

## The Excelsior College Distance Learning A.D.N. Program: Facts, Answers, and Links.

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Author: LunahRN. (Jan 14). [The Excelsior College Distance Learning ADN Program: Facts, Answers, and Links](http://allnurses.com/showthread.php?t=808335). Retrieved Friday, Aug 16, 2013, from <http://allnurses.com/showthread.php?t=808335>

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I thought I'd compile some basic information/answers to the questions we see here over and over. This is a work in progress. Please feel free to point out any errors. Thanks!

1. Excelsior College (EC) ADN grads are not eligible for licensure in all states, and some states have additional requirements before NCLEX: <http://www.excelsior.edu/state-board-requirements>. Obtaining a BSN after your RN will not necessarily negate the issues in states that will not recognize EC's education; those states always consider the source of your RN, which would be EC.
2. The school's ADN program page has great information, including the School of Nursing catalog. Download it and READ it so you know what to expect: <http://www.excelsior.edu/programs/nu...sociate-degree>. Seriously, read it. There should be no surprises anywhere along the way. EC does not have "hidden" fees or requirements. They put it all out there for students.
3. If you create an account and go to the downloads page (<https://my.excelsior.edu/group/myexc...tion-and-forms>), there is a document called "How Much Will Your Excelsior College Associate Degree in Nursing Cost?" that is a very handy tool to estimate exam costs and estimate fees. Use it. This way there are no surprises, like when students say they didn't know about the \$485 student services annual fee or the \$495 graduation fee.
4. There is an application fee, currently \$80. This provides a transcript review and an evaluation of which courses you'll need to complete to graduate.
5. There is an enrollment fee, currently \$1015. Until you pay this enrollment fee, you will be subject to any curriculum changes that may occur between your transcript evaluation and enrollment.
6. There is a student services annual fee (SSAF), currently \$485. This is due annually on your enrollment anniversary date.
7. You have seven years to complete the program. If you do not complete it within seven years, you will be dropped from the program and will have to re-enroll with all associated fees and repeat the exams.
8. There is a graduation fee, currently \$495. You receive \$15 off of this fee for each course credit earned. Before you get too excited about this and think that EC will owe YOU money before graduating (like I did, haha), this is only for COURSE credit, not exam credit. The majority of the program is exam-based, not course-based. I took the Information Literacy (INL 102) through EC. That one-credit course knocked \$15 off of my grad fee.

9. Costs increase every July -- fees and tuition, usually, though some fees stay stable from year to year. The grad fee, for example, is the same now as it was for me in 2008.

10. Contrary to what people might think, this is not "the easy way" to become an RN. If you are not a highly motivated individual who can self-teach, think twice before going this route. If you start EC and find that you aren't suited to distance learning, there is no shame in that! Everyone learns differently.

11. There is a clinical exam at the end of the program -- the Clinical Performance in Nursing Examination (CPNE). It is very stressful for most people. If you fail the CPNE three times, you will be dismissed from the program. It is easy to fail for the little things, and some people who have years and years of experience will fail this exam. It is not difficult in execution -- it requires basic assessment and basic management -- but if you do not study because you think you already know how to be a nurse, then you are setting yourself up for potential failure. Learn the "EC way."

I will say this about the CPNE: you will find websites with people hating on the CPNE, but it is difficult for a reason -- this program does not have traditional clinicals, and EC must ensure safe and competent nursing practice. At the end of preparation and passing my CPNE, I didn't love the CPNE but I sure as heck respected it and saw the reason for it being what it is.

12. There are third-party publishers who have no relationship with the school, but who will encourage students to sign contracts for study guides. These contracts are binding and add thousands to the bottom line. Do not sign unless you intend to pay. The school discusses these companies and their lack of affiliation and endorsement here:

<http://www.excelsior.edu/about-test-...ation-services>

13. There are free exam content guides for each exam. These guides contain sample test questions, an outline of material that students are expected to know (your syllabus, essentially), as well as suggested texts and reading assignments. This is really all you need to do well on these exams, in addition to...

14. The EC practice exams! Worth their weight in gold, if you could print them out and lift

them. There are practice exams for each corresponding EC exam. Each practice exam currently costs \$75, and you get access to two exams: Form A and Form B. These are excellent gauges to see where you are in your studies, as well as valuable study tools in themselves.

15. You may only register for four nursing theory exams at a time.

16. You may take a nursing exam up to four times. The fourth time a student fails an exam, he/she is dismissed from the program.

17. If you fail an exam, you must wait 60 days to retake it the first time, and 120 days after any subsequent failure.

18. Students have three chances to pass the Focused Clinical Competencies Assessment (FCCA), which is a two-part, computer-delivered exam that covers 1) head-to-toe assessment and the nursing process and 2) managing multiple patients and working in

interdisciplinary healthcare teams. If a student fails the FCCA three times, he/she is dismissed from the program.

19. Students who are enrolled in the FCCA may NOT collaborate on the FCCA. This violates the school's academic honesty policy. This information comes directly from EC faculty, and we take it seriously at allnurses. Do NOT discuss FCCA content or mechanics. We mean it.

20. The current first-time pass rate for the CPNE is 63% ([http://www.excelsior.edu/exam-details-cpne#\\_1](http://www.excelsior.edu/exam-details-cpne#_1)).

21. How is it possible to become an RN without actual clinicals? Because this program is open only to those who are healthcare providers of some sort who have completed clinicals in other programs and hold some kind of certification or licensure. This is not a pre-licensure program. Read the admission requirements here: <http://www.excelsior.edu/special-req...sociate-degree>

22. You can take one nursing exam, NURx214: Transition to the Registered Professional Nurse Role, before enrolling, as well as any prereqs like A&P or Micro. However, if the curriculum changes before you enroll, you are subject to the new curriculum. Usually EC will publish notification on their website before making curriculum changes with an effective date.

23. Why would you wait to enroll? Because paying the enrollment fee starts the clock ticking toward the due date of your SSAF, currently \$485. The longer you can delay actual enrollment, the later your SSAF becomes due, giving you more time to complete the exams and program before paying that SSAF. But again, you will be subject to curriculum changes if you are not enrolled. Choose wisely.

24. A&P and Micro transfer credits will be accepted if they are no more than five years old at the time of enrollment and are deemed acceptable for credit.

25. A&P and Micro must be completed before students can register for the nursing exams, with the exception of NURx214, Transition to the Registered Professional Nurse Role.

26. We all know the old saying "C = RN," right? Consider the current climate for new grad RNs; one trend for employers to weed out applicants is to set GPA minimums. Don't just study to pass, study to learn and grasp the material and excel.

27. Exams (with the exception of the FCCA and CPNE) are done at Pearson VUE (<http://www.pearsonvue.com/>). If you schedule an exam, show up! You will not be rescheduled or reimbursed if you miss your date/time, unless there are dire circumstances.

28. Some people do have to drive a long distance to get to a Pearson testing center. When I was testing, my closest test location was about 1.5 hours away. I just made a day out of it -- went shopping at the nice mall nearby, treated myself to a nice meal, etc. The site locator page is here: <http://www.pearsonvue.com/vtclocator/> -- for EC exams, click on "Academic/Admissions" in the left column, then choose "Excelsior College" from the right column. (Of course, now there is one within 10 miles of my old house, haha).

29. There is an overview of the CPNE with a lot of helpful information on EC's site: <http://www.excelsior.edu/exam-details-cpne>. Explore it!

30. You must pay your graduation fee before EC will send your transcripts to your state's Board of Nursing (BON). Applying for the NCLEX-RN is completed in parts: register with Pearson and pay them, apply to your BON and pay them, and then request your transcripts be sent to your BON from EC via the information in your graduation packet. Some BONs do allow students to take the NCLEX prior to the actual graduation date, but that varies; check with your BON.

31. Have patience! After your CPNE, it takes a few weeks for the school to process you for graduation (though admittedly if you call them, sometimes it seems to take less time, and I think they tell you it'll take 4-6 weeks so that you're pleasantly surprised when it takes 3 weeks). Why does it take so long? EC is a large school with thousands of students, and you are not the only one being processed. Yes, I know that you're the most important one, though.

32. Your graduation date is not the date you finish your CPNE. The cut-off dates for CPNE and conferral are on the "Graduation and Beyond" page, accessible after you sign into MyEC: <https://my.excelsior.edu/group/curre...ion-and-beyond>

33. There is no federal financial aid for the ADN program because it is exam-based. However, EC does award scholarships based on need as indicated by students' FAFSAs, so be sure to complete a FAFSA each year.

34. There was an ADN pilot program that has courses rather than exams so that students can qualify for financial aid, but there were only a few selected for it -- it is not currently open to everyone.

35. There are payment plans that students can use to help stretch those education dollars. Most students I know just pay as they go. Payment plan information is here: <http://www.excelsior.edu/payment-plans>

36. It is often less expensive to take CLEPs for some of the requirements, but EC limits the number of ACE transfer credits. Personally I took the Human Growth and Development CLEP to cover the Lifespan Developmental Psychology requirement and the Introductory Sociology CLEP to cover the sociology requirement. EC does have exams for these subjects, but they are much more expensive and you will save money using CLEPs. I had two Associates degrees prior to starting EC, so I didn't have too many general ed requirements to complete. You can find more info about CLEP here: <http://clep.collegeboard.org/>.

37. There are no actual Micro or A&P CLEP exams, but EC does have these exams. Just be aware that if you return to school for your BSN, some schools want these classes to have had a lab component, and EC's exams do not have that. Plan accordingly. There are some online versions with labs, or local community colleges are another great option.

38. No one but YOU can determine if EC is the right path for you; strangers on the Internet cannot decide for you. If you're eligible for admission based on the admission criteria (<http://www.excelsior.edu/special-req...sociate-degree>) and EC is recognized for licensure in your state (<http://www.excelsior.edu/state-board-requirements>), then certainly it's an option, but its appropriateness and fit is completely up to you.

39. Do not violate academic honesty by sharing test questions. This leaves you vulnerable to dismissal from the program.

40. You will find "notes" out there for sale from various sources. You will also find used study guides from third-party publishers on eBay and such sites. This is not necessarily enough to pass the exams, but everyone is different. Find a study groove that works for you.

41. After an exam at Pearson, you find out your grade and receive a printout showing how you did in each section. Don't be thrown off by the percentages on the breakdown page -- not all questions are scored, so the numbers may appear strange.

42. You must achieve a "C" or better to pass an exam.

43. The FCCA and CPNE are pass/fail.

44. Information Literacy (INL 102) is required unless you already have a Masters degree or have taken a class that satisfies EC's (seemingly strict) standards when it comes to this course. Some students have used Penn Foster's ENG 103 course to satisfy the requirement in the past, but the current trend seems to be that EC has determined that it no longer satisfies the INL 102 requirement. But, take heart: if you take INL 102 from EC, you'll get \$15 off your grad fee. Haha. INL 102 is a pass/fail course that can usually be completed in a day or two.

45. CLEPs are also pass/fail, but the score you received (whatever out of 80 possible) does appear on your transcripts.

46. There are many options for finding local study buddies, and geographically diverse students have studied by using programs like Skype. Think outside the box!

47. I found that it was easiest for me to stay motivated by paying for and scheduling my exams, then using that as a deadline -- otherwise I'd just study into oblivion, never feeling quite ready. This method might work well for others, too.

48. You will get a degree in the mail shortly after your grad date. You will probably think it is the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. I sure did.

49. After passing the CPNE, the NCLEX is like cake. That's not to say don't study for it, but you'll see what I mean. The CPNE can be life-changing in terms of showing you what you can do when you put everything into it, and you'll probably come out feeling like you can accomplish darn near everything.

50. Excelsior College is NLNAC and regionally accredited. I had no problems having my credits accepted by all the RN-BSN programs to which I applied, though one did want me to take Chemistry... ugh!

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Thanks Lunah! You are an inspiration to all!