

Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Program Survival Guide

Congratulations on your acceptance to the University of Kansas Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Program! You've earned this; it takes an incredible amount of time, effort, and hard work to make it into this program. This survival guide provides an overview of the program and helpful nuggets of advice from my own tenure as an SRNA. Every student survives CRNA school in their own way, so take all my advice with a grain of salt. What worked for me may not work for you, and that's okay. I recommend connecting with current students in the program whenever you have the opportunity. Each student has a unique perspective on how they've maximized their time in the program and can share their own tips and tricks. You've got this!

Program Structure

First Year (Mostly didactic; the hardest year)

- Summer: two demanding courses
- Fall: four courses + "active shadowing" 8 hours/week in the OR
- Spring: four courses + two 8-hour OR shifts weekly (more responsibility and prep work)

Second Year:

- Online courses
- Three 12-hour OR shifts weekly
- Increasing autonomy and independence
- Sometimes alone in the OR supervised by an anesthesiologist

Third Year:

- Online courses
- Nearly full autonomy in the OR; treated like staff
- Out-of-town monthlong rotations

Preparation Before Day One

Before your first day of the program, ensure you're prepared and ready to learn. One surprising item is missing from this list: studying. I'm all for going the extra mile, but this is one step that will only result in wasting precious free time before you begin this program. Trust the process; between the didactic courses and extensive OR time, you will graduate as a highly competent CRNA.

1. Academic Preparation

- a. You'll enroll in classes a month before the first summer semester starts. You'll get an email from the school about when and how to enroll, and at that point you can download the Office applications for free through KUMC's website. It's not an intuitive process, so call IT support and they'll walk you through the process if necessary.
- b. I highly recommend learning to take notes on your computer rather than by hand. Many professors move quickly, and handwritten notes become impossible.

- c. Download OneNote or another note-taking application and learn how to use it *before* the first day. You'll need to be prepared to keep your notes organized.
- d. Sync your class's calendar (link available on the school website) with your personal Google calendar. If you have trouble, call the office and ask them to walk you through the process. The program administrators will put all classes and other activities on this calendar, and the schedule frequently changes, so it's the best way to stay organized.
- e. Create a dedicated study space for yourself at home if you have available space. Keep it quiet, clean, organized, and full of any supplies you might need, like a white board and computer charger. A home printer is very useful for printing anesthesia care plans prior to a clinical day, though you also have access to free printing at the library
- f. Read up on learning and studying techniques. My favorite is *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* by Peter Brown. It's remarkably helpful to learn the most effective, research-based methods of studying that you can utilize during this program. Unlearning bad habits is key to didactic success in this program. Just because you've always studied a certain way doesn't mean it's the best way to study.
- g. Be mentally prepared for speed, rigor, and a heavy workload. This program moves very quickly; it feels like trying to take a drink from a fire hose. It's easy to get bogged down and feel like there's too much content to reasonably learn it all. The workload is especially intimidating because the content you learn in class needs to live in your brain long term so you can provide safe patient care in the OR and pass your boards. You need to maximize the productivity of your study time. Be brutally honest with yourself after a study session - were you focused? Did you retain the material you were studying? If not, why not? Tinker with your routine as you go. You don't have extra time to waste on ineffective studying. Self-awareness is key here.

2. Prepare financially – do not skip this one!

- a. Make a concrete financial plan for three years of lost income and tuition payments. Include your spouse or anyone else you share finances with in this decision.
- b. Meet with a financial advisor. It's helpful to have an expert set of eyes take an objective look at your financial situation and give you guidance.
- c. Save as much as you can before school starts to alleviate the financial stress of graduate school. My savings from overtime shifts as a nurse saved us during the first six months of this program as my husband and I adjusted to a one-income life.

3. Prepare emotionally

- a. Make sure that you and your loved ones understand the magnitude of this profoundly difficult program that you're about to start. I often tell people who

ask about school that it's the best *and* hardest thing I've ever done. Make sure you've processed and prepared for this commitment.

- b.** Take regular stock of how you and your loved ones are coping once the program is underway. KUMC has an excellent free counseling department, and there is no shame in seeing a counselor. They work only with KUMC students, so they are remarkably in tune with the struggles of graduate school. They also provide free couples counseling, which can be helpful even if you're not having specific issues but want an outlet to discuss the strain of completing such a difficult program.
- c.** Even though this program is incredibly challenging, you do still need to make time for normal human activities. You still get to participate in life outside of school, like cooking dinner and enjoying happy hour. You do, however, have to be very organized to plan for events that take more than a few hours away from studying. Look at your calendar a month ahead so you're not blindsided by two exams and a paper due the week after an out-of-town wedding.
- d.** Consider your life priorities and the order in which you list them. This self awareness helps when you feel overwhelmed by your to-do list between school deliverables and personal commitments. You never want to get an A in a class because you got an F in your marriage. Hold on to those parts of your life that are non-negotiable – your partner or children, quality time with family or friends. That's the stuff that keeps you sane.

This program will challenge you in unexpected ways, but it will also transform you from an ICU nurse into a confident, capable CRNA. Lean on your classmates, stay organized, and give yourself grace on the hard days. You're ready for this.