



Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Program

Student Handbook

2022-2023

Western Carolina University
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[WCU DNP Website](#)

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Welcome to the Doctor of Nursing Practice Program

The faculty and staff at Western Carolina University (WCU) welcome you to our Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. We are proud to offer our program to students interested in advancing their clinical practice, scholarship, and leadership skills. Our DNP program is a practice-focused doctoral program designed to prepare Post-Master's nurses and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) to lead innovation in nursing practice and healthcare.

The DNP program educates nurses prepared in advanced practice nursing roles (NP, CRNA, CNL, CNM, and CNS) or health systems/organizational leadership in clinical inquiry, scholarship, policy, and innovation in health care. The DNP doctorate prepares graduates to analyze systems of care and provide transformational leadership to improve patient safety, quality of care, and implement evidence-based, culturally competent care practices. Translation of research findings into evidence-based practice is emphasized throughout the program, and broad goals of the program include the ability to interpret, analyze, and apply research findings to clinical and systems/population level practice settings, determine and measure system and population outcomes, manage information systems, and use appropriate technology for health and risk management and communication. The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) represents the highest level of preparation in nursing practice and leadership.

We are committed to preparing competent and compassionate healthcare professionals who will achieve the DNP doctorate as their terminal degree in nursing for clinical practice. This handbook serves as a guide to the DNP program; it ensures clarity regarding the curriculum requirements and progression criteria for the DNP program. It is our hope that you will find the handbook helpful as you progress through the program.

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and administration, we wish you much success as you pursue your doctoral education with the DNP Program at WCU. Our goal is for you to experience a supportive, innovative, and rich learning environment as you complete your degree and educational journey.

Dr. Angie Trombley, DNP, APRN, PMHNP-BC
WCU Doctor of Nursing Practice Program Director
Assistant Professor

For general DNP program information: Dr. Angie Trombley, Program Director at WCU,
atrombley@wcu.edu

General Information

Introduction

This student handbook is designed for graduate students enrolled in the Doctor of Nursing Practice Program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The DNP program provides master's prepared nurses with opportunities for practice-based doctoral education. The DNP program is taught by the graduate nursing faculty as well as advanced practice nurses and leaders from the community.

The DNP program has been developed to meet recommendations of the American Association of Colleges and Nurses (AACN), the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF), the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) and American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP).

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree offered by WCU prepares graduates to analyze systems of care and provide transformational leadership that will improve patient safety, quality of care, and implement evidence-based (translational), culturally competent care practices. Graduates from this program will be able to interpret and apply research findings to practice settings, determine and measure system and population outcomes, manage information systems, and use appropriate technology for health and risk communication. DNP graduates will have the skills and abilities to substantially contribute to system reform to achieve goals articulated by the Institute of Medicine, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Quality Forum.

The Philosophy Mission, Core Values, and Goals of the School of Nursing at Western Carolina University can be found in the [Graduate Nursing Student Handbook](#).

The Doctor of Nursing Practice program at Western Carolina University (WCU) is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) (<http://www.ccneaccreditation.org>)

Program Outcomes-Upon completion of the DNP program, graduates will:

- Analyze and integrate evidence from nursing science with evidence from other relevant scientific disciplines to form a scientific foundation for advanced practice in nursing.
- Apply clinical scholarship, scientific evidence, and analytical methods to improve health care outcomes.
- Develop and evaluate systems to enhance safety and quality of health care.
- Advocate and participate in collaborative interdisciplinary efforts to improve health outcomes at the practice/organization, community, state and national levels.
- Engage in culturally competent and ethically sound advanced nursing practice.
- Demonstrate leadership in the improvement of patient outcomes and transformation of health care delivery.
- Directly manage the complex problems of clients/populations and systems to facilitate access and navigation of the health care system to improve health outcomes.

Figure 1: Essential Elements of Analysis, Leadership, and Practice in the DNP Program

Analysis	Leadership	Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of complex health problems • Diagnosis of problem • Evidence based practice • Global health indicators social determinants of health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of health care delivery systems advocacy for health policy • Communication skills • Cultural competence and humility Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced practice specialty knowledge • Mastery of advanced practice specialty skills • Cognate knowledge relative to specialty • Design and coordination of services System of care factors affecting patient outcomes

DNP Core Competencies

Students are expected to master the core competencies reflected in [The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice \(2006\)](#).

DNP Program Overview

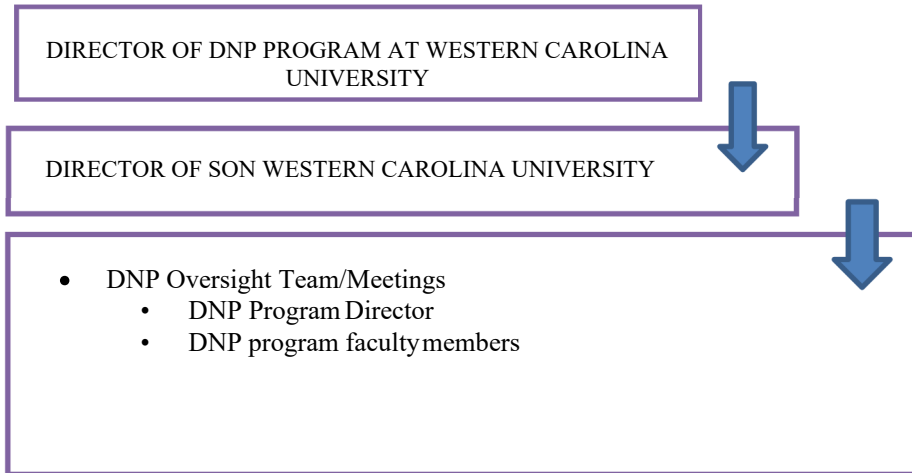
The DNP Director is directly responsible to the School of Nursing administration. The DNP Director is directly responsible to the Director, School of Nursing at WCU. The DNP Director is the leaders of the DNP faculty team. The Director of the School of Nursing at WCU ensures overall success of the DNP Program.

Curricular issues identified by the DNP director and faculty) are considered and approved through the appropriate internal approval channels. Students will be subject to all policies of WCU School of Nursing and WCU University.

DNP Program Contact Persons

- Dr. Angie Trombley (atrombley@wcu.edu) – Doctor of Nursing Practice Program Director, WCU School of Nursing
- Dr. Terri Durbin (tdurbin@email.wcu.edu) -Director, WCU School of Nursi

Organization Chart for DNP Program



Curriculum Plan

The Doctor of Nursing Practice program requires 34 post-master's graduate semester credit hours and completion of a total of 1,000 clinical hours (including 500 hours in the same clinical practice specialty from the MSN program). The DNP program is offered with a full time and part time schedule. Applicants who completed fewer than 500 hours in their MSN program, and do not hold an approved national certification, will be expected to complete additional clinical hours to achieve the total of 1,000 for the DNP program. Approved national certifications include:

- ANCC or AANP National certification as a Nurse Practitioner in specialty
- NBCRNA as a Nurse Anesthetist
- AONE Certification in Executive Nursing Practice (CENP)
- ANCC Nurse Executive-Advanced
- ANCC Clinical Nurse Specialist in specialty
- ANCC Informatics Certification
- CNC as a Clinical Nurse Leader

All students will be required to complete the curriculum that includes a sequence of courses as listed in the plan of study that follows.

Doctor of Nursing Practice Program Western Carolina University
Program of Study: Summer 2022: Full-Time Post Master's DNP Program (Total credits: 34)

		Summer 1
		NSG 823 Economic and Financial Aspects of Healthcare Systems (3) NSG 826 Leadership and Healthcare Systems (3) NSG 814 Foundations and Applications of Evidence Based Healthcare (3)
		Credits: 9
Fall 1	Spring 1	Summer 2
NSG 822 Health Care Policy and Ethics (3) NSG 817 Applied Biostatistics (3) NSG 801: Essentials of Academic Writing (1) NSG 917 DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency (3)	NSG 802: Community Epidemiology (3) NSG 816 Global Health & Social Justice (3) NSG 917 DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency (3)	NSG 815 Healthcare Program Evaluation and Quality (3) NSG 917 DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency (3)
Credits: 10	Credits: 9	Credits: 6

Doctor of Nursing Practice Program Western Carolina University
Program of Study: Fall 2021: Part-Time Post Master's DNP Program (Total credits: 34)

Fall 1	Spring 1	Summer 1
NSG 814 Foundations and Applications of Evidence Based Practice (3) NSG 817 Applied Biostatistics (3) NSG 801: Essentials of Academic Writing (1)	NSG 802 Community Epidemiology (3) NSG 816 Global Health & Social Justice (3)	NSG 823 Economic & Financial Aspects of Healthcare System (3) NSG 826 Leadership, and Healthcare Systems (3)
Credits: 7	Credits: 6	Credits: 6
Fall 2	Spring 2	Summer 2
NSG 822 Health Care Policy and Ethics (3) NSG 815 Healthcare Program Evaluation and Quality (3)	NSG 917 DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency (3)	NSG 917 DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency (3)
Credits: 6	Credits: 3	Credits: 3
Fall 3		
NSG 917 DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency (3)	(Program of Study: Subject to Change)	
Credits: 3		

Student Enrollment Status

Full-time enrollment status for the DNP program at WCU SON is defined as taking a minimum of 9 credits for the fall and spring semester and 5 credits for summer semester.

Part-time enrollment status for the DNP program at WCU SON is defined as taking a minimum of 6 credits for the fall and spring semester and 3 credits for summer semester.

The program of study for full-time students is a minimum of 4 semesters. The program of study for part-time students is a minimum 7 semesters.

Maximum time allowed to complete the DNP degree is 6 years.

Student Advisement

Each student will be assigned an advisor on admission to the university. The advisor is to mentor the student and provide advice and academic support as needed to complete the program of study plan. The courses are designed to be taken in a sequence to support the terminal DNP Scholarly Project. It is important **not** to deviate from the plan of study. Any deviation from the plan of study may prolong graduation from the program. The scholarly project must be successfully completed prior to graduation. Delays in project implementation, analysis, or presentation may add additional semesters to your plan of study. Plans of study should be reviewed with your academic advisor every semester to ensure accurate enrollment in courses.

Overview of Clinical Residency Requirement & Scholarly Project Development Process

Overview

The Clinical Residency requirement and Scholarly Project development are inextricably connected and completed in three courses titled: **DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical Residency**. Students meet the requirements for residency and project development in the three courses and through the Scholarly Project Committee approval of the Final Scholarly Project Defense.

Student learning opportunities during each Clinical Residency and Project Development course are designed to enrich the student's knowledge and practical skill foundations in areas that will facilitate development and completion of the DNP Scholarly Project.

A. Course Requirements for Clinical Residency:

The residency of each Clinical Residency and Project Development course is comprised of four components: clinical hours, clinical learning contract, reflective discussions, and scholarly activities. A brief description of each component follows.

1. Clinical Hours

The clinical hours are completed during the three residency courses and are designed to facilitate student clinical learning specific to the student's primary area of interest and consistent with the DNP Essentials and specialty competencies. These experiences include in-depth work with experts in nursing, as well as other disciplines, and systematically provide meaningful student engagement within practice environments for feedback and reflection. Student learning opportunities are designed to enrich the student's knowledge and practical skill foundations in areas that will facilitate achievement of the DNP Scholarly Project. The following list offers examples of possible clinical hour opportunities and potential directions for the Scholarly Project related to evidence-based practice change or outcome enhancement:

1. Work to change practice based on the evidence in your institution.
2. Provide clinical leadership (e.g., advanced practice committee in your institution, state or national level).
3. Learn a new skill or procedure (under direction of the clinical expert) that will enhance your ability to translate evidence into practice.
4. Work with a clinical expert to develop best practices.

For post-master's DNP students, a minimum of 500 academically supervised hours will be required in the DNP Scholarly Project and Clinical residency courses. Students may choose their current place of employment as their clinical site with the intention of expanding their clinical role. Hours obtained at the student's place of employment are separate from regular work hours. Proficiency may be acquired through a variety of methods (case studies, practice contact hours, completing specified procedures, demonstrating experiential competencies, or a combination of these elements) and according to the agreed upon Clinical Learning Contract created in the Clinical Residency courses with the course faculty and clinical expert. Clinical learning contracts will be approved by clinical experts and course faculty in the Clinical Residency and Project Development courses.

Students who have not earned 500 clinical hours upon entry in the program, and who do not hold an approved national certification, will have an option to earn additional clinical hours through a clinical elective course offered at each respective university.

2. Clinical Learning Contract

Each student will develop an individualized DNP Learning Contract in collaboration with the course faculty and clinical expert during each residency course (See the DNP Clinical Scholarly Project Guidelines).

The purpose of the clinical learning contract in each residency course is to increase the student's exposure to and involvement in doctoral level clinical practice under the direction of a clinical expert. The student is responsible for identifying and proposing a collaborative arrangement with a clinical expert who has practice expertise or works in a clinical setting of interest. Students may be used to obtain additional affiliation agreements and clinical requirements fulfilled according to the student's respective home university and School of Nursing policies, as well as agency requirements, prior to beginning a clinical residency experience. Input from the clinical expert is important as the contract is developed. The student and clinical expert must establish mutually agreed upon objectives and evaluation criteria. The specific objectives, requirements, and evaluation criteria will depend on the practice focus in which the student is participating, the student's level of education, and the student's educational needs. The Clinical Learning Contract will be approved by course faculty/IOR in Clinical Residency and Project Development courses. As part of the clinical contract, clinical hours must be documented and submitted on the DNP Residency/Scholarly Project Log. These two items must be 1) uploaded to the DNP online learning platform (e.g., Canvas) and 2) submitted to the DNP Program Director and the WCU Office of Student Services via wcnursing@wcu.edu prior to the end of the semester. A student will not be able to continue to matriculate through the DNP program unless the WCU Office of Student Services acknowledges having received the signed Scholarly Project Log. A brief

description of how the objectives were met at the end of the residency should also be included on the Learning Contract.

Although the clinical expert provides input on student progression, **faculty are responsible for determining final grades of all DNP students.**

3. Reflective Learning:

All students participate in reflective learning as a means of integrating clinical leadership and inquiry into previous or current practice. Students synthesize what has been learned and reflect upon how the course content was integrated into their practice.

Formal, professional reflection allows the student to integrate ethics, health policy, collaboration and health information technology. This allows them to synthesize what has been learned. Students will reflect back on clinical cases, common diagnoses, and population concerns and discuss how ethics were considered, how informatics were used with team members, patients and families, how health policy and politics were considered, and how health disparities were impacted in those situations. Students will outline how they used their leadership skills in those situations, demonstrating what was learned about their work, their strengths, and what more they could bring to the situation. These reflective narratives will be embedded in course discussions.

4. Scholarly Activities

Students participate in multiple academic and scholarly activities. For example, students are expected to attend conferences, seminars, journal club, grand rounds, morbidity and mortality meetings, patient conferences, practice-based lectures, interdisciplinary committees, quality improvement committees and any other opportunities available at their site. In addition, students are required to be involved and contribute to interdisciplinary initiatives. The scholarly activities should support the objectives in the Clinical Learning Contract. Students will evaluate their participation in the Clinical Learning Contract.

Students must submit documentation of fulfillment of DNP competencies in the online learning platform for each clinical residency and project development course, including documentation of practice hours, clinical contracts, and other activities related to DNP competencies.

B. Requirements and Process for DNP Scholarly Project Development & Completion

The DNP Scholarly Project is a project that brings together the practice and scholarship

aspects of the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree. It is designed to address complex practice issues that affect groups of patients, health care organizations, or health care systems utilizing informatics, technology, and in-depth knowledge of the clinical and behavioral sciences. The clinical scholarship required in the DNP Scholarly Project reflects mastery and competency in the student's area of expertise.

Development of the DNP Scholarly Project is facilitated through each of the Clinical Residency courses. The actual DNP project is evaluated by the Scholarly Project Committee and culminates in a scholarly presentation. A dissemination activity such as presenting at a public conference, presenting a poster at a regional or national conference, project presentation at a regional or national clinical facility, or developing a manuscript to be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal is expected upon completion of the program. Students may choose to work in private practices, clinics, inpatient units, hospital systems, and other institutions and communities in the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of outcomes of the DNP Scholarly project.

The student, the practice setting, and the student's DNP Scholarly Project Committee must jointly agree upon the scholarly initiative. The student must complete any required IRB approvals prior to implementing the project.

C. Sites for Clinical Residency/Project Development

Students are responsible for securing a site for their Clinical Residency and DNP Project development. The site must be approved by the faculty teaching the Clinical Residency and Project Development course and DNP Director. A current site of employment, or another site, may be used when the project identified is not within the current job duties and is an expansion of their clinical role. Hours obtained at the student's place of employment are separate from regular work hours.

For students not using their workplace, it is estimated that 3-6 months may be required to secure the appropriate contractual agreement to use the site for the DNP Scholarly Project; therefore, students are encouraged to begin securing a site in the first semester of the program. Students may not begin their project until a site agreement has been signed.

DNP Scholarly Project Process and Timeline

DNP Scholarly Project and Committee

The DNP Scholarly project begins with the selection of the committee guiding the project. Selection of the committee chair occurs early in the first semester of the program. Additional members will be selected by the end of the first semester. The DNP Scholarly Project Committee monitors the progression of the student through the project process. The student and chair will meet at least once during each semester.

The DNP Scholarly Project is guided by the DNP Scholarly Project Committee. The student is responsible for:

- Choosing the committee members with input from his/her chair during the initial semester of enrollment.
- The composition of the DNP Scholarly Project committee is expected to include a minimum of one doctoral prepared (PhD, DNP, MD or any other doctoral prepared individual) regular faculty member with graduate status from WCU School of Nursing, and a clinical expert from the practice area. The chair must come from the student's admitting university.
- When a DNP student chooses to terminate the relationship with their committee chair, the student must meet face-to-face with the committee chair for respectful discussion. The student must also inform the DNP Director, and if necessary, the Director of Nursing prior to dissolving the relationship.
- When a chair chooses to terminate the relationship with the student, a meeting with the student's entire DNP Committee, the DNP Director is required prior to dissolving the relationship.
- The student is responsible for completing the DNP Scholarly Project Committee Form.

The Committee is responsible for:

- Guiding the student through the project planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Determining the successful completion of the project requirements. Failure to successfully present the DNP scholarly project more than twice will result in termination from the program.

Steps for Project Completion and Work with Committee:

1. Topic Approval: Students submit an oral and written presentation to the DNP Scholarly Project Committee for approval and feasibility of their topic. (See the DNP Clinical Scholarly Project Guidelines). Student must prepare a power point presentation describing the key components of the project topic at the end of the first semester. If a student fails to pass the oral presentation, the committee and the student will develop a remediation plan.
2. Presentation and Approval of Project Proposal: Students submit a written proposal to their committee in advance of an oral presentation. Students make a formal presentation to their committee of their scholarly project proposal. A student is allowed a second attempt to present their proposal to the committee if they are unsuccessful the first time. Failing the proposal presentation on the second attempt will result in dismissal from the program
3. IRB Approval: The student will work with their chair to secure IRB approval. Typically, IRB approval at the institution where the project will occur is the first step, followed by approval at the university.
4. Presentation and Approval of Scholarly Project: Students submit their written project to their committee in advance of an oral presentation. Students make a formal public presentation to their committee and invited guests of their scholarly project proposal. A student is allowed a second attempt to present their final project to the committee if they are unsuccessful the first time. Failing the final presentation on the second attempt will result in dismissal from the program.

IRB Approval

Research conducted at WCU is subject to a wide range of federal and state policies established to ensure ethical conduct in research. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures respect, fairness, and safety in human subjects' research. DNP Scholarly Projects must be submitted to the IRB at the clinical site as well as the student's university for review and approval prior to beginning any project. Specific instructions for the university IRB are:

1. WCU - [IRB](#)

Degree Completion and Graduation

To graduate from the DNP program, the student must successfully complete the coursework, meet the clinical hour requirement, implement, and present a scholarly project. Faculty is responsible for determining final grades of all DNP students.

Use of Degree Credentials

There is no degree credential for doctoral candidacy. Although sometimes used, the DNP(c) designation is not an accepted convention to indicate doctoral candidacy. A doctoral candidate should continue to use the degree initials that have been earned. It is appropriate to state that one is a doctoral candidate in text form, e.g., in the biographical information that accompanies a published

article. It is acceptable to use the DNP credentials only after one has successfully completed the degree.

Time Limits for Degree Completion

All graduation requirements must be completed within 6 years from enrollment in the first course as outlined in the University Graduate Catalog.

Amount of Transfer Credit Accepted

DNP students may transfer up to 6 graduate semester credit hours (with a grade of B or better) with approval of the DNP Program Director and the universities' Graduate Schools. Students may not transfer credits that were used in completion of another degree. No course being transferred may be older than 6 years at the time of graduation.

Financial Aid

Contact the WCU financial aid office for information:

WCU: [Financial Aid](#)

Grades Required

All graduate students are subject to academic suspension. An accumulation of three marginal C grades in any graduate course work will result in suspension of the student's enrollment. If a student makes a grade of F in any graduate course, enrollment will be suspended.

The DNP program's academic suspension policy is as follows:

3 grades of C or 1 grade of F

Grading and Appeal Policies

Please refer to the university's Graduate Catalog for a complete description of grading and appeal policies.

Grading Scale: The following scale will be used for grading all nursing course-related activities and deriving the final course grade.

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
U	≤ 69

Student Complaints

Student issues or complaints regarding the program that are not related to grades, should be taken to the Program Director. Issues that cannot be resolved at the level of the Program Director will be taken to the Director of the SON.

For WCU, the process for filing a complaint can be found on the [website](#).

DNP Program Instructional Technology Requirements

Below are the minimum instructional technology requirements adopted by the university for this program. In order to be successful in completing the DNP courses distance instructional formats, students need solid, basic set of computer skills. The skills needed include, but are not limited to:

- Basic skills in using a word processor and perform tasks such as cutting and pasting and creating presentations in presentation software
- Saving your files in several different formats and locations
- Uploading files in online applications
- Downloading and installing software
- Internets skills should include, using email and file attachments, using your browser effectively, making bookmarks, chatting and using search functions. This is a hybrid program. A computer with the software and hardware listed on the IT form are required to attend this program. It is **required** that you have a laptop with the listed requirements on the IT form and bring it to orientation and classes.

Each student is expected to have Internet access and access to a laptop computer with web cam and microphone capability and the following software:

- Microsoft Office (Word, PowerPoint, Excel)
- SPSS
- Adobe Reader (free download at <http://get.adobe.com/reader>)
- Endnote (optional)

Clinical and Health Requirements

Clinical requirements are considered met for students conducting their project at their workplace. For students not using their workplace for the project, they are required to follow the SON policies below:

WCU:

University: [Immunizations](#)

School of Nursing: [Immunization and other agency requirements](#)