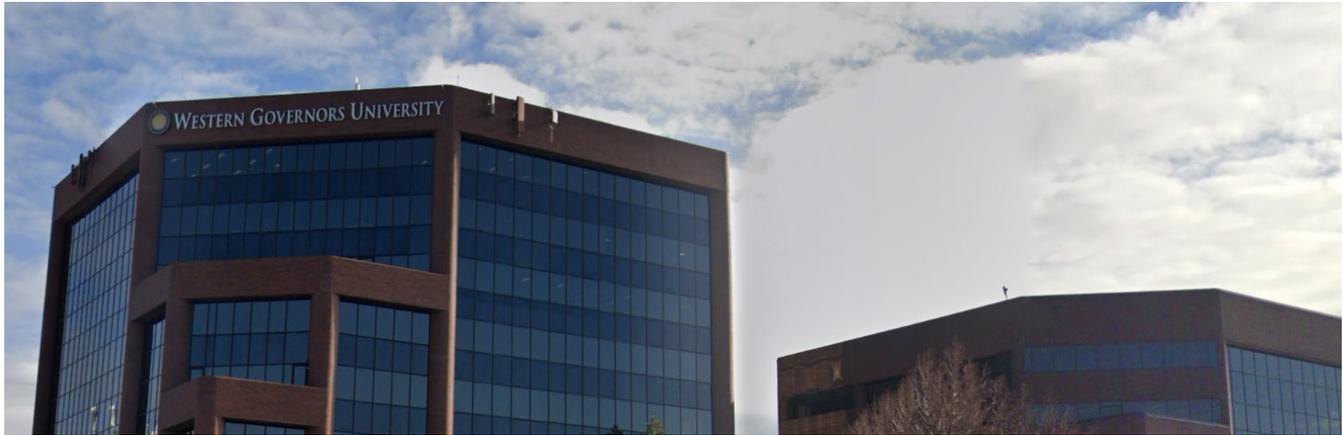


America's Nursing School

The Nursing Program at Western Governors University



Nurses play a vital role in America's health care system. They are the most common interface between Americans and their health care needs. Surveys show that nursing is ranked the most trusted professions for the past 20 years.¹ The coronavirus pandemic in recent years has highlighted their importance; many nurses took on heavy and intense workloads do deal with surges in caseloads while working with stressed medical resources.

There has long been discussion of a nursing shortage nationally. Data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics suggest that the demand for nurses has been surging since the pandemic. The number of unfilled openings in the health care sector (among which nurses represent a sizable share) has doubled from the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2022.²

Western Governors University (WGU) is playing a leading role in filling this vital health care and economic need across the country. That is the key takeaway of a new Utah Foundation analysis commissioned by WGU.

As an online university, WGU has provided 84,390 nursing graduates from all 50 states since 2009 – 60,368 of whom received bachelor's degrees in nursing and 24,022 of whom received master's degrees in nursing.

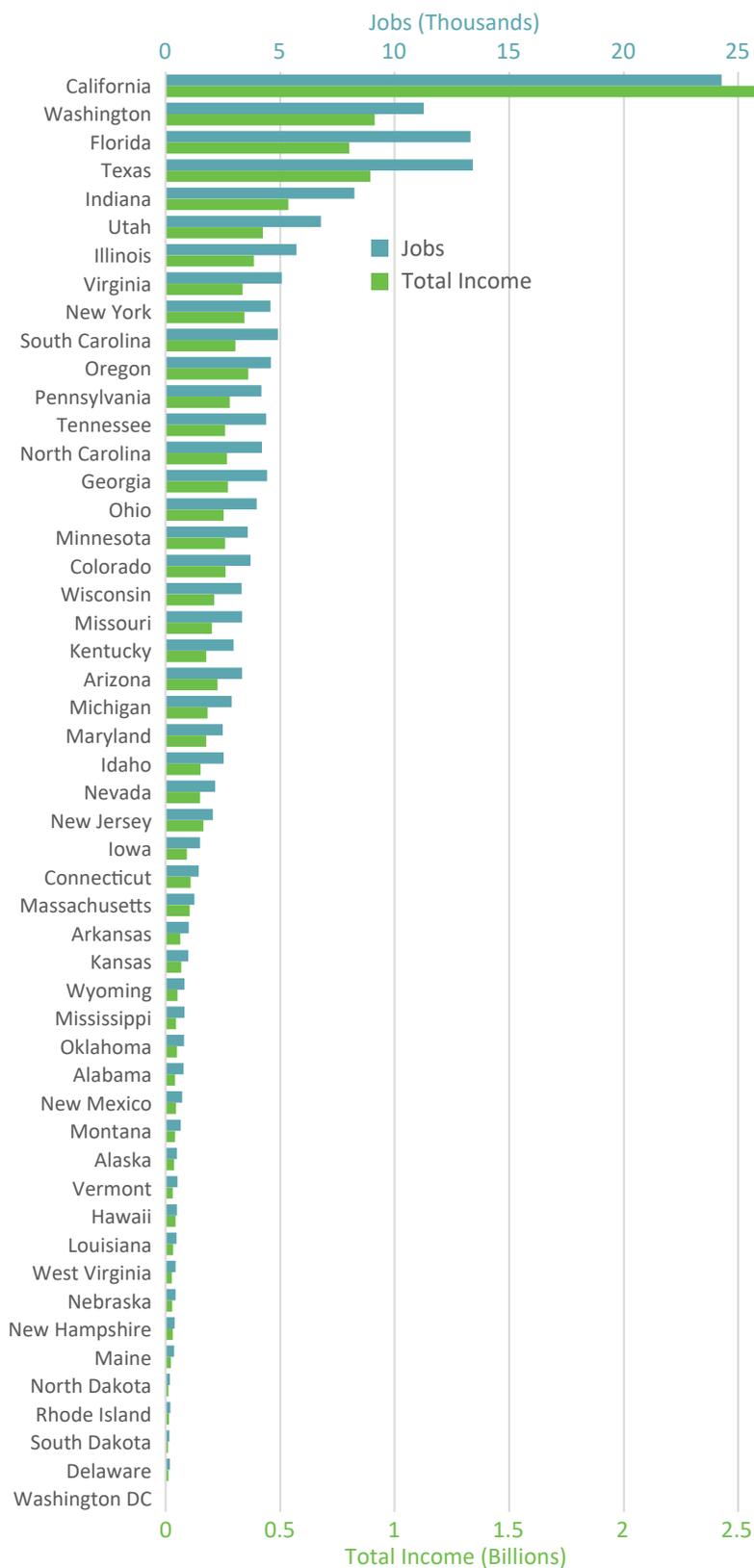
The number of unfilled openings in the health care sector doubled from the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2022.

Figure 1: Monthly Openings, Hires and Separations for the Health Care industry, 2012-2022



WGU nurses are found in all 50 states, with significant employment and income impacts in many of them.

Figure 2: Total Jobs and Income Associated with WGU Nursing Graduates, 2022



The Utah Foundation estimates that, among the 84,390 graduates since 2009, 79,181 are still active in the nursing industry. These nurses support an additional 91,713 jobs organized to meet the nursing supply chain and support the nurses’ lifestyles as they spend their income. (See the methodology in the appendix.) In terms of income, WGU nursing graduates will have earned an estimated \$6.7 billion in 2022, and their jobs and income are associated with an estimated \$5.6 billion in additional supporting jobs. (See a table of jobs and income by state in the appendix.) In total, WGU’s nursing program graduates are linked to 170,000 jobs and \$12 billion in personal income.

That economic activity varies across the nation. The six states with the most nursing graduates (California, Washington, Florida, Texas, Indiana and Utah) account for just over half of WGU’s nursing graduates during the past 13 years. The nursing graduates in these six states also account for 50% of the income earned by the graduates of WGU’s nursing program.

To be clear, this analysis does not say that all of the economic activity described in this brief report would not exist but for WGU. Without WGU as an option, many prospective nurses would have attended an alternative program. Further, even with fewer nurses available, Americans may have sought a similar level of medical care. However, this analysis does provide a sense of scale in looking at how WGU touches communities through its students.

WGU graduates occupy and support more than 170,000 jobs, yielding \$12 billion across the nation.

WGU nursing graduates make up 2.0% of all the registered nurses with an active license in the nation. Moreover, in 2021, WGU produced a whopping 17% of the nation’s registered nurses earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

WGU nursing graduates make up 2.0% of all the registered nurses with an active license in the nation. The share varies between 8.8% in Utah and 0.2% in the District of Columbia. Moreover, in 2021, WGU produced a whopping 17% of the nation’s registered nurses earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.³ This means that WGU is currently responsible for about 2% of the nation’s nursing economic impact, and WGU’s share of total impact is expected to increase quickly. Further, in terms of the economic impact when just looking at 2021 graduating nurses, WGU seems to be leading the nation by a large margin.

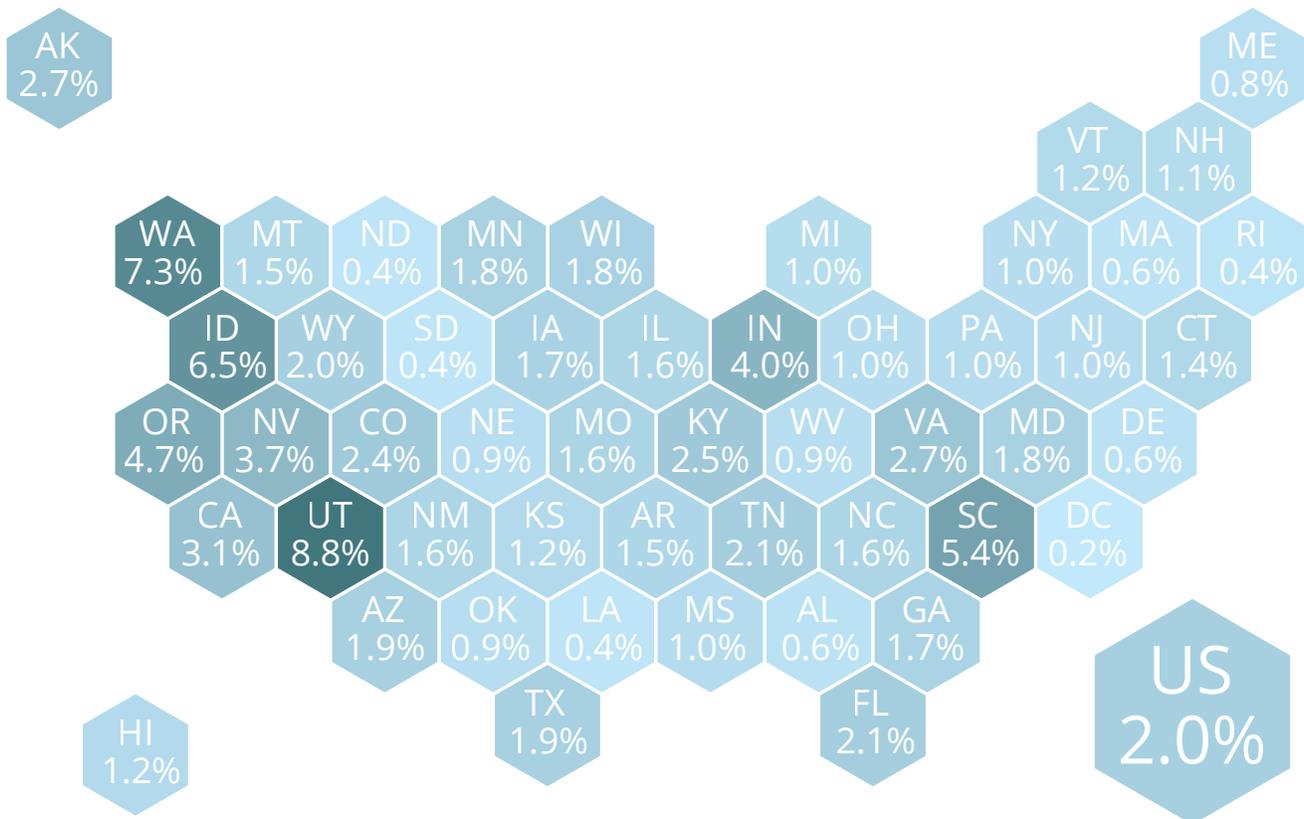
An appropriate level of nurses is essential to quality health care. Numerous studies over the past decade have linked lower levels of nurse staffing to higher levels of patient mortality,⁴ higher levels of hospital readmission,⁵

and higher levels of hospital-responsible infections,⁶ among other negative effects.

Not only do WGU nurses benefit their communities, but their degrees also provide individual benefits – especially to the extent that WGU trains individuals with limited means of completing college degrees through more traditional methods. Students with nursing bachelor’s degrees have access to in-demand jobs, and at substantially higher wages than those job seekers without degrees. In fact, registered nurses (who generally must have an associate or bachelor’s degree) earn more than twice as much as those in the industry without a degree (such as certified nursing assistants).⁷ Similarly, those with master’s degrees in nursing (nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and nurse anesthesiologists) earn 1.4 to 2.5 times as much as registered nurses.⁸

WGU nurses are found across the nation, but represent a larger share of the nurse population in the West.

Figure 3: WGU Nurses as a Share of Total Registered Nurses in Each State, 2022



APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

The Utah Foundation modeled its estimates using state-level data from WGU regarding its nursing graduates. Active graduates were estimated using national attrition rates from the 2008 and 2018 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses.⁹ National rates of full-time and part-time employment, hours of full-time and part-time employment, the likelihood of working a second job and the estimated additional income of that job, and the wage benefit of experience were taken from the same survey. State-level wage data were obtained through the Bureau of Labor Statistics for registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, nurse midwives, and nurse practitioners.¹⁰ Economic multipliers were obtained from the Bureau of Economic Analysis for hospitals, ambulatory health care services and nursing and residential care facilities.

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10. See Note 7.

Appendix Figure: Detailed State-by-State Findings, 2022

	Jobs			Income (millions)		
	Low	High	Average	Low	High	Average
California	23,006	25,558	24,282	\$2,312	\$2,848	\$2,580
Washington	10,705	11,827	11,266	829	995	912
Florida	12,725	13,888	13,307	733	871	802
Texas	12,832	13,980	13,406	815	974	895
Indiana	7,782	8,713	8,247	483	590	536
Utah	6,418	7,149	6,783	382	466	424
Illinois	5,489	5,921	5,705	354	417	386
Virginia	4,838	5,310	5,074	305	366	336
New York	4,383	4,780	4,581	313	375	344
South Carolina	4,655	5,169	4,912	276	332	304
Oregon	4,365	4,827	4,596	328	393	361
Pennsylvania	4,008	4,373	4,191	256	304	280
Tennessee	4,198	4,558	4,378	238	280	259
North Carolina	4,026	4,380	4,203	245	289	267
Georgia	4,215	4,642	4,429	248	297	273
Ohio	3,818	4,150	3,984	233	275	254
Minnesota	3,447	3,738	3,593	238	279	259
Colorado	3,531	3,903	3,717	238	286	262
Wisconsin	3,171	3,445	3,308	194	229	211
Missouri	3,175	3,480	3,328	185	219	202
Kentucky	2,824	3,104	2,964	162	192	177
Arizona	3,185	3,496	3,340	207	247	227
Michigan	2,758	2,998	2,878	168	198	183
Maryland	2,378	2,601	2,490	161	193	177
Idaho	2,402	2,658	2,530	138	168	153
Nevada	2,069	2,267	2,168	137	163	150
New Jersey	1,962	2,144	2,053	150	178	164
Iowa	1,442	1,572	1,507	86	101	93
Connecticut	1,383	1,503	1,443	99	117	108
Massachusetts	1,186	1,312	1,249	95	117	106
Arkansas	968	1,054	1,011	59	69	64
Kansas	950	1,033	991	62	73	67
Wyoming	782	849	816	47	55	51
Mississippi	784	858	821	41	49	45
Oklahoma	758	830	794	46	54	50
Alabama	752	812	782	37	45	41
New Mexico	682	748	715	41	49	45
Montana	633	698	665	38	45	42
Alaska	471	512	491	33	40	36
Vermont	504	540	522	28	33	31
Hawaii	463	514	489	39	47	43
Louisiana	460	502	481	29	35	32
West Virginia	423	457	440	25	29	27
Nebraska	420	458	439	26	30	28
New Hampshire	361	412	387	27	34	31
Maine	345	380	362	21	25	23
North Dakota	185	202	193	12	14	13
Rhode Island	189	210	200	14	17	15
South Dakota	164	182	173	10	12	11
Delaware	170	183	177	10	12	11
Washington DC	31	34	33	\$2	\$3	\$2

This report was commissioned by Western Governors University. Its principal author was Christopher Collard.