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Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Scholarly Project Overview

All graduate students at Montana State University are required to demonstrate scholarship. As a graduate nursing student enrolled in the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree program, you are required to complete and defend an evidence-based practice Scholarly Project (course #s: NRSG 674 – 2 credits; NRSG 675 – maximum 9 credits) as a requirement for graduation. The formal paper and project defense will be evaluated by your chairperson and committee of faculty experts.

The purpose of the DNP Scholarly Project is to provide you with the opportunity to acquire expertise in clinical practice knowledge development to enhance quality of care and patient outcomes. You will do this through a process of identifying a clinical concern, developing a clinical question, and answering the clinical question through appraisal of the evidence; evaluation of the clinical environment; implementation of evidence-based practice recommendations, policy, or leadership strategies; evaluation of outcomes; and dissemination of findings. Through this process you will have the opportunity to examine how nursing and related relevant theories can guide interventions, practice changes, policy development, and/or leadership strategies. You will examine relevant evidence and propose practice recommendations based upon feasibility of answering your clinical question within the clinical environment.

The DNP Scholarly Project exemplifies the discovery, application, and synthesis of advanced nursing knowledge to improve health outcomes for individuals, families, communities, or systems. The project represents the use of analytical methods, translation of existing research to practice, and recognition of cross-disciplinary integration of new knowledge at both the micro and macro system levels. The DNP project will allow you to demonstrate the ability “to lead and manage collaborative efforts with physicians and other members of the health care team to redesign and improve practice environments and health systems” (Initiative for the Future of Nursing, 2010, p. 2).

A scholarly project is not intended to test new models, develop new theory, or test hypotheses; however, these projects might “generate new knowledge through innovation of practice change, the translation of evidence, and the implementation of quality improvement processes in specific practice settings, systems, or with specific populations to improve health or health outcomes” (AACN, 2015). Depending upon your area of emphasis or interest, the Scholarly Project might include analyzing a health care policy, evaluating a program or intervention, formulating an in-depth case study, improving quality of care or practice, conducting a comprehensive systematic review to determine best practice, or developing a strategic plan for the delivery of healthcare clinical practice.

DNP Projects should: a. Focus on a change that impacts healthcare outcomes either through direct or indirect care. b. Have a systems (micro-, meso-, or macro- level) or population/aggregate focus. c. Demonstrate implementation in the appropriate arena or area of practice. d. Include a plan for sustainability (e.g. financial, systems or political realities, not only theoretical abstractions). e. Include an evaluation of processes and/or outcomes (formative or summative). DNP Projects should be designed so that processes and/or outcomes will be evaluated to guide practice and policy. Clinical significance is as important in guiding practice as
statistical significance is in evaluating research. f. Provide a foundation for future practice scholarship (AACN, 2015).

**DNP Scholarly Project Committee**

The chairperson and committee members have the ultimate responsibility to assure quality of the project and the final document. The chairperson, in consultation with you and committee members, is responsible for guidance on all matters of design, content, and format for the DNP Scholarly Project. Committee members are responsible for guiding you in their area of expertise as it relates to the DNP Scholarly Project. 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.

**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 third semester (end of first summer 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 chair of your DNP Scholarly 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 DNP degree program. The chairperson is responsible for contracting with you each semester regarding the specific aspects of your Scholarly 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 675, which is your DNP Scholarly Project work (maximum NRSG 675 credits = 9). 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 chairperson negotiate selection of committee members. Four members are required for the committee (three must be from the College of Nursing and 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.

**Student Responsibilities**

As a DNP 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 DNP Scholarly 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 College of Nursing and Graduate School and to follow the established deadlines.
Members of the MSU College of Nursing faculty are available in person, by phone, or by e-mail to guide you through your Scholarly Project. Faculty chairs are available during fall and spring semesters when you are registered for NRSG 675 credits.

**Examples of DNP Scholarly Projects**

The sky is almost the limit in the types of projects you can complete. Some types of projects might include:

- Practice change initiative
- A quality improvement/Performance Management project
- An evidence based practice model change
- Policy/practice case report and analysis
- Implementation and evaluation of an innovative use for technology to enhance or evaluate care
- Collaboration with researchers to answer a clinical question
- Collaboration with stakeholders to initiate legislative change using evidence
- Design and evaluate programs
- Conduct financial analysis to compare care models and potential savings
- Design and use databases to retrieve information for decision making, planning, and evaluation
- Work with lay or professional coalitions to develop, implement, or evaluate health programs, such as health promotion, and disease prevention programs for vulnerable patients, groups or communities

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 Doctor of Nursing Practice degree.

**Project Design and Format**

The design and format of your written project will be determined by your chair and committee. While specific formatting may vary from using the Squire Guidelines, to manuscript, to chapter design all projects include the same basic components (Appendix 1). Be sure to consult with your chair early in the writing process so that you know how your paper/project is to be designed.

**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 Scholarly Project in order to graduate on time. The milestones are as follows:
• Semester 1
  o Select a Committee Chair; work on Program of Study & Committee Form (refer to Graduate Program Handbook)
• Semester 2
  o Program of Study due before end of summer semester (all students)
  o Enrollment in NRSG 674
  o Develop a Scholarly Project proposal with Chair and Committee members (part of NRSG 674 coursework)
  o Proposal meeting with Committee either this semester or next
• Semester 4 (3-Yr and 4-Yr)
  o Submit Scholarly Project Proposal Approval Form after project proposal is presented and approved by committee (refer to Graduate Program Handbook)
  o Prepare and submit IRB (with permission from Chair and Committee and Project Proposal Approval form completed)
  o Begin work on project
• Subsequent semesters
  o Continue work on project
• Semester 7 (3-Yr, MN-DNP), Semester 10 (4-Yr)
  o Presentation/Defense of Scholarly Project to Chair, Committee, and College
• Semester 8 (3-Yr, MN-DNP), Semester 11 (4-Yr)
  o Submission of Scholarly 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 DNP Scholarly 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 4 (see Timeline above) after your project proposal defense. 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/

Clinical Residency Hours

You are required to spend a minimum of 270 clinical residency hours (6 clinical lab credits) completing your DNP Scholarly Project. These hours are in addition to the time you spend on 5 lecture credits associated with NRSG 674 and NRSG 675. Students will complete these clinical residency hours in NRSG 674 and NRSG 675 (refer to your Program of Study). According to NONPF, residency provides additional hours in autonomous practice, leadership, practice inquiry, and policy as part of the fabric of professional preparation for the NP with a practice doctorate (NONPF, 2010). The clinical residency hours for the DNP Scholarly Project seminar
courses (NRSG 674) should focus on experiences that combine clinical practicum with scholarly activities to provide in-depth learning for students. These clinical hours provide an opportunity for meaningful engagement with experts from nursing, as well as other disciplines. During residency the students integrate and synthesize knowledge by demonstrating competency in an area of nursing practice, completing a scholarly project, and writing a publishable paper based on their project. The clinical residency hours reflect the Nurse Practitioner Core Competencies (NP Core Competencies). The NP Core Competencies are acquired through mentored patient care experiences with emphasis on independent and inter-professional practice; analytic skills for evaluating and providing evidence-based, patient centered care across settings; and advanced knowledge of the health care delivery system (NONPF, 2012). The following areas should be the focus of the clinical residency hours for the DNP project courses:

- Scholarly activities, healthcare leadership skills, and professional development.
- Identifying a problem, population, and identifying project sponsors and key stakeholders.
- Completing a needs assessment and determining resources needed/available to complete the project.
- Identifying tools and desired outcomes.
- Demonstration of an understanding of the interdependence of policy and practice.
- Using best available evidence to enhance quality of care in clinical practice
- Developing plans for comprehensive care management that address the multi-dimensional needs of patients presenting for advanced practice nursing care.
- Translating research and other forms of knowledge to improve practice processes and patient outcomes.
- Providing leadership to foster collaboration with multiple stakeholders (e.g. patients, community, integrated health care teams, and policy makers) to improve health care.
- Applying knowledge of organizational practices and complex systems to improve health care delivery.
- Critically analyzing data and evidence for improving advanced nursing practice.
- Assuming complex and advanced leadership roles to initiate and guide change.
- Communicating practice knowledge effectively both orally and in writing.
- Contributing to the design of clinical information systems that promote safe, quality and cost effective care.
- Leading and advancing quality improvement of direct care for individuals and populations and health systems.

The following activities are some examples of time that can be applied toward residency hours:

1. Time spent in a clinical agency to evaluate a practice protocol, clinical guidelines, or process improvement.
2. Time spent participating in a health initiative at the local, state, regional level.
3. Time spent in formal skill building to develop, implement, or evaluate your scholarly project (such as tutorials, meetings, conferences, consultation with experts)
4. Evaluating how organizational, structural, financial, marketing, and policy decisions impact cost outcomes, quality, and accessibility of health care.
5. Applying clinical investigative skills for evaluation of health outcomes at the patient, family, population, clinical unit, systems, and/or community levels.
7. Completing a needs assessment, implementing a change initiative, or disseminating evidence from inquiry to diverse audiences using multiple modalities.
8. Time spent researching your area of specialization.

Clinical hours do not include:
1. Time spent in seminars/conferences that are counted toward a course in which you receive credit.
2. Time spent traveling to and from seminars/conferences.

Tracking Clinical Residency Hours
An electronic spreadsheet for tracking clinical hours will be provided in the online course: NRSG 674 DNP Scholarly Project Seminar. This tracking sheet should be used to document all clinical hours spent completing the Scholarly Project Proposal and Scholarly Project. You should submit tracking sheets to the course instructor for NRSG 674 and to your DNP Scholarly Project Faculty Chair (for NRSG 675) by the end of each semester. Any time spent doing project work is considered clinical project hours and should be documented on the clinical hour log. NRSG 674 has 1 credit of clinical lab that translates to 45 clock hours. So the minimum expectation is that you would spend 45 hours working on your project. You will record these hours in your clinical log. For subsequent semesters when you are working on your DNP project (NRSG 675), each 1 credit of clinical lab equates to 45 clock hours. So you should plan on spending a minimum of 45 hours per credit on your project during these courses. Please note that some semesters will have 2 credits of clinical lab, which would be 90 hours.

Project Defense

The Graduate School requires that students successfully defend their Scholarly Project as a requirement for graduation. The primary purpose of the project defense is for the graduate student to demonstrate scholarship (guidelines for Dissertation 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.

DNP students should be ready to defend their DNP Scholarly Project during their last fall semester in the graduate program. The chairperson decides when your project is ready for the defense. The project defense is considered an exam (Appendix 2) and is conducted only when the final draft of the project is complete (as determined by the chair).
References


Appendix 1

Sample Project Design

This is to serve as a rough guide for the DNP 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. Your chairperson may require you to write using chapters or might prefer a manuscript or using Squire Guidelines for final paper format. Please clarify this early with your chairperson. Use these guidelines in several ways: 1) as a guide for successfully writing a summative paper of your project, 2) developing your final Power Point defense, and 3) converting 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.
Appendix 2
Scholarly Project Defense Rubric

Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)

Scholarly Project Defense Rubric

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<td>2. A thorough review of the literature with synthesis of the evidence</td>
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supporting the clinical question and project.

3. Summary of the current knowledge

4. Literature search strategy and databases used.

5. Is there an evidence table in Appendix?

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**Theoretical Underpinnings**

There is an explanation of the nursing theory or theories used as the conceptual framework for this project. It is integrated throughout the implementation and evaluation.

**Methods**

1. **Ethical Issues**
   a. Describe the ethical issues, IRB review or exemption
   b. Describe the ethical aspects of the project that might affect participants’ physical well-being.
   c. Include any HIPPA protection statements as appropriate

2. **Sample and Setting**
   a. Describe the sample (patient population if any) and those involved in the project (#, ages, gender, etc)
   b. Describe the specifics of where this project is taking place.
   c. What are the relevant elements of the setting (geography, physical resources, organizational culture, staffing
or leadership issues).

3. Intervention

   a. What is/are the interventions/actions that will be taken and why were these chosen (rationale)?
   
   b. What outcomes are expected and why (rationale)?
   
   c. What are the steps of the intervention? (what was to be done and by whom)
   
   d. What instruments or procedures were used in the intervention? What is the reliability or validity of this instrument?

4. Analysis

   a. Provide detail of qualitative or quantitative methods used to draw inferences from the data
   
   b. Explain ability of study design to detect effect (effect size)
   
   c. Describe analytic methods used to demonstrate effects of time as a variable (i.e. statistical process control)
   
   d. What methods are used to assure data quality and adequacy (i.e. Blinding, repeating measurements and data extraction, collection of sufficient baseline measurements/data)

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1. Consider benefit, harm, unexpected results, problems, failures

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**Discussion**

1. Summarize the most important successes and difficulties in implementing intervention components.
2. Highlight the project’s particular strengths
3. Compare and contrast your outcomes with the literature
4. Note any differences between observed outcomes and expected outcomes?
5. Draw inferences about causal mechanisms
6. Review issues of financial cost
7. Suggest steps to help improve future projects
8. Limitations
   a. Consider sources of confounding bias or imprecision of study design, measurement, and analysis that might have affected project outcome (internal validity)
   b. Explore factors that could affect generalizability (external validity)
   c. Review efforts made to minimize and adjust for expected limitations

**Conclusion**
1. Consider overall practical application and usefulness of the project
2. How useful was the intervention?
3. Suggest implications for future studies

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**Overall Paper/Defense Comments:**