

LEAP

LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT + ADVOCACY PARTNERSHIP

Understanding the Proposed Reclassification of Advanced Nursing Degrees

For more than 50 years, The W has earned a national reputation for excellence in nursing education. That reputation wasn't built overnight. It grew out of rigorous programs, exceptional faculty, and graduates whose performance consistently exceeds national averages. Our nurses lead with competence, clarity, and compassion — qualities that define professional preparation at its highest level.

That is why the U.S. Department of Education's proposal to reclassify advanced nursing degrees as "non-professional" raises real concerns. On paper, it may look like a bureaucratic adjustment. In practice, **it sends the wrong signal about a field that anchors healthcare in Mississippi** and across the country.

The MSN, DNP, and Nurse Practitioner programs at The W rank among the most respected graduate programs in the nation. Reclassifying these degrees as something other than "professional" diminishes not only the value of the programs themselves but also the work of thousands of nurses who provide primary care, manage complex patient needs, and lead clinical teams every day. At a time when the healthcare workforce is stretched thin, this is not the moment to blur the public's understanding of what advanced nursing requires.

For our students, the financial impact is likely to be limited. As Dr. Brandy Larmon, Dean of the Vandergriff College of Nursing & Health Sciences, notes, most of our graduate students are already working nurses who balance careers, families, and advanced study with remarkable dedication. Many rely on employer support or modest borrowing to continue their education. A change in loan caps won't stop them from moving forward.

But the broader message matters. Mississippi depends on advanced-practice nurses in ways many other states do not. In rural counties, they are often the first — and sometimes the only — providers available. Classifying their degrees as "non-professional" undercuts the seriousness of

the responsibility they carry. It also risks discouraging advancement in a field led overwhelmingly by women at a moment when the country urgently needs more highly educated nurses, not fewer.

The W's commitment hasn't changed. Graduate nursing education is professional education — demanding, essential, and central to the well-being of our communities. Our programs have earned national recognition not because we chase rankings, but because our graduates prove their training in clinics, hospitals, and communities across Mississippi and beyond.

This proposal isn't just about classification. It's about respect. It's about the profession that holds the lives of others in its hands every single day.

The W will continue to advocate for clarity, fairness, and policies that strengthen — not weaken — the pathways that prepare advanced-practice nurses. And we will continue to stand with our students, faculty, and healthcare partners to ensure that these degrees retain the recognition, support, and respect they have earned over the past half-century.

Be a Voice for The W!

The W moves forward because its people do. And that includes you. Your voice carries weight — with legislators, community leaders, alumni, and agencies that depend on accurate information. When you speak up, share updates, or correct misunderstandings, you strengthen The W's position.

Here's how you can take action right now:

- Share this newsletter with another alum or friend of The W.
- Reach out when an alert is issued.
- Tell your local legislators why The W matters to you and to Mississippi.
- Stay connected with the Development & Alumni team.

If you're ready to get involved, even in a small way, contact us at developmentandalumni@muw.edu.