure you can provide a safe anesthetic for a vascular case or a neuroskeletal case. These cases require additional care and expertise; therefore you need a sufficient amount of practice with these cases. A good program will provide you with a

lot more than the minimum of specialty cases including: vascular, heart, lung, and neuroskeletal.

The method of anesthesia breakdown encompasses much more than general anesthesia. A proficient anesthetist can perform **regional techniques** including: nerve blocks, spinals, and epidurals. In addition, you need to be utilizing a variety of airway devices. You can never know what skills you will need in an emergency. When you have only performed a skill once or twice, you will be sweating bullets, but with good practice and experience you can safely perform any technique.

COA also requires a student to utilize their pharmacological knowledge by administering a minimum of 200 cases using IV opioids, muscle relaxants, induction agents, and inhalation agents. A clinically focused program will no doubt double or triple these numbers.

Finally, **clinical procedures** are an important part of an anesthetist's daily routine. What might these include? These include very basic skills such as starting a new IV catheter and putting in a central venous line. Many techniques a critical care nurse witnesses on a daily basis will be performed when you are CRNA. These include starting arterial lines, central lines, floating pulmonary artery catheters, and utilizing all of these lines intraoperatively. A proficient anesthetist can manage a difficult case and start lines when and if a patient needs them!

Where do you want to work after you graduate?

Finally, the best way to determine what cases you need is **where you want to work after you graduate**. If you want to work independently in an all CRNA group, you need to attend a school that will give you rural experience with the ability to do a wide variety of cases. However, if you plan on working in an anesthesia care team environment, you will have the back up of anesthesiologists and often a chief CRNA. Therefore, you can have someone to consult with. In addition, you may want to ask schools what cases they offer if you have a particular interest and also try to interview recent graduates or senior students. The senior students will give you a lot of insight about how comfortable you will feel clinically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to know what type of clinical experience you will have in your program. You need to make sure you are doing a sufficient amount of cases and are performing all required skills appropriately. Remember, this career is one that requires a high degree of technical skills and you need to make sure you are learning and performing these skills appropriately.

Choose Your Top Priorities

Unfortunately, you won't be able to find a school that excels in *everything*, so decide now what is most important to you in a CRNA Program and go after it. I will list common priorities here, just in case there are some you haven't considered.

Timing – If it's important to you to get into a program right away, apply to schools where you have already met the requirements.

Let's say that you are a well-rounded applicant and you're only missing one specific prerequisite. If you've only looked at a handful of schools in your state, it may seem that *all* the programs require that class you haven't taken. The reality is that if you looked at schools in a different area, you may find that many programs do not have that specific requirement.

I'm not encouraging you to take the "easy way out," but in many cases, taking one additional class could put an entire year between you and your dream to become a CRNA. I encourage you to be a smart applicant and **maximize your strengths by applying to schools where you already meet the requirements.**

Most Competitive — When you look through the CRNA School Searchable Database, pay close attention to "acceptance rate". This figure looks at how many students apply vs. are accepted into the program.

Least Competitive - Apply where you have the greatest chance of acceptance. Keep in mind that CRNA Programs have an average of 25% acceptance rate, ranging from 6% to 77%. As you can see, you can greatly increase your chances of being accepted just by applying to programs which have less competition.

There are three methods for identifying a school that is less competitive and therefore might afford you a better opportunity of acceptance.

CRNA School Database – If you have access to the CRNA School Searchable Database, simply search by "acceptance rate."

If you do not have access to this tool, look for schools with lower requirements.

Lower academic requirements – The fewer applicants a school has, the lower they will make their requirements. They want to be able to draw from the best of the applicants, so in order to enlarge their applicant pool, they will often lower requirements. Also, the quality of applicants varies from year to year, so it's a good idea to call a few schools you are considering and ask where they're at with applicants for the year. Their answer will either give you hope or tell you it's better to apply elsewhere that year.

Located in a state with many other CRNA Programs – Ever notice how Pennsylvania has 12 CRNA programs while California only has 5 (even though it's a MUCH larger state)? Guess which state will have the least competitive programs? I'll give you a hint, it's not CA. In fact, if you remember the story from chapter 4 about the 50 year old man who gained admittance with questionable critical care experience? That was to a school in Pennsylvania. This rule of thumb may be less true in Florida since students flock to the programs more for the nearby beaches than they do because of the program.

Financial – Find a CRNA school that is budget friendly, or else one that offers a scholarship or stipend (there are only a couple of these).

Master's vs. DNP Degree – Until 2025, you will be grandfathered into the CRNA profession with a Master's degree, but there are some who plan on obtaining a terminal degree. If that is you, it is better (cheaper, and less time) to go through a BSN-DNP program rather than putting your degree together one piece at a time. Remember, you'll need a DNP if you ever plan on teaching.

Family friendly – Find a program that is more laid back and allows you to maintain your family life (as much as fulfilling your dreams are important; if you lose your marriage as a result of school stress (and I know of students who have), it may not be worth the accomplishment).

For example, program A may have a high ranking and offer great clinical experience, but they may also require you to travel across the state (or even across country) to get that experience. That's fine if you're single, but if the extra travel puts a strain on your family and causes you to perform poorly in class or clinical, then it really isn't the best CRNA school for you.

However, if CRNA program B is close to home, doesn't require much travel and would give you more time to complete your assignments *and* be with your family, then it's a better choice for

you, even if it has a lower rank.

Many have contacted School Search Inc. and asked for a list of programs which do not require you to travel out of state for clinicals; I regret to say that such a list would be very time intensive to maintain. Your best bet is to narrow down your list of preferred schools to a handful, then call each one up and ask about clinical and travel time.

Lastly, see “online CRNA schools” section for info about schools that tend to be more family friendly.

Online CRNA Schools – I feel compelled to put this section in here, because if I didn’t, someone would surely ask. There are currently no online nurse anesthesia programs in the US. Practicing CRNAs tend to feel that an online CRNA program wouldn’t offer adequate training.

Though some programs have tried to initiate a fully online option, the opposition towards the idea is too strong at this point for any program to materialize. Until further notice, just plan on packing up your life and attending a physical school.

You will, however, find that some DNP programs are designed to have their first year online, then start anesthesia the second year. These schools are family friendly, and often have you take less grad units per semester.

Make sure you like the school

Many applicants are so focused on “getting in” that they fail to consider if they even *want* to go there. I strongly recommend that you find alumni (or current students) from the programs you wish to apply to and talk to them about their experience. Many of them regret the choice they made and are miserable there. Keep in mind that there are ways that a program can “ruin your life” so to speak. I had a heartbroken student contact me with this story:

“I was 95% through with the program when my father passed away. I was unable to complete the research project by the deadline because of my grief and the time this life event took away from me. They gave me a one month extension and I was also unable to have it completed by that deadline. I was able, however, to finish all of my classes with excellent scores. I even had a job offer from one of the hospitals where I completed my clinical experience. The school chose to expel me because I didn’t meet the second

deadline. I appealed the board to allow me another extension and they would not. The case is now closed and there is nothing more I can do. I have just wasted two and a half years of life as well as \$150,000 – every penny of which I took out in loans and will have to repay. If I want to be a CRNA, I will have to start all over from square one and spend another \$150,000 for the same degree I already worked so hard for.”

I realize this is an isolated case and things like this rarely happen, but they do happen; and you REALLY don't want it to happen to you.

While it's true that the student was to blame for not meeting the second deadline, I believe that if this student had attended a different CRNA program, he may have had a different outcome. He was at the mercy of the program director and the board, and they could have had compassion on him and given him an extended deadline as well as some extra work, and he gladly would've completed it. Studies have shown that the grieving process takes an average of 6 months. While a one month extension may have seemed generous in the eyes of the committee, it didn't take into account the student's prior track record, the depth of his grief, or the average time it takes a person to grieve a significant loss.

The moral of the story is to find out how faculty treats students and if they are your advocate. Some programs are a lot more supportive of student needs, while others seem to have other priorities – student success not being one of them.

This truly has to be the most overlooked factor in choosing a school. Yes, it will take extra effort on your part to do a little digging on the school. You'll need to find information they do NOT post on their website. You can search around on the forums, but you can't trust everything you read in forums. There are disgruntled students who've made it their goal in life to ruin a school's reputation and will post again and again claiming to be different people.

Your best bet is to talk to the students who are there now and ask them (in private); if they could do it over again, would they still choose the same school?

Before we leave this story completely, I would like to bring out a second moral of the story. **Make sure you're ready for an intense program.** Do some serious soul-searching before you apply to CRNA school. How do you handle stress? Do you have adequate coping strategies to make it through the program if you are hit with a financial, emotional, or relational blow? If you have a track record of handling stress poorly, you may want to postpone this career move while you work on building up your "coping skills tool belt". It would be a real shame to invest all of that time and money into a career you desire, only to walk away from it all having been defeated.

Should I Get a DNP?

What is the Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree?

There are two different kinds of terminal nursing degrees: research-oriented degrees and practice-oriented degrees.

Research-oriented degrees include the Doctor of Nursing Science (DNSc, DNS or DSN) and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

The **practice-oriented degree**, also called the clinical doctorate, is the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). The Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia is referred to as the DNAP.

The DNP degree is meant to prepare registered nurses to become advanced practice nurses. The curriculum includes leadership training, application of clinical research and advanced practice training.

The DNP degree will soon be required of all advanced practice nurses; including nurse practitioners (NP), certified nurse midwives (CNM), clinical nurse specialists (CNS) and nurse anesthetists (CRNA).

DNAP Will Soon Replace the MSNA

In 2015, the AANA required that all CRNA programs began changing their curriculum from a Master of Science in Nurse Anesthesia degree to a Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Practice. Programs will need to have made this change by 2025.

In the meantime, all nurse anesthetists who obtain a CRNA master's degree before 2025 will be "grandfathered" in and will not be required to go back to school to get a DNP.

4 Reasons Why You Should Get the DNP Now

First, the requirements are in place that by 2025 new CRNAs will be graduating with doctoral degrees. This is not a maybe situation, it is happening. Many schools have begun their transition over to the DNP by offering direct entry 36-month programs that are BSN to DNP. You may have the idea that the DNP will take much more time to complete than the MSN; however, this is not true. Most Master degree programs are 28 to 30 months in length; in

reality you will only spend 6-8 more months in college to achieve the DNP. However, does that mean you will be without income for 6-8 more months? Simply put, no. Many DNP programs offer the first year online and allow full time employment as a nurse during this year. Schools recognize that 36 months of full time study is a long commitment, and are trying to make the first year a transition that will allow students to continue working so they can have more savings and an easier time the last two years. This means that while you may have to balance work and school for a while, you will only be out of work two years as opposed to three.

Second, why put off to tomorrow something that can be done today? Once you finish CRNA school, it's unlikely you'll want to go back to school at a later time, let alone spend another two years getting your DNP. You will need to make great sacrifices while getting through school and may want to make up for lost time by spending any free time at home with friends and family. Therefore it is not reasonable to assume that you would get your MSN and then start your DNP upon graduation. In addition, most MSN to DNP programs are two years in length, cost in excess of \$30,000, and require a sizable time commitment. After you've sacrificed 28-30 months and have considerable debt, the prospect of more time and more debt will not sound appealing. This means that if you go this route (get your DNP later), you will be spending at least 48 months to get a degree that could be earned in 36 months. It truly makes sense to get the DNP right away and be done.

Third, the DNP is becoming the standard for any career in academia. Any future career in teaching or working at a University will require you to have your doctorate. Therefore, not having your DNP could possibly prevent a career change from clinical practice to a career as a professor. This impact will be greater in the coming years, but many current program directors and faculty are getting their DNP or have made plans to start in the near future.

The final reason to get the DNP sooner rather than later is that higher education is rewarding and working hard to learn as much as possible will pay off in the long run. While it will be challenging, the DNP will make you terminal in your field and will enable you to achieve a higher level of career satisfaction knowing that you are the holder of the highest degree in your field. Therefore, with the above reasons in mind, get your DNP the first time.

What is a CRNA Program Like?

Here, I will tell you what “normal” looks like, so that you are aware when you come across a program which is “abnormal;” whether that is in a good or bad way.

Sometimes we make decisions without fully knowing what other options we had. In this section, I will make it clear what levels of variation you’ll come across when looking for the right program, as it will help you make a more educated decision.

Quick Facts

CRNA Degree offered

Roughly 60% of Nurse Anesthetist Programs offer a Master of Science in Nursing or a Master of Science in Biology or Health Science. The remaining 40% offer a DNP.

Program Length

An average Nurse Anesthetist Program is 31 months, though they range in length from 24-36 months. 36 months is the minimum length of a DNP program.

Credit Hours

This can range from 40 to 120 or so. Keep in mind that some schools use quarter hours and others use semester hours. Also, some nurse anesthetist programs will give you credits for your clinical experience while others won’t.

Starting Month(s)

Most nurse anesthetist programs start in August (or September); many start in January.

Application Deadlines

The deadline is usually about a year before the start date of the program, so start your planning early! Most schools will begin interviews shortly after the deadline, and will only interview about a third of the applicants. There are a few schools that accept applications year round and a few that give you a short window of time in which to apply.

Cost of Nurse Anesthetist Programs (for entire duration of the program)

*Cost of in State Tuition: **\$15,000 - \$140,000 (average: \$70,000)**

**Fees and expenses: \$1,000 - \$20,000

Grand Total: \$15,000 - \$160,000

*Cost of Out of State Tuition: **\$18,000 - \$140,000 (average: \$85,000)**

**Fees and expenses: \$1,000 - \$20,000

Grand Total: \$19,000 - \$160,000

*Private CRNA schools do not charge out of state tuition.

**For most schools I've listed, "fees and expenses" includes certification fees, mandatory conference costs, nursing supplies and textbooks.

It does **not** include transportation costs (which really add up when you're driving to clinicals that are up to 5 hours away), parking fees, mandatory health insurance costs or malpractice insurance. It also doesn't include the purchase of a laptop and a smart phone, which are essential for most programs. I don't include these costs as they vary greatly from person to person, and you may already have these things.

Class Size

The actual average class size is 24.

Number of Applicants

Average applicants is 98. Average number of seats in a program is 24. This means every applicant has a 24% chance of getting accepted into a program. What this simple math overlooks, however, is the fact that most applicants will apply to 2-4 programs. This means that the average applicant is not competing with 98 applicants, as not all who apply and get accepted will choose to attend the program. In laymen's terms, it's not as difficult to get accepted into a program as you may have initially thought.

Academic and Clinical Experience

There are basically two kinds of nurse anesthetist programs: **front loaded and integrated**. At least 90% are front loaded, which means that the first year is primarily didactic or academic, while the remaining portion is spent in clinical rotations. An integrated program is one that begins clinical experience early in the first year and incorporates both didactic learning and clinical hours throughout the duration of the program.

CRNA School Performance

CRNA School Rankings

You'll want to heavily consider the All-CRNA-Schools.com rank for each school, as these rankings are based on each school's performance.

Years Accreditation given

You can look at how many years' accreditation the school was given to show how stable the program is (10 is the maximum). Many new programs are given only a few years until the next review, as new programs tend to go through many changes when they first begin.

Pass Rate for CRNA Boards

The pass rate for CRNA boards is very straightforward and is a great indicator of how strong a school's academic instruction is. I've found, however, that many schools don't post this information on their websites. 89% is the national average, so you'll want a statistic that's better than average. Usually if you call the program contact person, they will tell you last year's pass rate.

Attrition Rate

It's also important that you look at the school's attrition rate as well. If it's really high, they may be failing borderline students to keep their pass rates up.

CRNA Employment Rate

CRNA employment rate is a less accurate gauge, since most schools have a 100% employment rate (though they don't advertise it). I threw in this statistic more for encouragement than anything else. When you're finished with this arduous journey, you're just about guaranteed a job – if you're willing to live anywhere.

CRNA Salaries

An median annual nurse anesthetist salary in the US is \$172,554 (April, 2017)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ'S)

What does the average student registered nurse anesthetist look like? The average SRNA is about 30 years old, has around 3 years' experience in a critical care unit, and has a 3.4 GPA. About half of them are married and around 30% have kids.

How many hours should I expect to be engaged in the program each week? Anywhere from 40-70 hours a week. You should plan on spending an average of 50-60 hours in the program each week.

Can I work as an RN while I'm in the program?

99% of the time, the answer is no. A few schools will allow you to work up to 16 hours a week, but it's almost never a good idea. The program is very intense and requires your full focus and attention.

CHAPTER 11

The Application Process



Application Process

There are a lot of moving parts to the application process, so the most important thing you can do is to stay organized. Go through each program you want to apply to and make an outline for yourself including deadlines for each step (and each program). Mark those deadlines on a calendar and give yourself alerts for those deadlines. This automates the process and gives you less to have to remember.

Keep all of your important documents in a file together (you may need both a paper file and an electronic one). It's also a good idea to make a "cheat sheet" for yourself that lists all of the schools you have previously attended, their addresses, their contact information, etc. You'll have to list this information on each application you fill out, and this will ensure you don't have to look up the information multiple times.

Keep the following things together in a file:

1. Your "cheat sheet"
2. A copy of organization membership
3. Certification cards
4. Curriculum Vitae
5. Personal statement
6. RN license
7. Sigma Theta Tau achievement during nursing school (if applicable)
8. For each school, have application deadlines, as well as specific instructions for each school's application process including how many letters of recommendation and from whom.

Avoid common mistakes

Make sure there are **NO spelling or grammar errors** in anything you submit to the school. This may sound obvious, but it is more common than you think, and will do a great deal of damage to your chances of getting an interview. Simple errors on your application suggest either poor writing skill, a failure to proofread your work, or willingness to submit your work in a careless manner.

Letters of Recommendation

Only request letters of recommendation from appropriate sources

Most schools will require you to obtain letters of recommendation from specific positions in the hospital (charge nurse, CRNA whom you've shadowed, nursing professor, ICU director, etc.). If specific instructions are given, follow them explicitly! Failure to follow instructions portrays either a lack of respect or inattention to detail; neither of which are desirable. Only choose people who know you well, and on a professional basis (ICU staff, nursing professors, etc.). Obtaining references from random people who know you on a personal level is a kiss of death to your application.

Ask “Are you willing to write a positive letter of recommendation for me?”

When requesting a letter of recommendation, do not simply ask for a letter of recommendation. Ask if they can write a glowing one. If they feel unable to portray you in a positive light, this allows them to politely refuse.

Only ask those who know you well and like you

A decent letter of recommendation will not be sufficient. The admissions committee is looking for the presence of superlatives in these letters. The absence of them is a sign that you are not a top candidate for a graduate program. If the authors go so far as to say anything negative about your character, work ethic or professional performance, you are doomed by their letter alone.

To this end, it is far better to obtain a glowing recommendation from your ICU charge nurse than a shallow, short and plain letter from a program alumni or department chair. Title alone does not matter as much as the content does. The person writing the recommendation must know you well enough to praise your performance in specific ways.

When you ask for a recommendation, give a deadline

Even people who like you and want for you to succeed have busy lives and are prone to procrastinate. When you ask for their letter of recommendation, give them a deadline of when they need to send it in, and make the deadline two months before the actual deadline. This way, they're not put in a position where they could disqualify you from consideration as a result of their delinquency. I know of a student who was not considered for admission at the school of her choice because one of her letters of recommendation were not sent in on time, despite her asking for it months in advance.

Give them a thank you card

These people just helped you tremendously. They stopped their busy lives, sat down with their thoughts and conjured up memories of your performance and work history. They wrote something out, printed it off, signed it, put it in an envelope, found a stamp to put on it, sealed it, and walked it out to the nearest mailbox. In our age of email, people aren't used to mailing things anymore, and it took this person extra effort to get this done. A thank you card is the least you could do to acknowledge them and show appreciation for their time. It's also good PR.

Tip from a CRNA:

"EXCELLENT suggestion for a written Thank You Card. It doesn't even cross the minds of most of the younger generation to hand write anything really. Hand written notes are still appreciated in today's society."

-Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Personal Statement

Also known as Statement of Purpose

Every school will ask for something slightly different for your personal statement, but the most common question is “Why do you want to become a CRNA?”

Many of the concepts in this section are taken from a study called “Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process.” To conduct this study, a survey was sent out to 457 graduate schools. In this survey, the Chair of the Graduate Admissions Committee was asked to recount one or two kisses of death on a graduate student application⁴. A kiss of death was defined as something that caused an otherwise strong candidate to be disqualified from the running. Approximately 20% of chairpersons responded to the survey and below are the tips they gave. I have tailored many of the tips to CRNA school specifically and have added a few other tips.

Follow the instructions

I feel a bit redundant by saying this, but if they ask for a 1-2 page essay, do NOT turn in a 4 page one, even if you do think it will be the most amazing paper they’ve ever had the privilege of reading. If they ask specific questions, be sure to answer them. They are comparing each applicant to the next, and by following the given outline, you’re making it easier for them to include your statement in the comparison.

Exemplify honesty and integrity

Do not falsify any information just because you think it will make you look good. You can be sure your sins will always find you out. The nurse anesthesia community is a small one, and believe it or not, there are ways for them to verify whether your testimony is true or false. More than that, an honest sincere answer is more powerful than a boastful one. Don’t tell them what you think they want to hear; tell them the truth.

⁴ Appleby, D. C., & Appleby, K. M. (n.d.). Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process. UNL Department of Psychology. Retrieved April 7, 2017, from psychology.unl.edu/psichi/Graduate_School_Application_Kisses_of_Death.pdf

Avoid references to your mental health

Even if you've overcome great odds by coming as far as you have, if you have any mental health conditions, it is not to your advantage to mention them in your personal statement. Doing so may create doubt that you can successfully complete a graduate program.

Do not make this letter a discussion of your personal life

CRNA faculty is looking for your professional persona, not your personal one. If you tell them too much about your personal life, it looks like you have very poor boundaries. From their perspective, this lack of boundaries could spill over into the CRNA program and allow your personal life to destroy your chances of graduating their program.

Don't make it sound like you're becoming a CRNA in order to save the world

While it's noble to want to help others, belaboring this point too much can sound fake. They want to know that your success in graduate school and your interest in the field of anesthesia are even more important than any philanthropic goals you may have.

The tone of your statement should reflect the tone of the school

Be mindful of where you are applying and the culture of the school. Let your personal statement reflect that culture. If you are applying to a religious school, then it is advantageous to reference how God has led you to this point. If, however, you are applying to a secular school, a reference to God may or may not be received well – it just depends on the culture of the school where you apply. Schools in the Midwest and Southern states will likely be very open and accepting of a mention of God, whereas schools on the West Coast or other regions may or may not be.

Your writing should be clear and organized

Be sure that everything you write is clear, organized and reflects a high level of thinking. A statement that does not follow a fluid train of thought, or does not make logical points will be weeded out very quickly. One of the purposes of this statement is to ensure that you are capable of writing graduate level work. Do not disappoint.

Know the school well

Your personal statement should reflect an in depth knowledge of the program's curriculum, values, mission statement, etc. It's ok to use the same basic template of a personal statement for several different schools; but be sure to personalize the letter each time you use it for a different school. If your statement looks generic (or still has the address on it from the last school you applied to), it makes you appear as if you don't care where you earn your Master's or Doctorate degree from.

Support your statements with evidence

If you say that you are a perfect fit for the program you are applying to, you will need to back it up with specific evidence. If you are unable to do so, it actually proves the opposite – you are not a good fit for the program. If you were, you would have given valid reasons to support your claim.

Flattery will get you no where

Definitely do not attempt to laud praises on the faculty or excessively compliment the program you are applying to. These efforts will come across as insincere and will most likely backfire. Also avoid other inappropriate attempts to impress, such as name dropping or blaming others for your own poor academic performance.

Use the school's mission statement

Make sure to read a school's mission statement so you can use some of their goals as your goals. An example is if the school you apply to wants to prepare you for rural practice, mention how you are either from a rural area or plan to move to a rural practice. This will help you stand out from the rest.

Example Personal Statement

Written by a CRNA who is seeking a terminal degree

I am very excited to begin my journey of earning a doctorate in nurse anesthesia practice. My career goals are multifaceted and it is my plan to first pursue the educational focus of the program and upon its completion, take the remaining courses to finish the management component.

A doctorate of nurse anesthesia practice will further my education in evidence based decision making. I want to take these skills learned and introduce them to the rural hospitals in which I work. It has been my experience the CRNA is the primary anesthesia provider in these small hospitals and evidence based practice decisions generally are given a back seat to “empirical evidence and intuition.” While I know there is value in these methods, I also know practicing with evidence as a base is safer and therefore a better choice for patient care.

I would also like to be a liaison between the “seasoned” CRNA and the doctoral prepared anesthetists. In the field, there seems to be a lot of questions and concerns centering on the need and usefulness of obtaining a doctorate (of any kind) in nursing. I would like to champion the need of doctoral prepared nurse anesthetists and demonstrate how this education level brings a wealth of knowledge and worth to our practice.

Thirdly, having a DNAP will show surgeons and other physicians my dedication to anesthesia and the care of my patients. Working independently in a rural hospital affords many types of interactions between anesthetists and physicians. A terminal degree in the practice of nurse anesthesia, along with professional skill and diplomacy, will help to earn respect for the profession and the safe care we give our patients.

Finally, my ultimate goal is to teach in an anesthesia program while maintaining an active anesthesia career at the patient’s bedside. To that end, taking both the educational and management courses in this doctoral program will be of great benefit in achieving all my career goals.

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Do not confuse curriculum vitae with a resume. They are similar, but definitely different.

Resume vs. Curriculum Vitae (CV)

A **resume** is a brief snapshot of your skills, experience and education. It is usually no more than one or two pages and is widely used when applying for professional positions. You would have submitted a resume to apply for your current RN position.

A **CV**, on the other hand, is much longer and also includes any teaching experience, publications, presentations, awards, honors, affiliations and other details. A CV is used almost exclusively in the academic setting, either for graduate school, research or scientific positions.

While the goal of a resume is to create a picture of who you are professionally, the goal of a CV is to create an image of your scholarly identity.

How to format your CV

When putting together your CV, remember that there is no standard order that your information should appear. Rather, it is to your benefit (and expected) that you will put the most important block of information first. You will essentially order the information from most important to least important, as more emphasis is put on whatever is listed first in your CV.

Use incomplete sentences – be clear and concise

Rather than saying,

“I worked in a Progressive Care Unit for twelve months, during which time I cared for telemetry patients, transfers from ICU as well as pediatric patients.”

Say,

“Progressive Care RN (2014-2015). Cared for telemetry patients, ICU transfers and pediatric patients.”

The goal here is to cut out unnecessary words and give the reader a quick summation of your accomplishments.

Use parallel structure

The first principle you will need to employ is consistency. The technical term is parallelism. This means that every statement needs to have the same grammatical structure. I'll give you an example so you know what I mean.

Example: Inconsistent grammar usage

- Staff Nurse Intensive Care Unit** **March 2015-present**
Queen of the Valley Medical Center, Napa, CA
- **Monitoring** vital signs of the client *present progressive verb*
 - **Met** hygienic needs of patient *past tense verb*
 - **Wound care and dressings** e.g. bedsore, surgical wounds *noun phrase*
 - **I always maintained** accurate records and reports *independent clause*
 - **Able to provide** postoperative care specific to surgical procedure and postoperative instructions *adjective*

Example: Great use of parallelism

- Staff Nurse Intensive Care Unit** **March 2015-present**
Queen of the Valley Medical Center, Napa, CA
- **Monitored** vital signs of the client
 - **Met** hygienic needs of patient
 - **Administered** wound care and dressings e.g. bedsore, surgical wounds.
 - **Maintained** accurate records and reports
 - **Provided** postoperative care specific to surgical procedure and post-operative instructions

The use of bullet points

While bullet points are very common in resumes, they are much less common in CVs. Whether or not you choose to use bullet points will depend on how the use of them will affect the overall appearance of your CV. If you have several long phrases, about a full line in length, the use of bullet points is recommended as it will provide a visual break of text. However, if you have many short phrases (as in the example above on parallel structure), you would want to avoid bullet points, as it leaves a lot of white space that could be used more efficiently.

Putting your best accomplishments first - examples

Again, whatever your strengths are as an applicant, those things should come first in your CV.

For example, if you have one year of experience in a large Medical ICU, one year in Surgical ICU as well as six months in a Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU), then your ICU experience should definitely come first.

However, if you barely have eight months experience in a general ICU, yet graduated your BSN or MSN Summa Cum Laude, and are a member of the Honor Society of Nursing Sigma Theta Tau, then your educational history should be first.

Whatever you feel sets you apart from other applicants should be first. The block of information that contains the least flattering information about you should be the last section of your CV.

General tips on constructing your CV

You should go through your curriculum vitae (CV) every six months or so to add new accomplishments. Revise it and look it over during your down time. Have a trusted friend look it over and give their feedback. In order to get where you are now, you've already developed a very strong resume; so all you have to do now is tweak your existing resume until it is a sophisticated and lengthier curriculum vitae.

*The majority of this information was gleaned from the Purdue Online Writing Lab:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/641/01/>*

CHAPTER 12: The Interview

What to Wear



When you applied to your current nursing job, you may have worn slacks, a dress shirt and a tie to your interview or a dressy outfit if you are a woman. You'll definitely need to step it up a notch for your CRNA school interview.

First impressions are made in the first 90 seconds, and your personal appearance is very critical if you want to make a good one.

"I once went to an interview where a male applicant had not combed his hair properly and it was sticking up on the side. He was oblivious to this and when the director of the

program saw him, she simply shook her head. While this is sad, he did not wake up early enough to correct this minor problem and this helped cost him a spot in the program."

-Matthew Harmon, BSN, RN

Men: Wear a suit and tie with polished dress shoes. Choose a fairly neutral and dark color, as dark colors are classier and more formal. Black, gray or navy blue are great choices. Wear a neutral color shirt – white is a popular choice. Just be sure it's light in color and contrasts well with the dark suit you've chosen. Your tie should be simple – nothing flashy or too bold. This is not the time to make your tie a conversation piece. Stick to a neutral color tie, or blue or red (blue evokes trust, red signifies power).

If you need to go out and buy everything new, do it. It's important that you look your best. On that note, be sure your suit and shirt are neatly ironed. Showing up in a wrinkled shirt is a sure way to blow the interview. This is one of the most common mistakes that men make when going for an interview. Also, shave the morning of (or the night before if your skin gets blotchy after shaving), and get a haircut about a week before your interview.

Women: A classic cut dress or a two piece pants or skirt suit. Stay with neutral colors and stay away from anything too fashionable. Fashion may impress your peers, but the admissions committee is made of mature adults who likely don't pay much attention to fashion and may be offended by anything that makes a statement.

Do NOT show cleavage. You are trying to impress the admissions committee with your intelligence, not your body. You want to look professional and to be taken seriously. Also, you don't know who will be interviewing you. For all you know, it could be a panel of women who feel more jealousy toward you than admiration. On that note, be sure your bra does not show. You should be wearing a suit jacket over your blouse, anyway; but in case you take that off at any point, be sure your bra is neutral in color and does not show through your shirt; it's just tacky. If you wear a skirt, make sure it's close to knee level. This is simply an issue of modesty.

Shoes should be closed toed. Stay away from high heels, as you will want to be comfortable. If you wear jewelry, it should be simple, modest and conservative. If your legs show, be sure to wear nylons. Bring a bottle of clear nail polish in your purse just in case your nylons get a run halfway through the day.

Make sure your clothes are easy to get out of in the event the interview includes a tour of the school which might necessitate changing into scrubs. Wear makeup (stick with light colors – nothing too bold), and either wear your hair up or choose a very sleek way to style your hair if you wear it down.

Men and Women: Bring a briefcase to carry your keys, wallet and a few extra copies of your application in case you have to refer to it, a pen, notebook and some breath

fresheners (women, leave your purse at home). Polish your shoes. Dirty or scuffed shoes will really ruin your polished look. Be sure your clothes are freshly ironed.

You will also want to throw a few non-messy snacks in your briefcase. A recent applicant told me how she followed the advice I gave and showed up an hour early to the interview, but for various reasons completely outside of her control, the school was 4 HOURS LATE in interviewing her! She was starving by the time the interview started and all she could think about was food. She had to excuse her grumbling tummy more than once while answering questions. I'm sure this is a rare exception (and frankly, inexcusable for the school), but my job is to prepare you for everything, and this is something she had certainly not anticipated, and was not at all prepared for.

You should plan on getting a haircut about a week before the interview. This should give it enough time to grow out so it still looks great but doesn't have that "just cut" look. Your hair should be a natural color; so if you've experimented around with "fun" hair colors like pink, bleached or green, now is the time to dye it back.

Importance of the Interview

This is an excerpt from WFUBMC's applicant FAQ section on the importance of the interview:

"Experience shows that people fail to successfully complete programs of nurse anesthesia for various reasons. There are no "givens" that a student with a certain GPA or so many years of experience will automatically be able to successfully pass through the rigorous curriculum. The interview is an extremely important opportunity for us to assess the less-quantifiable attributes that may predict an applicant's success here. Based on the interview, sometimes applicants with relatively short ICU experience are admitted and some with more experience are declined. The same applies to GPA, test scores, and other measures. Our most important goal, for our benefit and that of our students, is to admit those who give us the best indication that they will be able to withstand the rigors of the program and to become the high quality graduates for which we are known."

How to prepare the day before

You will feel like a nervous wreck during the interview. This is perfectly normal. To de-stress ahead of time, be sure to pray or meditate. Get plenty of sleep the night before, and show up an hour early. This may seem excessive, but trust me, it's not. If you are going to a group interview, everyone else will be there at least 30 minutes early, and if you walk in only 15 minutes early,

you will seem “late.” Getting there early will give you time to orient yourself to your surroundings, take many deep breaths and rehearse what you plan on saying.

High-power pose for 2 minutes prior to your interview

According to Amy Cuddy, Associate Professor at Harvard Business School and guest lecturer on TED Talks, we gain confidence by changing our body language. We have all heard that body language is a reflection of what is going on inside, but Cuddy suggests that we can change how we feel inside by changing our body language.

She teaches about power and dominance at Harvard business school, and illustrates that in both the primate kingdom as well as the human one, we tend to expand our bodies – sprawl out and take up space – to show dominance. She calls this a high-power pose. Conversely, when we feel powerless, we close our bodies and make them appear small – folding our arms, crossing our legs, hunching our shoulders, etc. This is labeled a low-power pose.

She ran an experiment in which people were asked to assume high and low power poses, assigned randomly, for two minutes. Immediately after, they were given the opportunity to gamble (confidence makes people more willing to take risks). 86% of those who had been asked to assume a high-power pose chose to gamble, whereas only 60% of those who assumed a low-power pose chose to take the risk.

The researchers also told people to give a speech after sitting in high or low power poses. The judges, who had no idea what position the subjects took, or even what the test was about, evaluated the high power position posers much better. She suggests that before you have an interview, you should go into a bathroom stall and assume a high-power pose for two minutes. It will boost your confidence during your interview and you will ultimately be judged as a more desirable candidate. Just to be clear, she doesn’t suggest that you assume a high power pose *during* your interview, just immediately before.

Find her 21 minute talk at TED.com http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html

Common Interview Questions

I have compiled a list of the most commonly asked CRNA School admission interview questions. These questions were compiled from every obscure anesthesia site and every blog or forum post available on the topic. I copy pasted all 20+ pages of data, read through it, deleted anything redundant, or anything that wasn't that helpful. I've synthesized the most useful information for you and categorized it with neat little headings.

The most important thing you can be during the interview is **confident**! The better prepared you are, the more confident you will be. Questions that appeared in almost every list of "CRNA School interview questions to prepare for" appear in **red**.

General interview tips

Be courteous (yes sir/mam if the people are way older than you). Even better than that is to address each person by their name (Mr. ____ or Dr. ____). Only attempt this if there are only a few names to remember, or if you're really good with names. Be sure to maintain strong eye contact, a firm handshake with each person in the room and say thank you at the end.

You also want to take command of the table when you are speaking; don't hold back. This interview is all about you. The worst thing you could do is to walk out and say I wish I would have said _____. You had your chance.

General Questions

Why do you want to become a CRNA? (This question WILL be asked. It's THE most commonly asked question in the CRNA school interview).

What would make you a successful CRNA?

Tell us about yourself and your experience.

Tell us about your strengths and weaknesses?

How do you describe success?

How do you handle conflict?

How do you handle stress? Give a scenario.

What leadership experience do you have?

What volunteer work or community service have you done?

What are your roles and responsibilities?

Who is the greatest influence in your life?

How do others see you?

If you could be any animal, what would it be, and why?

What is your favorite color and why?

If you were a number, what would it be?

What do you want your tombstone to say?

What do your enemies say about you?

If you could have a meal with any 3 people in the world, who would they be?

Tell me about your proudest achievement.

What are your two most important achievements as a nurse?

You seem so confident; are you prepared to be a novice again? How do you handle criticism?

How well have you prepared? Do you have support?

Is your spouse fully supportive of this effort?

What is your support system like?

How do you feel about giving up a paying job for several years?

What financial preparations have you made to ensure that you will not have financial difficulties during anesthesia school?

What preparations have you and your family made to prepare for the rigors of CRNA School?

Do you foresee any barriers to your education? (Finances, time commitments)

Career goals

What motivates you to pursue an advanced nurse practitioner role?

Why did you choose this career field?

What are your short and long term career goals?

Where do you see yourself in five or ten years from now?

Describe personal, professional, and educational attributes that make you uniquely suitable for this career field.

How do you feel that your background will influence your research, clinical work and areas of interest?

What changes in your personal or professional lifestyle do you anticipate as a graduate student and as an advanced nurse practitioner? How have you planned for this?

What is your single strongest personality trait that will help you in your academic and professional career as a CRNA?

What is your most important weakness that you will struggle with during your academic and professional career?

As a member of a small and elite profession, what obligations will you have, if any, toward this profession?

Tell me about your clinical CRNA shadow experience? How did that influence you to pursue this profession?

What have you done to develop or change in the last few years?

Next question, why did you decide to go from being a _____ to being a nurse to applying to CRNA School?

Program specific questions



To answer these questions with confidence and competence, you need to know the school's program very well, and also know its competing programs. There must have been a reason you applied to this program over the other ones out there. Know those distinctions very well. Know what stats this program boasts over the other programs. Know what they're proud of.

Also find out what research is being conducted by the faculty of the school. Knowing what they're interested in will have a very positive impact.

If you're applying to this program is because you think it's the only chance you have to get accepted... don't say that out loud. Come up with another reason to use during the interview.

What do you know about XYZ school and our program?

Why did you choose our program? (They WILL ask this)

How do you think you will fit into the program?

What are your expectations of the program?

What will you do if you don't get into the program?

What do you think it takes to complete this type of program?

What makes you think you're able to complete this type of program?

What strengths do you bring to this program?

Why should we pick you over someone else?

Do you foresee any barriers to your education?

Educational history

Tell us about your research projects

Why do you have so many C's on your transcript?

I see you took a graduate level course in _____. How has that class helped you in your clinical practice?

Work history



Be very careful what you offer up about your experience. If you've only done a balloon pump once or twice, don't offer that as part of the training you have (or just tell them you've done it once or twice). They will assume you are proficient with anything you tell them you have experience in.

The clinical questions they ask you WILL be based on the experience you've had. They don't expect you to have mastered every area of ICU, just the procedures and patient populations you've dealt with day in and day out. If you attempt to inflate your experience by claiming expertise in areas where you are still a novice, it will grossly backfire and you'll look and feel quite ignorant.

If they do happen to ask you a question you are unfamiliar with, such as a question about an open heart patient when you worked in Neuro, just tell them you don't have experience in that area. Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question or what type of answer they're looking for.

Tell us about your work experience.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

What is your unit like? What kind of patients and drips do you take care of? What is your favorite and why?

Tell me about a typical pt. in your ICU.

How long have you been in the ICU?

Give me an example of a time when you had to think out of the box.

Give an example of when you worked on a team.

Tell me about a time when you had to manage a difficult clinical situation.

Tell me about a time when you were working with someone who wasn't pulling their weight, and they had a different value system than yours. How did you deal with this person?

Tell me about a time when you failed. What happened, and how did you recover?

Give an example of where you showed leadership.

Give me an example of your problem solving.

Discuss a mistake you made and how you resolved it...

If I asked your boss to tell me your weaknesses, what would he tell me?

Do you work well under pressure? Give an example.

What was your last difficult pt.? What made it difficult and what did you do?

Be prepared to talk about any sedation/paralytics/pain med infusions you use in ICU (eg. Nimbex, Fentanyl, Ativan drips to sedate).

Talk about any epidural experience you have had in ICU if any.

Ethical questions

In clinical, if someone told you that you were taping your IV wrong, what would you do?

If I told you to do the IV "this" way, and you didn't want to do it, what would you do?

Tell me about a time when you had an ethical dilemma at work. What did you do?

Tell me about a time when you felt it was you against everyone else. You thought you were right and that everyone else was wrong. What did you do?

If you saw one of your fellow students or colleagues using drugs outside of work/classroom, what would you do?

Clinical questions

They will ask you questions you do not know the answer to. That is ok and expected. They want to see that you are not so arrogant that you will just BS your way through it. Remember, they know the answers to all of these questions, so you're not fooling anyone by making stuff up. Just say you are familiar with it but not sure the exact answer. That shows them that you know when to ask for help and that you're aware of your own limitations.

How do you wean a patient from the Ventilator?

What would you do for a patient that comes in with a M.I.? Why?

Select a vasoactive medication and describe how it works on the molecular level.

Tell me about Vasopressin. Where does Vasopressin work?

Please explain the difference between SAO₂ and PAO₂?

What is MvO₂?

Tell me everything you know about hemoglobin.

Discuss the pharmacologic differences between dopamine and dobutamine.

Identify Myocardial infarctions on a 12 lead EKG.

What are appropriate interventions for cardiogenic shock?

What increases ICP?

What is the FIRST thing you would do if you looked up and saw 2nd degree type 2 heart block, and the BP was low?

How does Atropine work?

How does Digoxin work?

What are the symptoms of sepsis?

What would swan numbers show in a septic pt. and why?

What does levophed do? What is its mechanism? What receptor sites does it work on?

Normal range for ICP?

What do balloon pumps do and how are they beneficial for heart patients?

Why don't you give beta blockers to asthmatic patients?

How do you calculate SVRI?

Interpret these _____ gases?

How would you treat these gases?

If I told you to give atropine, what would you do? (Would you follow orders without asking questions?)

The correct answer here is to ask about the patient. You would never administer a drug without knowing the patient's background.

Anesthesia profession questions:

What does a CRNA do?

What is the role of a CRNA?

What do you see as your role as a CRNA?

What are current political issues in the field of anesthesia?

Find them at: AANA.com or studentdoctor.net Anesthesia forum

With what theoretical/research/philosophical approaches to the field do you identify?

If you had to pick a topic for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, what might it be?

Who (within the field) has influenced you the most?

What do you consider the biggest issue facing the profession today? Next 5/10 years?

Questions to ask the school:

One of the biggest mistakes you could make here is to ask a question that is clearly posted on their website. You should very thoroughly read through their website before the interview and make up a list of the school's strengths, as well as questions that still remain once you've learned all you can online. These questions are just there to give you a good starting point.

Some programs have 12 months of clinical, while others have 24 or more. The case requirements are the same, but the experiences can vary greatly - even between students in the same program. You are required to have 5 open heart procedures. In one program you may stand in the room basically observing 5 open heart procedures. In another program, you may put in the lines, intubate the patient, deliver the anesthetic and give all the drugs. Those are completely different experiences.

The requirements for regional anesthesia are: 1 spinal, 1 epidural. One is not enough to get you anywhere near proficient. You need to do 50 to reach 90% proficiency and some programs will get you that level of experience, but probably not in 24 months. When you look for a desirable position the employer will be most concerned with your level of clinical experience. Difference in program length is often related to amount of time in clinical.

A program can have some students in great clinical sites and some students in clinical sites where the CRNAs can't push their own medications, and are highly restricted. Remember, you're interviewing them just as much as they're interviewing you.



Also, do remember that some questions are better to ask than others. Avoid asking close ended questions. These are questions with yes/no or finite answers. If you really want to know these things, call ahead and ask the secretary. During the interview, you want to show critical thinking skills by asking the school open ended questions.

Example: Rather than asking, "What are your pass rates on the certification exam?" You should ask "What do you feel contributes most to your high pass rates on the certification exam?" Why are your pass rates so much higher than the national average?" The first question suggests you haven't done much research, while the second question shows a depth of thought that will be more likely to impress them.

What are you looking for in an ideal SRNA?

What is your definition of excellence?

What are the strengths (and/or weaknesses) of the program?

How are students who struggle academically handled?

How do you handle a significant life change of one of your students? Ex. Death in the family, divorce, major illness, etc.? Is the student given a grace period? (Avoid mentioning the birth of a child as they may assume you are pregnant or plan on becoming pregnant and thus exclude you from their consideration.)

Could you describe what the classes are like? Lectures, discussions, problem-based learning, etc.?

What do you feel is the biggest factor contributing to the attrition rate of ___ ? (Know the attrition rate before the interview). Only ask if their attrition rate is very high or low.

Are the students pushing their own medications and doing a variety of procedures?

How do you deal with competition with residents to place lines/intubate/perform other procedures at clinical sites? Do they work with CRNAs outside of an ACT environment?

What is the average number of pediatric and thoracic cases?

What type of regional anesthesia experience does your typical graduate obtain? How many spinals and how many epidurals?

Some clinical sites offer a wider range of experiences than others. How are students assigned to clinical sites? If I am selected, will I have a choice in which clinical sites I am sent to?

If the program has a sim lab, ask “what is the sim lab experience like? What are some of the things you simulate?”

If accepted, what will make me a successful student in your program?

CHAPTER 13: Once You Are Accepted

Wrap up any unfinished prerequisites

Sometimes, a school will accept you contingent on your successful accomplishment of X, Y or Z. If this was true for you, make those things your top priority.

Registered Nursing License

As long as you have a current RN license in at least one state, you should be eligible for programs in any state of your choice. Once accepted, you'll need an RN license in the state or states you'll be practicing in.

In order to obtain an RN license in another state, all you have to do is Google "licensure by endorsement," then fill out the required application, get fingerprinted and pay a fee (roughly \$150). Expect it to take 6-8 weeks for processing before you are fully licensed in the other state. Some CRNA programs offer clinical rotations in multiple states and will require you to be licensed in those states.

Fill out the FAFSA

There are separate federal, state, and school deadlines for the FAFSA. Go to [Fafsa.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov) to find out what the deadline is in your state. It should take less than 20 minutes to fill out, so it's best to get it out of the way as soon as possible.

Apply for scholarships

If you're counting on scholarships to help you pay for CRNA school, now is the time to begin applying. Many scholarships or grants have specific deadlines and are only given to one worthy student per year. Make a list of the scholarships you plan on applying for and allot 5-10 hours per week to apply for them.

Secure loans if needed

Once your FAFSA has been processed, you will receive a financial packet that will tell you what loans you qualify for and how to proceed.

Take a core curriculum graduate class

If any of the core curriculum courses are offered at a school near you or at an online program, and you have the time to take them while you wait for your CRNA program to begin, do it. Just make sure the class/classes will transfer before you enroll.

Plan your living arrangements

Decide if you want to live on or off campus. This may involve doing a cost comparison. If you're unfamiliar with the area you're moving to, be sure to do as much research as you can online. Find out what neighborhoods are close enough to school, and if they are neighborhoods you would feel comfortable living in. The last thing you want to do is sign a rental agreement and realize too late that the neighborhood or part of town is unsafe.

Plan your resignation from your current job

If you can afford it, try and schedule in at least a short vacation between ending your nursing job and beginning your CRNA program. It will most likely be the last truly peaceful rest you have until you've passed the CRNA boards!

Buy textbooks ahead of time

Order your course text books ahead of time and skim them over. Even a familiarity with foundational concepts will give you an advantage when the program begins.

Get your relationships in order

You are about to embark on two to three very stressful years. Make sure the important people in your life understand this and that you have their support. A strong relationship can make it through this time, but an already weak relationship may not. Do whatever you can to strengthen your relationships ahead of time to ensure they can weather the storm.

Tip from a CRNA: "Good relationship advice. I've seen many divorces both in nursing school and in CRNA school either during school or shortly after."

-Todd Hammon, MSN, CRNA, CCRN, CEN

Appendix

Reference Material for your convenience



How to Increase Your Chances of Acceptance

Please don't become overwhelmed. It is not expected that you do all of the things on this list. Rather, a combination of many of them will make you a very strong applicant. There are those who have been accepted with only the bare minimum requirements, but they were limited in the schools that would consider their application. The more of these hurdles you cross, the more options you will have and the more likely you will be accepted to the school of your choice.

This is simply a summary of all of the tips suggested in the book for you to have as easy reference.

1. Maintain a GPA of 3.5 or better
2. Prepare financially – save money ahead of time to use for school expenses
3. Use a spaced repetition system to maintain your long term memory for everything you learn during the years preceding your application
4. Work in a large, level one trauma center critical care unit for 2-3 years
5. Maintain a leadership role in your ICU, as either charge nurse or a preceptor
6. Shadow several CRNAs for a maximum of 40 hours and record your experience in detail
7. Join the AACN and the ENA
8. Obtain your PALS, BLS, and ACLS certifications
9. Become a PALS, BLS or ACLS instructor
10. Obtain your CCRN certification
11. Obtain a subspecialty CCRN certification
12. Obtain an additional certification depending on what department of critical care you work in
13. Get your professional work published in a nursing journal
14. Score over 300 on the GRE
15. Take at least one graduate course and ace it
16. Follow all application instructions explicitly
17. Only apply to schools where you meet the requirements
18. Apply to schools that are a good fit for your level of achievement
19. Have all application materials in well before the application, and before the priority deadline, if the school has one

20. Request letters of recommendation from hospital staff who know you well and are sure to sing your praise
21. Write an honest, sincere personal statement that reflects a high level of thinking
22. Submit a curriculum vitae which list your strengths first, is formatted to match the content, is concise and uses parallelism
23. Dress professionally for the interview: suit, tie, polished shoes, ironed shirt, etc.
24. Get plenty of sleep the night before and show up an hour early for the interview
25. Practice the interview questions until you are very confident that your answers will come out smooth and articulate

Minimum Requirements

I've given you a list of everything you can do to go above and beyond to get accepted into the school of your choice. This list is the opposite. Here, I list the absolute minimums you must achieve to be considered by any school. Having the minimums in every category will not suffice for any school I know of, but you may get away with having minimums in a few categories.

- ☐ **Baccalaureate degree in a science field** (Chemistry or biology is often accepted). BSN preferred.
- ☐ **A minimum GPA of 2.75** (cumulative as well as specifically in all science courses)
- ☐ **A current RN (Registered Nurse) license**
- ☐ **1 year critical care experience.** Students have been accepted with as little as OR, PACU, labor and delivery and float team (including ICU). Typically this requires that you have many years of RN experience. Students have been invited to interview with as little as 3 months ICU experience.

Just remember that the more “minimums” you have, the more important it is that you go above and beyond in as many other areas as possible.

Anesthesia Sites for the Pre-CRNA



As you enter the nurse anesthesia profession, you will find these anesthesia sites most helpful to reference.

AANA.com

"Founded in 1931, American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) is the professional association representing more than 44,000 Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) and student registered nurse anesthetists nationwide... More than 90 percent of the nation's nurse anesthetists are members of the AANA."

Nurse-Anesthesia.org

The largest nurse-anesthesia forum online. It's an ideal community to join if you're serious about pursuing this profession, and it's a great place to get specific questions answered. You can ask CRNAs specific questions about the profession as you decide if it's the right profession for you; or get tips from those who've gone before you.

As you get closer to your goal of becoming a CRNA, you can gain additional privileges in the forum. You can progress from registered user to pre-SRNA (accepted to school no AANA number), to SRNA (school and AANA number) and finally to CRNA. The forum also provides links to many helpful anesthesia sites.

AllNurses.com

Though this community is targeted for nurses as a whole, it has three great sub-forums (pre-CRNA, SRNA, and CRNA). There are lots of discussions about interviewing at specific schools, specific class prerequisites and GPA issues. Just keep in mind that the forum is moderated by RNs rather than CRNAs, so there is some misinformation about the CRNA profession.

CRNA Student Blog – nurseanesthetist.org/blog/

If you want to know what it will be like in CRNA school, this is definitely a great resource. The blog is written by a CRNA student (SRNA) and gives you a summary of each completed trimester (7 total). It's written intelligently, with a personal tone and gives you the highlights and trials of the journey through a nurse anesthesia program.

Ask the Nurse Anesthetist (careers.ipvtv.org)

If you ever wished you could interview a nurse anesthetist in order to discover if this profession is really a good fit for you, now you can! Find thorough, detailed answers to questions like "What do you like best about your job?", "Is your job stressful?", "What do you dislike most about your job?", etc. The questions are answered by actual CRNAs and will give you much to think about and consider before you pursue this path. Of all the anesthesia sites out there, this one is most helpful.

Before you apply to CRNA School

After scouring through over 100 school anesthesia sites, none were as helpful to the prospective applicant as Wake Forest. Along with describing their nurse anesthesia program, the school offers a thorough self-assessment test that will show you exactly what schools are looking for from applicants.

WFBMC's program is one of the most difficult to get into; so if you can pass their self-assessment test, chances are, you'll do just fine when applying to the school of your choice. Obviously, not everything they say will apply to you (if you apply to a different school), but it will be worth the time and will give you a great idea where you shine, and what you can do to improve your application.

CRNA Salary (crnasalary.com)

This is one of the anesthesia sites I used as a reference when creating the "salary by state" section of the website.

All-CRNA-Schools.com CRNA School Rankings

(all-crna-schools.com/schools-by-rank2/)

Graduate Record Exam (GRE) (ets.org)

This is the official site for the GRE. Since most nurse anesthesia programs require this test, you'll want to visit this site to determine when and where you need to take the test and how to best prepare for it.

National Board of Certification & Re-certification for Nurse Anesthetists (NBCRNA)

I feel their title says it all. (nbcrna.com)

International Student Transcript Evaluation (naces.org)

If you are an international student and will be applying to CRNA schools in the states, you'll need to get your transcripts evaluated by any one of the organizations listed here in order to get your GPA and course prerequisites transferred into the US equivalents. If you're confused by all of the options, I recommend WES.org

International Nurses - US work visa (cgfns.org)

If your RN license is in another country, and you wish to begin working as an RN in the US, you will need to take the CGFNS qualifying exam. This site will also tell you what other steps you need to take before you make this transition.

A great place to find answers to questions about international nurse anesthesia. "The IFNA is the authoritative voice for nurse anesthetists and nurse anesthesia, supporting and enhancing quality anesthesia care worldwide."

7 Creative Ways to Pay for CRNA School



Seven Eight Creative Ways to Pay for CRNA School

Applying to CRNA school is not cheap. The process is something that will require you to have a little extra saved up. So we know that you will need extra money – not just to cover application fees, though. You'll need 2-3 years' worth of living expenses as well, along with enough money to pay for tuition.

As you know, there are four fronts that can net you a larger final total amount:

- Earn more
- Spend less
- Save more
- Borrow

Here are your options (Keep in mind; you may need to use a combination of several options):

1. Work as a strike nurse
2. Apply for Grants and Scholarships
3. Build a Passive Stream of Income
4. Sign up for the Army Reserves
5. Save 10% (or more) of your earnings while employed full time
6. Cash out your 401k
7. Utilize FAFSA Student Loans
8. Utilize Private Student Loans

An additional way students often pay for CRNA school is to have their spouse work full time to cover living expenses and take out loans for tuition. This obviously only works if you have a spouse, and that spouse is willing to work full time while you are in school.

Work as a Strike Nurse

What is strike nursing?

I'm sure you've heard of travel nursing; everyone has! However, you may not have heard about strike nursing. Strike nursing is a type of travel nursing you can participate in while maintaining your current full time RN position.

Strike nursing specifics

Each year, hospitals all over the US experience employee strikes, and during their period of negotiation, they need outside help to care for patients. While this situation is often emotional for those directly involved, it can be a great opportunity for you to earn a lot of additional income in a short period of time. Depending on the year, you may have the opportunity to work as many as ten strikes, though you are not obligated to work any of them.

Pay starts at \$50 per hour (sometimes as much as \$100 per hour), and most strikes guarantee a minimum of 48 hours of work and require a two week commitment (that's **\$2,400 earned in one strike** after working only 48 hours at \$50 per hour). If, for some reason, you are available to work and the facility cancels you, you may still be paid for 48 hours of work.

You will need to be willing to work all seven days in a week and will be paid overtime for all hours in excess of a standard work week (in most places, that's time and a half for more than 40 hours of work).

Your airfare or gas expense to and from an assignment **will be covered 100%** by the travel agency, and housing will be provided as well. Though sometimes private housing is offered, only shared housing is guaranteed.

Though you typically only sign a contract for a strike nursing assignment 10 days before the strike begins, you will often know months in advance that a strike is looming at a certain hospital.

How can you keep a full time job and do strike nursing?

This will often require you to switch your schedule around with your co-workers last minute and will not always be easy. It is also much easier to manage for nurses who currently work 12 hour shifts, as you already have four days off in any given week. You simply need to rearrange

your schedule so that your days off are all in a row. You can also use a few vacation days to accomplish this.

However, it can be done (I know people who manage to make it work), and in the end, you're trading a few weeks of a crazy schedule for the amount of money it would typically take you several weeks of full time work to earn. And, you're earning this money in addition to your regular full time income.

Recommended states for licensure

If you pursue strike nursing, it is recommended that you obtain a license in any of the following states, as these are the most likely to experience a strike:

- California
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- New Jersey * (a NJ license takes a long time to process – apply early for licensure)
- New York
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island

Ethics of strike nursing

Some RNs question the ethics of “bailing out” a hospital which “refuses to pay nurses what they're worth”. Those same RNs *say* they would rather scrape road kill off the highway (to provide food for their family) than “wear the scrubs of a scab” (as one forum member put it).

Here is why I disagree: First of all, in healthcare, the patient comes first. Strike nursing provides the perfect opportunity for outside nurses to step in and care for patients while the dispute between employees and employer is worked out.

Second: The hospital feels a great deal of financial strain during a strike: they're paying 50-100% more in labor costs (paying the strike nurses), than they would normally pay their staff. They can't keep that up for very long. Historically, strikes never last very long. It's temporary, and you can both profit and care for the patients while it lasts.

Grants and Scholarships

Keep in mind that nothing in life comes for free. Applying for grants and scholarships is very time consuming. *I knew a girl in college who made it her summer job to apply for scholarships and earned \$40,000 as a result of her efforts.* Don't be mistaken. She did not get "lucky." She simply applied to every single scholarship she could find. She did not win most of them, but she applied to so many that she was sure to get a return on her efforts. If you're going to go this route, know that it will take a significant amount of your time, but could be rewarding.

On the flip side, what is typically required in a scholarship application is very similar to what you will already be preparing for your CRNA school application: letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, curriculum vitae, etc. All you need to do is tweak things a bit for each scholarship application.

Since specific grants change each year and are often only awarded to one student, I won't bother listing specific grants you can apply to. Rather, I'll give you a list of places to look where you are likely to find graduate school grants you are eligible for.

ENA (Emergency Nursing Association)

There are roughly 20 grants available through the ENA. Each one has a deadline of June 1, and each one either awards \$3,000 or \$5,000 to one deserving applicant. With most of them, you need to be: pursuing a master's degree in nursing, maintaining a GPA of 3.0 or better and have been a member of ENA for the previous 12 months. However, preference is given to applicants who maintain active involvement with ENA (work on committees, meeting attendance, teaching in organization-sponsored events, attending conferences, etc.)

AACN (American Association of Critical Care Nurses)

They give out over \$100,000 in awards annually. Awards range in amount, and are distributed year round.

AACN (American Association of Colleges of Nursing)

There are roughly five scholarships available to graduate nursing students ranging in award amount from \$2,500 to \$10,000. Several of them give preference to students who are under-represented or of a minority background.

Fastweb.com

Fastweb.com is a large website that helps match students to scholarships. Just as a test, I created an account with them, entered in the “average” age of CRNA students (30-35), female (60% of applicants are), and that I was seeking entrance into a master’s level nurse anesthesia program. I was matched with 19 scholarships, ranging in award amount from \$500 to \$10,000, with most being around \$1,000. Some of them require that you write an essay and most of the scholarships I was matched with were offered by random businesses and organizations – none of them were specific to nursing.

Nursingsociety.org

This is a resource site linking to many other scholarship opportunities specifically for nurses.

CollegeScholarships.org/scholarships/nursing/anesthetist.htm

This is another resource site linking specifically to nurse anesthesia scholarships. Many of these opportunities are program specific, which are definitely worth applying to because you already know there will be a much smaller applicant pool. You’re only competing against the people in your program – many of whom will not apply.

HRSA.Gov

If you choose to work in a rural hospital when you become a CRNA, NURSE Corps Loan Repayment Program will pay off 60% of your unpaid student loans in just two years, and an additional 25% of the original balance for an optional third year. You must apply and be accepted into this program and work at a qualifying hospital.

Summary

If you are serious about earning money through scholarships, don’t stop with my meager list. I only listed a handful of sources that I found easily. If you do more searching, you’ll find plenty more scholarships that you are eligible for. I recommend that if you’re going to go through the effort of applying for scholarships, apply to as many as you can so that you increase your chances of winning.

Build a “Passive” Stream of Income

First, I will discuss an option that you most likely have not considered. That is the option of letting your ideas work for you while you study. Let me explain. There are four primary ways to earn money.

1. Work by the hour for your money (this includes salaried positions)
2. Let others work by the hour for your money
3. Let your ideas work by the hour for your money
4. Let your money work by the hour for you

By becoming a CRNA, you are entering a fulfilling career where you will be working by the hour for your money. But while you're in school (if you still want cash flow), you will need to find some other way to earn money since it is neither permitted nor recommended that you moonlight (have a side job) while you're an SRNA (Student Registered Nurse Anesthetist).

Ok... just to be fair, there are a few schools which allow you to work on the side, but they each carry a disclaimer that if work ever interferes with your grades, you will be asked to quit your job, be put on probation or asked to leave the program. Most programs require an average of 60 hours per week of your time, so if you have any life at all outside of school, you will not be able to work.

Hiring someone else to work for you requires you to have capital as well as the time to manage them, so this one's not ideal as a primary vehicle for passive income.

Letting your money work for you requires you to have money to begin with and then invest it wisely; but in most cases, you need to invest a very large sum if you want significant annual returns.

So, we land on Option 3: let your ideas work for you while you're in CRNA school. Just in case you think this is a harebrained idea, I personally know two current CRNA students who have done this and each have had a nice flow of extra cash (roughly \$500 monthly) while they're in school.

Let me give you a few examples of what this could look like:

Create a Website

Build a content heavy, keyword-focused niche website. The goal here is to build a website on a topic you are both passionate and knowledgeable about. If you're able to provide relevant,

helpful information people are actively searching for, you then monetize (earn money) from your traffic by placing advertisements on your site (you get paid each time a visitor clicks on an ad), or by getting a commission on a product that you sell on your site. Depending on the size and scope of your site (and the amount of time you put into it), this model could net you \$500 to \$3,000 on average each month. Maintaining the site is something you could do sporadically as you have time while in school.

Write an E-book

Write a book and publish it on Amazon (Kindle). When I was growing up, the only people I knew who wrote books and made money off of them were novelists or authors of children's books. Today, the market is huge. I'm not talking about writing a 300 page novel. I'm talking about writing several 10-page ebooks and selling them for \$0.99 each to a mass market. I just browsed through the Kindle ebooks for sale and found everything from "All You Need to Know About Quinoa" to "How to Make your Own Homemade Laundry Detergent." If your ebook solves a problem that many people are having, you will do well. If you can create one of these books per week for one year, you'll have 52 books for sale at the end of the year. If each book sells an average of once a day (at 35% royalty rate), you're looking at an income of \$18 per day, or \$546 per month. Or you can write a longer e-book worthy of a \$2.99 - \$9.99 price tag and generate a 70% royalty from each sale. You may have fewer sales, but more profit per sale.

A variation of this is that you could create an info product (usually including information that is hard to come by and is extremely valuable to the right market). You then set up an affiliate program through Clickbank.com (or any of its competitors) and let other marketers sell your product for you (generally at a much higher price than a typical ebook).

Best Option for You

I'm clearly not arguing that everyone going into CRNA school should become an entrepreneur first; but for some people, this may be a viable option and will help offset the cost of CRNA school. The amount of money you are able to earn will depend more on your creativity and business sense than it will on the amount of time you spend (though that is a factor too). It's certainly no guarantee, but it's something to consider. I think that creating a site or ebook that brings in \$500 a month is a very reasonable and attainable goal and could be accomplished with as little as one year advanced planning (with maybe 10 hours a week on the side of your full time endeavors). Your total earnings over a 27-month period (that is the average length of a CRNA program), would be \$13,500. While that isn't enough to pay anyone's way through school, it would be a nice cash flow on the side to help offset your expenses.

Sign up for the Army Reserves

Written by: Hannah Talbot, SRNA

When I was in my first year of CRNA school, an Army recruiter came to talk to my class about joining the Army Reserves as an aspiring CRNA. They had some great things to say, but I also knew it was their job to make everything sound impossible to turn down. After that meeting, I started doing a lot of research on my own. I scoured the internet for information. I asked CRNAs that are currently or have been in the military. And I met with a recruiter and asked him every question I could possibly think of.

Joining the Army Reserves as a future CRNA has many benefits. You will be commissioned in as a 2nd Lieutenant, which is Officer status. There are 3 options for the benefits you can apply for, with varying service requirements. The first is called STRAP, which stands for Specialized Training Assistance Program. This provides you with a **stipend of approximately \$2100 each month while you are in school**. For each 6 months of stipend you receive, you owe 1 year of service. Next, there is the **loan repayment option**. **This allows for \$20,000/year in loan repayment, with a maximum benefit of \$50,000**. Thus, this would require 3 years of service to get the full \$50,000 repayment. Third, you can take both options. This would of course add to your service requirements.

The contract you sign will be for a total of 8 years, regardless of which benefits you decide to take. The benefits then decide how many years will be active service in the Army Reserves. If for instance, your duty requirement is 6 years then you can either finish your last 2 years as active service in the Army Reserves or you can go on the Ready Reserve list, meaning that you have no further duty requirements but are still eligible for draft for the remaining 2 years.

After a couple of weeks of research, I started the application process. The entire process can take up to 1 year, so it is important to get the process started ASAP once you have made a decision. The paperwork can be very overwhelming. You have to list every address, job, and school you have had in the last 10 years. You provide school transcripts for every school. You also have to have 1 reference for each address, job, and school that you list. You provide the contact information for your CRNA school faculty. You also need 3 reference letters. And none of the references can be repeated. Your recruiter will also assist you in making a resume that fits the format they are looking for. This will be the first thing that the board sees, so make it count! Anything that is going to make you stand out should be included, such as awards, honor roll, committee memberships, and volunteer work. You will also write a position statement

which includes why you want to be a CRNA and why you want to join the Army. You also complete information on your medical history, including providing medical records for anything important.

Once your paperwork is complete, your application is submitted for review. At this point, they will ask you for any clarification or further documentation needed regarding your medical history information. There are some conditions that could lead to disqualification at this point. If everything checks out, you will receive your authorization to continue on with the process. The next step is the physical. This will take place at an Army facility near you. It includes lab work, an EKG, chest x-ray, eye exam, hearing test, dental exam, and physical with a physician.

Once your physical is complete, the remainder of your paperwork is collected and finalized. From here, your entire application is submitted to the board for approval. The board meets every few months. There are a set number of openings each year, and these positions are opened every October. If they find you to be qualified but the positions are already filled, you'll be waitlisted for the next time around. It takes about 2 weeks from the time the board meets for you to find out the decision. If you are approved, then your file is sent to the Senate for approval.

Once that is done, then you can commission in! The commissioning is where you sign your contract and are sworn in as an Officer of the Army. About 2-3 months later, your orders will be finalized and you'll receive your first stipend check! Your first payment will be backdated to the date of your commissioning.

While you are in school, there are no duty requirements. Your only responsibilities are going to school and submitting a form each month stating that you are completing your academic duties. Once school is completed and you have passed your boards, you will attend Leader's Training Course (LTC) which is Officer school. This is instead of Basic Training. LTC is a 1 month program in Houston, Texas where you will learn the basics of being an Officer in the Army. This is paid training. After your Officer school is complete, your Army Reserves duties start. This includes 1 weekend a month and 2 weeks out of the year of duty training.

This is a brief overview of the benefits and process of joining the Army Reserves as a SRNA. There are many more specifics and details that are not included in this article. You should meet with a recruiter and ask any questions you may have, so you can make an educated decision for yourself and your family. Lastly, do not join simply for the monetary benefits. If you do not have an interest in joining the military and serving your country, the money will ultimately not

be worth it to you. That being said, the Army Reserves are a fantastic option for those that have the desire to serve without the full commitment of Active Duty service.

To find your local recruiter, go to <http://www.goarmy.com/locate-a-recruiter.html>.

Save 10% of Your Earnings

While you're working as an RN in preparation for CRNA school, live on only 90% of your earnings (or less if you can) and save up the rest toward your school fund. I recommend that you do not keep this money in your general use savings account, but rather open up another account with a different bank – this way you don't "see" your saved money every time you log into your general use bank account. It keeps the money separate – physically as well as mentally.

I recommend that you save 10%, even if you are trying to pay back school loans from your ADN or BSN. Ideally, you would pay back all of your student loans first, then begin saving, but this may not be possible in every situation depending on how much you still owe. It's better to have cash in your pocket to begin CRNA school with than to be penniless and debt free. Again, ideally you'd be debt free **and** have cash in your pocket.

The stress of CRNA school is big enough without adding to it the financial stress of not being able to pay your bills. More than that, most schools will ask you during the interview what you have done to prepare financially for CRNA school. You should plan now so you have an impressive answer to give them.

Cash out your Retirement Fund

I'm sure there are some reading this who will entirely disagree with me about this being a viable option. Let me explain why I think it's worth considering.

I'll start by saying that I completely understand the concept of compound interest and saving for retirement so that you're not stuck working till the day you die. But I also understand interest rates, risk and being in debt.

Basically, if you are in a position where you have not saved (for school, specifically), and you are considering taking out the entire amount needed for tuition and living expenses in loans, consider cashing out your retirement fund as an alternative.

When you consider annual inflation (It's much higher than they report), the interest rate you're earning from your retirement account and you compare that to the amount of interest you'll have to pay for PLUS loans (and the weight of having all of that debt over your head), you'll quickly see that it may make sense.

On this same note, if you still have several years before you apply for CRNA school, you may want to consider discontinuing your 401k contributions and adding that amount to your school fund each month. This way, you can avoid the penalty fees associated with early withdrawal.

FAFSA Student Loans

In order to secure a student loan, you need to fill out a FAFSA. By this point in your academic career, I'm sure you're quite familiar with this process. They say it only takes 17 minutes on average to fill out, so it's definitely worth the time.

Once you've filled out the FAFSA, you'll be given two options of loan types: Unsubsidized Stafford Loan and Graduate Plus loans.

I'm leaving out a Perkins loan, but you have to demonstrate financial need in order to qualify for Perkins (and even then, their max loan per year is only \$4,000), and if you're working as an IUC nurse (as you should be to gain entrance into CRNA school), you'll hardly qualify as a needy student. If you are in special circumstances and are offered a Perkins loan, definitely take it, as it offers really great rates and your loan won't accrue interest while you're in school.

Unsubsidized Stafford Loans

Unsubsidized Stafford Loans allow you to borrow up to \$20,500 per year with a maximum total debt of \$138,500. You'll be charged 6.8 percent interest with a 1 percent origination fee. Interest will begin accruing once the loan is originated, but this is still the safest and best option for CRNA school grad students, as it offers a low interest rate and allows you several repayment options that are contingent on your income. In order to qualify, you must be a U.S. citizen, a U.S. permanent resident or eligible non-citizen and not be in default on any education loan or owe a refund on an education grant.

Graduate PLUS Loans

Unless you're living with your parents or have a working spouse who will pay the bills while you're securing your graduate degree, your allotment of \$20,500 per year with the Stafford loan will hardly be enough; you'll need a PLUS loan. Graduate PLUS loans carry a 7.9 percent interest rate and a 4 percent origination fee. You can borrow as much as it costs to attend school, including living expenses and books (though the living expense allotment will be calculated by the school).



Note: In order to secure a Graduate PLUS loan, you need to have good credit! If you have adverse credit history, including defaulted student loans, recent bankruptcies and the like, you will not qualify for PLUS loans. Prepare for CRNA School now by making choices that will reflect well upon your credit score. This

means you must keep open lines of credit and make regular payments on them. For those of you who are Dave Ramsey fans, avoid cutting up your credit cards unless you're positive you will be able to save up enough cash to pay for CRNA School without using credit.

If you do have adverse credit, your only hope of securing a loan will be to have a cosigner. However, before you have a loved one cosign a loan for you, consider the damage that could be done to your relationship if something were to happen that prevented you from re-paying the loan and your loved one was then responsible to pay your bill. Cosigning has ruined many relationships. If you're in this position, consider all alternatives and really weigh the cost before taking this step.

Private Student Loans

In most cases, your best option will be to take a government backed loan. The primary reason that the government loans often outshine private loans is that they give you more options for re-payment. Government loans allow for income-based payment plans and forbearance which can either lower or eliminate your payments for a period of time, while private lenders have fewer flexible options.

Variable Rate Private Loans

Variable Rate Private Loans can look like a really appealing option because they offer very low interest rates – even as little as 2.25 percent. The problem is that you’re given no guarantee that the interest rate will stay that low and you may end up paying much higher rates before you’re able to pay off your entire debt.

Fixed Rate Private Loans

A few private lenders (including Wells Fargo, Chase and Sallie Mae) offer fixed rate private loans. In some cases, these rates are even lower than graduate plus loans; however, they still don’t offer much flexibility in re-payment plans.