

## **UAlberta nursing PhD now available at a distance**

*UAlberta among first nursing faculties in Canada to offer fully online PhD studies, providing flexibility for working students.*

Bryan Alary

(Edmonton) The University of Alberta is opening its doors to the world by giving students the flexibility and choice of completing a nursing PhD online.

The Faculty of Nursing is now accepting applications into a new online stream for its PhD program. Among the first in Canada, this new accessible option gives students—such as working nurses, hospital administrators or nursing educators—the ability to fulfil research-intensive PhD course requirements with minimal disruption to their work or family life, said dean Anita Molzahn.

“There’s a wide range of prospective students telling us they want and value a U of A nursing degree but they need more flexibility to complete the work. They could be from other parts of Canada, from other countries or even from right here in Edmonton, but it isn’t possible for them to leave their job or travel to make regular class schedules,” said Molzahn. “Our PhD online cohort approach gives these students the ability to pursue a doctoral degree without a loss of income or the stress of having to uproot.”

The new online stream begins in May 2015 with an initial cohort of about 15 students. Though they will come from a variety of communities, the entire group of students will come together in one collaborative learning environment, said Wendy Caplan, director of e-learning services with the Faculty of Nursing.

### **Established leader in online education**

“The cohort approach to online learning is extremely valuable,” said Caplan, explaining students will work together, learning through synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous teaching methods.

Online students will spend the same amount of time on their studies—eight courses in total—as PhD students attending classes on campus. They will also attend two spring institutes in their first and second years, all the while working with a supervisor and committee to complete their dissertation.

Caplan said the Faculty of Nursing already has a proven track record with offering innovative online learning for students. Building on that success and expanding to a fully online PhD cohort was the “next logical step.”

“We provide our students with a very high level of support from instruction to technology to planning,” she explained. “We’re going to make this the best possible educational experience for our students. They deserve nothing less.”

### **Flexibility a draw for working nurses, nursing educators**

Normally, PhD studies can take four to six years to complete, which often requires relocating to Edmonton for at least one or more semesters. Vicki Foley was fortunate to receive a paid leave from her employer, a post-secondary nursing faculty in Atlantic Canada, but says that isn’t going to be the case for the majority of students going into the program.

“Very few people my age or at this stage in their career can leave their job and not get paid. And so many of them have families, so leaving your kids for four months at a time is not an option,” she said.

Foley, now an assistant professor of nursing at the University of Prince Edward Island, said that given the job and family disruption, travel and accommodation costs, she would have jumped at the chance to complete her PhD online.

“I chose the U of A based on quality and its reputation for research excellence. The U of A is basically regarded as the top university in the country,” said Foley. “When you add in this new flexibility, I think this program will be even more highly valued in the nursing community.”

“The Faculty of Nursing has proven that we are at the forefront of nursing education in Canada,” added Molzahn. “We were the first nursing faculty in the country to offer a PhD in nursing and we were among the first to see the potential in online learning. The online cohort is another innovation—and another point of pride—for us in providing an unparalleled student experience.”

### **Related links**

[Faculty of Nursing - PhD Online](#)

## Key messages

1. UAlberta Faculty of Nursing is among the first nursing faculties in Canada to offer the option of fully online distance learning for the PhD program.
2. The online PhD option provides flexibility, making the program an option for students who are working and living in communities from all corners of Canada, the United States or beyond. Traditional PhD models require students to leave their jobs or move temporarily.
3. UAlberta Faculty of Nursing has an exceptional reputation among nursing schools in Canada; graduate students highly value a degree from the U of A.
4. UAlberta Faculty of Nursing is a leader in offering innovative learning to students. The faculty offered the first PhD in nursing in Canada and is a proven leader in alternative learning models through distance learning and new technologies.
5. The online model is offered on a cost-recovery basis, so it doesn't require additional budget resources. Tuition is higher, but this is offset by the fact students don't experience a loss of income from leaving their jobs, or from paying for additional housing and travel to and from Edmonton.