

Inaugural Nursing Careers Class at USU Broadens Student Perspective on Healthcare Professions

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HDFS Department Head Rob Stawski addresses students as part of the health sciences careers panel discussion.

Beginning Fall semester 2025, the Nursing Department within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) at USU began offering a one-credit course—*Introduction to Nursing as a Career*—designed to give undergraduate students an inside look at the nursing profession and introduce them to a range of career opportunities in the broader healthcare field.

Many students want to pursue a career in the health professions and complete the prerequisite classes—such as anatomy, physiology, and chemistry—during the first two years of their university coursework. After finishing these requirements, they apply for admission to the nursing program. But acceptance into the USU nursing program is competitive. After the department doubled the size of its program in May 2024, adding a second cohort of 30 students per year, the program is limited to graduating 60 students each year.

“Because it’s competitive, we want our students to really know, before they apply for admission into the program, that this is what they want to do,” said Pam Anderson, interim department head of the Nursing Department at USU.

Anderson explained that the motivating factors when creating the *Introduction to Nursing as a Career* class was to expose students to what nursing really entails and to introduce other career options in healthcare-related

fields that may also fit their goals and skillsets. “If they discover that nursing isn’t right for them, we want to show them what other options there are in the college,” said Anderson. “Students should know that there are many degrees that allow them to stay in the healthcare industry and work with people.”

The new class gives students an in-depth look at nursing and culminates with an overview of other healthcare careers. Weekly topics include what a day in the life of a nurse looks like, inherent qualities of great nurses, the challenging emotional landscape of the work, the ins and outs of USU’s nursing program, and job prospects and salary potential in Utah and across the country.



Pam Anderson, interim head of the Department of Nursing, with adjunct faculty Payden Christensen

“The students seemed most impacted when we discussed the emotional landscape that registered nurses experience,” recalled Payden Christensen, BSN and adjunct faculty member who teaches the new class. “They were very attentive to the stories and feelings we related, and they wanted to understand how nurses handle them in the day-to-day.”

The final 15 minutes of each class is devoted to learning basic hands-on nursing skills such as measuring blood pressure and pulse/respirations with a stethoscope, wound care and applying bandages, transferring people from a gurney to a bed or out of a bed, and more.

Anderson explained that one of the best ways to prepare for a career in nursing is to become certified as a nursing assistant (CNA) or medical assistant (MA). Working in the field gives students the best idea of what nursing is all about. “Nursing is helping people go to the bathroom, brush their teeth, comb their hair, helping them get dressed,” she explains. “If they don’t have a lot of CNA hours, they may not really know what they’re getting into.”

On the last day of the seven-week class, a panel discussion of CEHS department heads and faculty is held in which members discuss alternative opportunities for

students who wish to focus on health and human services. Health sciences careers include occupational, physical, and respiratory therapy; medical technician; physician's assistant; radiologic technologist; medical laboratory scientist; social work; marriage and family therapy; public health professional; and more. Many of these career paths begin with undergraduate degrees earned through the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services.

"The panel discussion on the last day was very impactful," said Christensen. "Some students were looking for ways they could incorporate nursing with other classes they were taking. Many students even stayed after class to ask follow-up questions of the panel members."

In Fall 2025, two sections of the one-credit course were offered. It meets for one hour each week and lasts for seven weeks. Interest in the inaugural class, which ended in mid-October, was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and the second section filled quickly.

"Our goal is for these students to reflect on their personal interests," said Anderson. "We want them to compare nursing with other healthcare professions and identify personal next steps for exploring or pursuing the healthcare career that is right for them. We hope they leave with a sense of direction and encouragement."