



ANDERSON  
College of NURSING *and*  
HEALTH PROFESSIONS  

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University of NORTH ALABAMA

Doctor of Nursing Practice  
Student Practicum Guidebook  
2023-2024

## **Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions**

### **Vision**

The vision of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions is to improve health in the community by effecting change in systems and policies and to promote research and scholarly activities that advance nursing and healthcare knowledge.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions is to graduate nurses and other health professionals who are prepared to assume professional roles in diverse healthcare environments.

### **ACONHP Goals**

1. Provide high-quality, innovative student-centered nursing and health-related programs built upon scientific disciplines.
2. Graduate nurses and health professionals who are prepared to practice person-centered care in diverse local, regional, and global healthcare environments.
3. Promote scholarship, scholarly activities, teaching, service, and practice that advances quality, safety, and knowledge in healthcare.
4. Develop professional partnerships across professions to enhance healthcare within complex systems.
5. Optimize the use of information processes and technologies in healthcare practices.
6. Foster a spirit of professional excellence and resilience amongst a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff.

### **DNP Program Outcomes**

1. Construct a scientific knowledge base for nursing practice
2. Incorporate current healthcare delivery approaches that guide person-centered care.
3. Summarize principles of safety and quality into
4. Assemble evidence-based nursing knowledge to improve population health outcomes.
5. Integrate present and emerging health technologies to deliver safe, high-quality healthcare.
6. Cultivate a healthcare system that advocates for equitable healthcare across all populations.
7. Facilitate interprofessional collaboration that enhances patient or population outcomes
8. Generate strategies that promote improved health outcomes for all populations.
9. Relate nursing knowledge to practice for the promotion of the profession.

## **Doctor of Nursing Practice Student Practicum Guidebook**

In the four DNP project and practicum courses, learning requires collaboration between you, your clinical preceptor, site mentor (if needed) and faculty navigator. It is critical that you recognize and validate arrangements in advance of your practicum experience. The information in this handbook will help you plan for optimal practicum learning experiences. Read all information carefully and follow the guidelines provided.

In the project and practicum courses, learning activities will contribute to your professional portfolio, which provides evidence of your progress and development in achieving program outcomes. Review each project and practicum course syllabus carefully and discuss milestones with your practicum preceptor and faculty navigator to avoid missing deadlines.

You will have faculty members who will guide the decisions and activities you engage in throughout your practicum and as you work towards completing your DNP project. Enjoy your practicum experience and take advantage of every opportunity to apply your new knowledge and skills.

It is critical that clinical experiences be planned in advance of your practicum courses. This handbook will help you prepare for the best possible practicum experience. Make sure that you read this handbook carefully and follow the guidelines.

## ***Practicum Guidelines & Procedures***

### **General Guidelines**

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2006), doctoral education is distinguished by the completion of a specific project that demonstrates a synthesis of the student's work and lays the groundwork for future scholarship. The DNP curriculum primarily involves mastery of an advanced specialty within nursing practice and methods of practice improvement and change. The DNP Project must be used to demonstrate mastery of the DNP curricular content. The Final DNP Project provides an opportunity for the student to integrate their new skills into practice and to demonstrate many of the principles of nursing scholarship and the competencies delineated in the DNP Essentials. The integration of these new or refined skills improves outcomes through organizational/systems leadership, quality improvement processes, and the translation of evidence into practice. The criteria for the DNP Project should reflect the Essentials of DNP education as outlined in the 2006 AACN document and listed below:

1. Scientific Underpinnings for Practice
2. Organizational and Systems Leadership for Quality Improvement and Systems Thinking
3. Clinical Scholarship and Advanced Analytics
4. Information Systems/Technology and Patient Care Technology for the Improvement and Transformation of Health Care
5. Health Care Policy for Advocacy in Health Care
6. Interprofessional Collaboration for Improving Patient and Population Health

## Outcomes

7. Clinical Prevention and Population Health for Improving the Nation's Health
8. Advanced Nursing Practice

The DNP Essentials should be reflected in and define the scope of the DNP Project.

The DNP Project should begin in the early stages of the program and continue throughout the program. This scholarly project must be a significant, evidence-based contribution to existing nursing knowledge, nursing practice, and patient outcomes. Furthermore, the project provides the opportunity for students to translate knowledge into practice.

It is the intent of the faculty that students utilize various course learning activities as a means of facilitating progress toward the completion of the project.

Students may assist in the identification of an appropriate location and preceptor for the practicum experience, as you, the student, are most familiar with providers and facilities in your location. Faculty are responsible for approving practicum locations and preceptors. This site should be selected at a minimum of eight (8) weeks prior to the practicum course, but preferably at least 16 weeks prior to the practicum course for the teaching/learning and leadership students.

During each practicum, you will discuss the course requirements and your personal learning goals with your preceptor. Faculty members may also periodically meet with you and your preceptor to ensure progress toward set goals is being achieved; meetings may be virtual or face-to-face. Email communication remains one of the main forms of communication. You are also responsible for maintaining a log of your practicum experience that includes accurate reflections on activities and attainment of course outcomes and competencies. Your course faculty member is responsible for evaluating your performance and all associated assignments completed during the practicum experience. You are responsible for making travel arrangements and paying for all related practicum experiences.

Clinical hours are required for each track. The scheduled hours will be arranged in conjunction with your approved practicum site and preceptor. Hours may not be carried over between courses and may not be completed prior to the start of courses. You may schedule full days, partial days, or consecutive days as agreed upon by you and your preceptor. If you cannot complete your practicum hours within the time frame of the practicum course, but you have completed a minimum of 75% of the clinical course requirements and are up-to-date on all other course work (i.e. assignments, exams, etc.), you may request a grade of Incomplete.

Incompletes must be resolved by the end of the next semester. Failure to complete the course requirements in the subsequent semester will result in a course grade of F. As a professional, you are required to schedule practicum hours so that patient safety is assured. Sufficient time should be allocated to complete practicum hours and ensure

patient safety. For example, students should not work 7 pm-7 am and then schedule practicum hours beginning at 9 am that morning.

### Characteristics of DNP Projects

The DNP Project documents the outcomes of the student's doctoral education experience, providing a measurable medium for evaluating the master of and growth in knowledge and clinical expertise. The DNP Project should demonstrate a synthesis of all classroom and clinical learning experiences that together demonstrate the student's achievement of program competencies.

All DNP Projects should:

- 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

### Types of DNP Projects

DNP Projects are related to advanced practice in the nursing specialty and are designed to benefit a group, population, or community rather than an individual patient. Projects evolve from an identifiable practice problem and are done in partnership with another entity, e.g., clinical agency, health department, education agency, government agency, or community group.

Types of DNP Projects that are acceptable include but are not limited to:

- Practice change initiatives
- Program evaluation
- Quality improvement initiatives (care processes, patient outcomes)
- Implementation and evaluation of evidence-based guidelines
- Health care policy analysis; develop, implement, evaluate, or revise policy
- The design and use of a database to retrieve information for decision-making, planning, and evaluation
- The design and evaluation of new models of care/practice models
- Designing and evaluating health care programs
- System change project
- Financial/cost and analyses to compare care models and potential cost savings
- Implementation and evaluation of innovative uses of technology to enhance/evaluate

care

- Collaboration on evidence-based legislative change
- The design, implementation, and evaluation of new evidence-based interventions
- Projects are selected and evolve through student collaboration with clinical mentors and DNP Project Team Leaders.

The [Doctors of Nursing Practice](#) organization maintains a Doctoral Project Repository of former DNP Projects that can be viewed on this [website](#).

### **DNP Project Examples:**

- Practice change initiatives
- Pilot study demonstrating practice improvement
- Toolkit
- Program needs assessment, development, and evaluation
- Evaluation of an existing program
- Develop an assessment instrument/protocol for a specified population
- A cost/benefit analysis of program models
- Performance/quality improvement project
- Practice management project
- Healthcare policy project
- Other scholarly projects as approved by the Project Team
- Implementation and evaluation of evidence-based practice guidelines

### **DNP Project Components**

The DNP Project consists of four (4) distinct phases with accompanying requirements:

NU 800 – DNP Project I: Topic Identification

- An evidence-based supported idea
- A well-articulated problem and purpose statement
- Evidence of the problem/Gap analysis
- Approved site for the project and clinical affiliation agreement if required
- DNP Project Team Leader and Practice Mentor Agreement

NU 802- DNP Project II: Project Development

- A comprehensive proposal document
- A proposal presentation to the DNP Project Team for approval to implement
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval

NU 804- DNP Project III: Project Implementation

NU 806- DNP Project IV: Project Evaluation

- Final project defense
- Public poster presentation

## DNP Project Team

- Faculty Navigator: UNA Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions doctorally prepared faculty member who is willing to serve on the DNP Project Team
- Preceptor: A doctorally prepared individual employed by the agency where the project will take place who is willing to guide, and assist the student in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the DNP project.
- Mentor (optional): A master's prepared individual who assists the student and preceptor in planning, implementation, and evaluation of the DNP project. This individual is needed if the Preceptor is not always on-site in the clinical setting.
- Student: Doctor of Nursing Practice student enrolled in the ACONHP

## Requirements for Students

1. The student will work with the Faculty Navigator to select a doctorally prepared preceptor to serve on the DNP Project Team.
2. The student will consult with the Faculty Navigator to ascertain that the ACONHP has a contract with the agency where the student plans to complete the DNP Project.
3. The student will confer with the Faculty Navigator at least bi-monthly to discuss coursework and progress in the DNP Project.
4. The student will develop a proposal during NU 802 that meets project guidelines and course requirements.
5. A master's prepared mentor may serve as a fourth member of the DNP Project Team.
6. The student will give all members of the DNP Project Team at least two weeks for review and feedback on documents associated with the DNP Project.
7. The student will work with the DNP Project Team to set a proposal review date. The DNP Project Team will review the proposal and provide feedback.
8. The student will prepare and submit the application to the UNA Institutional Review Board (IRB), after review and approval of the Faculty Navigator. Any approvals required by the agency where the project is conducted will be prepared by the student, approved by the Faculty Navigator, and submitted, as necessary.
9. The student will complete clinical hours to implement and evaluate the DNP Project. The student will document this in the Practicum Hours Log. The student will work with the Faculty Navigator to select a method for dissemination of the final project evaluation (e.g., abstract to a professional meeting, manuscript development and submission, etc.).

## Course requirements

- Complete all core DNP courses:
  - For Advanced Practice: NU700, NU702, NU706, NU708, NU720, NU722, NU724
  - For Population Health: NU700, NU702, NU706, NU708, NU730, NU732, NU734
  - For Educational Leadership: NU700, NU702, NU706, NU708, NU734, NU740, NU742
- Submit all necessary practicum and compliance documents

- Physical Examination
- Proof of Immunization (Hepatitis B, MMR, Varicella, Tdap, COVID-19) ○ Tuberculosis screening
- Current Influenza Vaccination
- Current Basic Life Support Certification
- Current Student Liability Insurance
- Criminal Background Check
- Drug Screen
- Proof of Health Insurance
- Completed Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines
- Completed Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) guidelines
- Have an active, unencumbered nursing license in the state in which practicum hours will be completed
- Additional requirements specific to the site.

### **Preceptor Qualifications**

For DNP students, you may not partner with a site or preceptor without the required approvals and documents on file prior to the practicum experience.

Once a clinical site and preceptor have been identified, you and the Coordinator of Clinical Placement will work together to obtain approval for the site and to ensure that all proper documentation is in place. Each practicum site requires its own set of paperwork.

When you fill out the DNP Navigation Form you will be required to provide the following about your preceptor:

1. Preceptor name (as it is on their license)
2. Preceptor contact information (email address, practice site name, practice site address, phone number)
3. Preceptor title and credentials
4. Preceptor degrees, licensure, and certification # (Doctoral degree required)
5. Preceptor years of experience
6. Preceptor CV
7. Name, title, and email address of the individual authorized to sign clinical affiliation agreements

### **Clinical Hours Guidelines/Requirements**

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Program requires the completion of 1,000 clinical hours. Up to 500 hours from an MSN program may be applied to those 1,000 hours.

These hours are completed under the supervision of UNA faculty members. The clinical hours represent a clinical immersion that occurs in the planning, implementation,



evaluation, and dissemination of the DNP Project. These are not precepted hours providing direct clinical care to clients as are typical in an advanced practice graduate program. Practice hours should contribute to the preparation of the DNP student to attain the outcomes delineated in the DNP Essentials.

These hours should include indirect care practice in the health care setting or related environments that broaden the experience of the student. Clinical hours may only be logged for activities that are associated with the following courses:

- NU 702 Health Care Informatics
- NU 706 EBP Design and Translation
- NU 720 Scientific Underpinnings
- NU 722 Health Policy and Politics
- NU 730 Leadership and Innovation in Population Health
- NU 734 Population Health I
- NU 736 Population Health II
- NU 740 Transformational Teaching Learning Resources, Strategies, and Evaluation I
- NU 742 Transformational Teaching Learning Resources, Strategies, and Evaluation II
- NU 750 Role of Technology and Simulation in Population Health
- NU 800 DNP I: Project Identification
- NU 802 DNP II: Project Development
- NU 804 DNP III: Project Implementation
- NU 806 DNP IV: Project Evaluation

DNP program practice experiences are designed to provide:

1. Opportunities for integrating and synthesizing all of the *DNP Essentials* and role requirements necessary to demonstrate achievement of defined outcomes in an area of advanced nursing practice.
2. Systematic opportunities for feedback and reflection.
3. In-depth work/mentorship with experts in nursing, as well as other disciplines.
4. Opportunities for meaningful student engagement within practice environments.
5. Opportunities for building and assimilating knowledge for advanced nursing practice at a high level of complexity.
6. Opportunities for further application, synthesis, and expansion of learning.
7. Experience in the context of advanced nursing practice within which the final DNP Project is completed.

### **Hours Per Essential**

Students are required to obtain practice hours in all DNP Essentials to ensure the DNP Essential outcomes are attained. No minimum or maximum number of hours is required in each DNP Essential.

### **Hours at Place of Employment**

It is common for DNP students to be employed in settings or positions that appear to overlap with some of the outcomes delineated in the DNP Essentials. Practice hours and experiences should be linked to a well-defined learning objective and provide an experience over and above the DNP student's individual job opportunities or responsibilities. The DNP student should have the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills beyond what is expected with employment and then incorporate these into his or her nursing practice.

### **Hours in Education/Academia**

Practice as a nurse educator should not be included in the DNP practice hours. The focus of a DNP program, including practice experiences and the DNP Project, should not be on the educational process, the academic curriculum, or on educating nursing students.

### **Hours working on DNP Scholarly Project**

Much of the time spent working on the DNP Scholarly Project will count towards the DNP practice hours. The elements of the DNP Project should be the same for all students and include planning, implementation, and evaluation components. As an outcome of the DNP program, students must demonstrate the integration of all *DNP Essentials* into their academic progress, however, all eight *Essentials* do not have to be demonstrated in the DNP Scholarly Project.

### **Practice Hours Log**

You must maintain a log of your DNP Practice Hours. Hours should be documented according to the *Essential* and reflect the time spent to total the proper number of hours. *Essentials* should be included on the log with experiences that support attaining *DNP Essential Outcomes* and student goals.

### **Practicum Site Selection**

Students may recommend a preceptor and practicum site. The selection process should begin early on in your program, as the entire process can take several months. Students are most familiar with providers and facilities that are in their geographic location and are able to network with peers for the identification of desired practicum experiences. Students also have access to a continually updated list of current practicum sites. The preceptor application and preceptor resume/CV or professional profile form must be submitted a minimum of 16 weeks prior to the start of the practicum.

Once the practicum site has been approved, students will be instructed to move ahead with additional documentation and paperwork. Clinical Coordinator will be in communication with the facility and the appropriate individuals to secure the clinical affiliation agreement.

Once all the required contracts and paperwork are completed and on file, you may still have additional facility requirements that must be completed. This could include training, orientations, and/or additional documentation.

### **Location for Practicum Experiences**

- It is important to remember that the practicum gives personnel in the practicum facilities the opportunity to observe you as a potential employee. You might consider future employment goals when practicum sites are selected.
- The site may be at the facility/institution in which you are a current employee. You must function outside of your MSN role and work as a DNP student with your preceptor.
- These hours are not your normal work hours.

### **Practicum Application**

A practicum application will be needed for each practicum location/preceptor. The application will need to be filled out completely prior to submitting it to the clinical documentation manager.

### **Site Agreements**

A clinical affiliation agreement is required for all practicum sites. The clinical affiliation agreement must be signed by the authorized person from the facility being used and returned to the University of North Alabama Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions for completion. The process of completing site agreements can take several weeks to months. The practicum application must be submitted at least 16 weeks prior to the start of the practicum course. All subsequent practicum applications must be submitted at least 16 weeks prior to the start of that practicum course.

### **Ethical Behavior**

You are expected to present a professional demeanor, behavior, appearance, and communication at all times. You must comply with the policies in the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions Student Handbook which can be found [here](#). You should practice within the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics. You must also agree to abide by all requirements, policies, and procedures of the practicum site. When at a clinical site, you are required to dress appropriately, wear your lab coat, and UNA name tag at all times. You should introduce yourself to each patient as a UNA DNP student. A positive, open, professional communication style, willingness and eagerness to learn, and the ability to accept and act on constructive feedback in clinical sites are paramount to a successful practicum learning experience.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

A successful practicum experience requires collaboration among course faculty, students, preceptors, practicum coordinators, and the University. Students, faculty, and preceptors must ensure that practicum hours are not misappropriated or falsely represented during the practicum experience. Practicum hours are intended to facilitate learning and must be focused on helping the student achieve learning goals.

## **Responsibilities of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions**

### **Faculty/ Faculty Navigator**

- Be available via email or phone to provide support to you and your preceptor during each practicum course
- Verification of appropriate practicum site and preceptor
- Serve as a combination of facilitator, organizer, professional relations, coordinator, role model, coach, and mentor
- Maintain ongoing and effective communication throughout each practicum course
- Conduct meetings (virtual or face-to-face) as needed with you and your preceptor
- Responsible for the final clinical evaluation of your performance in each individual course
- Review, verify, and approve practicum site and preceptor for appropriateness to meeting student learning goals
- Evaluation of preceptor/practicum site for congruency with student outcomes
- Define student outcomes for learning in each practicum course
- Provide a faculty member to serve as instructor and facilitator
- Instruct students to abide by practicum site policies, procedures, and requirements
- Maintain open communication with students and preceptors during practicum courses
- Contact the practicum site as needed regarding site-specific requirements
- Confirm student compliance with site requirements at the start of each practicum course

### **Responsibilities of the Practicum Preceptor**

- Communicate with ACONHP faculty to promote student success in the practicum courses
- Orient the DNP student to his/her practicum site, including policies and procedures for the facility
- Identify suitable experiential learning opportunities that align with course outcomes and student outcomes
- Communicate preceptor expectations in an ongoing manner
- Serve as a role model for students in a professional development setting (teaching, leadership, practice)
- Provide supervision of the student's clinical practice and constructive feedback regarding performance in the practicum setting; complete post-practicum survey
- Provide feedback to ACONHP faculty regarding positive and negative student performance; feedback should be immediate when satisfactory performance is questioned

- Keep appropriate documentation of student attendance, hours, activities, etc.

### **Responsibilities of the Mentor (Optional)**

- Communicate with preceptor and student
- Assist preceptor with the identification of experiential learning opportunities that align with course outcomes and student outcomes
- Assist with supervision of project development, implementation, and/or evaluation
- Assist preceptor as needed

### **Responsibilities of the Student**

- May recommend practicum location and preceptor for the clinical course(s)
- Assist with the identification of the individual (individual contact information) responsible for obtaining appropriate legal and contractual documentation at the practicum location
- Communicate with and obtain appropriate practicum preceptor documentation
- Provide preceptor with the course and program student outcomes
- Establish a mutually agreeable practicum schedule and attend practicum experiences promptly as scheduled
- Present self in a professional manner through professional dress; wear UNA ACONHP name badge
- Actively seek learning opportunities
- Follow the policy and procedures of the practicum site, including rules of patient confidentiality
- Comply with all requirements of the practicum location (immunizations, background checks, drug screening, additional training, etc.)
- Communicate openly and effectively with the preceptor, keeping him/her informed of activities and discussing learning needs; identify and discuss problems and progress
- Participate in professional collaborative efforts and collaborative communication with other members of the healthcare team
- Function under the Nurse Practice Act statutes and regulations for expanded nursing roles
- Maintain accurate clinical documentation records, including clinical logs, time logs, etc.
- Submit required assignments, documentation, etc., on time to the appropriate location and faculty member
- Complete preceptor/practicum site evaluation

### **Student Concerns**

During the DNP practicum experience, students should immediately bring concerns regarding their preceptor, mentor, and/or practicum experience to their faculty navigator. Likewise, the preceptor should bring any issues concerning the DNP student to the faculty navigator immediately. The roles of the faculty navigator, preceptor, mentor, and DNP student are found in the DNP Practicum Guidebook.

## Unsatisfactory Student Behaviors

The following are some examples of unsatisfactory and unacceptable behavior in the practicum setting. Preceptors should report any unsatisfactory behavior to the course instructor and/or program director immediately. These individuals can be reached by calling 256-765-4957.

- Failure to notify preceptor of inability to attend planned practicum experience
- Failure to notify preceptor of late attendance to the practicum experience
- Leaving the practicum experience early without the preceptor's approval
- Failure to be prepared for the practicum experience
- Failure to dress appropriately for the practicum experience; the student should follow the facility dress code
- Failure to possess needed equipment for the practicum experience
- Arriving at the practicum experience mentally dull due to illness, fatigue, or substance abuse
- Failure to follow practicum site policy, procedures, and guidelines
- Failure to perform procedures at the expected knowledge level
- Failure to be accountable for actions
- Violation of patient confidentiality
- Failure to keep the environment and patients safe
- Failure to meet moral and ethical standards
- Failure to protect self from contact with the body fluids of others
- Emotional instability
- Inappropriate use of social media
- Blatant medication errors
- Any situation where the client is put in danger
- Failure to meet clinical outcomes
- Failure to submit required documentation

Any situation where the student places the client's life in danger or shows severe behavioral misconduct toward the client and family, practicum site, staff, faculty, or peers, may result in immediate Administrative Dismissal of the student from the program. Incidents of these types of behaviors include:

- Positive drug or alcohol test
- Evidence of dishonesty
- Falsifying information related to patient care or condition
- Sexual harassment
- Grossly unprofessional behavior
- Pattern of client endangerment
- Criminal, drug, or alcohol-related misconduct as described by the Alabama Board of Nursing

Faculty and staff contact information can be found [here](#).