College of Nursing

Masters of Nursing (MN)

Professional Project Handbook

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Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education
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Masters of Nursing (MN) Professional Project Overview

All graduate students at Montana State University are required to demonstrate scholarship. As a graduate nursing student enrolled in the MN degree program, you are required to complete and defend a MN Professional Project (course #: NRSG 575 – 4 credits) as a requirement for graduation, which will be evaluated by your chairperson and committee of faculty experts.

“The role of Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) is to meet the needs of a failing health care system. CNLs are prepared to function as clinical change agents to improve patient outcomes. Through extensive preparation in leadership, clinical practice, outcomes management, and communication, graduates are prepared to improve health outcomes of patients in a variety of clinical settings including acute care and community health settings.” (Wallace, M., Fox S., & Miller, P. p. 175).

The master’s prepared CNL is a leader in the health care delivery system across all settings in which health care is delivered. The implementation of the CNL role varies across settings. The CNL role is not one of administration or management. The CNL functions within a microsystem and assumes accountability for health care outcomes for a specific group of clients and application of research based information. (Fitzpatrick, J. & Wallace, M. p. 228).

Depending upon your area of emphasis or interest, your MN Professional Project might focus on: 1) quality care or practice improvement, 2) an analysis of a health care policy, 3) a program evaluation or intervention, 4) an in-depth case study, 5) a comprehensive systematic review for determination of best practice, or 6) development of a strategic plan for the delivery of healthcare in practice. The MN project is not intended to test new models, develop new theory, generate new knowledge, or test hypotheses.

MN Professional Project Committee

The chairperson and committee members have ultimate responsibility to assure quality of the MN Professional Project and the final formal paper.

Formalizing The Committee

The chairperson and committee must be formalized (paperwork required) with the College of Nursing and the Graduate School by the end of your second semester (end of first spring semester). Refer to the College of Nursing Graduate Program Handbook for specific instructions on formalizing chairperson and committee membership.

Chairperson

Your major advisor serves as the chairperson of your Professional Project committee and acts as a channel of communication for you within the college. You are responsible for staying in contact with your chairperson during your time in the MN degree program. The chairperson is responsible for contacting with you each semester regarding the specific aspects of your Professional Project. A negotiated time frame for the overall document should be constructed and a written contract or plan is recommended. The contract can be altered by mutual consent. The chairperson will submit a letter grade each semester that you are registered for course #
NRSG 575, which is your Professional Project work (maximum credits for NRSG 575 = 4). Refer to the College of Nursing Graduate Program Handbook for specific instructions on formalizing chairperson.

**Committee Members**
All faculty members in the College of Nursing are available to participate on project committees whether or not they teach in the graduate program. You and your major advisor/chair negotiate selection of committee members. Three members are required for the committee (two must be College of Nursing faculty who have earned masters or doctoral degrees). Collectively, committee membership should reflect knowledge in project methodology, knowledge in the specific content area, and/or expertise in writing. Refer to the College of Nursing Graduate Program Handbook for specific instructions on formalizing committee membership.

The chairperson, in consultation with you and committee members, is responsible for guidance on all matters of design, content, and format for the MN Professional Project. Committee members are responsible for guiding you in their area of expertise as it relates to the MN Professional Project. The chairperson and committee members have ultimate responsibility to assure quality of the project and the final document. The committee is responsible for helping you identify format errors, particularly with regard to APA editorial standards. You may be referred to the Montana State University Writing Center or may seek assistance on your own.

**Student Responsibilities**
As a MN degree-seeking student, you must be responsive to the direction of the chairperson and committee members regarding all matters of content and quality of the MN Professional Project and formal paper. You are responsible for all format requirements and corrections. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to know what is required by the Graduate School and the College of Nursing and to follow the established deadlines.

MSU College of Nursing faculty are available in person, by phone, or by e-mail to guide you through your MN Professional Project. Faculty chairs are available during fall and spring semesters when you are registered for NRSG 575 credits.

**Examples of MN Professional Projects**

- Practice change initiative
- A quality improvement/performance management project
- An evidence based practice model addressing a clinical issue
- Policy/practice case report and analysis
- Implement and evaluate an innovative use for technology to enhance or evaluate care
- Collaborate with inter-professional team members to address a clinical question
- Design program/practices and evaluate effect on clinical outcomes
- Collaborate with lay or professional coalitions to develop, implement, or evaluate health programs

You will involve your chair throughout all phases of your project, for example, at the beginning when selecting your project and defining the direction, while you are progressing, and during the
writing of the project. Ultimately, your chair and your committee are the ones who determine if your project meets the rigor required for a Masters of Nursing degree.

Steps and Timeline for Project Completion and Work with Committee

Each semester students are expected to work with their committee to reach certain milestones in completing their Professional Project in order to graduate on time. The milestones are as follows:

- **Semester 1 (fall)**
  - Select a Committee Chair
- **Semester 2 (spring)**
  - Form a committee in collaboration with Committee Chair
  - Meet with chair and committee to discuss ideas for the project and sign the Graduate Program of Study & Committee form (refer to Graduate Program Handbook)
- **Semester 3 (fall)**
  - Develop a Professional Project proposal with Committee Chair
  - Meet with Committee to discuss and approve proposal
  - Submit Professional Project Proposal Approval Form (refer to Graduate Program Handbook)
  - Prepare and submit IRB (with permission from Chair and Committee)
  - Begin project implementation and writing
- **Semester 4 (spring)**
  - Complete project and finalize written professional project paper
- **Semester 5 (fall)**
  - Present and defend Professional Project to Chair, Committee, and College
  - Submit Professional Project to Graduate School (electronic posting of final written project to library required)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Projects conducted at MSU are subject to a wide range of federal and state policies established to ensure ethical conduct in research. The IRB ensures respect, fairness, and safety in human subjects’ research. All MN Professional Projects should be submitted to the IRB at the clinical site (if applicable) as well as to the Montana State University IRB for review and approval prior to beginning any project. This should be done during semester 3 (see Timeline above). Be sure to work closely with your chair during the IRB submission process. Specific instructions for this can be found at: [http://www2.montana.edu/irb/](http://www2.montana.edu/irb/).

Project Defense

The Graduate School requires that students successfully defend their MN Professional Project as a requirement for graduation. The primary purpose of the project defense is for the graduate
student to demonstrate scholarship (guidelines for Thesis defense that are posted on the Graduate School website apply to Project defenses in the College of Nursing). Refer to the Graduate Program Handbook and Graduate School website for details about defenses, policies, procedures, scheduling, grading, and final approval of scholarly projects.

MN students should be ready to defend their MN Professional Project during semester 5 (last fall semester) in the graduate program. The chairperson decides when your project is ready for the defense. The defense is conducted only when the final draft of the project is complete (as determined by the chair).

The project defense is considered an exam. The project is defended by you in front of your committee. It is a formal presentation that is open to all faculty and graduate students. Your formal presentation should describe key components of your project. You should consult with the committee chairperson to determine format and stylistic issues of the presentation. The use of visual aids is encouraged. The time allotted for the defense is 1 hours: 30 minutes for the presentation followed by 30 minutes for audience questions. The committee may formulate specific questions to ask the student or the committee may choose a more spontaneous format for questions.
### Appendix 1

**Project Proposal Template**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Project:</th>
</tr>
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| **Introduction** | a. Background  
| b. Significance to Nursing  
| c. Local Problem/Needs Assessment  
| d. Purpose statement, General Aim, Specific Aim |

| **Review of the Literature** | a. Describes the nature of the issue, who is involved and who it affects.  
| b. Extensive background of the issue  
| c. Summary of the current knowledge  
| d. Extensive review of the literature with an evidence table in Appendix |

| **Methods** | a. Ethical issues  
| i. What will you do?  
| ii. Describe the ethical issues, plan for IRB review or exemption (Describe the ethical aspects of the project that might affect participants’ physical well-being; Include any HIPPA protection statements as appropriate)  
| b. Sample and setting  
| iii. Describe the sample (patient population if any) and those involved in the project (#, ages, gender, etc.)  
| iv. Describe the specifics of where this project is taking place (rural clinic, hospital, acute care setting, inpatient unit, legislature)  
| v. What are the relevant elements of the setting (geography, physical resources, organizational culture, staffing or leadership issues)  
| c. Intervention  
| vi. What is/are your interventions/actions that will be taken and why were these chosen (rationale)?  
| vii. What outcomes are expected and why (rationale)? |
| viii. | What factors contributed to your choice of the intervention |
| ix. | What are the steps of the intervention? (what was to be done and by whom) |
| x. | You might include a timeline of your project that includes the baseline/pre intervention data, interventions, post intervention data using a time-line diagram or flow chart |
| xi. | What instruments or procedures will be used in the intervention? What is the reliability or validity of the instruments? |
| xii. | What methods will be used to assure data quality and adequacy (i.e. Blinding, repeating measurements and data extraction, collection of sufficient baseline measurements/data) |
| d. | Analysis |
| xiii. | Provide detail of qualitative or quantitative methods that will be used to draw inferences from the data |
| xiv. | Explain ability of study design to detect effect (effect size) |
| xv. | Describe analytic methods that will be used to demonstrate effects of time as a variable (i.e., statistical process control) |
Appendix 2
Professional Project Paper Template

This is to serve as a rough guide for the MN project design. All of the numbered (1-9) components should be present in your paper/project. Several explanations are given under each number, but these serve as examples and can vary depending on the type of project you are doing. Please review these guidelines with your chair and make sure you are both very clear as to the extent and detail needed under each topic. Use these guidelines in several ways: 1) as a guide for successfully writing a summative paper of your project, 2) to develop your Power Point final presentation, and 3) to convert your paper into a manuscript for publication. Your paper must conform to APA format. Your paper also needs to conform to the MSU Electronic Theses and Dissertation (ETD) formatting Guides found here: http://www.montana.edu/etd/format_standard.html. Be sure to review the formatting guides before submitting a draft to the Graduate School’s ETD Formatting Advisor. Please discuss paper length expectations with your chair.

1. Title
2. Abstract (approximately 150-250 words)
   a. Single-spaced and no more than 350 words.
   b. The abstract must contain the following elements: (1) statement of the problem, (2) procedure or methods, (3) results, and (4) conclusions. Mathematical formulas, abbreviations, diagrams, and other illustrative materials should not be included. It should be written to be understood by a person who does not have expertise in the field.
3. Introduction
   a. Includes brief background, needs assessment/statement and provide some eye catching information
   b. Should include a problem statement or study question
4. Review of the Literature
   a. Describes the nature of the issue, who is involved and who it affects.
   b. Extensive background of the issue
   c. Summary of the current knowledge
   d. Extensive review of the literature with an evidence table in Appendix
5. Theoretical Underpinning
   a. an explanation of the nursing theory or theories used to guide this project
6. Methods
   a. Ethical issues
      i. What did you do?
      ii. Describe the ethical issues, IRB review or exemption
      iii. Describe the ethical aspects of the project that might affect participants’ physical well-being.
      iv. Include any HIPPA protection statements as appropriate
b. Sample and setting
   i. Describe the sample (patient population if any) and those involved in the project (#, ages, gender, etc.)
   ii. Describe the specifics of where this project is taking place (rural clinic, hospital, acute care setting, inpatient unit, legislature)
   iii. What are the relevant elements of the setting (geography, physical resources, organizational culture, staffing or leadership issues).

c. Intervention
   i. What is/are your interventions/actions that will be taken and why were these chosen (rationale)?
   ii. What outcomes are expected and why (rationale)?
   iii. What factors contributed to your choice of the intervention
   iv. What are the steps of the intervention? (what was to be done and by whom)
   v. You might include a timeline of your project that includes the baseline/pre intervention data, interventions, post intervention data using a time-line diagram or flow chart
   vi. What instruments or procedures were used in the intervention? What is the reliability or validity of this instrument?
   vii. What methods are used to assure data quality and adequacy (i.e. Blinding, repeating measurements and data extraction, collection of sufficient baseline measurements/data)

d. Analysis
   i. Provide detail of qualitative or quantitative methods used to draw inferences from the data
   ii. Explain ability of study design to detect effect (effect size)
   iii. Describe analytic methods used to demonstrate effects of time as a variable (i.e., statistical process control)

7. Outcomes/Results
   a. What did you find in your project?
   b. Consider benefit, harm, unexpected results, problems, failures

8. Discussion
   a. Summarize the most important successes and difficulties in implementing intervention components.
   b. Highlight the project’s particular strengths
   c. Compare and contrast your outcomes with the literature
   d. Were there any differences between observed outcomes and expected outcomes?
   e. Draw inferences about causal mechanisms
   f. Review issues of financial cost
   g. Suggest steps to help improve future projects
   h. Limitations
i. Consider sources of confounding bias or imprecision of study design, measurement, and analysis that might have affected project outcome (internal validity)

ii. Explore factors that could affect generalizability (external validity)

iii. Review efforts made to minimize and adjust for expected limitations

9. Conclusion
   a. Consider overall practical application and usefulness of the project
   b. How useful was the intervention?
   c. Suggest implications for future studies