Tips for surviving a nurse practitioner program

What I wish I knew before applying to nurse practitioner school

When I started nurse practitioner school, I thought I was ready. I was a successful, accomplished emergency department nurse for five years. I had straight A's in school up to this point and I had seen and done things that most folks had not. Then school started and I realized very quickly how unprepared I was and how much work I needed to put in to be successful.

I honestly struggled that first semester. I couldn't get my bearings and I couldn't figure out the trick to being successful without putting in the work. There had always been a work-around, but not this time. The program and the school demanded that I knew the material down to a level I had never imagined possible. And let me tell you something -- falling behind in graduate school is not something you want to do. It will be a monkey on your back for the rest of your time in the program.

So I've gotten into a groove and I've been successful since that first semester, but here a few things that I wish I would have done or known about from the beginning.

Make friends and network with other students right from the beginning. Whether you're in an online or on campus program, engage your fellow classmates because you're going to need them.

Invest in calendars. It doesn't matter what kind they are -- online calendars, mobile calendars, free calendars from church, or printable calendars with unicorns on them -- save them all, because you're going need them. You will find that the more ways you can list and schedule your time the better off you'll be. Do not trust your memory for a second, it will betray you.

Become comfortable using cloud-based storage programs. Cloud-based technology is great. You can compile study notes and save them to the cloud. They will follow you everywhere. You won't need to worry about flash drives anymore. Google offers free online word processing software that you can use anywhere.
**Budget your time.** No matter what type of NP program you're enrolled in, you are going to sacrifice time with your family. All of your time will be devoted to school. It sucks, you will hate it, but you will get through it. No matter what else is going on in my day, I make time to have dinner with my family every night. It might be the only time I get to spend with them, but I make it count.

**Think through your financial situation.** I have worked full-time so far during the program, but I have realized that I won't be able to keep it up. I'll have to take out extra student loans to cover the difference. My family and I planned for this and hoped we could avoid it, but alas, it is better for my sanity and my grade point average. NP school is a lot of money, and while the thought of borrowing so much can be daunting, it may be necessary.

**Get your clinical rotation hours in early.** When it comes time to start your clinical rotations, try to get your hours in earlier rather than later. I call it “front-loading” my hours. My advisor warns against it, but you never know when something is going to come up that will take time away from clinicals. Plus, I like the idea of being free of clinical rotations when all of the end-of-semester projects and finals are due.

I hope this advice helps. This list is by no means all-inclusive, but just some of the most important things that stick out in my sleep-deprived and overloaded memory.

*Sean P. L’Huillier, BSN, RN, CEN,* is an emergency department nurse currently enrolled in Georgetown University's School of Nursing and Health Sciences Family Nurse Practitioner Program.
Good morning, Ms. Orten,

I am very pleased to learn that Binghamton University's graduate nursing program wishes to distribute content from Clinical Advisor during your upcoming new student orientation. Our content is created with the intention that it be freely disseminated among our audience of nurse practitioners and what better way to reach them than in an educational environment!

Please feel free to reproduce our content for use at your institution. Please also share with your students that their feedback and contributions are always welcome.

All the best,

Kathleen Walsh Tulley
Editorial Director
Haymarket Media
O: 646-576-4912
C: 917-287-6282

This e-mail and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error please notify the sender by replying to this e-mail.

www.haymarket.com

Haymarket Media, Inc., 114 W. 26th Street, New York, NY 10001