

ICUF Labor Gap Analysis

The Economic Value of Florida's Independent Colleges and Universities

Regional Economic Consulting Group

Prepared on behalf of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF)



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Executive Summary

Florida's Independent Colleges and Universities (ICUF) play a critical role in closing the state's labor gaps, particularly in high-demand sectors like healthcare, business, management, and law. This report, produced by the Regional Economic Consulting Group (REC Group) on behalf of ICUF, analyzes how ICUF graduates become skilled workers who fill open positions across Florida's economy.

Using a microsimulation model built on federal education and labor market data, REC Group tracked graduates' paths from their degree programs to available job openings. The simulation accounts for real-world dynamics, including out-of-state migration of graduates ("brain drain") and the influx of workers relocating to Florida from other states, to produce a realistic picture of the statewide labor market.

In 2025, ICUF institutions produced approximately 35,653 graduates, ranging from associate degrees to doctoral degrees. After accounting for in-migration of out-of-state workers and out-migration of graduates, the remaining graduates enter a labor market with over 393,000 job openings. ICUF graduates claimed roughly 33,668 of those openings, representing a meaningful share of Florida's workforce pipeline.

The report's most striking findings concern the sectors where ICUF's absence would be most damaging. In healthcare, removing ICUF graduates would widen the labor gap by 83%, increasing the number of unfilled positions from 6,595 to 12,059. In legal occupations, the gap would nearly triple (a 193% increase), rising from 1,008 to 2,957 open positions.

ICUF graduates also demonstrate strong labor market competitiveness. With a mean choice index of 8.0, meaning graduates require an average of eight application iterations before landing a job, ICUF outperforms the Florida College System (21.3) and performs comparably to the State University System (8.2). Doctoral graduates are the easiest to place, while associate-level graduates face the most competitive job market. Programs in legal studies, agricultural, and engineering technologies produce the most efficiently placed graduates.

Salary outcomes reflect the value of ICUF's degree offerings. ICUF doctoral graduates secure positions paying an average of 88% of the maximum attainable salary in their field. ICUF also leads all institutional groups in median salary for legal professions (\$152,333), engineering technologies (\$86,834), and mathematics and statistics (\$83,496).

ICUF institutions are the tip of the spear in Florida's workforce development. Their targeted career-aligned degree programs, particularly in healthcare, law, business, and technology, fill critical gaps that would otherwise strain Florida's economy. This analysis underscores the importance of continued investment in ICUF programs that directly align with Florida's highest-demand, highest-wage industries.

Introduction

ICUF institutions directly address labor market gaps by investing in degrees that translate into jobs. Universities and colleges offer many degrees, but not all degrees lead to jobs available in the market. To fully grasp the extent to which ICUF institutions fill labor gaps in Florida, ICUF has contracted the Regional Economic Consulting Group to investigate job openings in the state and how degrees from ICUF institutions address those shortages.

To analyze how ICUF institutions affect labor shortages, the labor market is divided into three components: labor supply, labor demand, and the labor gap. University graduates represent the supply of workers. Job openings represent the workforce demand in the labor market. A simulation using the US Department of Education Degree to Job Crosswalks measures the labor gap by linking each graduate's degree to their corresponding job options. The simulation is probabilistic; graduates with the highest degree attainment take turns choosing the highest-paying job that is still open and compatible with their degree field, until all jobs are filled. The simulation does not take into account the student's previous work experience or academic rankings, including whether the student graduated with honors. The simulation focuses on the degrees obtained and their level.

The simulation enables the REC Group to help assess the value of degrees offered at ICUF institutions by analyzing which industries are growing fastest, pay the highest wages, and have the greatest worker demand. The analysis allows institutions to align degrees with the highest-paid jobs experiencing shortages, understand which degrees face the most competitive job markets, and which job markets are oversaturated and unable to absorb all incoming graduates. ICUF universities, their top degree programs, and the key sectors their students enter highlight them as the tip of the spear in Florida's economic development.

Objectives

This study's main objective is to analyze the jobs and industries into which graduates of ICUF institutions enter, and to assess whether those jobs help close Florida's labor gap. It is necessary to analyze graduation statistics from ICUF institutions, job openings, and current labor market forecasts to determine the extent of openings and which industries and occupations are most affected.

Assumptions & Methodology

ICUF institutions supply workers to the labor market, filling critical employment gaps in Florida by offering degrees aligned with Florida's largest industries experiencing labor shortages. To understand how ICUF graduates fill and impact the labor gap, a Labor Gap Model microsimulation forecasts job openings by industry and assigns graduates from each Florida school system to available jobs. The Labor Gap Model is an individual-level simulation in which each graduate (job seeker) acts as an independent agent navigating the labor market. Workers make decisions based on their education, expected income, and experience level until they are matched with a job or forced into an alternative pathway.

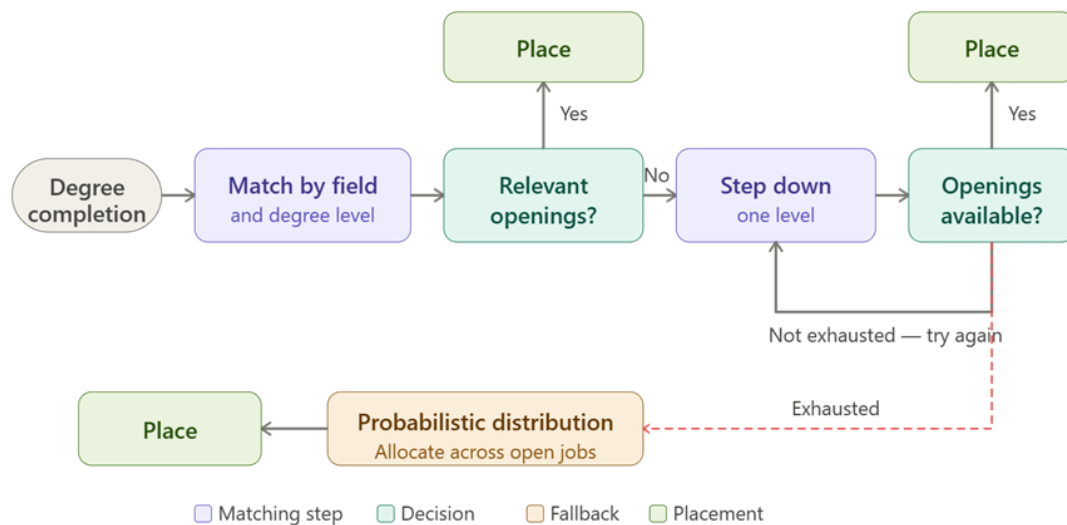
Microsimulations are used to analyze the supply to and demand for job openings in the Florida economy. ICUF institution graduates supply workers across industries in Florida's labor market. To track how students move from degree completion to careers, a Labor Market Model simulation maps degrees to occupations using the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)–Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) crosswalk, a joint effort of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This matches degrees to potential jobs.¹

The model uses the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to identify the primary industries to which all occupational employment in the United States is assigned.² Because this is a many-to-many relationship, with several occupations working in multiple NAICS, many degrees can lead to many job options, or a single degree can lead to several career paths. By using the available SOC's as a map showing how degrees feed into different industries, and by limiting the analysis to industries ICUF graduates can enter, the model shows how ICUF institutions contribute to employment in the state and forecasts the share of employment and overall projected employment growth in Florida.

A simulated population of new job seekers entering the Florida labor market is tracked by integrating federal data (IPEDS) with demographic surveys (ACS) while correcting for known flaws in those datasets. Within this microsimulation, as students graduate and fill job openings, employees seek the highest salaries, and employers hire the most educated candidates. This leads to crowding out students with lower levels of education or in more concentrated industries.

¹ [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

² [North American Industry Classification System \(NAICS\) U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Figure 1: Labor Market Simulation Flow Chart

For instance, a paralegal with an associate's degree may want to work at a law firm upon entering the workforce. However, associate degree holders will be pushed out of their preferred jobs when higher-degree holders, such as bachelor's degree paralegals, enter the workforce and compete for the same positions. In general, the lower the degree level, the more applications a graduate typically needs to send. However, there are specialized industries that flow directly into the labor force, including specialized certificates, specific medical schools, and theological degrees. The microsimulation helps determine the supply of workers entering the labor force, the number of available job openings, and ultimately enables a value on the degrees and economic impact of ICUF institutions.

The analysis does not consider students' prior work experience, academic standing, or honors status. It focuses solely on the degrees earned and their level.

Results, Findings, and Analysis

A foundation of the labor supply relies on the 2024 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) completion data, drawn from all registered Florida institutions.³ In addition to ICUF, other Florida institutional groupings include the Florida College System (FCS), the State University System of Florida (SUS), and other Florida universities not in these groups (OTHER).^{4,5} Table 1 shows the total graduates by degree level in 2025. ICUF institutions awarded 3,859 associate degrees, 14,372 bachelor's degrees, 13,096 master's degrees, and 4,326 doctoral degrees.

Table 1: Total Graduates by Institution

Degree Level	FCS	ICUF	Other	SUS	Total
Associate's	59,160	3,859	15,833	2,400	81,252
Bachelor's	8,781	14,372	9,925	64,463	97,541
Master's	—	13,096	4,968	25,322	43,386
Doctorate	—	4,326	187	5,356	9,869
Total	67,941	35,653	30,913	97,541	232,048

Before matching graduates to jobs in Florida, there are a few caveats to consider in the Labor Gap Model. Florida is a high-growth, high-migration state. When a new Financial Analyst position opens in Tampa, it isn't just competing with local university graduates; it can also be filled by an experienced professional relocating from New York, California, or another state. The model does not assume all open jobs are available to local students. It features an "In-Migration Penalty" calculation that physically removes jobs from the board if they are statistically likely to be taken by out-of-state movers.

Similarly, the model must account for the fact that some graduates will immediately leave the state after receiving their degrees, a phenomenon known as "Brain Drain." Different majors leave the state at different rates. The model evaluates each student and rolls a random probability against the historical out-migration rate for their demographic. By physically removing out-migrants before the simulation begins, we prevent the model from artificially filling jobs in Florida with students who have already moved to Atlanta, New York, or other states. Table 2 shows degree-level patterns of out-migration, broken down by institution type.

³ [IPEDS](#)

⁴ [Florida College System](#)

⁵ [State University System of Florida](#)

Table 2: Out-Migration of Graduates by Institution Grouping

Degree Level	FCS	ICUF	Other	SUS	Total
Associate's	1,699	96	424	58	2,277
Bachelor's	351	1,022	746	4,733	6,852
Master's	—	748	260	1,565	2,573
Doctorate	—	119	2	198	319
Total	2,050	1,985	1,432	6,554	12,021

ICUF institutions prepare competitive workers for the labor market by offering a diverse range of degrees tailored to Florida's growing industries and job market. ICUF degrees offer a path to employment with more focused degrees in healthcare, law, and business, rather than general degrees not linked to specific occupations. As students graduate and enter the workforce, industries with open positions after the simulation indicate a labor gap. Extracting ICUF graduates from the simulation shows which industries would be most affected if ICUF institutions were unable to educate Floridians.

ICUF institutions have the greatest impact on the labor markets for legal, healthcare practitioner, technical, and management occupations. Without ICUF, the legal occupations' labor gap grows from 1,008 open positions to 2,957, representing a 193% increase. Table 3 shows job openings claimed by ICUF graduates.

Table 3: Job Openings Claimed by ICUF Graduates

Job Area	Job Openings	Modeled Claims	ICUF Claims	Unfilled Openings	Unfilled w/o ICUF	ICUF Effect
Business and Financial Operations	27,536	18,165	3,672	9,371	13,043	39.2%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	29,608	23,013	5,464	6,595	12,059	82.9%
Management Occupations	27,445	22,603	5,338	4,842	10,180	110.2%
Computer and Mathematical	14,503	12,447	1,671	2,056	3,727	81.3%
Legal Occupations	5,160	4,152	1,949	1,008	2,957	193.4%
Total	393,660	220,027	33,668	173,633	207,301	19.4%

Source: [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#): Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey

The core of the simulation mirrors a real-world labor-market hierarchy: highly educated and experienced professionals secure specialized roles first. Not every graduate finds a job in their chosen field. Graduates face competition from more experienced workers and other graduates for equal opportunities to fill job openings in their specialty. Graduates

who do not immediately secure jobs in their field are forced to take the next-best job at a lower salary, move to a different area, or return to school.

Table 4 shows the average number of iterations or job applications required for the model to place graduates in jobs (lower values indicate better performance). The numbers indicate how many “job applications” a graduate must submit to land a job. Institutions and degree levels with lower mean choice indices may indicate that graduates enter the workforce more quickly due to high industry demand. The easiest graduates to place are doctors, and the hardest are associates.

Table 4: Mean Choice Index

Degree Level	FCS	ICUF	Other	SUS	MEAN
Associate's	22.9	16.7	15.6	24.9	21.2
Bachelor's	10.5	9.5	9.1	9.4	9.5
Master's	—	5.2	4.1	4.6	4.7
Doctorate	—	4.1	1.7	3.3	3.6
Mean	21.3	8.0	11.6	8.2	12.6

ICUF institutions offer specific degree programs that prepare students for in-demand, available jobs in the workforce. The programs with the best chance of landing a job and the fewest applications are legal professions and studies; engineering technologies/technicians, general; agricultural/animal/plant/veterinary science and related fields; communication technologies/technicians and support services; and architecture and related services.

Programs with the greatest difficulty placing students can indicate industries with high competition or those likely to require additional education. One of the degrees that requires the most applications is the liberal arts and sciences degree. Table 5 shows the high and low breakdown of the average choice index by degree and institutional groupings.

Table 5: Average Choice Index by Degree Program

Degree Level	FCS	ICUF	Other	SUS
Legal Professions and Studies	10.4	2.4	3.8	3.7
Engineering Technologies/Technicians, General	14.3	2.5	15.3	3.8
Health Professions and Related Programs	15.9	8.5	14.5	5.1
Communications Technologies & Support Services	4.0	4.0	4.0	—
Architecture and Related Services	3.6	3.7	—	3.7
Agricultural/Animal/Plant/Veterinary Science	7.9	3.0	3.9	3.1
Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies	24.8	20.9	19.6	20.9
Engineering	6.8	4.8	7.6	5.2
Homeland Security, Law Enforcement & Protective Services	3.7	3.8	4.2	4.7

An example of the Labor Market Simulation at work is with the ICUF nursing program. Nursing students graduate and enter the labor market, randomly placed in openings within the simulation. Students from each school have an equal opportunity to be placed in a job if their degree aligns with the available jobs in Florida. Note that no graduates with associate's degrees place higher than registered nurses, and no graduates with bachelor's degrees go beyond registered nurses. Graduates with a master's degree can become registered nurses and/or nurse practitioners. Graduates with doctorates can be medical and health services managers, nurse anesthetists, and physicians. Table 6 shows a breakdown of job openings claimed by ICUF nursing graduates.

Table 6: Job Openings Claimed by ICUF Nursing Graduates

Detailed SOC	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate	Total
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	163	—	—	—	163
Medical Assistants	2	—	—	—	2
Nursing Assistants	351	—	—	—	351
Registered Nurses	39	1,153	655	—	1,847
Nurse Practitioners	—	—	315	—	315
Pharmacists	—	—	10	—	10
Medical and Health Services Managers	—	—	—	211	211
Nurse Anesthetists	—	—	—	45	45
Physicians, All Other	—	—	—	1	1
All other jobs (non-medical)	132	—	—	20	152
Migrated	22	66	19	8	115
Total	709	1,219	999	285	3,212

As seen above with the nursing students, graduates cannot simply choose the highest-paying job. The model presents the student with a list of all historically valid job pipelines for their degree field, sorted by pay from highest to lowest. The model then checks if there is still open inventory for that occupation. If there is, the student claims the job, the inventory is reduced by one, and the next student begins their hunt. By forcing students to navigate historical probabilities, the model simulates the friction of the real-world job hunt.

Table 7 shows attained salary as a percentage of the highest possible salary, averaging across degree level and school group. The mean does not necessarily indicate that the salary is high; rather, it reflects that the salary is closer to the highest attainable within that degree-occupation pipeline.

Table 7: Mean Salary Attainment

Degree Level	FCS	ICUF	Other	SUS	Mean
Associate's	0.55	0.59	0.63	0.54	0.57
Bachelor's	0.66	0.62	0.66	0.61	0.62
Master's	—	0.62	0.62	0.66	0.64
Doctorate	—	0.88	0.89	0.89	0.88
Mean	0.57	0.65	0.64	0.64	0.62

Across all institutional groupings, mean salary attainment increases with degree level. This means that more education pays. ICUF associates found jobs paying 59% of the average maximum wage, and ICUF doctorates found jobs paying 88% of the average maximum wage. Other institutional groups achieve higher mean salaries for associate's degrees because these institutions specialize in degrees designed for direct employment, such as mechanical and repair technologies, engineering technologies/technicians, and construction trades. ICUF specializes in degrees such as engineering, legal occupations, business management, marketing, and related support services. Table 8 shows the median salary by degree and institutional grouping.

Table 8: Median Salary by Degree Program

Industry	FCS	ICUF	Other	SUS	Median
Engineering Technologies/Technicians, General	\$39,814	\$86,834	\$21,922	\$68,995	\$50,928
Business, Management, Marketing & Related Support	\$60,726	\$77,113	\$68,877	\$66,517	\$66,517
Legal Professions and Studies	\$33,976	\$152,333	\$152,333	\$152,333	\$152,333
Engineering	\$34,289	\$49,263	\$40,131	\$70,835	\$70,835
Education	\$29,290	\$54,852	\$31,416	\$49,485	\$49,485
Mathematics and Statistics	—	\$88,496	—	\$34,289	\$34,404
Computer and Information Sciences & Support Services	\$25,106	\$73,738	\$55,366	\$73,738	\$61,775
Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians	\$48,721	—	\$48,721	—	\$48,721
Construction Trades	\$116,936	—	—	—	\$116,936
Health Professions and Related Programs	\$28,815	\$63,024	\$30,843	\$63,024	\$43,499

Understanding which industries have the highest demand and salaries, and which degrees align with each job opening, helps institutions assess the value of the degrees they offer. This informs institutions on which degrees and programs to invest in and expand, based on which degrees will help workers get jobs with a quality salary.

Conclusion

The labor gap presents a significant challenge, particularly when the demand exceeds the supply. Florida's growing economy cannot operate at full or near-full capacity without a sufficient workforce in key industries. To remain competitive, both public institutions and ICUF must continue producing degrees that align with labor market needs. Recruiting talent from other states or abroad may offer short-term relief, but it does not solve Florida's long-term workforce needs.

Unfilled healthcare positions mean patients are without providers and can reduce productivity. Gaps in legal occupations leave individuals and businesses without needed counsel. Workforce shortages create downstream consequences that compound over time, making ICUF institutions an essential part of Florida's economic infrastructure.

ICUF institutions produce specialized graduates and can position investment decisions about which educational programs to grow, sustain, or develop in response to labor market competition.

The data presented here offers a foundation for those decisions. Continued research that tracks graduate outcomes over time, monitors labor gap trends by sector, and evaluates the return on investment of specific degree programs will only sharpen the case for strategic, evidence-based support of ICUF institutions as a cornerstone of Florida's long-term economic resilience.

Appendix: Case Study on Using the Labor Gap Model for Nursing in Florida

Introduction: Explaining the Labor Gap

A labor gap in nursing occurs when the economic demand for qualified nurses exceeds the available supply of both employed and willing-to-be-employed individuals. To better understand how this gap develops and expands, it's essential to examine both sides of the equation, demand and supply, and introduce a third factor: how these elements interact over time through job openings.

The total economic demand for nurses depends on three main factors: population size, age distribution, and the amount of healthcare services consumed per person at each age. As Florida's population increases, more nurses are needed just to maintain the current care ratios. However, this population growth alone does not fully capture the demand, as older residents tend to consume significantly more healthcare services than their younger counterparts. When these two factors, population growth and an aging population, collide, the demand for nursing care increases faster than population growth alone would suggest.

On the supply side, the available pool of nurses at any point in time reflects the sum of those currently employed, plus new graduates who remain in-state rather than migrating elsewhere, plus nurses arriving from other states or countries, minus those leaving through retirement or other exits.

$$\text{Supply of Nurses} = \text{Employed Nurses} + \text{New In-State Graduates} + \text{In-Migration Nurses} \\ - (\text{Retirements} + \text{Other Exits})$$

Each of these components moves independently, and when retirements and other exits outpace inflow into the workforce from graduation and migration, the supply base shrinks as demand continues to climb.

Openings are the mechanism through which the gap becomes visible. They accumulate from three sources: positions left unfilled from the prior period that were never successfully hired, newly created positions driven by rising demand, and positions vacated by retiring nurses that must be backfilled.

$$\text{Job Openings or "Employer Demand"} = \text{Unfilled Openings from the Prior Period} + \text{New Demand-Driven Openings} + \text{Retirements} + \text{Other Exits}$$

Employer needs, driven by staffing ratios, patient volumes, and regulatory requirements, set the floor for how many positions must be filled. Infrastructure capacity, such as the number of hospital beds, clinics, and long-term care facilities, determines the ceiling.

Openings are best understood as a stock measure of workforce need at a given point in time, not simply a flow of new jobs. Graduates and in-migration act as inflows that replenish this stock, while retirements and exits represent outflows that deplete it. Below represents a steady state of the market under ideal conditions:

$$\text{New In-State Graduates} + \text{In-Migration Nurses} = \text{Retirements} + \text{Other Exits}$$

When the inflow of new workers equals the outflow, the stock of job openings remains stable, and the market is in equilibrium. However, when the number of openings increases, it indicates that graduation and migration rates are not keeping pace with growing employment demand and the need to replace existing personnel. This results in outflows exceeding inflows, widening the gap between total economic demand and available supply. This is the current state of Florida's nursing market, the primary focus of this analysis.

Within this framework, the role of Florida's independent colleges and universities, ICUF, is not incidental but structural. ICUF institutions are a primary engine of in-state nurse production, generating a significant share of the graduates who choose to remain in Florida and enter the workforce each year, representing a direct and reliable source of supply-side replenishment for the state.

The importance of this contribution becomes clear when openings are examined over the forecast period. After accounting for in-migration and certified, qualified workers, Florida is projected to sustain between 18,000 and 19,000 nursing openings each year through 2032, growing at approximately 1.2% annually, in line with the broader employment forecast produced by REC Group and similarly matching the Florida Department of Commerce's employment outlook for nursing.

Holding that level of openings stable, preventing it from growing faster than employer demand alone would dictate, requires that inflows from graduation keep pace with retirement each year. ICUF placements are a critical part of that balance. When they are present, the annual gap between openings and available supply remains contained. When they are removed from the equation, the unfilled gap compounds rapidly, adding thousands of positions per year that neither migration nor other graduate pipelines can absorb. By 2032, the difference between a market with ICUF placements and one without will amount to approximately 17,000 cumulative unfilled positions.

Nursing Openings in Florida

The figures in Table 1 show the percentage of annual nurse job openings that remain after accounting for in-state migration and certificate-level placements. This data represents employer demand alone, highlighting available job openings as the primary, most controllable factor driving the new workforce supply.

Over the five-year forecast period, Florida is projected to sustain between 18,000 and 19,000 openings per year that require graduate-level placement. This is not a spike driven by a single demographic event or policy change, but rather a persistent structural baseline that reflects the ongoing interplay among population growth, an aging patient base, and the steady retirement of experienced nurses.

Registered nurses account for more than half of total employer needs across the forecast period, reflecting both their clinical centrality and the breadth of settings in which they practice. The second largest category of need comes from nursing assistants, whose demand is rising sharply as long-term and home-based care expands to serve Florida's growing elderly population.⁶

These job openings are not static. In line with the broader employment forecast, the total number of openings is expected to grow at an average rate of about 1.2% per year, a modest but compounding increase. If these annual openings go unfilled, even a small percentage contributes to the structural shortage that characterizes Florida's long-term nursing gap between supply and economic demand. While these openings reflect employer demand, unfilled positions also affect the overall economic demand for healthcare services within the population.

Table 1: Nursing Occupation Openings Forecast, Florida 2027–2032

Occupation	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	2,128	2,158	2,178	2,206	2,234	2,262
Nurse Anesthetists	157	158	159	161	163	165
Nurse Midwives	23	24	24	24	24	24
Nurse Practitioners	930	942	949	960	972	983
Nursing Assistants	4,614	4,676	4,714	4,773	4,832	4,891
Nursing Instructors and Teachers, Postsecondary	46	47	47	48	49	50
Registered Nurses	10,606	10,753	10,847	10,986	11,124	11,264
Grand Total	18,503	18,757	18,918	19,159	19,398	19,638

Source: [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#): Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey

Graduate Impact on the Nursing Openings

As shown in Table 2, Florida's nursing graduates fill approximately 93.4% of the openings remaining after accounting for in-state migration and certificate-level placements. This is a meaningful fill rate, but it is incomplete, and the shortfall remains nontrivial. Over the

⁶ [Florida PACE Providers Association](#)

course of the forecast period, the number of positions left unfilled by graduates ranges from 1,221 in 2027 to 2,357 by 2032.

Florida's universities maintain a consistent and reliable pipeline. The filled position figures are flat across every year of the forecast precisely because they reflect a stable, predictable rate of production rather than a volatile or declining one.

The consequence of that steady state production, however, is that it cannot by itself close a gap driven by growth. The roughly 6 to 12 percent of openings that go unfilled each year do not simply disappear. Some portion of those positions carries forward into the following year, adding to the stock of unmet employer demand and compounding alongside the new openings generated by population growth, an aging patient base, and ongoing retirements. It is this carry-forward dynamic, unfilled positions accumulating year over year on top of rising new demand, that drives the widening gap visible throughout the forecast period.

Table 2: Total Filled Nursing Positions by Occupation, Florida 2027–2032

Occupation	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	Share
Registered Nurses	10,016	10,016	10,016	10,016	10,016	10,016	58.0%
Nursing Assistants	4,187	4,187	4,187	4,187	4,187	4,187	24.2%
Licensed Practical & Vocational Nurses	2,048	2,048	2,048	2,048	2,048	2,048	11.9%
Nurse Practitioners	881	881	881	881	881	881	5.1%
Nurse Anesthetists	149	149	149	149	149	149	0.9%
Nurse Midwives	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nursing Instructors & Teachers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grand Total	17,281	17,281	17,281	17,281	17,281	17,281	100%

ICUF's Impact on the Labor Gap

ICUF institutions are at a critical juncture in Florida's economy, serving as one of the state's primary sources of qualified nursing candidates. The scale and consistency of that contribution become most apparent not by examining what ICUF produces, but by asking what the market would look like in its absence.

Florida's nursing labor gap, the difference between the total economic demand for nursing services and the number of available nurses, widens each year due to two main factors: unfilled positions from the previous year and new demand driven by population growth and an aging demographic. These factors reinforce one another; as the gap becomes larger, it becomes increasingly difficult for any single initiative to address and close it.

Total economic demand reflects what the healthcare system ideally needs. In contrast, industry demand reflects what employers actually hire for and is limited by available

resources and capacity, such as hospital beds, clinics, and funding. Therefore, industry demand is always a subset of total economic demand and operates at a level below it.

When open positions exceed available workers each year, two things happen simultaneously:

1. The unfilled positions carry forward, adding directly to the existing gap.
2. Population growth and aging independently generate new demand on top of that carryover.

If the number of placements does not keep up with job openings, and this shortfall increases, the gap between them does not grow at a steady rate. Instead, it deepens more quickly each year because the deficit from each year becomes the starting point for the following year.

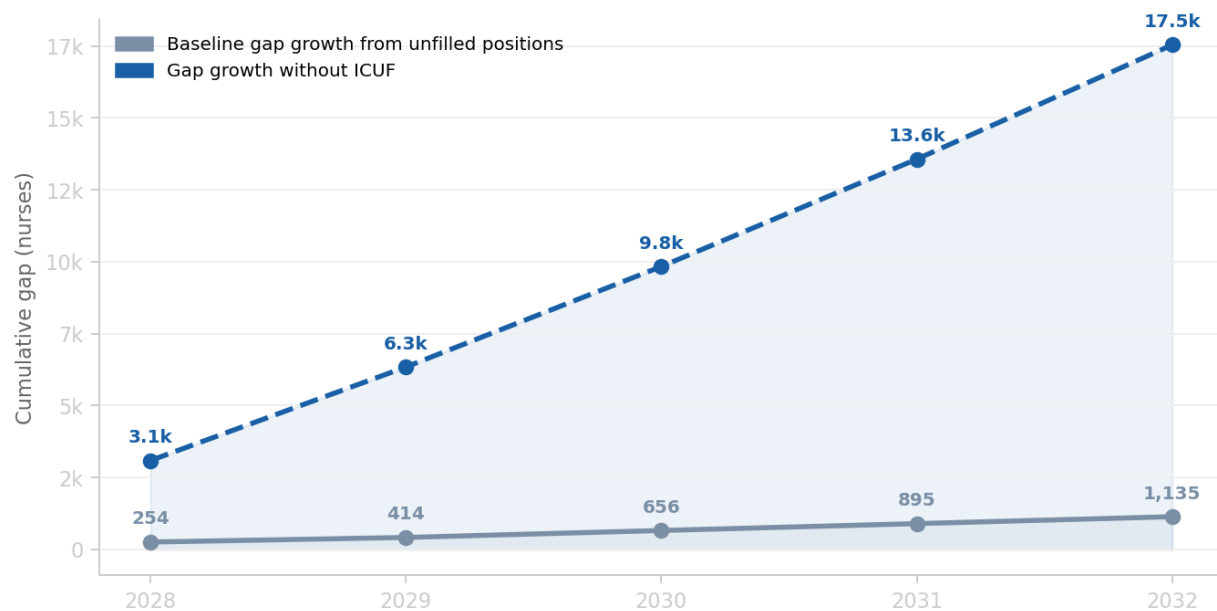
Figure 1 illustrates that effect by translating ICUF's annual placements into their direct impact on the nursing gap. A 2021 study by IHS Markit projects a statewide nursing shortage of 59,100 by 2035, and already accounts for current graduation rates, in-migration, and anticipated retirements.⁷ That baseline projection itself is a serious policy challenge.

The baseline gap growth begins at 254 positions in 2028 and rises to 1,135 by 2032. This figure is derived directly from the tables above: Table 1 shows 18,503 total openings in 2027, while Table 2 shows Florida's education institutions placing 17,281 nurses, leaving 1,222 positions unfilled. Not all those unfilled positions carry forward, however. The net change in openings in any given year reflects three offsetting forces: the share of prior-year openings that carry over, changes in the retirement rate, and growth in new openings driven by rising employer demand. The interaction of these forces produces a baseline annual change of only 254 positions in 2028, evidence that, with ICUF placements intact, Florida's nursing market for openings remains relatively stable from year to year.

ICUF's annual contribution of approximately 2,837 placements is one of the primary forces holding that dynamic in check. Remove it, and the carry-forward effect accelerates sharply. Without those placements, the model shows the unfilled gap climbing from 3,091 in 2028 to 17,539 by 2032, a compounding accumulation that no combination of in-migration or alternative graduate pipelines can readily absorb.

Applied to the IHS Markit projection, the 59,100-shortage forecast for 2035 assumes ICUF's contribution remains in place. Without it, that figure would grow by at least 17,500 positions, pushing the total projected shortage above 76,600 nurses by 2035. That is the full cost, in workforce terms, of losing ICUF's contribution to Florida's nursing pipeline.

⁷ [Florida Nurse Workforce Projections: 2019 to 2035](#)

Figure 1: Cumulative Gap Growth With and Without ICUF Placements, Florida 2028–2032

Metric	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Baseline gap growth	254	414	656	895	1,135
Gap growth without ICUF	3,091	6,342	9,835	13,567	17,539

Conclusion

Florida's nursing market is under persistent, compounding pressure. Demand is rising steadily, driven by a population that is both growing and aging faster than the national average. Retirements are accelerating as a large cohort of experienced nurses approaches the end of their careers. And the gap between the positions employers need filled and the qualified nurses available to fill them is widening, not dramatically in any single year, but consistently and cumulatively across the entire forecast horizon.

The analysis presented here makes clear that this is not a crisis arriving in the future. It is a structural condition already underway, measurable in the 1,222 unfilled positions recorded in 2027 and visible in the trajectory that carries that number to 2,357 by 2032. Left unaddressed, those annual shortfalls do not reset; they accumulate, compounding alongside new demand until the gap becomes difficult to close through any realistic combination of recruitment, migration, and accelerated graduation.

Within this landscape, ICUF institutions represent something the broader nursing workforce cannot easily replicate: a stable, predictable, in-state pipeline of qualified nursing graduates that replenishes the workforce year after year without reliance on interstate migration or other workforce programs. Their 2,837 annual placements are not a supplement to the system. Remove them, and the baseline shortage of 59,100 projected by IHS Markit for 2035 would grow to more than 76,600, a figure that would

strain Florida's healthcare infrastructure at precisely the moment when demographic pressure is growing.

The policy implication is straightforward. Investments in ICUF nursing programs are not discretionary spending on higher education. They are a direct intervention in one of Florida's most consequential labor markets, one where the cost of inaction compounds every year and the window for course correction narrows with each graduating class that goes unfunded, under-supported, or turned away.