Doctor of Nursing Practice Scholarly Project Handbook

Acknowledgements

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DNP Scholarly Project Overview

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) is the terminal *clinical* degree for the discipline of nursing. The DNP differs from other doctoral degrees by focusing on clinical practice, rather than research, as in the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree, or education, as in the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. The DNP scholarly project (SP) is students' demonstration of the knowledge, skills, and abilities developed over their doctoral studies. Through the SP, students exemplify CMU's DNP program mission and learning outcomes and the DNP Essentials outlined by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN).

Writing and Manuscript Preparation

- All manuscripts should be formatted according to the CMU Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines.
- The Department of Health Sciences follows the guidelines outlined by the American Psychological Association for citations, tables, figures, and references.
- Students who require writing assistance and support may contact the CMU Writing Center. The Writing Center offers suggestions for document revisions. They do not serve as formal editors.
- All students are responsible for the manuscripts they submit for course grades.
- Students may not use formal editors until the final SP manuscript has been defended in NURS 760.
- Contact the course instructor for the associated SP course (outlined below) for specific questions related to manuscript preparation and writing expectations.

Scholarly Project: Scope

The scope of the SP focuses on systems-level interventions to improve health care outcomes (AACN, 2019). Students are expected to:
- Demonstrate multi-level analysis while focusing on the aggregate units of intervention (e.g. community, organization, public policy).
- Identify a gap in clinical practice.
- Analyze the state of the science on the phenomena under study.
- Design and implement the intervention, innovation, or program to improve health care outcomes through direct and/or indirect care.
- Evaluate outcomes from the intervention, innovation, or program and articulate the actual or potential clinical significance of the outcomes.
- Articulate a dissemination and sustainability plan for the SP.
- Develop a foundation for future scholarship.

Scholarly Project: Team

The SP team includes the student, course faculty, and community partners (stakeholders). The SP team is formed during the first semester of the SP timeline. Once constituted, the SP team remains until the SP is completed. Thus, all team members make approximately a two-year commitment to their roles on the team. The responsibilities of each team member include, but are not limited to:

- *Student:* The student should have completed all other graduate coursework and should have completed a minimum of 700 clinical hours under program faculty supervision.
- *Course faculty:* Doctorally-prepared faculty member and practice mentor for the SP. Responsible for oversight of the student's SP activities.
- *Second faculty:* A second faculty member should be doctorally-prepared and should provide support to the course faculty and the student.
- *Community partners (stakeholders):* Community partners are identified by the student during the first semester of the SP. Community members serve as contact persons within an organization or agency that facilitate the student's access to the organization or agency and its system inputs (e.g. leadership, clinical staff, information technology support, etc.).
- Additional mentors, advisors, and faculty are added to the SP team as needed. Additional team members must be approved by course faculty prior to their participation on the SP team.

Occasionally, students must reconstitute their SP team due to faculty and/or community partners' competing commitments. When this occurs, students should work directly with course faculty to identify and recruit additional SP team members.

Scholarly Project: Timeline

Students develop their SP over *four* semesters as outlined in the table below.

Course	Course Title	Semester
NURS 660	Scholarly Project: Identification	Spring
NURS 725	Scholarly Project: Development	Fall
NURS 750	Scholarly Project: Design & Defend	Spring
NURS 760	Scholarly Project: Implement & Evaluate	Fall

General Manuscript Outline

Although SPs vary, the following outline is generally followed.

Section 1 Introduction (NURS 660)

- Description of the phenomena of interest
- Gap in clinical practice
- Statement of the problem
- Purpose statement
- Definition of Terms

Section 2 Review of the Literature (NURS 725)

- Restatement of the problem and project purpose
- Literature acquisition and review process
- Synthesis of the literature and summary of findings

Section 3 Theoretical Framework (NURS 750)

- Review of summary of findings
- Theoretical framework to be implemented throughout all sections of manuscript

Section 4 Methods (NURS 750)

- Review of the purpose statement
- Project design and planned procedures
- Data collection, management, and analysis
- Ethical considerations
- Project's potential to address the DNP Essentials

Section 5 Results (NURS 760)

- Project findings, based on data collected, study purpose
- Process evaluation
- Discussion of findings
- Sustainability plan

Section 6 DNP Essentials (NURS 760)

- Strengths and weaknesses of project
- Clinical significance of the project
- Dissemination plan
- Actual DNP Essentials met by the project

NURS 660: Scholarly Project: Identification

Overview

NURS 660: Scholarly Project: Identification focuses on the concepts of leadership and autonomy for the Doctor of Nursing Practice. The student collaborates with a community stakeholder for the duration of the SP. A needs assessment is conducted by either the student or the stakeholder. If the student conducts the needs assessment, the student is required to submit required documentation to the CMU Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following the needs assessment, the student, in conjunction with the stakeholder, identifies a gap in clinical practice, and formalizes the SP's problem and purpose statements. Students must pass NURS 660 in order to progress to NURS 725.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of NURS 660, the student should be able to:
1. Function effectively as a professional leader through collaboration for scholarly projects.
2. Create successful negotiations with stakeholders in the development of the needs assessment.
3. Propose change in practice through the identification of the gap in clinical practice.
4. Compare and contrast DNP Essentials for the practice doctorate.
5. Justify a problem in need of inquiry that has the potential for addressing a gap in practice.
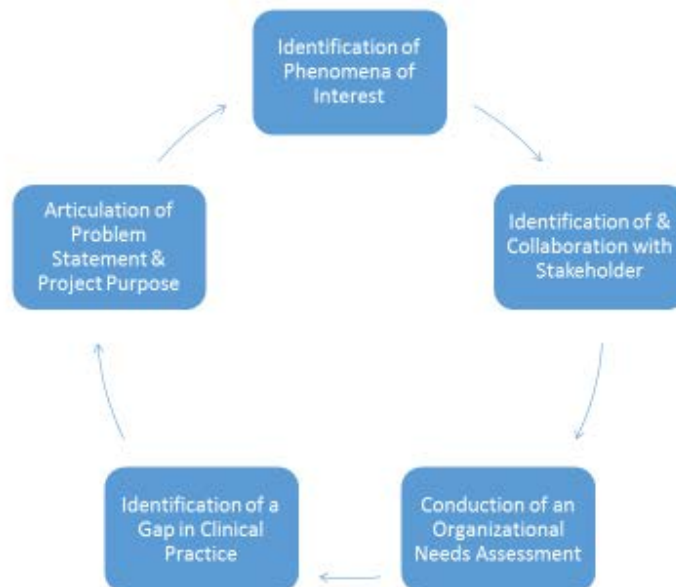

Figure 1. NURS 660: Scholarly Project: Identification.

NURS 725: Development

Overview

NURS 725: Development focuses on the synthesis of available knowledge and literature in the development and refinement of the SP's purpose. The nature and clinical significance of the problem are constructed in a logical sequence to support the purpose. Students are expected to perform a systematic integrated review of the literature to elucidate the state of the science of their phenomena of interest. Students are expected to submit their literature review for publication or presentation (podium or poster). Students work with course faculty to identify appropriate conferences/publications based on the student's SP focus. Students must pass NURS 725 to progress to NURS 750.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of NURS 725, the student should be able to:
1. Formulate a logical statement, supported with evidence, that articulates the nature and significance of the gap in clinical practice.
2. Assess and critically appraise existing knowledge about the problem to formulate a SP purpose.
3. Construct a systematic integrated literature review with supporting evidence to discuss the gap in clinical systems, practice, or policy.
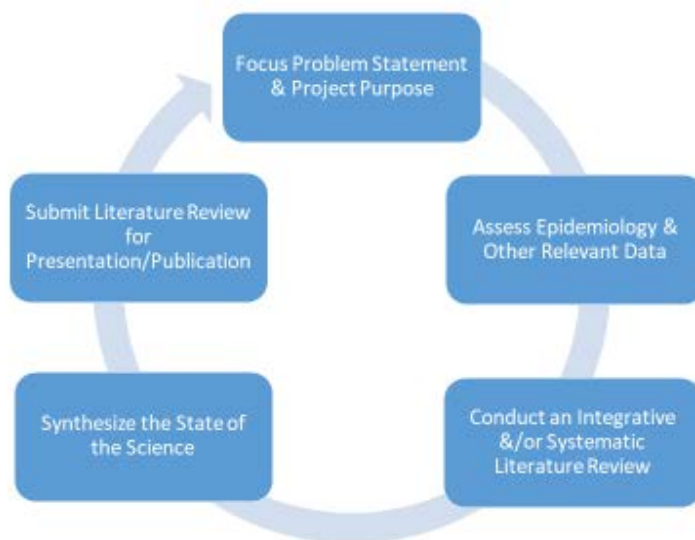

Figure 2. NURS 725: Scholarly Project: Development.
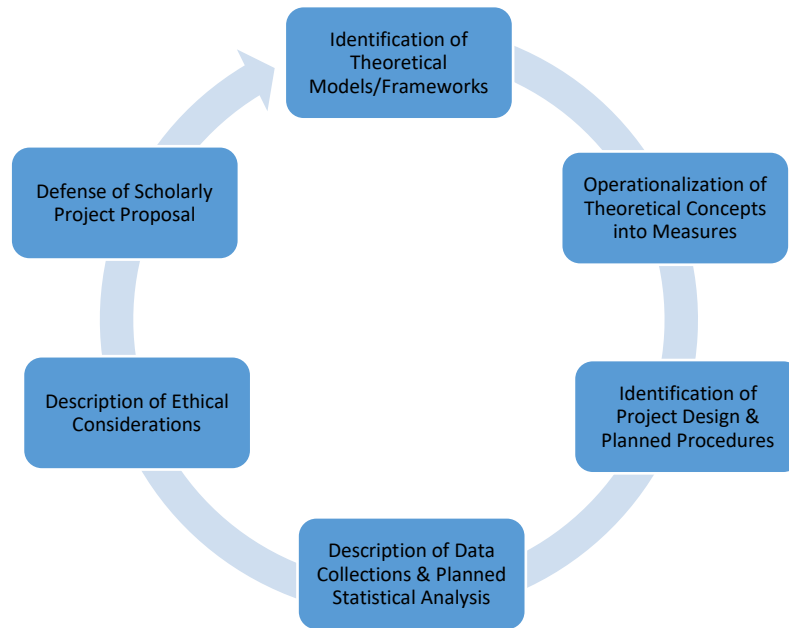
NURS 750: Design and Defend

Overview

NURS 750: Design and Defend focuses on the development of SP proposal that demonstrates synthesis of doctoral work. There is an emphasis on evidence-based practice models and methods, culminating with a proposal defense to improve clinical practice or patient outcomes. Students utilize nursing and borrowed theories to organize and guide their SP. Students develop their SP methods, including planned procedures, data collection, outcome measures, and statistical analyses. All students complete the [Request for Determination of Human Subjects Research](#). Based on IRB recommendations, the student may be required to complete additional IRB forms (e.g. [Exempt Protocol Application](#), [Expedited or Full Board Application](#)).

Students are required to enroll in NURS 650 as a co-requisite to NURS 750. Students are expected to dedicate a portion of their total clinical/practicum hours in NURS 650 to their SP. SP clinical/practicum hours should be aligned with the DNP Essentials specifically addressed by the SP. See the Appendix for a list of the DNP Essentials and examples of clinical/practicum experiences for each Essential. Students should work with their NURS 650 faculty to identify how many hours will be dedicated to the SP as SP clinical/practicum assignments vary among students and projects. Students must pass NURS 750 and the oral proposal defense to progress to NURS 760.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of NURS 750, the student should be able to:
1. Articulate the evidence-based practice decisions, including the credibility of sources of information, and the relevance to the practice problem confronted.
2. Use analytical methods to critically appraise existing literature and other evidence to determine and implement the best evidence for practice.
3. Defend the DNP scholarly project proposal prior to implementation.
4. Advocate for the protection of human subjects in creating an application for the Institutional Review Board.
5. Design and implement processes to evaluate outcomes of practice, practice patterns, and systems of care within a practice setting, health care organization, or community against national benchmarks to determine variances in practice outcomes and population trends.

Figure 3. NURS 750: Scholarly Project: Design and Defend.

NURS 760: Implement and Evaluate
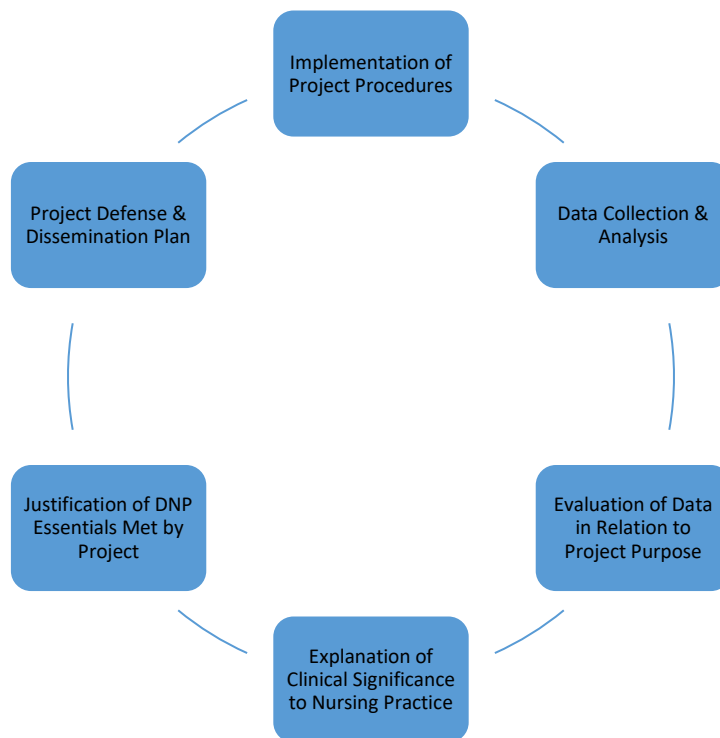
Overview

NURS 760: Implement and Evaluate focuses on the culmination of the SP, including translation of evidence to inform clinical practice. Students implement and evaluate aggregate-level interventions for the purpose of improving clinical practice and systems of care. Students defend their entire SP to the public approximately two weeks before the end of their final semester. The SP final defense includes a sustainability and dissemination plan. Examples of SP dissemination include community- or campus-wide presentations, presentations to local, state, or national legislators, presentations to professional societies or conferences, and manuscript publications. Students may use a professional editor only after their full manuscript has been approved by the SP team. Students are required to submit their final manuscripts to the course faculty at least one week prior to the end of the semester. Final manuscripts are sent to the Health Sciences Department Head and Director of Graduate Studies for signature before students are approved for graduation.

All students are required to enroll in NURS 652 as a co-requisite to NURS 760. Students are expected to dedicate a portion of their total clinical/practicum hours in NURS 652 to their SP. SP clinical/practicum hours should be aligned with the DNP Essentials specifically addressed by the SP. See the Appendix for a list of the DNP Essentials and examples of clinical/practicum experiences for each Essential. Students should work with their NURS 652 faculty to identify how many hours will be dedicated to the SP as SP clinical/practicum assignments vary among students and projects. Students must pass NURS 760, complete a total of 1000 clinical hours, and meet all other program requirements, in order to graduate with a DNP degree.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of NURS 760, the student should be able to:
1. Use information technology and systematic methods appropriately to:
    a. Collect appropriate and accurate data to generate evidence for nursing practice.
    b. Inform and guide the design of databases that generate meaningful evidence for nursing practice.
    c. Analyze data from practice.
    d. Deliver and evaluate evidence-based interventions.
    e. Predict and analyze outcomes.
    f. Examine patterns of behavior and outcomes.
2. Apply relevant findings to improve practice and the practice environment.
3. Integrate evidence, clinical judgement, and interprofessional perspectives in implementing and evaluating outcomes of care for patient aggregates.
4. Disseminate findings from evidence-based practice and research to improve healthcare outcomes.
5. Lead inter-professional teams in the analysis of complex practice and organizational issues.

Figure 4. NURS 760: Scholarly Project: Implement & Evaluation.

Appendix

The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice

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Essential	Example of Clinical/Practicum Experiences
I. Scientific Underpinnings for Practice	Meet with stakeholders &/or public officials to collect, review, interpret, &/or evaluate health or health system phenomena.
II. Organizational & Systems Leadership for Quality Improvement & Systems Thinking	Participate with governmental, organizational, academic, or political leadership to identify, modify or evaluate health or health delivery methods.
III. Clinical Scholarship & Analytical Methods for Evidence-Based Practice	Attend conference that directly informs project; Submit an abstract or manuscript for publication or presentation; Present project to the public or professional societies/organizations.
IV. Information Systems/Technology & Patient Care Technology for the Improvement & Transformation of Health Care	Meet with librarian to perform a literature review; Work with information technology within the stakeholder's organization to introduce, modify, or evaluate technology to improve health or health care.
V. Health Care Policy for Advocacy in Health Care	Work with elected leaders to introduce, modify, or evaluate policies that impact health or health systems
VI. Interprofessional Collaboration for Improving Patient & Population Health Outcomes	Serve on a multidisciplinary team to improve health or health care delivery; Peer-review for an interdisciplinary publication or conference that has direct relevance to the project.
VII. Clinical Prevention & Population Health for Improving the Nation's Health	Work with the chief operating officer in an organization to evaluate health delivery systems; Work with the local or state epidemiologist to measure &/or monitor health or disease trends.
VIII. Advanced Nursing Practice	Design, implement, &/or evaluate clinical interventions to improve the health of specific patient populations;

Note. Adapted from American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2006). *The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice.* Retrieved from
https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/Publications/DNPEssentials.pdf

Reference

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2019). *Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Tool Kit*.
https://www.aacnnursing.org/DNP/Tool-Kit