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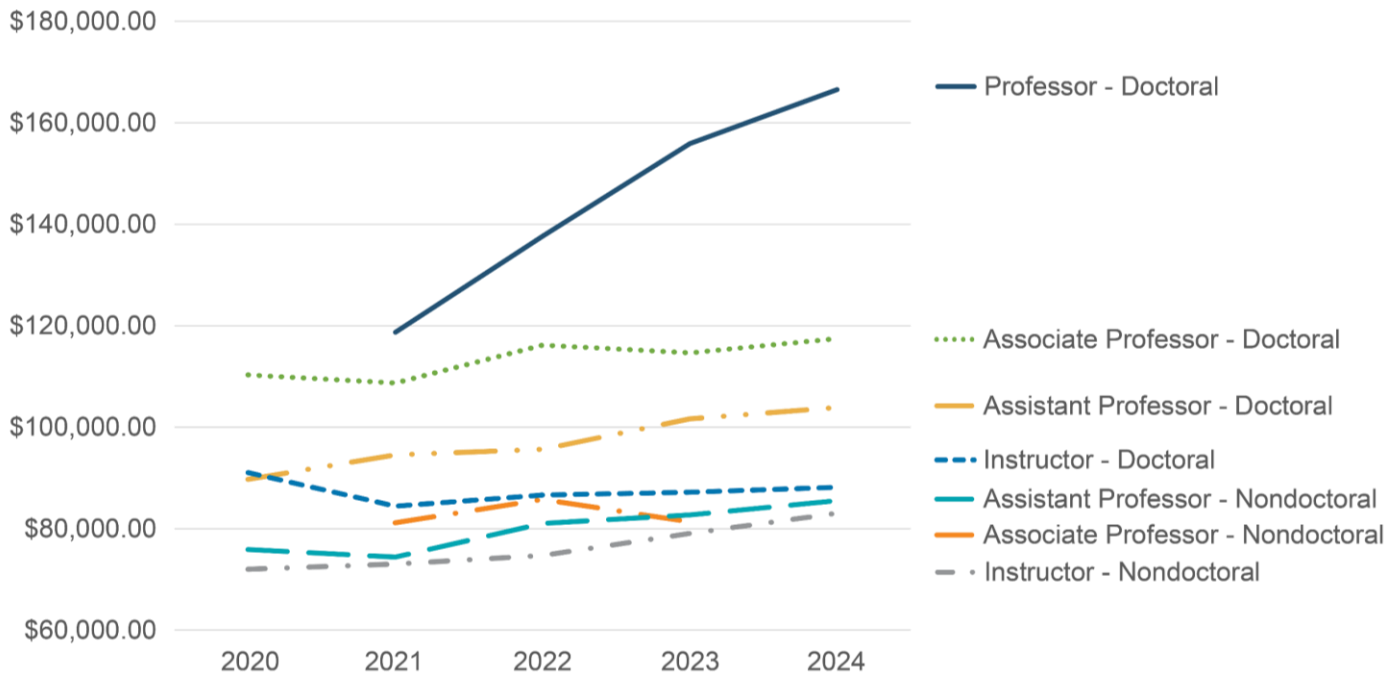
Nursing Faculty Salaries in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in South Carolina, 2020-2024

Introduction

South Carolina needs a strong pipeline of nurses to meet the state's healthcare needs. Expanding that pipeline requires enough nursing faculty to educate and prepare future nurses. However, nursing programs face ongoing challenges recruiting and retaining qualified faculty, in part because nurses can often earn more in clinical practice or other settings.[1]

Faculty compensation is an important part of this challenge. The salary gap can be especially significant for nurses with advanced education and clinical experience who are qualified to teach. Understanding nursing faculty salaries in South Carolina can help inform strategies to recruit and retain the educators needed to expand nursing education capacity. This brief examines trends in faculty salaries in four-year baccalaureate and graduate nursing education programs in South Carolina from 2020 to 2024.

Figure 1. Baccalaureate and graduate nursing program instructional faculty salaries by rank and degree, SC, 2020-2024



Source: American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). Annual Survey of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Programs, 2020–2024. Analysis of South Carolina faculty salary data provided by AACN.

Base faculty salaries increased across most positions in baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs between 2020 and 2024, but there are substantial differences by faculty rank and educational preparation (**Figure 1**). In 2024, doctoral-prepared assistant professors earned a median of $103,879, nearly $18,000 more than their nondoctoral counterparts. Nondoctoral faculty in assistant professor and instructor roles earned less than $90,000.[2]

Why Does Faculty Compensation Matter for the Nursing Workforce?

Differences in compensation between academic and clinical settings may make it difficult to attract and retain experienced nurses as educators.

Competition with clinical practice

Nursing schools are competing with clinical employers for nurses who have the education and experience needed to teach. Nurses with advanced clinical education can often command higher salaries in patient care settings than in academic positions, creating a significant opportunity cost for experienced nurses considering faculty careers.[3] The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) identifies noncompetitive salaries as the most commonly reported faculty recruitment challenge. In its 2025 vacancy survey, 33.7% of schools identified noncompetitive salaries as their most critical recruitment issue.[4]

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports a national median annual wage of $97,550 for registered nurse (RN) roles[5] and $134,920 across advanced practice registered nurse roles,[6] while AACN reported an average annual salary of $82,762 for master's-prepared nursing faculty in May 2026.[7] The difference is also seen when comparing faculty salaries with other nursing roles. An analysis of the 2022 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses found that the adjusted annual salary of nursing faculty was $18,346 less than staff nurses, $19,863 less than charge nurses, and $27,526 less than front-line managers.[3] The impact of these salary differences is reflected in nursing programs' recruitment challenges.

Doctoral-prepared nurses may also have opportunities in healthcare leadership, administration, informatics, research, and other roles outside of nursing education. The University of South Carolina has noted that these nurses can earn substantially more in healthcare practice than in faculty positions.[8]

Doctoral-prepared faculty are difficult to recruit

Doctoral-prepared nurses are an important part of the nursing faculty workforce, but they represent a small share of South Carolina's nursing workforce. Nationally, 80.9% of nursing faculty vacancies in 2025 required or preferred a doctoral degree.[4] In South Carolina, the pool of nurses with advanced degrees is relatively small. In 2024, 3,675 RNs (7.6% of RNs) held a master's degree in nursing (MSN) and 537 (1.1% of RNs) held a doctorate.[9]

South Carolina's nursing education requirements also create a need for nurses with advanced education and clinical experience. Programs approved by the South Carolina Board of Nursing must employ faculty who meet specified education and experience requirements, including a minimum of an MSN for teaching faculty and at least two years of clinical experience related to their area of instruction.[10] This means nursing programs are competing for a relatively small group of nurses who have advanced degrees, relevant clinical experience, and an interest in teaching. The challenge is even greater for positions that require or prefer a doctorate. At the same time, nurses with these qualifications have opportunities to work in clinical and other settings that may offer higher compensation.

Faculty shortages limit enrollment

Faculty shortages can directly limit the number of students nursing programs are able to admit, even when there is strong demand for nursing education. In 2024, pre-licensure RN education programs in South Carolina reported 1,435 qualified applicants that were not offered admission, which represents 22.5% of all qualified applicants.[11] In addition to limited clinical sites and classroom space as well as lack of approved seats, faculty shortages were among the most commonly cited reasons programs could not accept all qualified applicants.

The problem also affects the future faculty pipeline. Nationwide, nearly 17,000 qualified applications to graduate nursing programs were turned away in 2025, including applications to master's and doctoral programs.[12] Because most full-time nursing faculty positions require at least a master's degree, limited access to graduate nursing education can also limit the pool of nurses who are able to become faculty.

What is South Carolina Doing?

South Carolina has already recognized faculty compensation as a workforce intervention. South Carolina law explicitly identifies faculty salary enhancements as the first priority of the Critical Needs Nursing Initiative Fund.[13] The 2008 statute says the purpose of the enhancements is to bring nursing faculty salaries closer to the average for the geographic area in which South Carolina competes for nursing faculty. More recently, South Carolina established the Higher Education Nursing Initiative to support the recruitment and retention of nursing educators. During the 2022-23 legislative session, the General Assembly allocated $10 million for the initiative, with subsequent legislative sessions authorizing additional $10 million allocations. Half of each annual allocation is designated for temporary salary supplements for existing full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and clinical nursing faculty at public colleges and universities.[14]

While salary supplements help recruit and retain today's faculty, loan and tuition repayment programs help develop tomorrow's faculty. The BOLD Nursing Faculty Program provides tuition reimbursement to graduate nursing students in exchange for service as nursing faculty. The original program offered up to $30,000 per academic year for up to three years, with a corresponding faculty service commitment.[15]

The University of South Carolina (USC) announced in August 2026 that its Nursing Faculty Pipeline initiative is expanding statewide through a partnership involving USC, Clemson, and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). The initiative prepares doctoral nursing students for faculty careers by hiring them as full-time employees while completing their doctorates.[16]

Conclusions

Competitive faculty salaries are an important part of building South Carolina's nursing workforce. Nursing programs need qualified educators to expand enrollment and prepare more nurses for practice, but they must compete with clinical employers for nurses with the education and experience needed to teach. South Carolina has already taken steps to address this issue through faculty salary enhancements and programs that help prepare nurses for academic careers. Continuing and strengthening these efforts can help nursing programs recruit and retain qualified faculty and expand the state's capacity to educate the next generation of nurses.

Data Sources and Methods

Faculty salary data were obtained from the AACN Annual Survey of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Programs for 2020 through 2024. The survey collects information on nursing faculty, including salaries, from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs across the country.

For this analysis, data were limited to nursing programs in South Carolina and were used to examine salaries of full-time nursing faculty by faculty rank and highest degree earned. Median salaries were used to describe typical faculty compensation, because medians are less influenced by unusually high or low salaries than averages.

Limitations

- AACN suppresses salary data for groups with fewer than five respondents.
- AACN's annual survey focuses on baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs, so faculty employed primarily in associate degree nursing programs are not represented.
- Participation in the survey can vary from year to year, so changes in the number or mix of participating programs may affect year-to-year comparisons. The data therefore reflect salaries reported by participating SC nursing programs and may not represent all nursing faculty in the state.

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