

RADFORD UNIVERSITY

School of Nursing

DNP Final Project Handbook

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Overview of the DNP Final Project

A Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) is a dynamic nurse who has advanced education in leadership, clinical practice, and health care systems in Advanced Nursing Practice. These individuals play an integral role of the health care team with a concentration on the improvement of health outcomes.

Doctoral education, whether practice or research, is distinguished by the completion of a specific project that demonstrates synthesis of the student's work and lays the groundwork for future scholarship. For practice doctorates, requiring a dissertation or other original research is contrary to the intent of the DNP.

The DNP primarily involves mastery of an advanced specialty within nursing practice. Therefore, other methods must be used to distinguish the achievement of that mastery. Unlike a dissertation, the work may take a number of forms. An example of a final DNP product is a practice change initiative. This may be represented by a pilot study, a program evaluation, a quality improvement project, and an evaluation of a new practice model. Additional examples of a DNP final product could include manuscripts submitted for publication, research utilization project, substantive involvement in a larger endeavor, or other practice project. The theme that links these forms of scholarly experiences is the use of evidence to improve either practice or patient outcomes.

The final DNP project produces a tangible and deliverable academic product that is derived from the practice immersion experience. It should include IRB approval, study implementation, data collection and data analysis, summary of the study findings, and dissemination of study findings in the format of presentation or publication. The final DNP product documents outcomes of the student's educational experiences, provides a measurable medium for evaluating the immersion experience, and summarizes the student's growth in knowledge and expertise. The final DNP product should be defined by the academic unit and utilize a form that best incorporates the requirements of the specialty and the institution that is awarding the degree.

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2018), the DNP Final Project prepares individuals to utilize skills and knowledge gained through coursework. Areas of advanced skills and knowledge include leadership, health care systems, clinical competencies, and integration into practice in accordance with the DNP Essentials.

Choosing a DNP Project

Scope of DNP Project

Each DNP Project will:

- Focus on a change that impacts healthcare outcomes either through direct or indirect care.
- Have systems (micro-, meso-, or macro- level) or population/aggregate focus.
- Demonstrate implementation in the appropriate arena or 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 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.
- Provide a foundation for future practice scholarship

(Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Tool Kit, 2018, Scope of DNP Final Project section)

Acceptable Types of DNP Projects

1. Quality Improvement Project
2. Program Evaluation
3. Other Types of Research (Quantitative Research)
 - a. Survey
 - b. Quasi-Experimental Studies
 - c. Retrospective/Prospective Research
 - d. Mixed Methodology

Unacceptable Projects

1. Systematic Reviews
2. Integrative Reviews
3. Portfolio
4. Concept Analysis
5. CE Program
6. Submission of Legislative Bills
7. Case Study Report
8. Qualitative Research
9. Projects related to Nursing Education in Higher Education

Exemplars

Exemplars of previous DNP Final Projects can be found at the Radford University Scholars Repository - <http://wagner.radford.edu/>

DNP Final Project Faculty Team

A. Project Chair

1. Project Chair Requirements

- a) Graduate Standing Faculty with PhD or ED or DNP
- b) Faculty member's graduate project must have required IRB approval, data collection, data analysis, and have published their findings at least one paper to a professional journal
- c) Participation as a team member on two DNP final projects throughout the entire cycle of DNP student project completion

2. Project Chair Responsibilities

- a) Supports student to develop a project proposal paper & secure the project implementation site
- b) Collaborates with DNP final scholarly project team member to provide sound and balanced feedback (organizes at least one meeting per semester).
- c) Secures the approval of the project proposal from DNP final project team faculty members.
- d) Supports the student to develop the IRB proposal to submit and obtain the IRB approval prior to the implementation of the project.
- e) Supports data collection and data analysis process (if needed, secure statistician's support).
- f) Supports student in writing of their DNP final scholarly project paper and in presenting their findings at a local, regional, or national conference.

B. Committee Member

1. Committee Member Requirements

- Graduate teaching faculty with specialty or research interests on topic

2. Member Responsibilities

- a) Supports and collaborates with DNP final scholarly project team leader
- b) Supports student to develop a project proposal paper by providing feedback in a timely manner (within two weeks after receiving).
- c) Participates in Students' DNP Team Meeting
 - 1 or 2 meetings per semester
 - Provides written feedback to the student throughout the semester project deems necessary

DNP Final Project Course Progression

Completion of DNP Final Project component in progressive NURS courses

Course	Component of DNP Final Project
NURS 702: Theoretical Foundations for Advanced Nursing Practice (3 credits)	Develop theoretical framework of interest
NURS 800: Evidence for Advanced Nursing Practice (3 credits)	Develop concept / topic
NURS 802: Synthesis and Evaluation of Evidence-Based Data for Advanced Practice Nurses (3 credits)	Develop research question and statistical method for answering
NURS 804: Clinical Scholarship and Population-Based Outcomes for Advance Practice (3 credits)	Draft Project Proposal, Preliminary Defense, Team assignment
NURS 820: Doctor of Nursing Practice Final Project I (3 credits)	Submit completed Proposal to Team for review, Defense to Project Team, project approval, IRB submission
NURS 821: Doctor of Nursing Practice Final Project II (1 credit)	Implementation: Data collection, data analysis, first draft of Results section to Team
NURS 822: Doctor of Nursing Practice Final Project III (1 credit)	Completion of Writing (Results, Discussion, Conclusion sections), Final Project Paper submission, Defense, presentation (local, regional)
GRAD 799* Continuous Enrollment (1 credit)	*Students must be enrolled in University in the semester they will receive their degree. If the Final Project Paper submission and defense are incomplete in NURS 822, the student must enroll in this course for completion and award of degree.

Final Project Timeline

Progression Checklist for DNP Final Project Courses (NURS 820, 821, 822)

Course	Activities	Approximate Deadline
NURS 820	Dissertation Project Team form sent to Graduate College	Week 1
	Draft Proposal to all DNP Final Project Team members	Weeks 1-4
	DNP Final Project Proposal Defense with all Team members	Weeks 5-6
	Submission of changes to Final Proposal to Team members for review	Week 8
	Feedback, revisions, and approval of Final Project Proposal	Weeks 8-10
	IRB application submission to facility IRB and Radford University IRB	Week 10
	Await IRB approval	Weeks 10-15
NURS 821	Await IRB Application Approval	Weeks 1-2
	Completion of data collection; writing of methodology in past tense	Weeks 1-10
	Completion of data analysis using statistical methods from Proposal	Weeks 10-12
	Submission of Draft Results section	Week 13
	Begin writing Abstract	Week 15
	<i>*Depending on the type of project, an additional semester may be needed to complete data collection and data analysis. An Incomplete would be given until these are completed, turning the course grade from "Incomplete" to "Pass".</i>	<i>Additional semester as needed</i>
NURS 822	Completion and submission of Discussion and Conclusion sections to Team; feedback provided by Team members	Weeks 1-8
	Submission of changes to Final Paper and Abstract to Team	Week 11
	Submission of Abstract to local, regional, or national conference for poster or podium presentation	Week 12
	Submission of PowerPoint slides for DNP Final Project Presentation to Team for approval	One week prior to Defense
	DNP Final Project Defense to Team	Weeks 11-13
	Signed DNP Final Project Defense approval form sent to Graduate College	Weeks 11-13 after Defense
	Optional: Submission to target journal	Week 15

Final DNP Project - Paper Outline

The DNP Final Project paper outline is congruent with the requirements of the Radford University Graduate College guidelines for the comprehensive exam.

Required Paper Components

For details of 1-6, see the Radford University Graduate College Thesis Preparation Manual. Use APA 7th Guidelines.

1. Title Page
2. Abstract Page
3. Dedication Page (optional)
4. Acknowledgments(optional)
5. Table of Contents
6. List of Tables, Figures
7. Body of DNP Scholarly Project – Chapters 1-5 (details below)

Chapter 1 (no title)

Introduction: Introduces the thesis or dissertation problem and states its importance

This chapter must cover the following sections/subsections:

1. Introductory section that addresses:
 - a. problem and incidence
 - b. significance to nursing
2. Purpose: what your study will do to address the problem and significance of your investigation
3. Theoretical Framework: link key variables in your study to your chosen framework; provide diagrams if appropriate
4. Research Question(s)/Hypotheses: state or list if more than one by using numbers or bullets
5. Definition of Key Terms/Variables: provide conceptual definitions
6. Summary of chapter

Chapter 2: Integrated Review of the Literature

The Integrated Review of the Literature is a careful overview of related work, referencing similar research.

This chapter must cover the following sections/subsections:

1. Introduction
Introductory overview to outline the organization of the literature review
2. Each subsection of the literature review
 - a. Organize the studies in a manner that best supports your study's purpose and research questions
 - b. Be sure to include literature related to all major variables in your study.
 - c. Use subheadings to maintain organization and flow.

- d. Suggestions for organization include following your chosen theoretical framework, organizing by methodology of past studies, or organizing by your research questions.
 - e. Synthesize and critique the strengths and weaknesses of the current body of knowledge. Avoid merely summarizing study after study, however, it is acceptable to describe a few (≤ 5) noteworthy studies in more detail.
3. Gaps in the Literature
Identify gaps in the literature where they exist and state concisely how your study addresses those gaps (i.e., the justification for your study).
4. Summary
Summary paragraph(s) of the literature review

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter must cover the following items:

- a. Study Design: a. describes your study design and justify rationale for choosing
- b. Study Sample
 - a. defines target and accessible populations
 - b. discusses power analysis Radford University School of Nursing DNP Scholarly Project: Final Paper Format 2
 - c. Sample Recruitment: where and how subjects were recruited
 - d. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria
 - e. Protection of Human Subjects
 - i. IRB approval: study type (exempt, expedited, full board review), dates, any conditions of approval
 - ii. Methods used to protect subjects
 - iii. Risks and benefits of participation in study
- c. Study Variables Provide operational definitions for each variable in your study
- d. Instrument(s)
For each instrument used, describe:
 - a. specifically, what the tool measures
 - b. how it is administered (in person, online, paper, etc.)
 - c. subjective and objective data measures used (e.g., Likert scale, open-ended, etc.)
 - d. number of items
 - e. reported measurement reliability (Chronbach's alpha, etc.)
 - f. use in previous studies, first publication
 - g. measurement validity
 - h. level of measurement of the data obtained (i.e., nominal ordinal, interval, ratio)
 - i. how the tool is scored
 - j. range of possible scores
 - k. how scores are interpreted (e.g., high scores mean greater anxiety, etc.)
- e. Procedures
Describe study implementation in a step by step-by-step process, including all preparations, participant contact, and data collection. Procedural aspects include:
 - a. Describe how eligible subjects were obtained

- b. Describe subject interventions in detail
- c. Data collection
- f. Data Protection and Management
 - a. Describe how data was protected during study
 - b. Data analysis software used (e.g., SPSS, NVivo, etc.)
 - c. Data organization and selection: how you have done to clean the data; what you have done with missing data, outliers, etc.
- g. Data Analysis
 - a. Name the tests used to answer each research question or test each hypothesis (e.g., paired t-test, Pearson's correlation, etc.)
 - b. Explain how statistical assumptions were met for each test

Chapter 4: Results

Overview of the results/contributions of the thesis or dissertation. In one paragraph, re-state the overall purpose/aim of the study and each research question/hypothesis

This chapter must cover the following items:

1. Description of the Sample
 - a. Report the demographic characteristics of your sample. At a minimum, this includes number of subjects in the sample, length of time it took to collect data, gender, education, race/ethnicity, age.
 - b. Include any other pertinent demographics important to your study. This might be years of nursing experience if your sample includes nurses, marital status if your study is about families, etc.
 - i. Depending on the level of measurement (nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio) you should report mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, etc as appropriate.
 - ii. If you have independent and dependent variables, organize this section according to these subheadings.
2. Analysis of Research Question(s)
 - a. Answer each research question or relate the results of each hypothesis tested. Remind the reader of each research questions.
 - b. Specify the method(s) used to analyze the data for each research question/hypothesis
 - c. Descriptive statistics: include means, SD, frequency, etc.
 - d.
3. Inferential statistics: include data from t-tests, ANOVA, correlations, etc. e. Hypothesis testing:
 - a. Describe if the null hypothesis was supported and interpret, using words in plain English.
 - b. Use NURS 802 statistical text for guidance on what values are typically reported depending on the test performed (e.g., degrees of freedom, etc.).
 - c. When testing for significance, report the p value and provide a written interpretation of whether the results were significant or not.
 - d. Use tables to visually display the findings.

4. Additional Statistical Analyses
 - a. Explain any additional analyses that were conducted beyond those performed to answer the research questions.
 - b. This is where interesting or serendipitous findings should be reported along with a brief explanation/justification of why you performed these additional analyses. In other words, don't allow this section to look like a "fishing expedition" but instead justify why you are including this.
5. Summary: Restate the purpose of the study and how you accomplished it. In other words, repeat the major findings of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Conclusions, interpretations, implications, and recommendations for further research.

This chapter must cover the following items:

1. Relationship of Findings to Prior Research
 - a. Start with reminding the reader of the purpose statement and what the study found.
 - b. Next, Research Question by Research Question addresses how each result you obtained either supports or refutes previous research findings.
 - c. Speculate on reasons why your findings agreed with previous research findings (e.g., perhaps your sample was similar to other samples)
 - d. Speculate on why your findings did not agree with previous research
 1. Was your sample different in some way?
 2. Can measurement errors explain why your findings are different?
 3. Were there any unexpected findings? speculate why these may have occurred.
 4. Are statistics a possible explanation for your results?
 5. Is there collinearity between variables?
 - e. This is your opportunity to be creative. You don't always need references to back yourself up in this speculation!
2. Observations: general observations about your study Radford University School of Nursing DNP Scholarly Project: Final Paper Format 4
 - a. What was interesting or noteworthy?
 - b. What did you learn about your topic when conducting your study?
 - c. Did the study instruments you used perform as you expected them to?
 - d. Interpret your findings. Are they worrisome in some way? Reassuring?
3. Evaluation of Theoretical Model
 - a. How do your results support or not support the model you used?
 - b. What other variables that you did not include in your study might explain or better describe or answer your research questions?
4. Limitations
 - a. Were the study instruments previously used in this type of sample?
 - b. Did you adapt the study instrument?
 - c. Did the sampling plan (i.e., convenience sampling if you used it) limit the external validity/generalizability of your results?
 - d. Was the sample homogeneous or diverse?
 - e. Did social desirability skew your results?

5. Implications for Future Research
 - a. What are the next steps in knowledge development of this topic?
 - b. How would you improve upon the design of your study for the next time?
 - c. Should the theory be modified?
 - d. Should the study be replicated with a different sample?
6. Implications for Practice/Health Policy/Education
 - a. Discuss the clinical significance of your findings.
 - b. What are your suggested changes for nursing practice for Advance Practice Nurses?
 - c. For nursing education?
 - d. For health policy?
7. Conclusion: In a paragraph, repeat your overall study aim and state what your study results have contributed to nursing knowledge, practice, and/or theory. Include 1-2 sentences on the next steps for research.

Dissemination of Project

All students are required to disseminate their final project.

Examples of dissemination

- Publication in a Professional Journal
- Podium Presentation at Professional Conference
- Poster Presentation at a Professional Conference

Resources

NYU Libraries. (2020, August 7). How to create a research poster: A guide for creating a research poster. NYU Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.0030102>

Rossi, T. (2018, February 27). How to design a an award-winning conference poster. Animate Your Science. <https://www.animateyourscience/post/how-to-design-an-award-winning-conference-poster>