



**DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE  
PRACTICE INQUIRY PROJECT TOOL KIT**

**2024**

## Project Overview

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) project is a scholarly experience founded on the knowledge gained in the DNP curriculum and is designed by the student(s) in collaboration with faculty and community/agency content experts. It provides an opportunity for students to apply principles of evidence-based practice and implementation science. Students will demonstrate the role of clinical expert in the translation of research into practice, policy, and/or healthcare system innovation in a format that supports the synthesis, transfer, and utilization of knowledge.

The student(s) will demonstrate identification, development, and implementation of a quality improvement project through the application of scholarship. DNP project experiences are characterized by intensive interactions among faculty, students, and the community in which the project is enacted. **The broad theme that links all DNP projects is the utilization of evidence to improve practice and/or patient outcomes.** Exploration of the topic may begin at any point in the curriculum. The specialty DNP track chosen will determine the nature and structure of the project topic.

All students enrolled in the DNP program will complete an evidence-based practice project as a requirement for graduation. All DNP projects should:

- focus on a change that impacts healthcare outcomes either through direct or indirect care;
- have a system or population/aggregate focus;
- demonstrate implementation in the appropriate area of practice;
- include a plan for sustainability (e.g., financial, systems or political realities, not only theoretical abstractions);
- include an evaluation of processes and/or outcomes (formative and summative). DNP projects should be designed so that processes and/or outcomes will be evaluated to guide quality and policy; and
- provide a foundation for future practice scholarship (AACN, 2021).

DNP project must be completed within a minimum of 6 credit hours over three semesters. If the student(s) are unable to complete the DNP project in 6 credit hours he/she/they must remain enrolled in NU 977 for 1 credit hour/semester (See University Catalog) until project completion. During the first semester students will enroll in NU 971 DNP Project I. Within the structure of this course, students are expected to identify a topic and complete a project proposal and oral defense of the proposal. During the second semester, students are expected to satisfy university and/or organizational institutional review board (IRB) requirements when appropriate and begin implementation. During the third semester, students are expected to complete the project and successfully present/defend their project. An incomplete for the inquiry courses cannot be awarded. Inquiry courses are not available for enrollment during the summer sessions. Students earn a grade for NU 971 and NU 973 or NU 977 depending on when the project is complete. Students earn a Pass or Fail in NU 972. Pass is defined as “the student has made sufficient progress.”

Group projects (a maximum of 4 students per group) are expected to focus on the students' area of practice, goals, and project aims. Each member of the student group must meet all expectations of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project and will be evaluated accordingly. Each student must have a leadership role in at least one component of the project and will be held accountable for a deliverable. Illustrative examples of a leadership role include:

- the student serves as a vital member of an interprofessional team, implementing and evaluating a component of a larger project;
- students work on the same project across multiple units within the same organization or across multiple organizations or sites;
- students focus on different aspects of improving outcomes of care by meeting criteria guidelines (i.e., diabetes foot care, eye exams, HbA1c screenings);
- students analyze and implement changes in local, regional, or state policies to improve access to care (AACN, 2021).

### **Overview of Project Steps**

Prior to beginning the project, students must have faculty approval for the student project team roster and the topic. Details for each step can be found in this document and the related course syllabi for DNP Practice Inquiry Project (NU 971, NU 972, and NU 973). During the project process, the student is mentored and guided by a faculty-led Project Team.

1. Prior to enrolling in NU 971, students will collaborate with DNP faculty to begin the process of exploring a potential practice problem or opportunity. Problems can be derived from topics related to faculty expertise and/or interest relevant to student scholarship and/or practice interests.
2. During the first semester of project, students will review the DNP Project Tool Kit and the NU 971 syllabus. Students will complete Washburn University IRB training if not done previously.
3. Students will collaborate with the NU 971 Course Coordinator, Director of the DNP Program, and/or the Director of the PMHNP Certificate Program to select a topic and student team.
4. The Director of the DNP Program will assign faculty members to serve as Chairs for each student/team project. The Project Chairs must be WU School of Nursing faculty members who are doctoral-prepared and currently teach within the graduate program. Most faculty project teams will consist of at least the Project Chairs and one community/agency member who serves as a content expert. Additional School of Nursing faculty, or other Washburn leaders may serve on the Faculty Project Team, based upon the nature of the topic. The community/agency expert will be determined with approval by the Project Chair(s).

5. With the Faculty Project Team's approval, students will contact the organization or agency to discuss willingness to collaborate with the project. A statement of mutual agreement will be required for the project as it is developed and as IRB approval is requested.
6. While enrolled in NU 971, students will explore factors contributing to the chosen problem, review the literature, and develop a proposal for the specific project selected. At the conclusion of the semester, students will formally defend the proposal to the Faculty Project Team and receive approval for submission of the proposal to IRB.
7. At the beginning of the second semester of project (NU 972), students will prepare the appropriate IRB application (university and/or organization) and obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the project. After IRB approval is obtained, students will begin implementation of the project with continued supervision from the Faculty Project Team.
8. During the last semester/s (NU 973 ± NU 977), students will conduct the project, evaluate outcomes, and prepare a written final report or manuscript. Students will continue to work closely with the Faculty Project Team at this time.
9. Prior to the conclusion of the final semester, students will submit a copy of the project defense announcement, including an abstract, to the Director of Graduate Student Services and schedule the project defense. They will defend the project during a formal presentation to the School of Nursing faculty and other interested parties. A successful defense means that students have met the expectations for rigor and academic excellence required for the degree of Doctor of Nursing Practice. Students will submit an electronic copy of the final written Project or Manuscript to the appropriate NU 973 or NU 977 assignment box. This information will be permanently archived at Mabee Library.



### **DNP Project Grades**

NU 971 Practice Inquiry Project I will be graded using criteria and grading scale identified in the course syllabus.

NU 972 Practice Inquiry Project II will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Pass is defined as “the student has made sufficient progress.”

NU 973 Practice Inquiry Project III will be graded using criteria and grading scale identified in the course syllabus.

## **DNP Faculty Project Team Guidelines**

### **Faculty Project Team Selection**

1. The Director of the DNP Program and/or Director of the PMHNP Certificate Program will collaborate with students to identify a topic and student project teams. The goal is to complete this process prior to the start of NU 971 or during the first few weeks of NU 971.
2. In collaboration with students, the Director of the DNP Program will recommend Project Chairs for each project.
3. Students will work with their Project Chairs to refine the project topic and identify additional faculty or community members to serve on the Faculty Project Team.
4. The Project Chairs will report to the Director of the DNP Program detailing the project title and Faculty Project Team members.

### **Project Chair Role and Responsibilities**

The Project Chairs serve as mentors for students throughout the development, implementation, and evaluation of the project. During the first semester of project, the Project Chairs work in collaboration with the NU 971 Course Coordinator to guide students as they complete foundational assignments in DNP Inquiry, and the Project Chairs evaluate assignments directly related to the development of the Project Proposal. Other responsibilities include:

- Assuring IRB compliance
- Identifying additional faculty and/or community project team members
- Effectively communicating with the student(s), faculty team members and community/agency
- Determining the appropriateness of copyrighting the final project with the inclusion of any instrument authored by another
- Providing feedback to students on written drafts in a timely manner
- Documenting student progress toward completion of the project
- Collaborating with students and Assistant Director of Graduate Nursing Services to schedule the final oral project defense
- Leading the proposal hearing and DNP Project final approval process
- Insuring completion of all required documentation to the School of Nursing and Washburn University

**Project Consultants**

Depending on the nature and scope of the project, community experts may be asked to consult with the Project Team. Consultants will guide the student(s) and Faculty Project Team through intermittent or limited support throughout the project stages as needed. The Faculty Project Team and students will determine the need for consultants. Consultants are not voting members of the Project Team.

**Request to Change Project Committee**

Changes to the membership of the Faculty Project Team may occasionally be required. To change team membership, the student(s) will send an email to the Project Chair and Director of the DNP Program requesting a change and the rationale for the change. The Director of the DNP Program will consult with the Project Chair to determine a replacement. The Director of the DNP Program will notify the student(s) via email of the new committee member selected to serve on the project.

## **Project Proposal and Defense**

### **Components of the Written Project Proposal**

Each student (if working independently), or student team (if working as a group), will submit a written proposal as a course requirement of NU 971. This will be graded by the Faculty Project Team. Community members may provide input, but do not determine a grade. The written proposal is expected to contain the following elements:

- a. Title
- b. Abstract
- c. Introduction (includes problem statement)
- d. Project Purpose and Objectives
- e. Background
- f. Relevance for nurse practitioners
- g. Theoretical Framework
- h. Review of Literature
- i. Proposed Methods including Dissemination Plan
- j. Economic Impact
- k. Conclusion/Summary
- l. Organization\*
- m. Sentence Structure/Fluency\*
- n. Vocabulary/Word Choice\*
- o. Scholarly/Technical Writing\*
- p. Citations & Reference List\*
- q. Grammar/Spelling\*

\*Note: The written project proposal incorporates content from the Graduate Writing Rubric. See *NU 971 Final Proposal Draft Grading Rubric*.

### **Components of the Oral Project Proposal Defense**

Each student (if working independently), or student team (if working as a group), will participate in a formal presentation to the Faculty Project Team at the conclusion of NU 971, and will provide an overview of the proposed project and its methodology. The oral project defense ensures that the project has the necessary academic rigor and protections for human subjects needed for the planned implementation of the proposal. Community members may provide input, but do not determine a grade.

The oral project defense is presented during a scheduled *Zoom* session, using a balanced presentation style and a format which addresses the key headings from the project proposal. The time frame for the oral project defense is approximately 30 minutes, with opportunity for questions and responses at the conclusion of the presentation. See *NU 971 Oral Project Proposal Grading Rubric*.

After the oral project proposal defense, The Faculty Project Team may choose to:

- a. Approve the proposal: Project Team may move forward to NU 972
- b. Conditionally approve with minor revisions and no re-review:

The student(s) will file a final/revised project proposal to the DNP Project Team within two weeks of the proposal defense meeting.

- c. Require minor or major revisions and re-review:

The student(s) will develop a significantly revised or new proposal. The Project Chairs will work with the student(s) on revisions. The DNP Project Team will review the new proposal and all prior steps will be repeated. Note – this option may result in a delay of final graduation date.

- d. Reject the proposal:

The student(s) must develop a significantly revised or new proposal. The Project Chairs will work with the candidate on the revision. The Project Team will review the new proposal and all prior steps will be repeated. Note – this option will result in a delay in final graduation date.

Students must successfully pass the Project Proposal process before starting NU 972 Practice Inquiry Project II. If a student is unsuccessful in completing the Project Proposal process, the student must repeat NU 971 Practice Inquiry Project I.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Review**

Each student must complete Washburn IRB training prior to defending the project proposal. Most projects will need to undergo Washburn University IRB review during the second semester of project while the student(s) is/are enrolled in NU 972. Depending upon the nature of the project and the proposed population or setting, an additional outside IRB review may be required by the organization associated with the project site. Please use the following link to access the Washburn IRB training tutorial, application form, and informed consent template, and informed consent guidelines: <https://washburn.edu/faculty-staff/faculty-resources/irb/index.html>

Prior to requesting IRB review, written permission must be received from an authorizing official from the organization or agency hosting the project. Participant consent forms, copies of data-collection tools, and the organization/agency consent form must be submitted with the IRB application. Please allow 2-3 weeks for Washburn IRB approval. Once the student(s) has/have received approval from all required IRB entities, they may begin the project implementation phase.



## **Project Implementation and Evaluation**

After IRB approval, project implementation begins in NU 972 and continues into NU 973. Project outcome evaluation, the DNP Project Final Written Document, and the DNP Final Oral Defense are completed during the final semester of the DNP Project.

The student project team must keep the Project Chairs informed about any changes in the nature or development of the project as it progresses. If outside funding is considered for any part of the project, approval from the Project Chairs is needed **prior** to submitting any requests for funding. It is not an expectation that funding sources be obtained for conducting DNP projects unless the focus of the project is grant-writing and/or grant application. Students are also expected to communicate with the Project Chairs before submitting any abstracts for conferences or publications to report findings. Student may not submit to the public domain any materials that are an integral component of the project without prior approval by the Project Chairs.

### **DNP Project Final Written Document**

The final written document can be a manuscript submitted to a peer-reviewed professional journal, a White Paper, a Policy Brief, or an Executive Summary Report, and in some instances, a poster presentation. This will be determined in advance and in collaboration with the Faculty Project Team and the student(s). Grading of the written document is done by the Faculty Project Team. With the assistance of the Project Chairs, a final copy of the final written document is also submitted to the Director of Graduate Student Services for posting to the Washburn University Electronic Archive via the assignment box located in the NU 973 on-line course.

The final written document is expected to contain the following elements:

- a. Title/Abstract
- b. Introduction/Purpose/Objectives/Relevance
- c. Review of Literature (Summary/Synthesis)
- d. Theoretical Framework
- e. Implementation Methods
- f. Outcomes/Results/Analysis (including cost considerations)
- g. Recommendations/Conclusions
- h. Writing Mechanics

See *NU 973 Practice Inquiry DNP Project Grading Rubric – Written Document*

## DNP Final Oral Project Defense

The final oral project defense represents the culmination of the DNP program and provides an opportunity for students to showcase and apply the American Association of Colleges of Nursing Essentials. Assessment done during this activity is one method to determine that the student has met the requirements for the academic program. Faculty Project Team members will determine if a student has met all project requirements. See *NU 973 DNP Final Oral Project Defense Rubric*.

### Final Project Defense Steps and Grading

It is expected that students will complete the Final Project Defense process during NU 973 Practice Inquiry Project III. Final Project Defense steps include the following:

1. Review the DNP Project Tool Kit and NU 973 syllabus.
2. Prepare a balanced oral presentation using a format to organize content and highlight the key aspects of the project. Students should prepare a 30- to 45-minute presentation of the project and then be prepared to discuss specific details and answer questions related to the project. Students are expected to submit a draft of the presentation to the Faculty Project Team, allowing 1 to 2 weeks for the committee to review and comment on the draft submission. **This process may require several iterations.**
3. Students will collaborate with the Project Chairs and the Assistant Director of Graduate Nursing Services to schedule the final project defense meeting. The candidate(s), Project Chairs, and Project Team Members are required to attend the project defense meeting. The presentation is open to the public. Students are encouraged to invite community partners and organizations/agencies that hosted the project.
4. Students will submit the final draft of the oral presentation to the Faculty Project Team at least two weeks prior to the scheduled final project defense date.
5. Students will give the presentation of the final project. After the presentation is concluded, the Faculty Project Team will ask questions. Often the student or student project team will prepare 2 to 3 questions on key aspects of the project not covered in the presentation. After members of the Faculty Project Team ask their questions, members of the audience may ask questions of the candidate(s).
6. The Faculty Project Team will convene in private to evaluate the project defense presentation. Project approval may consist of the following:

- a). All Faculty Project Team Members approve the DNP Project:

Once the DNP Project is approved, the Project Chairs and Faculty Project team will sign and submit the Final Project Approval form and forward the form to the DNP Program Director, who will then sign and forward the form to the Director of Graduate Student Services.

- b). One or more DNP Project Team Members fail to approve the DNP Project:

In the event of one or more negative votes, the student(s) fails NU 973. The Faculty Project Team may recommend significant revisions to the project or require additional study/coursework in the area(s) of deficiency. A timeline will be established and the

Student(s) will be given a second opportunity to successfully complete the project. Students will be required to enroll in NU 977 for 1-credit hour for each semester it takes to complete the project. In the event of two failures, the student(s) will be dismissed from the DNP program.

7. Before the Project Chairs can determine a final grade, students must successfully complete the written document, presentation, and any other requirements as determined by the Faculty Project Team prior to the Project Defense. The final grade is then submitted to the NU 973 course coordinator.

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