University of South Alabama, College of Nursing
Clinical Nurse Specialist Option, Frequently Asked Questions

What is a clinical nurse specialist?

Clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) are advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) who ensure high quality nursing care that is evidence-based and promotes patient safety, while improving patient outcomes and lowering health care costs. They plan this important role across a variety of specialties based on patient population, setting, condition or type of care.

Is the entire program online or do I have to come to campus for some classes?

Classes are online.

What type clinical preceptors and clinical sites do I need and how many clinical hours do I need?

Clinical preceptors can be CNSs. Clinical sites may include acute or critical care settings with some hours in the emergent or urgent care setting as well. Every CNS student must have a minimum of 500 clinical hours with a CNS.

Can I complete clinical hours where I live and who arranges clinical sites?

The majority of CNS students complete clinical hours in their home communities or within driving distance of their home communities. Students in remote areas have sometimes had to travel outside their communities to find clinical sites. Students are responsible for finding appropriate clinical sites. If a student cannot locate a clinical site in their home area, faculty is often able to provide names of nearby sites that have been used by previous CNS students.

Our Standard Response:
Specialty tracks within the College of Nursing’s graduate program require a practice component. Although faculty assists students in locating appropriate practice/clinical sites, it is ultimately the student’s responsibility to secure a site and preceptor if indicated. Students who are unsuccessful in being accepted by an agency in their home community may have to travel to another area to complete practice requirements or withdraw from the program. Please review the list of clinical affiliations http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/con/students/clinicalagencies.html. If there is not a clinical site listed near you or you are interested in a site not listed, negotiations should be initiated as soon as you begin the program through the Specialty Option Coordinator for your specialty.

Can I complete clinical hours in the hospital or nursing home or home health agency where I work for pay?
All clinical hours for the CNS track are completed in acute care settings. The hours may be completed in a facility in which the student works, but clinical time cannot be counted as paid working time.

I see names of clinical affiliation sites for:  
http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/con/students/clinicalagencies.html  
but none of the sites are near me. What does this mean?

The affiliation list on the webpage is simply a list of clinical agencies with which USA has a long term affiliation agreement. Some CNS students use clinical sites that are not on the website list. The contract process is just a little different for sites that are not on the list and will be explained by faculty after students are enrolled in a clinical course.

Can I work full time and do well in the CNS program?

CNS students must learn to provide this high level care for both genders and patients across the lifespan so a great deal of planned study time is necessary to do well in the program. Many CNS students work full time while they are taking core and support courses. Once enrolled in the clinical courses, many students find it necessary to cut back to part time work.

Is there a “state board” test for CNSs?

Rules and regulations for practicing CNSs are determined by state boards of nursing so they vary, somewhat, from state to state, but most states require that all CNSs pass one of two national certification examinations. USA CNS graduates are eligible to take the Adult-Geron CNS certification exam through both the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) and the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN).