University of Arizona
College of Nursing

DNP Project Tool Kit

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Overview

The University of Arizona, College of Nursing offers the Doctoral of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree for students as a BSN to DNP program. The purpose of this document is to define the requirements for the development, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of the DNP Project. All students seeking a DNP degree must successfully develop, implement, and defend a DNP Project, including all project requirements within the timeframe, prior to graduation.

The DNP Project is divided into four phases. Content for each phase will be covered within the four semester courses of NURS 922; NURS 922 Fall 1, NURS 922 Spring, NURS 922 Summer, NURS 922 Fall 2. All courses must receive a passing grade of satisfactory or higher.

**Phases of DNP Project**

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<tr>
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<th>1 Unit</th>
<th>Planning, developing interests, networking, establishing DNP Project Chair</th>
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<td>Phase 2: NURS 922 Spring</td>
<td>2 Units</td>
<td>Development &amp; Project proposal defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3: NURS 922 Summer</td>
<td>1 Unit</td>
<td>Implementation &amp; Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4: NURS 922 Fall 2</td>
<td>2 Units</td>
<td>Completion, Final Defense, Plan for Sustainability &amp; Dissemination</td>
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**Process for Development:**

The UA CON faculty developed these requirements in alignment with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing *DNP Essentials* (2006), White Paper, *Doctor of Nursing Practice: Current Issues and Clarifying Recommendations* (2015), standards from professional organizations, such as the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF), and current evidence-based practice.

This document was approved by the faculty on April 30, 2019.

The following requirements replace previous policies and instructions.
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Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Project

All students are required to complete a DNP project along with all courses listed in the program guide for their specialty. The DNP project is an academic project (AACN, 2015). The DNP project and the DNP coursework contribute to the completion of the AACN DNP Essentials (AACN, 2015)

The DNP project is an opportunity to apply skills obtained in the theoretical coursework. The project should make an impact, directly or indirectly, on patient and/or healthcare outcomes (AACN, 2015).

The DNP student works with the setting stakeholders and the DNP Committee Chair to identify a clinical problem, evaluate the context of the problem, conduct a thorough review of literature, and synthesize evidence to formulate a potential solution or intervention. The intervention is then implemented and evaluated to determine the impact the intervention had on the given clinical problem. The project should be sustainable with the findings disseminated to stakeholders, and ideally distributed to other scholars and the public.

According to the AACN (August 2015) White Paper, Current Issues and Clarification Recommendations, at a minimum, all DNP projects should:

- Focus on a change that impacts a healthcare outcome(s) either through direct or indirect care.
- Have a system (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 abstraction).
- 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.

The AACN (2015) determined the project be identified as DNP Project not a capstone project.

DNP Project vs. PhD Dissertation Research

There are essentially two types of doctoral nursing scholarship that nurses may choose as terminal degrees in nursing, a PhD route or a DNP route. Though both types of scholarship may generate new information, DNP scholars do not test hypotheses, theoretical models, or generate information that is considered generalizable (AACN, 2015, p 2).

DNP scholars focus on synthesis, translation, implementation, and evaluation of evidence to solve clinical problems.
Research-focused (PhD) graduates are prepared to generate knowledge through rigorous research and statistically methodologies that may be generalizable.

Practice-focused (DNP) graduates are prepared to demonstrate innovations of practice change, translation of evidence, and the implementation of quality improvement processes in specific practice settings, systems, or with specific populations to improve health outcome. (AACN, 2015, p.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A DNP Project IS:</th>
<th>A DNP Project IS NOT:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Required of all DNP students</td>
<td>• A Randomized control trial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An academic project based on a practice issue</td>
<td>• A Qualitative case study</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Based on theory and literature</td>
<td>• Testing of a hypothesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed to make an impact, directly or indirectly, on patient and/or healthcare outcomes</td>
<td>• Testing of a theoretical model</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Limited to a time and/or place</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Developed with rigorous methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Developed to include a plan for sustainability</td>
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AACN DNP Essentials

The AACN DNP Essentials, “…outline the curricular elements and competencies that are required for schools conferring the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree,” (p. 8). Students should read this document in full upon admission to the program and refer to the document as they move through the curriculum.

The DNP Project itself provides an opportunity to operationalize skill and demonstrate DNP Essential competencies. However, not all projects will align with all DNP Essentials. Therefore, student learning is supplemented by activities in the core DNP courses to ensure requirements are met.

A short summary of the DNP Essentials is listed here:
1. Scientific Underpinnings
2. Organizational and Systems Leadership for Quality Improvement
3. Clinical Scholarship and Analytical Methods for Evidence-Based Practice
4. Information Systems & Patient Care Technology
5. Health Care Policy for Advocacy in Health Care
6. Interprofessional Collaboration for Improving Patient and Population Health
7. Clinical Prevention and Population Health for Improving the Nation’s Health
8. Advanced Nursing Practice

In addition to the DNP Essentials, prior to enrolling in NURS 922, the DNP student must:
- Have an ability to formulate answerable clinical questions
- Complete literature reviews
- Critically appraise evidence/clinical practice guidelines
- Articulate models for translation of evidence into the clinical setting.
- Understand the quality improvement process
- Be capable of interacting with technology and data
- Describe driving forces in global, nation, and local healthcare settings.

The student must identify a clinical problem, or practice gap, that can be impacted within the DNP Project. This will occur during NURS 922 Fall 1; the project problem needs to be finalized prior to NURS 922 Spring. Ultimately, the DNP Student will develop a feasible, evidence-based intervention during NURS 922 Spring. The DNP Student will implement the intervention, evaluate the process, plan for sustainability, and disseminate findings during NURS 922 Summer and NURS 922 Fall 2.

Adherence to Curriculum Plan

Students are required to adhere to the program guide for their specialty. Students are not permitted to take DNP courses early, out of sequence or without meeting the pre- or co-requisites described in the syllabus of each course. Any concerns with program guide should be addressed with your advisor.

Required Textbooks

The following list describes the required textbooks for the DNP Project courses. Faculty serving in the capacity of DNP Project Committee Chairs should be familiar with these textbooks and use them when mentoring DNP Students. Students are reminded that faculty may have additional requirements depending on the course or nature of the DNP Project.
Plan for Success

The DNP Project process is challenging but rewarding. Being successful will require excellent time management and strong organization skills.
Checklist for Success in N922 DNP Project:

- I have a dedicated space to work.
- I have scheduled regular intervals of time for thinking, reading, and writing. (Plan on at least four hours a week for your DNP Project. Sometimes more time will be required.)
- I have prepared myself and my family for this commitment.
- I have read examples of other DNP Projects located at the UA Library
- I have read the AACN White Paper, DNP Essentials, and UA CON DNP Tool Kit.
- I have an APA reference book or know how to use Purdue Owl Guidelines.
- I can effectively use bibliographic software, such as EndNote.
- I have met the CON Librarian, Mary Slebodnik.
- I have brainstormed DNP Project ideas with faculty and my setting.
- I have met the faculty member who agreed to serve as my DNP Project Committee Chair.
- I know how to set up an appointment at the Writing Center.
- I have set up an account for Grammarly, free writing assistant.
- I know how to set up an appointment with the writing coach Leslie DuPont.
- I am aware of the DNP Student Resources at The University of Arizona College of Nursing. (Adapted from Roush, 2015)

The University of Arizona, College of Nursing website has various resources that may be helpful as you get yourself set up for success.

Phase 1: NURS 922 Fall 1

Students will enroll in NURS 922 DNP Project Proposal Development (1 of 4) Fall 1 upon completion of the prerequisites NURS 629, 652, 705, and pre/co requisites 751 and 752. This will occur fall semester of the second year of the three-year program. In this section, we will review the action items for DNP students in Phase 1 of the DNP Project.

Even prior to admission, students should begin a brainstorming process regarding the DNP Project. During core courses faculty will guide students to develop the foundational skills necessary to develop the sections of the DNP project. Foundational skills include: the ability to apply a theoretical framework within the context of the DNP Project, the ability to find appropriate literature and synthesize the information, the ability to use a project model to guide the methodology of a DNP Project, and the ability to analyze the data collected to disseminate to the setting.

During this phase, the DNP student will meet with setting stakeholders and the DNP Project Committee Chair to evaluate identified needs and develop the project topic. Utilizing the IHI Quality Improvement Project Charter, first introduced in N752 Evaluation Methodologies for Safety and Quality Improvement, the student will outline the proposed project.

DNP students are encouraged to think creatively and to explore topics of interest.
However, the DNP student must also secure a site, or context, in which to implement their DNP Project. The student is required to secure a written, *Site Confirmation Letter* (Appendix 2) before February 1 of the NURS 922 Spring DNP Project Planning course. In other words, if the student cannot identify an organization willing to host their project, the student may have to develop a new idea.

The DNP project must be in a setting that is within the area of your specialty. If you are an FNP, PMHNP, or PNP an outpatient clinic site or community organization is a good option. For CRNA and AGACNP students, an inpatient setting is optimal.

By exploring the national healthcare agenda, students may anticipate some organizational needs. For example, if the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is penalizing an organization for patient readmissions, the organization may be interested in a DNP Project to improve this health care outcome. Students are also encouraged to examine issues related to their nursing role. For example, if a BSN to DNP student is training to become a nurse practitioner, consider issues related to the population of focus – family, pediatrics, psychological health... In Phase 1 of the DNP Project process, the student should start networking. Talk with faculty with similar interests with a special consideration for your assigned advisor as your DNP Committee Chair. Become engaged in the community and in professional organizations. Talk to colleagues and your employer. Talk to clinical preceptors about the challenges they see in the clinical setting. Networking will increase the possibility of connecting you to a project context you will find rewarding.

**DNP Question Development Tool**

After the student works with the DNP Project Committee Chair and the setting to complete the Quality Improvement Project Charter, students will develop the *DNP Question Development Tool* (Appendix 3) in NURS 922 Fall 1. The document is adapted from Dearholt and Dang (2012) and ensures that the student has thoughtfully engaged in the development of their Quality Improvement (QI) Project Charter and made contact with an organization that values a potential DNP project. This question development guide is just a tool; it should assist with writing the final DNP Project question. While the final DNP Project question will likely not be in PICOT format, this tool helps you to frame your thought processes and create the draft project question.

**Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Training)**

All DNP students are required to complete CITI Training (Collaborative Institutional Training Institute) prior to beginning Phase 1: NURS 922 Fall 1 of the DNP Project. Keep a certificate of completion to upload to the electronic drop box. This is the first step in IRB compliance.
Phase 2: NURS 922 Spring

Students will enroll in NURS 922 DNP Project Proposal Development (2 of 4) Spring upon completion of the prerequisites NURS 629, 652, 705, 751, 752, 922 Fall 1 and pre/co-requisites 615 or 620a or 629a or 642a (depending on specialty). This will occur spring semester of the second year of the three-year program.

DNP Project Checklist

*DNP Project Checklist (Appendix 1)*, contains a series of *electronic drop boxes*, available within the NURS 922 course in D2L. Students are required to upload the requested documents as they progress through the DNP Project process. The student will not lose access to this platform from semester to semester or between semesters. N922 is divided into four semesters; however, the D2L course will continue to build each semester. You will continue to have access to all previous work completed in N922 from Fall 1 through Fall 2. This is designed to allow you to store critical documents electronically and to promote communication by the DNP Project Courses Chair, faculty and each student’s DNP committee. Because students are not able to visualize this information prior to enrollment in a N922 Project Planning course, a summarized version is presented in Appendix 1, *DNP Project Checklist*.

The DNP Project Committee

The DNP student must assemble a *DNP Project Committee* according to the University of Arizona Graduate College and College of Nursing requirements. This is should be completed no later than March 1 of NURS 922 Spring. The DNP Committee will work closely with the NURS 922 Project Planning Faculty to advise the student on development of a written project proposal suitable for IRB submission.

Besides the student, the *DNP Project Committee Chair* is the most critical member of the team. The DNP Committee Chair must be a University of Arizona College of Nursing faculty member with a doctoral degree (DNP, PhD, EdD, DNS). The DNP Chair may offer the student advice and assistance on selection of the third Committee Member. *Every project is required to have a DNP Chair and two DNP Committee Members*. The DNP Committee Chair is assigned by the DNP Director and Specialty Coordinators during year one of the DNP Program. The second Committee Member is also required to have a terminal degree, and must be a University of Arizona, College of Nursing faculty member. The second committee member is assigned by the DNP Director and Specialty Coordinators at the beginning of Year 2 of the DNP Program.

The third Committee Member is selected by the DNP student and the DNP Committee Chair. This member may be a University of Arizona, College of Nursing faculty member or a member of the healthcare community with expertise in the project focus area that holds a doctoral degree. If the member is not faculty at The UofA, the student is required to submit a CV for this potential Committee Member to the Director of the DNP Program for prior approval. Students often select a physician, APRN, or other colleague they are working with at the project site.
Carefully review the responsibilities of the DNP Project Committee. Remember that **DNP Project Committee Members must agree** to be engaged in the process. This includes advising, review of the project proposal, providing support during implementation, providing the required evaluations, and attendance at all academic DNP presentations. The key elements of each DNP Committee Member, the student, and University of Arizona, College of Nursing Faculty and Staff are visually articulated in Figure 1.0 below.

**AACN White Paper** (2015), recommends the term “DNP Team” instead of “DNP Committee” to reduce confusion between the PhD and DNP programs. The University of Arizona, College of Nursing will continue to utilize the term **“DNP Committee”** and **not DNP Team**. This is due to the University of Arizona, Graduate College requirement for the CON to refer to the DNP Project Committee as a committee and will not support the title of “team”.

**Responsibilities of the DNP Committee Members**

**Responsibilities of the Student as Committee Leader:**
1. Enrollment in NURS 922 courses as supervised by the DNP Project Course Chair.
2. Update GradPath with DNP Project Committee members for approval through the Graduate College.
3. Upon receiving authorization by the Committee Chair, collaborate with committee chair to schedule the DNP Project Defense, IRB submission, and the DNP Project Final Defense. (See Appendix list for further information)
4. Submit work that demonstrates a high level of leadership and scholarship to the NURS 922 D2L course in accordance with the course calendar.

5. Submit work to the DNP Project Committee that demonstrates a high level of leadership and scholarship, within the NURS 922 course calendar deadlines.

6. Coordinate and maintain communication and activity between the UofA CON and the student’s progression.

7. Coordinate and maintain communication and activity between the UofA CON and the implementation site.

8. Ensure compliance to ALL DNP Project requirements in accordance to NURS 922 Course calendars.

9. Provide appropriate time allocation for the review and scheduling of activities. See How to schedule a DNP Project Proposal Defense and Final Defense within this document and the DNP Guidelines for more information.

**Responsibilities of DNP Committee Chair**

1. Current University of Arizona, College of Nursing faculty member with a terminal degree (DNP, PhD, EdD).

2. Maintain IRB Compliance requirements, including CITI training and updated CV.

3. Mentor student throughout the preparation of the DNP Project proposal, the project development, IRB process, implementation, evaluation process, and final written DNP Project Paper and Poster Presentation.

4. Lead Committee review and approval of the DNP Project Proposal, Final Project Defense including paper, poster, and publications.

5. Communicate effectively with committee members.

6. Provide feedback to student on written drafts in a timely manner following the NURS 922 course calendar dates.

7. Document student progress toward completion of the DNP Project Tool Kit and refer students to the DNP Project Courses Chair and faculty as needed.

8. Mentor new faculty who have not participated in a DNP project committee with a focus on fellow committee members.

**Responsibilities of DNP Committee Member 2**

1. Current University of Arizona, College of Nursing faculty member with a terminal degree (DNP, PhD, EdD).

2. As needed advise and critique drafts of the developing DNP Project proposal prior to the DNP Project Proposal Defense and the DNP Project Final Defense.

3. Participate in the Committee review, approval of the project proposal, and final project defense.

4. Provide feedback to the student in a timely manner.
Responsibilities of DNP Committee Member 3
1. Hold a terminal degree (DNP, PhD, EdD MD) in a professional area and an expertise in the DNP Project implementation site and/or topic.
2. As needed advise and critique drafts of the developing DNP Project proposal prior to the DNP Project Proposal Defense and the DNP Project Final Defense.
3. Participate in the Committee review, approval of the project proposal, and final project defense.
4. Provide feedback to the student in a timely manner.

How to select Members for your DNP Project Committee

Submit the DNP Project Committee Appointment Form in GradPath - {Should be approved by spring semester of year two of the program (concurrent to first clinical management course)}
1. Your advisor is assigned to you the first semester of your program year 1. This person is assigned as your DNP Project Committee Chair. The DNP Project Director and your specialty coordinator will make the assignments.
2. The second member of your committee will be assigned to you, by your specialty coordinator, during or prior to NURS 922 Fall 1 during your program year 2.
3. You will work with your DNP Project Committee Chair to determine the third member, or special member for your committee. Generally, this is person working within your clinical site and must have a doctoral degree. Students often select a physician, APRN, or other colleague they are working with at the project site.
4. You are responsible to update committee members in GradPath. To do this you will submit the Doctoral DNP Project Committee Appointment (NURSDNP) form in GradPath.
5. If you will have a Special Member (not faculty at the UofA) on your committee, please send an email to your Specialty Coordinator for approval. You must include the CV for the special member. The special member will not be in the list of members to apply to your committee, until the request has been approved.
6. Ensure that you have properly submitted the Doctoral DNP Project Committee Appointment form in GradPath, by logging on and check the approval status icon (same as above)
7. If it states Pending. Scroll down to the bottom of the page to see whose signature you are waiting on, so that you can respectfully follow up with that person.

How to change a DNP Project Committee Member or Chair

When the DNP student has confirmed the DNP committee members, this will generally remain consistent with no changes made throughout the DNP Project development. However, occasionally a student may feel that a member needs to be removed and an alternate member needs to be added. The process for the student to make DNP committee member changes is:
1. Maintain a respectful and professional demeanor.
2. Discuss with current DNP committee chair.
3. Locate a willing faculty member to replace the member being removed.
4. Complete the change of DNP committee member form this is located in GradPath.
5. In GradPath, select “modify” next to the approved committee appointment form. Make the necessary changes and submit the updated form for approval.
6. Notify, via email, all members of the DNP Committee of the change being made.

Individual versus Group Project

While it is more common for the DNP student to complete an individual project, a group project is an option with early and precise planning.

Since this is such a highly debated subject, the AACN (2015) White Paper makes the following remarks regarding group projects, “…group projects are acceptable if they are consistent with the aims of the project…” (p. 4). It further adds that, each student must be individually evaluated using a rubric on all elements of project development, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination. Each student must have a clear leadership role on at least one set of aim/objectives. There must also be a record of each student’s contribution to the project (AACN, 2015). The University of Arizona, College of Nursing endorses these recommendations.

The faculty at the University of Arizona, College of Nursing set the following requirements for Group Projects:

- The maximum allowance per DNP Project is 3 students per cohort.
- The students and DNP Chair must agree to comply with the AACN (2015) recommendations for group work.
- Students that wish to work in a group project must agree to remain in the group no later than the beginning of spring semester. After this time, you have a commitment to stay and will not be permitted to change DNP Project topics.
- The DNP Project Proposal must include the form, Group Project Plan (Appendix 4)
  *If students need further advisement on this decision, they should consult the DNP Program Director or the DNP Project Courses Chair, depending on the nature of their question.

Approved Types of DNP Projects

At the University of Arizona, College of Nursing, all DNP Projects must meet the minimum expectations as outlined by the AACN (2015):

1. Change that impacts outcomes
2. System focus
3. Demonstration of implementation
4. Plan for sustainability
5. Evaluation of process
There are several different ways these requirements are obtainable. In Moran, et al., (2019) Chapter 6, Figure 6-2 lists examples of some of the forms a DNP Project may take.

The CON has approved the following types of DNP Projects:

**Quality Improvement Projects**: efforts to improve services to impact a health outcome. According to the IOM, this means of improving safety, effectiveness, and delivering care that is patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable (Moran et al., 2019).

**Program Evaluation**: planning, implementing, and evaluating programs that improve health and impact health outcomes (Moran et al., 2019).

Depending on the skill sets of the DNP student, projects may also have strong technology, information-technology, leadership, or education components. When a clinical problem is identified, the student can collaborate with the DNP Chair and stakeholders within the setting to determine the best approach. Program evaluations may also be designed to evaluate how well an existing program is functioning. Students are encouraged to review previous DNP Projects, consider current evidence, and collaborate to promote scholarship.

**Quantitative vs. Qualitative Projects**

DNP Students are not permitted to use a qualitative design for the DNP Project. The DNP program does not provide the skills required for qualitative research designs.

Students will conduct a needs assessment to prepare for the methodology of the project. The needs assessment does not constitute “data collection” and is therefore appropriate to do before receiving IRB approval. This needs assessment may be in the form of conducted focus groups and/or asking open-ended questions. This data will not be coded, but may be evaluated for commonalities among the information. This is common way of obtaining information about clinical practice prior to planning and implementing a change. Due to the nature of the analysis, this is not considered a qualitative project.

**Clarification: Education Based Project Recommendations**

**How can you make the most impact with a DNP Project?** Almost all DNP Projects involve some element or degree of education. However, educational interventions *alone* are generally insufficient as DNP Projects.

Review the IOM (2011) *Clinical Practice Guidelines We Can Trust*. In Chapter 6, it discusses the best strategies to ensure that healthcare providers adhere to guidelines. Please note, that
education in the form of in-service, etc., results in implementation of information into practice only 4-6% of the time (IOM, 2011).

However, when education is coupled with other strategies, such as audit and feedback or reminders, a (much) bigger impact is made on the healthcare outcome (IOM, 2011). Students and DNP Committees should discuss this point. Nursing education is highly valued and extremely important. DNP Projects are NOT intended to develop DNP students in the role of nurse educators, unless they are already trained and working in that capacity (AACN, 2015).

For example, if a Post-Master’s DNP student is employed by a school of nursing and wants to develop a project on debriefing practices, then that is appropriate. In contrast if a BSN to DNP student, in training to become a nurse practitioner, it would be inappropriate for them to develop a nursing simulation program for FNPs. They do not have the training or expertise to do the project. Students, who aspire to be nurse educators, will need and should seek additional preparation and training in that role (AACN, 2015).

**Theoretical Framework** refers to a theory that guides the selection, implementation and/or evaluation of an intervention or program, and is reported in the **Theoretical Framework** section of the DNP project paper. The theory is not about the health problem, but rather is identified from existing theories about changing behavior or educating adults or changing attitudes.

The Theoretical Framework helps guide and inform the project. For example, a student using the Erickson’s **Modeling/Role-Modeling Theory**, which focuses on developing an understanding of the patient's personal barriers to following healthcare orders and where the patient's personal drive comes from and then taking this information and role-modeling a personalized plan for treatment that will address the patient where they are. The DNP student is creating a project, which aims to increase adherence to medication in HTN patients. Using this theory, the student will address the patient's personal barriers (or a more generalized barrier list from literature) and develop the DNP Project based on these factors.

The chosen theory, or framework, may be used in its entirety or adapted to the specific project. For example, the student may find that Ajzen’s (1985) **theory of planned behavior** cannot be applied in its entirety to the DNP project, but instead finds certain relationships within the theory useful for guiding the project’s intervention to influence provider knowledge and attitudes about pre-surgical NPO requirements.

**Examples of Recommended Theories**

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<th>Theory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health promotion model (Pender)</td>
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<td>Chronic care model (Wagner)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health belief model (US Public Health Service)</td>
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<td>Lewin’s change theory</td>
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Students wishing to use a theory not listed will need permission from the DNP Committee Chair.

EXAMPLE 1: PMHNP DNP Project Theoretical Underpinnings

Example: Raising Awareness about the Value of Family Therapy in the ABC Clinic

Problem: The ABC Clinic offers individual and group therapy to people of all ages. A recent survey revealed that approximately half (50%) of all current patients have at least one first degree relative who is also a current patient. Three master’s-prepared clinicians currently employed by the clinic are interested in providing family therapy, but feel they need in-service training in its delivery. The clinic’s managers are concerned about the cost associated with training and lack of available space. The managers are focused on improving patient outcomes as part of their mandatory reporting processes.

Lewin’s Force-field analysis framework (supports proposal of a change)

Relevant key points from this theory:

- Identify forces that drive and restrain change (financial considerations; lack of clinic space)
- Develop strategies to reduce the restraining forces (obtain agreement from local church for use of space).
- Strengthen driving forces of change (educate management on financial incentives and potential for improved patient outcomes for reporting purposes).

References:

EXAMPLE 2: AGACNP DNP Project Theoretical Underpinnings

Example: Facilitating Change in Protocol to Initiate Goals of Care Discussion with ICU Patients/Families

Problem: Healthcare providers are not adequately addressing end-of-life care, particularly goals of care discussions, with patients and their families facing serious or life limiting illness in the hospital setting. Systematic reviews provide evidence of inadequate communication between provider and patient concerning goals of, for example concerning patient choices for
palliative care over aggressive treatment. It is proposed that there is need to facilitate change in provider attitudes and behavior regarding a formal protocol for initiating goals of care discussions with patients and/or their family members to enhance quality of care for patients in a given clinical setting.

**Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior**

This theory proposes that intentions to perform a certain behavior is influenced by three core values: attitudes toward the behavior; the subjective norms extant in the clinical setting; and perceived control over the targeted behavior.

The student may use this theory to guide a study of provider values that may influence their eventual adoption of a formal protocol for initiating a goals of care discussion with patients/families in their clinical setting. The student for example, may be interested in current values about the goals of care discussion among providers. The study would measure providers’ attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived control regarding the goals of care discussion with patients facing end of life.

**References:**


**EXAMPLE 3: CRNA DNP Project Theoretical Underpinnings**

**Example:** NPO protocol for pre-operative patients

Problem: NPO policies at a particular practice site were found to be vague or inconsistently followed. The lack of adherence to new evidence based NPO guidelines could negatively impact pre- and post-op patients’ health and well-being. The student proposed to implement a project to facilitate needed change in NPO guidelines by conducting an educational activity with anesthesia providers.

**Diffusion of Innovation (Rogers, 2003)**

The theory posits that there are five characteristics that influence whether a new concept will be adopted: observability, realistic advantage, compatibility, trialability, and complexity. Stringer (2018) argued that the ERAS protocol for allowing carbohydrate clear liquids up to two hours before surgery adequately meets all five characteristics and thus, an educational session addressing these characteristics would facilitate adoption of a new NPO protocol in the clinical setting. Stringer’s (2018) DNP project focused on evaluation of an educational session on consumption of carbohydrate clear liquids up to 2 hours before surgery.

**References:**


**Recommended Models for Methodology Section of DNP Projects**

The student will utilize a model for implementation within the methodology section of the DNP Project Proposal. This model will guide the development of the methodology, or “Do” part, of
the DNP Project. There are many models available. *If a DNP student would like to use a different model, permission from the DNP Project Chair is required.*

The following models are recommended:

**Quality Improvement Projects:**

Quality improvement (QI) is the most common type of project for DNP students. Refer to content from NUR752 Evaluation Methodologies for Safety and Quality Improvement, which utilizes the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) (2019) Model for Improvement.

The Model for Improvement (MFI) has two parts, part one contains three guiding questions:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- What change can we make that will result in improvement?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?

This is expanded into six steps: Step 1 Introduction, Step 2 Forming the Team, Step 3 Setting Aims, Step 4 Establishing Measures, Step 5 Selecting Changes, Step 6 Testing Changes. Step 1 is an overview rather than an action. Steps 2 and 3 contribute to answering the first question. Steps 3 and 4 are linked to the second question. Step 5 is question 3. Step 6 is synonymous with the second half of the model, Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA).

**Program Evaluation Projects**

Effective program evaluation is a systematic way to improve and account for public health actions by involving procedures that are useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate. The Framework for Evaluation in Public Health guides public health professionals in their use of program evaluation. It is a practical, nonprescriptive tool, designed to summarize and organize essential elements of program evaluation. *(CDC, 2019)* A DNP student that is developing a Program Evaluation Project will utilize the [CDC Framework for program evaluation in public health](https://www.cdc.gov/evaluationframework/), which includes the Logic Model and has six steps:
The purposes of the CDC Framework for program evaluation in public health are to:

- summarize the essential elements of program evaluation,
- provide a framework for conducting effective program evaluations,
- clarify steps in program evaluation,
- review standards for effective program evaluation, and
- address misconceptions regarding the purposes and methods of program evaluation. (CDC, 2019)

Developing the DNP Project Proposal

The four NURS 922 DNP Project Proposal Development courses are designed for the DNP student to develop the necessary skillset to write a scholarly DNP Project Proposal, prepare an IRB application, collect and analyze data, and present findings through the DNP Project Final Defense, Poster development, and possibly publications. The textbook, “A Nurses Step-By-Step Guide to Writing a Dissertation or Scholarly Project” by Karen Roush (2018) is an essential part of this process.

To begin this process, the student has completed the DNP Question Development Tool (Appendix 3), networked with faculty and stakeholders to ensure the hosting organization values the project, and identified/secured a DNP Project Committee Chair. As the work of proposal writing unfolds, a Site Confirmation Letter (Appendix 2) is secured and the DNP Committee Members have been updated with Grad Path.

The DNP Project Proposal must be formatted according to the template located on the CON Student Resources page and in NURS 922 D2L course (Appendix 5). SQUIRE Guidelines and APA 6th edition must be used to guide the writing throughout the document. The Required Content is a minimal expectation. In the next sections, we will further define some of the particular components of the required content.
Table of Evidence (Literature Grid) and Literature Synthesis

As a part of the DNP Project Proposal, the student will include a table of evidence that answers the proposed clinical question of the project. To standardize the elements of the table, the students will use the headings and requirements presented (Appendix 7). This will be assigned as part of NURS 922 Fall 1. This literature grid will focus on the project topic and will not include the literature required for the theoretical framework or implementation models, these will be compiled within the respective proposal sections.

Following in NURS 922 Spring, students will be required to create a literature synthesis from the table of evidence. A literature synthesis is not simply listing studies and the findings. The student should organize the literature around the variables, concepts, and factors from different studies these be compiled and be presented in the context of your project. See “A Nurses Step-By-Step Guide to Writing a Dissertation or Scholarly Project” by Karen Roush (2018) for further information.

DNP Project Proposal Appendices

In the appendices of the DNP Project proposal will include all required documents from the proposal including site approval letter, project consent, recruitment flyer, surveys, measurement tools, evaluation instruments, chart audit forms, project budget, project timeline, table of evidence, bibliography, and any other items used in the project. These should be listed Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. See Appendix 11 for proper Appendix order.

Formal Presentation of the DNP Project Proposal

The DNP Student and DNP Committee Chair will work together to assess the progress of the DNP Project Planning. When the written Project Proposal is complete, the student will do a Formal DNP Project Proposal Defense to the DNP Committee. The presentation should be approximately 1 hour and should summarize the project. Students should use the University of Arizona, College of Nursing Power Point Template (available in the NURS 922 D2L course) for formatting the presentation slides.

The written Project Proposal must be submitted to the DNP Committee at least 2 weeks (10 business days) prior to the presentation to allow time for the DNP Committee to review. The proposal may be emailed to committee members with a doodle poll to schedule the defense. Students must allow ten business days to review prior to the defense being scheduled. Instructions regarding scheduling is available below. Students may not send the doodle poll without DNP Committee Chairs’ written permission.

On the day of the presentation, the DNP student should provide digital copies of the paper and the slide presentation for the Chair and Committee Members. The defense can be in person in the CON or via Zoom online meetings. Scheduling will be conducted via doodle poll. The
defense time must be agreed upon by all committee members; this may take more than one doodle poll attempt.

During the proposal defense the DNP Committee will vote to determine if the student’s project: 1) the project is approved as written; 2) the project is approved with minor revisions; or 3) if the project is rejected.

The process for the DNP Committee vote is as follows:
1. If the defense is in the CON, ask the student to leave the room for the voting to occur.
2. If the defense is via Zoom meeting online, the DNP Committee Chair will place the student in the “waiting room.” The discussion and voting may then take place. The student may be informed when a decision has been made.
3. The DNP Committee must also give permission for the student to submit the project to the IRB. This may be done with project approval. If revisions are necessary, IRB application permission will be placed on hold until changes have been approved.
4. After the defense, the DNP Committee will complete the Project Proposal Evaluation Form and the DNP Project Proposal Grading Rubric as found on the college’s website. The DNP Committee must provide written feedback on areas of deficiency within one week of the DNP Project Proposal Defense.

How to schedule DNP Project Proposal Defense

1. First, receive permission from your DNP Project Committee Chair to schedule defense.
2. Email committee members your DNP Project Proposal.
3. Work with your Committee to schedule a time to defend your proposal.
4. Committee members must be given ten business days or two weeks to review the proposal prior to the DNP Project Defense.
5. Create a DoodlePoll give multiple options for dates and times. Send link to all committee members.
6. You must choose a time that works for all three committee members. This may take more than one attempt. You may have to create and send multiple DoodlePolls.
7. When you have a time that all three committee members have chosen. You may schedule the meeting.
8. If defending in person: schedule a room using the UAHS Room Scheduling.
9. If defending online: schedule a Zoom meeting using UAHS Zoom.
10. After your proposal defense, students must have their Committee Chair sign the DNP Project Proposal Defense Results form
11. The student must email the completed form to OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu). This form is not in Grad Path. It is located on the CON website.

*Confirm that OSSCE has received your PDF Proposal Form*
Institutional Review Board(s) Requirements

All DNP Projects at the University of Arizona, College of Nursing must be submitted to the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board, also known as IRB.

**There are no exceptions to this rule.**

If a student is working with a host organization that has its own IRB process, the student must submit the project proposal to both IRBs. Apply for IRB approval to the implementation site IRB before the UofA IRB. The student is not allowed to apply for IRB until you have received permission from your DNP Committee Chair. When you have your DNP committee chair approval, you may then send your determination or application form and all required attachments to Dr. Alice Pasvogel. She will assist with preparation and will submit for you. Do not submit anything directly to the UofA IRB office.

Students must also show proof of CITI Training (discussed in previous section).

Students will be provided training on the process during NURS 922 courses. It is recommended that the student explore the University of Arizona IRB site and incorporate the required IRB Templates and Forms for the Health Sciences into their project documents as the project is developed. When the information is submitted, there is an internal process in which the University of Arizona, College of Nursing faculty member, Dr. Alice Pasvogel, reviews the application to ensure technical compliance. When the application is satisfactory, it will go to the next step of review. All of this communication occurs electronically. Please refer to the IRB Checklist for DNP Students located in Appendix 8.

The student may track the status of the project. The student must remain alert to electronic notifications from the IRB, Dr. Alice Pasvogel, and the DNP committee chair and make modifications as requested. When all modifications are made, the student will be notified that the project is approved. The student will receive this approval via email.

Students should not submit any part of the proposal to the IRB without written permission from the DNP Committee Chair and without the approval of Dr. Alice Pasvogel. Students will prepare the determination of human subjects form or the application for human subjects form and email, with DNP Project Committee Chair approval, to Dr. Alice Pasvogel. Dr. Pasvogel will submit the document to the University of Arizona IRB when the submission is satisfactory.

Student may not begin any part of project implementation until: 1) all IRB approvals are obtained; and 2) the DNP Project Committee Chair gives permission. Students should have IRB approval prior to or during the Implementation course, NURS 922 Summer.

Phase 3: NURS 922 Summer

Students will enroll in NURS 922 DNP Project Development (3 of 4) Summer upon completion of the prerequisites NURS 629, 652, 705, 751,752 616b or 620b or 629b or 642b (depending on
DNP PROJECT TOOL KIT

specialty), 922 Fall 1, 922 Spring. This will occur summer semester of the second year of the three-year program. In this section, we will review the action items for DNP students in Phase 3 of the DNP Project. In Phase 3, the student will engage in the implementation and evaluation of the DNP Project.

Upon IRB approval (see section on IRB approval), and with the permission of the DNP Project Committee Chair, the student may begin to execute the project implementation. This may occur before the start of the DNP Implementation Course if the requirements are met. Students will enroll in the NURS 922 Summer course. The purpose of the course is to provide support to the student and DNP Committee during the implementation process. Students and DNP Committees are also assisted in the project evaluation and data analysis process and guided through elements of writing the Final DNP Project Paper, this will occur in the NURS 922 Summer semester and Fall 2 semester.

Phase 4: NURS 922 Fall 2

Students will enroll in NURS 922 DNP Project Development (4 of 4) Fall upon completion of the prerequisites NURS 629, 652, 705, 751, 752, 615b or 620b or 629b or 642b (depending on specialty), 922 Fall 1, 922 Spring, 922 Summer. This will occur fall semester of the third year of the three-year program. In this section, we will review the action items for DNP students in Phase 4 of the DNP Project. In Phase 4, the student will complete implementation, analyze data, plan for sustainability, and report findings through the Final DNP Project Paper, poster, and Final Project Defense.

It is important to disseminate the project’s findings at the implementation site. Students are instructed in activities such as preparing a manuscript submission, constructing professional poster presentations, and abstract preparation for professional conferences. Students are guided through the expectations for the Final Steps of the DNP Project Process in this course.

Final DNP Project Paper

The DNP student will compose the Final DNP Project Paper according to the template instructions located in NURS 922 D2L course and CON website.

The student will revise the Proposal Paper and change it to past tense (Proposal: “I will do...” v Final Paper: “I did...and these are the results”). Then the student will present the results, discussion, and implications for clinical practice, healthcare policy, education, and quality. The student will describe plans for sustainability and dissemination beyond the implementation site and academic setting and present plans for future scholarship.

The student must submit a copy of the Final DNP Project Paper to the DNP Project Committee at least ten business days prior to the formal Final DNP Project Presentation for review. At the Final Defense presentation, students should bring a printed or digital copy of the DNP Project document for each member of the DNP Committee. The student also needs to present the DNP
Project Final Defense Poster (Appendix 12 & 13). After the DNP Committee approves it in writing, the student will receive a signed document (Appendix 16).

The University of Arizona, College of Nursing endorses the recommendation of the AACN to establish an electronic repository of DNP Projects. Therefore, students and faculty should be aware that the Final DNP Project Paper will be posted at The University of Arizona ProQuest.

Final DNP Project Poster

The DNP student will present a Final DNP Project Poster. The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate the ability to design, develop, and present a poster. The student will use the University of Arizona, College of Nursing Poster Presentation Template located in NURS 922 D2L courses and Appendix 12 and 13. The student will ensure the poster meets the following minimum requirements (Appendix 12):

- Full Title of Project with Student as first author followed by Chair, Team Members
- Abstract of 250 words or less
- Purpose (goal of the project)
- Background/Significance (why was it important)
- Method (Design, sample, instruments, data collected)
- Results (what were the findings)
- Discussion/Conclusions (What do the findings mean)
- Short reference list in APA format
- Student contact information

The Final DNP Project Poster dimension requirements will be indicated when the student receives the Confirmation Email for the Final DNP Project Presentation. A copy of the poster in PDF must be included in the Final DNP Project Paper.

Final DNP Project Presentation

The DNP student is required to give a formal presentation of the DNP Project and its findings/implications in order to earn the DNP degree (prior to graduation). Students will receive email reminders each term to schedule the final defense from OSSCE. Scheduling (confirmation of date/time with committee) must be completed by October 31st. Dates will be established and communicated for students graduating in the spring or summer terms.

Students have the option to coordinate the meeting with their committee or be scheduled into the college’s Final Defense Week (FDW). FDW is usually the week prior to Thanksgiving each year. FDW week for spring and summer terms will be communicated via email each term.

The presentation is open to the public. Each semester, students will receive a list of semester-specific deadlines from OSSCE. Dates will also be posted in the NURS 922 D2L course site and you will receive email reminders. The final date you may defend your project to earn the
degree and participate in the December Convocation are available at the UofA Graduate College website. **Failure to defend by this date will result in extension of the doctoral completion date. There are no exceptions to this rule.**

You **must** submit your project to the UofA Graduate College by the deadline. The date is listed at UofA Graduate College website. Even if you complete the final defense, you must submit the final project to the Graduate College by the posted deadline, or the degree will not be conferred. That date is usually about 10 days prior to the end of the term. Students are encouraged to reach out to OSSCE with date or deadline questions.

During the defense, the DNP Project Committee will vote to determine if the student’s project: 1) the project is approved as written; 2) the project is approved with minor revisions; or 3) if the project is rejected. The process for the DNP Committee vote is as follows:

1. If the defense is in the CON, ask the student to leave the room for the voting to occur.
2. If the defense is via Zoom meeting online, the DNP Committee Chair will place the student in the “waiting room.” The discussion and voting may then take place. The student may be informed when a decision has been made.
3. After the final defense, the DNP Committee will complete the [DNP Project Final Defense Grading Rubric](#) and record the results of the defense in GradPath.

**How to Schedule DNP Project Final Defense**

1. All students desiring to graduate (defend) must complete the OSSCE “Intent to Defend” form by the posted deadline.
   a. Students who have a non-UA special member must schedule the defense prior to Final Defense Week. The student is responsible for coordinating a date/time with all committee members.
   b. Students who have all UA committee members may schedule prior to or during Final Defense Week.
2. All scheduling must be completed by October 31st (fall term). A similar deadline will be sent to student planning to complete in spring/summer terms.
3. **Final Defense Week**- If you are planning on defending during final defense week, (usually the week prior to Thanksgiving in the fall term), and have noted this in the Intent to Defend form, OSSCE will assign you and your committee a date, time, room and Zoom link.
4. Submit the completed GradPath Announcement of Final Defense Form- by the posted deadlines. The form **must be approved no less than 10 working days before the final defense.**
5. Check with your Chair to ensure you have no pending items.
6. Email your final DNP Project paper and your DNP Project Poster to all committee members at least 10 business days before your final defense date.
7. Outside of Final Defense Week- If the student is planning on defending outside of the Defense Week, it is the student’s responsibility to schedule the day/time/zoom. Please notify OSSCE of date & time as soon as possible for reserving a room. Due to lack of available rooms, the sooner we can schedule a date the better.

8. Once you have the details (date/time/room) of your defense, you must submit the Announcement of Final Oral Defense (NURSDNP) form in Grad Path.

9. Please monitor this form, to make sure this has been approved.

Schedule a Zoom Meeting for DNP Project Final Defense

**This must be completed prior to submitting the Final Defense Form on Grad Path

- Zoom meeting using UAHS Zoom

Final Steps

After the student has defended the final project, the student must closeout the Project IRB (Appendix 10):

1. Make any changes to the Final Project Paper as recommended by the DNP Project Committee.
2. Send the final DNP Project paper to Melinda Burns for final formatting approval.
3. Close out the IRB project at the University of Arizona and if applicable the implementation site.
4. Ensure that all project related documents are uploaded into the electronic drop boxes.
5. Work with DNP Project Chair to determine if a manuscript is appropriate.
6. Ensure that both the Graduate College’s Final Completion Checklist & the items on the Doctoral Final Defense Checklists are completed. Both are available on the DNP Forms & Worksheets page.

Graduation (Convocation) Attendance

All students preparing to defend the DNP Project for degree completion should review the college’s policy on attending Graduation Ceremonies. A defense of the DNP Project is required for attendance, unless an exception has been previously authorized as the policy outlines. Students should refrain from making travel arrangements until the final defense is confirmed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: After IRB approval, can I change elements of my project?

A: You may not change any elements of your project after you have received IRB approval. If a change must be made, you will have to seek IRB approval for the change. This is a time-consuming process; make sure you are prepared to implement as written prior to applying for IRB approval.
Q: What is the process for changing my DNP Project Chair?

A: The DNP Project Chair will not be changed without proper cause and administrative approval. The procedure is outlined in this document on page 14.

Q: What is the process for changing members of my DNP Committee?

A: Committee member 2 (assigned to you) will not be changed without proper cause and administrative approval. The procedure is outlined in this document on page 14.

Q: Can I change my DNP Project topic?

A: You may change your topic at any time. If you do, you will have to repeat all sections of the process. Do not make any changes to your topic without your DNP Project Committee Chair's approval. Please note: Changing your topic after NURS 922 Fall 1 semester may extend your graduation date.

Q: Can I change the site of my DNP Project?

A: Yes, if you make the change prior to IRB approval. If you have already received IRB approval you may not change implementation sites without seeking a modification from IRB. Make sure to discuss with your DNP Project Committee Chair.
Appendix

Appendix 1: DNP Project Checklist
Appendix 2: Letter for site confirmation
Appendix 3: DNP Question Development Tool
Appendix 4: Group Project Planning Form
Appendix 5: DNP Paper Project Template Squire Guidelines
Appendix 6: SQUIRE Guidelines
Appendix 7: Literature Grid
Appendix 8: IRB Checklist
Appendix 9: Sample Completed IRB Determination Form
Appendix 10: IRB Close-out Form
Appendix 11: Proper Appendix Order for Final Project Paper
Appendix 12: DNP Project Final Defense Poster Instructions
Appendix 13: DNP Project Final Defense Poster Presentation Template