Doctor of Nursing Practice Project Guidelines

WINONA
STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Graduate Nursing

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Introduction

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Project Guidelines outline the purpose, logistics, and requirements of student scholarly projects. They supplement but do not replace the Winona State University (WSU) Department of [Graduate Nursing Student Handbook](#). All policies and procedures outlined in the Graduate Nursing Student Handbook apply to the DNP Project.

The DNP Project is completed in a series of three courses (NURS 780, NURS 781, and NURS 782). In addition to the activities outlined in these DNP Project Guidelines, students must complete all required assignments and learning activities indicated in the outline, syllabus, and website for each course.

DNP Project Purpose and Overview

The WSU DNP program integrates content in planning, implementing, and evaluating practice change throughout the curriculum. By successfully completing the DNP Project, students demonstrate competency in this curricular content and fulfill the WSU requirement for all graduate degree programs to contain a capstone writing experience.

The DNP Project also showcases student mastery of *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education* (AACN, 2021):

I.	Knowledge for Nursing Practice
II.	Person-Centered Care
III.	Population Health
IV.	Scholarship for Nursing Practice
V.	Quality and Safety
VI.	Interprofessional Partnerships
VII.	Systems-Based Practice
VIII.	Informatics and Healthcare Technologies
IX.	Professionalism
X.	Personal, Professional and Leadership Development

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) (2021) explains that the DNP project is "a scholarly work that aims to improve clinical practice" and, "therefore, is required of students completing a practice doctorate in nursing" (p. 25).

Key components of the DNP Project include:
- Identifying a problem
- Searching, appraising, analyzing and synthesizing the literature and evidence
- Translating evidence to develop strategies to address the problem
- Designing and implementing a plan
- Evaluating the outcomes, process and/or experience
- Disseminating the DNP Project

Examples of DNP projects include, but are not limited to:
- Implementing and evaluating an evidence-based guideline or clinical practice change initiative.
- Implementing and evaluating a clinical protocol or guideline that reflects best practice.
- Designing and evaluating an evidence-based practice improvement in a clinical setting.
- Developing, implementing, and evaluating an evidence-based, health promotion and disease prevention program that is designed to benefit an at-risk or vulnerable community.
- Implementing a leadership model.
- Innovating a health policy.

These projects share the common goal of *applying evidence to improve patient outcomes through practice change*. The final product of the DNP Project will include a practice-oriented manuscript ready to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication and an oral presentation of the project.

Students are expected to complete the DNP Project as a paired group of two students. Students will identify potential partners before enrolling in NURS 780 with guidance from the faculty course coordinator and the Clinical Placement Coordinator. Partnership decisions should include consideration of workplace, geographic location, and whether the student is enrolled in specific programs, such as Mayo Clinic NPCEC. Individual projects may be allowed with consent from the DNP Project Advisor.

Student partners evaluate one another on elements of teamwork, collaboration and professionalism each semester. Students are encouraged to leverage their individual strengths in the preparation and conduct of the project. Each student is *equally responsible* for ALL phases and components of the project design, implementation, and evaluation. Students are encouraged to work together to set timelines, expectations, and strategies. Student disagreements, conflicts, or concerns should be handled at the student level. Course faculty can be consulted for assistance with problem-solving after team members have worked together.

DNP Project Team

The DNP Project team collaborates with and supports students as they design, implement and evaluate their DNP projects. The team includes:
- **DNP Project Advisor/Chair:** A doctorate-prepared Department of Graduate Nursing faculty member assigned to the student(s) by the DNP faculty who:
    - Works closely with students and mentor(s) to assist the student in achieving project objectives
    - Monitors student progress and evaluates clinical performance in coordination with the mentor
    - Communicates with the student and mentor via scheduled faculty site visits, conference calls, and/or written correspondence as needed

- **DNP Project Team Member**: A Department of Graduate Nursing faculty member with expertise in the clinical nursing phenomena of interest, the methodology used in the project, and/or other knowledge related to the DNP Project
- **DNP Project Mentor**: A member of the professional community who holds a position in at the DNP Project clinical site that allows them to facilitate DNP student access to organizational information, decision-makers, and other personnel in order to complete the development and implementation of the DNP Project within the organization

DNP Project Coursework

A series of three consecutive courses (NURS 780, NURS 781, NURS 782) provide the framework for completing the DNP Project. The key steps in the DNP Project and the respective courses where they are completed are outlined below.

STEP 1: Identification/Approval of DNP Project Area of Interest and DNP Project Team	NURS 780
STEP 2: Develop Written Proposal Template and Hold Proposal Presentation	NURS 780
STEP 3: Obtain IRB Approval	NURS 781
STEP 4: Implement the Project	NURS 781
STEP 5: Analyze Implementation Outcomes	NURS 781 and/or NURS 782
STEP 6: Write the Final Report	NURS 782
STEP 7: Oral Presentation and Submission Copies of Completed Project (Dissemination Meeting)	NURS 782
STEP 8: Disseminate the DNP Project	NURS 782

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) and related learning activities are outlined in the individual courses. Completion of the DNP Project is the major emphasis of the course series, but additional learning activities will be used to support project work and student development.

Registration and Clinical Progression

The DNP Project timeline is designed so that students complete their projects as they progress through the courses, NURS 780, NURS 781, and NURS 782. Please note that faculty are not required to work during breaks, scheduled holidays, or when the student is not registered for NURS 780, NURS 781, NURS 782, or NURS 798. Faculty and students may negotiate a timeline for work that is mutually agreeable.

Students must meet the deliverables of each course (e.g., proposal, implementation, dissemination) AND achieve a passing grade in the course before progressing to the next course. Students who are making adequate progress but have not completed all course requirements (e.g., need additional clinical hours, completion of proposal meeting), will enroll in NURS 789 for continuing enrollment. In special circumstances that are beyond the student's control, an In Progress (IP) grade may be permitted. Students who are not making adequate progress will fail the course. Students may repeat a failed course one time.

Clinical Site

DNP students work with the Course Coordinator(s) and Clinical Placement Coordinator to identify a clinical site that can provide the facilities and expert support for them to achieve the course student learning outcomes. The clinical site may be a hospital or long-term care facility, a health care system, an insurance company, a public health agency, a school/college of nursing, a research institute, a nonprofit agency, or other organization. WSU must have a clinical affiliation agreement with the clinical site, and students are responsible to complete all clinical agency requirements and onboarding before starting clinical. The Clinical Placement Coordinator serves as the primary point of contact for clinical site identification and placement. Each clinical partner has different requirements for student access for DNP Projects (e.g., deadline for request, selection of project, identification of mentor).

Clinical Requirements

Students may not begin clinical work (not including initial conversations with mentor, onboarding, etc.) on their project until they are in NURS 780, and the course is in progress. Students must comply with all clinical requirements outlined in the WSU Graduate Nursing Student Handbook. The WSU Clinical Placement Coordinator will communicate with the student regarding the clinical agency onboarding process and timelines.

Clinical Hours

A DNP degree requires a minimum of 1,000 hours of supervised clinical practice post-baccalaureate (AACN, 2006). NURS 780, NURS 781, and NURS 782 are clinical courses that provide a total of 360 clinical hours that contribute to the required 1,000 clinical hours. Each clinical course credit requires 60 clock hours of clinical time. Clinical experiences are designed to help students achieve specific competencies outlined in *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education* (AACN, 2021). Examples of activities that count as clinical hours are provided on the individual course websites.

Students will log clinical hours using the "Time Log" in *Typhon* each semester. Students must maintain updated time logs and are encouraged to record their hours when they are completed rather than entering them in bulk later. Students should include a concise summary of the clinical activity done in each time log entry using the "Notes" function. The DNP Mentor may be asked to verify clinical hours.

The DNP Proposal

The DNP Project Proposal is composed of a written proposal template and a proposal presentation. The DNP Project Proposal Template is divided into sections that students complete throughout their first semester. This process is described in more detail in the NURS 780 course website.

DNP Project Proposal Template Outline

The DNP Project Proposal Template includes the following content:

- **Introduction to the Problem**
  - Organization Introduction
  - Problem Background and Significance
  - Problem Summary
- **Literature Review and Synthesis**
  - Search Strategy (Including Clinical Question)
  - Literature Appraisal and Review
  - Literature Synthesis
- **Project Purpose, Objectives and Design**
  - Problem Statement
  - Project Objectives
  - Project Design
  - Project Setting
  - Project Participants
  - Purpose Statement
- **Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**
- **Implementation Plan**
  - Evidence-Based Practice Model
  - Implementation of Evidence-Based Practice Model
  - Evaluation
  - Project Timeline
  - Budget/Resources
  - Protections of Human Subjects
  - Organization Support and Readiness for Change
- **Data Management Plan**
  - Data Collection
  - Data Analysis
  - **Sustainability Plan**

DNP Project Proposal Presentations

The DNP Project Proposal Presentations are held on the final class dates of NURS 780 in front of classmates and faculty. During the DNP Project Proposal Presentation, the DNP student(s) will provide an oral presentation of the DNP Project Proposal as a group, with both partners presenting equally. The oral proposal presentation will contain the following sections:

- Introduction to the clinical problem/issue
- Description of the EBP or translation model that will guide the project
- Clinical practice setting/population description
- Summary of evidence-based recommendations
- Plan for implementation and evaluation of the proposed evidence-based intervention or practice change

Following the student presentation, faculty and classmates will ask clarifying questions, and/or give suggestions to enhance the proposal. Students are required to pass their proposal in addition to NURS 780 coursework to move forward with NURS 781 and their DNP Projects.

Human Subjects Considerations

The DNP student(s) is responsible for seeking guidance from their DNP Project Advisor regarding the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures for the DNP Project. Generally, WSU IRB approval is required if any human subjects are involved in any phase of the project, for example, conducting a patient/staff needs assessment, reviewing baseline patient/staff data, and/or evaluating patient/staff outcomes. In most cases, students are also required to submit their proposal to the IRB at the institution in which the project is being carried out. Students should work with their DNP Project Advisor and DNP Project Mentor to determine the appropriate steps. IRB approval is completed as part of the course, NURS 781.

DNP Project Manuscript

DNP students register for NURS 782 during the semester project completion is anticipated. The final step in the DNP Project is dissemination of results and learning from the project. This involves preparing a manuscript based on project findings that is suitable for publication and presenting those findings in a formal presentation, or meeting. The DNP student must receive a passing grade on both the manuscript and the meeting to pass NURS 782.

With input from the DNP Project Advisor, students select a potential journal and submit the author guidelines for that journal along with their completed manuscript to their DNP Project Advisor for review. The manuscript will be evaluated based on specified criteria reflecting DNP program outcomes as described in the course outline, syllabus and/or course materials (i.e., rubric, instructions).

DNP Project Dissemination Meeting

Following approval from the DNP Faculty Advisor, the DNP Project Dissemination meeting can be scheduled. The completed DNP Project is often of interest to other students, faculty and community members, and guests may be invited to attend the public portion of the Dissemination meeting. The student(s) works with the Department of Graduate Nursing Office Administrative Specialist to schedule the DNP Project Dissemination Meeting using the Meeting Scheduling Form located on the course website. The student must send the DNP Project manuscript and the selected journal author guidelines to all DNP Project team members for review at least 10 business days prior to the planned DNP Project Proposal meeting date.

Students provide a formal presentation of the completed project during the DNP Project Dissemination meeting. The overall purpose is to provide an opportunity for students, team members and guests to disseminate the knowledge and outcomes from the project. Students will also address the project's contribution to nursing practice knowledge and implications for the discipline and professional practice. Students will provide a plan for sustainability of the project and/or next steps.

Following their presentation and discussion, guests are excused, and the students are asked to leave the room for a short period of time. The faculty team, with input from the DNP Project Mentor, will decide if the DNP Project was presented satisfactorily. The students will be informed of their grade at the completion of the meeting.

If a student does not receive a passing grade on the Project Dissemination meeting, the student must correct deficiencies and meet again for the Dissemination meeting with the DNP Project team. Students may repeat the Dissemination meeting once.

Project Completion

Completion of the DNP Project requires a passing grade in all DNP Project courses (NURS 780, NURS 781 and NURS 782). The DNP Project will not be reported as complete until all final copies and documentation have been submitted to the DNP Project Faculty Advisor and course assignment drop boxes. Failure to submit final documents may result in a failing grade and delay in progression and/or graduation.

The DNP Project Advisor submits documentation of project completion to the Department of Graduate Nursing chairperson which is forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies. After the DNP Project Advisor has approved the final manuscript, the student will work with the DNP Project Advisor and Department of Graduate Nursing Office Administrative Specialist to submit the final manuscript to the OpenRiver digital repository if indicated.

References

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2021). The Essentials: Core competencies for professional nursing education. Accessible online at https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/AcademicNursing/pdf/Essentials-2021.pdf

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2006). The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice. Accessible online at https://www.aacnnursing.org/portals/42/publications/dnpessentials.pdf