## Table of Contents

Masters of Nursing (MN) Professional Project Overview ........................................ 3
Program of Study and MN Professional Project Committee ........................... 3
Examples of MN Professional Projects ............................................................... 5
Steps and Timeline for Project Completion and Work with Committee ........... 6
Institutional Review Board (IRB) ........................................................................ 6
Project Defense .................................................................................................... 6
Final Approval of Professional Project ............................................................... 8

### Appendices

Appendix 1: Sequence of Required Forms .................................................... 9
Appendix 2: Project Proposal Template ......................................................... 10
Appendix 3: Professional Project Paper Template ......................................... 12
Masters of Nursing (MN) Professional Project Overview

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

“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 an application of research based information. (Fitzpatrick, J. & Wallace, M. p. 228).

The MN professional project is not intended to test new models, develop new theory, generate new knowledge, or test hypotheses. Depending upon your area of emphasis or interest, you might focus on: 1) a 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 development of a strategic plan for the delivery of healthcare in practice.

Program of Study and MN Professional Project Committee

MSU College of Nursing faculty are available in person, by phone, or by e-mail to guide you through your Program of Study and Professional Project. Faculty teaching in the graduate program can be accessed during the fall, spring, and summer semesters when school is in session.

Major Advisor/Chairperson

Your major advisor serves as the chair of your Professional Project committee. You are responsible for contacting your chairperson each semester. You and your chairperson will negotiate a time frame. The contract can be altered by mutual consent. The chairperson will submit a letter grade each semester that you are registered for Professional Project credits (NRSG 575).

The Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education serves as temporary academic advisor for all MN graduate students until a major advisor is identified (during each student’s first fall semester). The major advisor serves as the student’s chairperson and acts as a channel of communication within the college. If a major advisor is not identified by the end of the first
semester, the Associate Dean will assign an advisor to guide the student until a major advisor/chair is selected.

Committee Members
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 methodology, knowledge in the specific content area of your project, and expertise in writing. All faculty members in College of Nursing are available to participate on project committees whether or not they teach in the graduate program.

The chairperson, in consultation with you and committee members, is responsible for guidance on all matters of content and format for the Professional Project. Committee members are responsible for guiding the student in their area of expertise as it relates to the 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 the student identify format errors, particularly with regard to APA editorial standards. Students may be referred to the Montana State University Writing Center or may seek assistance with assistance on their own.

Progression
Important forms required to document students’ progression through the graduate program. The sequence of the Graduate School and College of Nursing forms are listed in Appendix 1. The most up-to-date forms should be used from the Graduate School (http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/forms.html) and College of Nursing (http://www.montana.edu/nursing/student/graduate.html) websites.

Formalizing the Committee and Program of Study
The Graduate Program of Study & Committee form (Form 1, Appendix 1) must be on file with the Graduate School by the end of your second semester. Form 1 is used to notify the Graduate School of your committee members and the coursework that the College of Nursing faculty and committee members have approved to meet the minimum requirements for the MN degree at Montana State University. Form 1 must be signed by the committee chair, the student, and all members of the student’s committee. Non-tenure track faculty members and community members may participate on committees after providing a vita or resume (Form 2, Appendix 1), which is subject to College of Nursing (Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education) approval. The Associate Dean writes letters of recommendation for non-tenure track and community committee membership. Once everything is in order and complete, the Associate Dean signs Form 1 and forwards it, along with letters of recommendation and CV/Resumes (if applicable), to the Graduate School for final review and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Signatures of chairperson and committee members signify approval of the student’s Program of Study (Form 1, Appendix 1), approval of the proposed project topic and plan (Form 3, Appendix 1), and passing of the project defense (Form 4, Appendix 1).
Committee Changes
In the event of committee membership changes, revisions are submitted to the College of Nursing using the Graduate Committee Revision form (form available at http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/forms.html). Both the original and revised committee sections must be filled out with the person(s) being removed and the one(s) being added to the committee initializing next to their name indicating their concurrence. An explanation for the revision(s) must be included. The Revision form is then sent to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education (College of Nursing) for signature and routing to the Graduate School.

Student Responsibilities
As a MN student you must be responsive to the direction of the chairperson and committee members regarding all matters of content and quality of your 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.

Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum credits: 4</th>
<th>At least 2 committee members from the College of Nursing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grading: Letter grade</td>
<td>Minimum committee membership: 3 members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair must be faculty in the College of Nursing and have a doctorate (PhD, EdD, DNP). Tenured/tenure track faculty not required.</td>
<td>Professionals from outside MSU may serve on committees (vita required, Form 2, Appendix 1) – submit vita with Program of Study (Form 1, Appendix 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 (Form 1, Appendix 1)
- **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 (Form 3, Appendix 1)
  - 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 – Form 5, Appendix 1)

**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 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).

The chairperson decides when your project is ready for the defense. The project is defended by you in front of your committee. The defense is a formal presentation that is open to all faculty and graduate students. You, your committee chairperson, and your committee
members must attend the defense in person or via videoconference. Per Graduate School policy, graduate committee members are not allowed to attend the defense via teleconference and College of Nursing faculty must be present on one of the five college campuses (Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Kalispell, and/or Missoula).

You must be registered for a minimum of three credits during the term in which the defense takes place. The project defense is conducted only when the final draft of the project is complete (as determined by the chairperson) and before the end of the term in which you complete your graduate work.

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 defense is 2 hours: 30 minutes for the presentation followed by 30 minutes for audience questions. The remaining time will include committee questions without audience and the committee deliberation. The committee may formulate specific questions to ask the student or the committee may choose a more spontaneous format for questions.

**Scheduling**
To schedule the defense, the committee chairperson and student decide on the date. Once a mutually acceptable defense date is determined, the chairperson schedules the defense using the Videoconference/Teleconference Request Form (link: [http://www.montana.edu/nursing/facstaff/infotech/videotcrequest.htm](http://www.montana.edu/nursing/facstaff/infotech/videotcrequest.htm)).

The Associate Dean’s office will announce the defense presentation date, time, location, title of the Professional Project, chairperson, graduate student’s name, and committee members to all graduate students and college faculty. The defense also will be posted on the MSU calendar by the Associate Dean’s office. All are welcome to attend.

**Grading**
The student is excused from the room while the committee determines adequacy of the student’s presentation and responses to posed questions. A majority of the committee members must deem the presentation and responses to be adequate for a judgment of “pass.”

At the time of the defense, the Report on Comprehensive Exams/Thesis Defense Masters Students Only (Form 4, Appendix 1) must be completed and signed by all committee members. The completed form will be sent to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education for signature and forwarded to the Graduate School.

Per the Graduate School: For students who do not pass the project defense, a record of the questions posed, brief notes capturing the essence of the student’s response and a record of the committee vote is prepared and forwarded by the chairperson to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education within one week of the examination. Students who do not pass may repeat the defense once after two months have elapsed. Failure to pass a second defense will result in the student’s termination from the nursing graduate program.
Please refer to the Graduate School policy for Defense of Thesis (which applies to MN Professional Projects) at: [http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/policy/degrreq_masters.html](http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/policy/degrreq_masters.html) - scroll down to the Defense of Thesis section.

There are also official forms on the Graduate School website for Report on Qualifying Exam/Comprehensive Exam/Thesis Defense Masters Students Only (Form 4, Appendix 1) and for Certificate of Approval Form for Theses and Dissertations (Form 5, Appendix 1).

**Final Approval of Professional Project**

The chairperson has the responsibility of final review of the paper before it is submitted to the Graduate School. Final acceptance or rejection of the professional paper is the responsibility of the Dean of the Graduate School.

Professional papers from College of Nursing graduate students are subjected to rigorous standards and must be submitted electronically to the Graduate School by the published deadline before graduation. Refer to the Electronic Thesis/Dissertation (ETD) website for further information ([http://www.montana.edu/etd/](http://www.montana.edu/etd/)). The Certificate of Approval (Form 5, Appendix 1) is used for archiving the ETD with the MSU library. The Graduate School prefers that this form be typed prior to committee signatures.

Note: The ETD Certificate of Approval Form (Form 5, Appendix 1) requires original signatures. The Graduate School will accept more than one copy of the ETD Certificate of Approval form if more than one copy is needed to obtain original signatures in a timely manner. Students must factor in the extra time needed to circulate this document prior to the deadline, which is published on the Graduate School website. For detailed information regarding ETD preparation, formatting, submissions, including a checklist, go to [http://www.montana.edu/etd/](http://www.montana.edu/etd/).
Appendix 1
Sequence of Required Forms

- Form 1: Graduate Program of Study & Committee Form and Instructions (Graduate School form - http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/forms.html)

- Form 2: Non-MSU Committee Membership CV/Resume (College of Nursing form - http://www.montana.edu/nursing/student/graduate.html)

- Form 3: Professional (MN) and Scholarly (DNP) Project Proposal Approval Form (College of Nursing form – http://www.montana.edu/nursing/student/graduate.html). This form is to be completed and signed by your committee at your proposal meeting and submitted before you submit to IRB and actually begin your project.


- Form 5: Certificate of Approval Form for Theses and Dissertations - (Graduate School form – http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/forms.html) - electronic submission/ETDs of professional project papers (MN degree) is required by the College of Nursing.
# Title of Project:

| 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)? |
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>viii.</td>
<td>What factors contributed to your choice of the intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ix.</td>
<td>What are the steps of the intervention? (what was to be done and by whom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xi.</td>
<td>What instruments or procedures will be used in the intervention? What is the reliability or validity of the instruments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xii.</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiii.</td>
<td>Provide detail of qualitative or quantitative methods that will be used to draw inferences from the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiv.</td>
<td>Explain ability of study design to detect effect (effect size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xv.</td>
<td>Describe analytic methods that will be used to demonstrate effects of time as a variable (i.e., statistical process control)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3  
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