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Post-Master’s DNP
Full-Time
Spring Summer Fall

S1
N703
N704
Start Clinical Log

S2
N700
N710
5/1 Capstone Topic Selection Form Due

S3
N706
N715
N720
10/15 Capstone Proposal Due
11/1 Capstone Proposal Presentation Due

S4
N702
N705
2/1 Submit Proposal to IRB/JBI as applicable

S5
N714
N721
10/15 Final Capstone Paper Due
11/1 Final Capstone Presentation Slides Due
Final Log Due

S6
N723
N730

Post-Master’s DNP
Part-Time
Spring Summer Fall

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S8
N723

S9
N730
The Capstone and Clinical Guidebook is a step-by-step guide to assist DNP students and Capstone Chairs in understanding the purpose and process of completing the Capstone Project. This reference includes information about the Capstone Project’s development, implementation, and related requirements. Though ideally these steps take place chronologically, be aware that there may be overlap in some stages of the process. While some of this information can be found in the DNP Student Handbook, this guide further details the project expectations from both the student and faculty perspective. You may contact the DNP Program Director for any additional questions.

**Capstone Project Description**

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the capstone project is a tangible deliverable to demonstrate the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of practice immersion and educational experiences (AACN, 2006). The Capstone Project can take on a variety of forms including:

- Quality Improvement
- Implementation of evidence-based practice change initiatives
- Program evaluation
- Systematic literature review
- Or substantive involvement in large practice change projects in clinical settings

The common element to these options is **clinical practice inquiry** and scholarship. One of the key distinctions between PhD and DNP scholarship is that PhD scholarship’s purpose is to produce new evidence, while the purpose of DNP scholarship is to implement previously discovered evidence into practice settings facilitating the translation of best practices into health care settings in a timely and efficient manner.

In the DNP program, the student collaborates with the following mentors to identify and problem solve solutions to unmet health needs in clinical settings and the community:

- **DNP Faculty** – Developing ideas regarding patient population, approaches to problem solving, and health care climate through formal course work
- **Practice Mentors** – Provide guidance and insight regarding the needs and challenges of initiating change in the selected practice setting
- **Capstone Chairs** – Provide guidance and support regarding methods, troubleshooting problems throughout the program and completion of the Capstone Project

In the process of the student developing and implementing the Capstone Project, the DNP Essentials (AACN, 2006) (See Appendix A) are achieved and the student contributes a scholarly product with the potential to have a **significant** and **sustainable** impact on patient care. The Capstone Project serves to:

- Document outcomes of the student’s educational experiences
- Provide a measurable medium for evaluating the practice immersion experience
- Summarize the student’s growth in knowledge and expertise
- Create a foundation for future scholarly practice
Capstone Chair Assignment

Upon admission to the DNP program, each student will work with the DNP program director or designee as the student develops his/her area of interest while taking preliminary courses. The initial DNP academic advisor provides the student direction during the first several semesters of the program until the DNP Capstone Chair is assigned.

The Capstone Chair, a SMU faculty member, guides the student through all aspects of development and completion of the Capstone Project. S/he must be doctorally prepared and may or may not have specific expertise in the student's Capstone Project topic or field. If the Capstone Chair is not an expert in the student’s area, additional content experts may be included on the Capstone Committee. See Appendix B for a list of DNP program faculty available to serve as Capstone Project Chairs. The list includes the faculty members’ area of scholarly interest and practice expertise.

- The DNP Program Director makes the Capstone Chair assignment in the Spring prior to N720 Capstone Emphasis Seminar.
- Capstone Chairs and students must meet thereafter to discuss and finalize the Capstone topic idea prior to the submission deadline – May 1.
- Students must provide a link to his/her ePortfolio containing the pages/documents provided in Appendix C to enable Capstone Chairs to track student progress. Instructions for creating the ePortfolio are included.

The Capstone Chair with the Practice Mentor (See “Practice Mentor and Clinical Agency Contracts” below) comprise the Capstone Project Committee. The student is free to add additional members to the Capstone Project Committee. Additional members may include a faculty member from outside of the institution or other individual(s) with specialized knowledge and expertise relevant to the Capstone Project.

Selection of Topic and Format

Your topic selection should be informed by your work in the following courses at a minimum:

- N703 Epidemiology and Population Health
- N700 Evidence-Based Research Methods

In collaboration with your Capstone Chair, you are expected to submit your description in PICO format in the narrative section of the Capstone Topic Selection form (see Appendix D) and to select your chosen format.

**DEADLINE #1:**

**MAY 1:** Please submit the completed Capstone Topic Selection form to the DNP Program Director, Dr. Michelle DeCoux Hampton at mhampton@samuelmerritt.edu the Spring prior to starting N720 Capstone Emphasis Seminar.

Capstone Topic Selection forms will be reviewed by the Progression Committee in mid-May and feedback can be expected no later than June 1.
The purpose of the progression committee is to ensure that each DNP student:

- Is evaluated based upon the same criteria
- Selects a Capstone Project that fits the definition of clinical practice inquiry and/or scholarship
- Meets the same standards of quality and rigor in the development and completion of the Capstone Project

The Progression Committee will consist of a minimum of three participants including: the DNP Program Director, an appointed DNP faculty member, and the student’s Capstone Chair.

Progression Committee approval is required for each of the following stages of Capstone Project development, implementation, and presentation:

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<td>November 1 while enrolled in N723</td>
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The Progression Committee will review submissions and provide feedback to students.

- **Students who receive an approval** from the Progression Committee may proceed with the next steps of Capstone Project development, implementation, or graduation.
- **Students who are asked to revise and resubmit** must address each of the committee’s concerns satisfactorily, resubmit to the Progression Committee, and receive approval prior to proceeding.

To avoid delays in progression, it is recommended that students familiarize themselves with this guide and begin to work on Capstone Project ideas early in the program with feedback from course faculty, Capstone Chairs, and the DNP Program Director.
Please note that if a student makes a change to the topic selection OR a substantive change in the Capstone Proposal plan after receiving Progression Committee approval, the student is expected to resubmit the changes to the Progression Committee as soon as possible. **A substantive change includes**, but is not limited to a change of:

- Topic
- Setting
- Project focus
- Design
- Intervention
- Population

If you are uncertain if a change you would like to make to your project constitutes a substantive change, please contact the DNP Program Director.

**Proposal Development and Presentation**

In N700 Evidence-Based Research, students are asked to write a mock research proposal to learn the basic structure and requirements for a proposal. However, the final Capstone Project proposal is written after the student receives approval from the Progression Committee about the topic selected. This takes place in **N720 Capstone Emphasis Seminar**. Sample formats are given in the Canvas course.

**DEADLINE #2**

- **OCTOBER 15**: Complete written draft of Capstone Project proposal due on Canvas (see Canvas for submission details)
- **NOVEMBER 1**: Complete draft of slide presentation for December onsite meeting
- **FIRST WEEK OF DECEMBER**: Final proposal presentations

The Progression Committee will meet to review submissions and students will receive written feedback, approvals and/or requests for revision and resubmission. Revisions on slides are expected to be completed prior to the December onsite meeting and paper revisions should be completed prior to the end of the semester. Within the N720 course, you will also be asked to select a Practice Mentor and identify a clinical practice site for your Capstone Project/Clinical Practice Hours (see below).

**Practice Mentor and Clinical Agency Contract**

Because the Capstone Project is often completed in the student’s place of employment, the student often selects the Practice Mentor based on the individual's expertise and ability to support the proposed work. Students who would like to request assistance in identifying a practice mentor or site should contact his/her Capstone Chair or the DNP Program Director.

- Student identifies potential practice mentor(s) and discusses with Capstone Chair.
The student must submit the *Practice Mentor Contact Form* and the *Clinical Affiliation Contract Request* form in N720. (See the *Appendix E* for forms and Canvas course for details.)

The Practice Mentor works with the student at the practice site to provide expert clinical knowledge and facilitate access to resources required to complete the project. See *Appendix F* for the Practice Mentor Welcome Letter. Specific responsibilities include:

- Assisting the student in selecting realistic and specific goals that meet the aims and objectives of both the practice site and the DNP program.
- Guiding the student in the development, implementation, and completion of the Capstone Project.
- Providing feedback to the student and the student's Capstone Chair throughout the project.
- Providing oversight (though not necessarily direct supervision) of clinical hours pertaining to the Capstone Project specifically.

**Clinical Hour Requirements**

At the conclusion of the DNP program, a student must have obtained 1,000 clinical practice hours. These hours must be from a supervised educational environment (e.g. the clinical hours completed during your MSN together with the clinical hours in the DNP program is acceptable).

Implementation of the capstone project will require a minimum of 250 hours. For Post-MSN students, more hours may be required depending upon how many hours were completed in the student's advanced practice nursing/Master's program. For FNP/DNP students, all 1,000 hours will be completed within the program: 630 in FNP and 270 in DNP coursework.

DNP precepted clinical hours are those spent:

- Developing or working on the capstone project
- In advanced practice clinical placements
- In quality or clinical practice improvement activities that inform the Capstone Project
- If the project is to be completed within the student's place of employment, the precepted hours *may not include* those hours in which the student performs his or her usual work, but rather the hours for which the student is engaged in work that informs or is directly related to the project.

Clinical hours must be documented in order to meet the DNP requirement. Clinical logs should reflect the following:

- Activities involved in advanced practice, leadership, or the Capstone Project planning, implementation, or evaluation
- Dates/hours spent in above activities
- Reflection on the achievement of the DNP Essentials
The practice mentor’s signature to verify the completion of the hours

Each DNP student is required to keep a log of precepted clinical hours throughout the program to be submitted with the completed Capstone Project in N730. *Capstone Chairs should track student progress toward the completion of clinical hours each semester.* (See Appendix G for the Clinical Log and Log Balance Sheet.)

### Approvals

**Progression Committee:**

After completion of N720 Capstone Emphasis Seminar, you will have developed a proposal for your project. The format may differ depending on the type of project you selected; but in this handbook, proposal will be used to refer to any type of project or the deliverable from N720.

By the completion of N720, students will receive feedback from the Progression Committee about proposals submitted to N720 (see Timelines on pp. 2-3 for location of this course in each cohort).

- If you received an approval, you can immediately move on to preparing your proposal for submission to either the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI)(for systematic literature reviews).
- If your proposal was not approved, immediately address the issues raised by the Progression Committee and resubmit within 2 weeks. **You may not progress to IRB or JBI submission without an approval.**

**IRB:**

In N700, you will become acquainted with the purpose and requirements for IRB submission. It will be necessary to review the guidelines for both your clinical agency (if applicable) and SMU prior to preparing your proposal for submission.

**The Capstone Chair must review and approve the following prior to submission:**

- Proposal
- Protocol Approval Form
- Letters of Support
- Informed Consent
- Subjects Bill of Rights
- NIH or CITI training certificate
- IRB approval from other institutions or concurrently submitted documents (if applicable)
- Instruments (if applicable)
- Project Fliers (if applicable)
- Educational Materials (if applicable)

1. **Clinical Agency.** Depending on your clinical agency, there may or may not be an IRB.
If there is an IRB, locate the guidelines and first prepare your proposal application to meet the agency requirements. SMU requires the approval of any outside agencies prior to submitting to the SMU IRB. Prepare any consent forms to address the requirements of both SMU and the clinical agency.

If the clinical agency *does not* have an IRB, determine if there is an ethics board from which you should seek approval.

If neither exists, obtain a letter from the agency stating that you have approval to conduct your Capstone Project with the agency’s clientele.

2. **SMU.** After obtaining the necessary approval from the clinical agency, review the guidelines for SMU IRB submission ([http://www.samuelmerritt.edu/academic_affairs/irb](http://www.samuelmerritt.edu/academic_affairs/irb)). Edit or add any necessary elements to ensure that the proposal also meets the requirements for SMU’s IRB.

After taking these steps, submit your proposal again to your Capstone Chair. Approval from your chair and the DNP Director must be documented using the IRB Pre-Approval Form (See Appendix H). Once you’ve received approval, you may submit to your proposal with the Pre-Approval form to SMU’s IRB. *Please note, that several students (as well as faculty) submit proposals to the IRB, delays might occur, so submit your proposal as soon as possible.* Approval must be obtained for any project that includes human subjects prior to implementation.

While you are in the midst of the approval process, stay in close contact with your Capstone Chair.

- Forward any communications you receive about your proposal to your Capstone Chair.
- cc your Capstone Chair on any communications you send regarding your proposal.
- Notify your Capstone Chair if >6 weeks has passed without notification or if you are concerned about the timeframe for approval conflicting with projected start dates.

Once SMU IRB approval is received, students may proceed with implementation.

**JBI:**

For students completing a systematic literature review through the Joanna Briggs Institute, no IRB approval is required. Discuss your decision to pursue a systematic literature review with your Capstone Chair and proceed with the following steps:

- Register for and take JBI course – “*JBI Comprehensive Systematic Review Training Program.*” For the most recent list of courses available, contact Katie Hoover at katie.hoover@ucsf.edu.
- Select topic and develop the research question (PICO).
- Identify your second reviewer (usually your Capstone Chair).
- Search JBI and Cochrane databases to confirm topic is unique.
• Register JBI topic title. Complete the Title Registration form (see Appendix I) and send requests to: ibisynthesis@adelaide.edu.au, cc: Daphne.Stannard@ucsfmedctr.org

• Create/write the protocol in CReMs (JBI software package) (See JBI Protocol Checklist in Appendix J). Once you’ve received the approval of your Capstone Chair, submit for approval to: ibisynthesis@adelaide.edu.au. cc: Daphne.Stannard@ucsfmedctr.org  DO NOT “Transfer report” prior to approval!

• Once the protocol is approved by JBI, students may proceed with the remaining steps of the systematic literature review process.

• JBI will send communications only to the primary reviewer. Be sure to cc/share all communications to and from JBI after you submit the protocol with your secondary reviewer and/or Capstone Chair.

**Implementation**

**IRB Approved Capstone Projects:**
Forward IRB approval letters to Capstone Chair and proceed with implementing the project as outlined in the proposal. There should be no significant changes to the proposal after approvals have been obtained. If there are issues that arise that prevent implementing the project as defined, contact your Capstone Chair and/or the Program Director as soon as possible and wait for feedback before proceeding.

**JBI Approved Protocols:**
When the approval has been received from JBI, continue with the following steps:

• Create accounts and systems for storing your notes, citations, articles, and other information. Tables and bibliography software will be useful to manage.

• Conduct searches in all databases recommended by JBI (and detailed in your approved protocol) and retrieve data sources/articles.

• Conduct searches of grey literature and retrieve data sources.

• Read and take careful notes of the retrieved data sources.

• Conduct critical appraisal of your sources with your secondary reviewer.

• Extract data from the studies you and your secondary reviewer have decided to include in the systematic review.

• Review and synthesize information and data.

• Complete the meta-analysis/meta-synthesis.

• Write the results and conclusions.

• Submit to Capstone Chair for approval.

• After receiving Capstone Chair approval, submit final report to JBI for review for publication. (See Appendix K for a JBI Flowchart.)

During project implementation, students will enroll in N721 Capstone Development. In addition to carrying out the project, students will update the literature review from the proposal and create the structure for the remaining sections of the final paper.
Final Paper and Presentation

As in the proposal phase, student students participate in a 2-3 day on-campus session in December. When enrolled in N723, the final Capstone Project will be presented to faculty, peers, and invited guests. This is an opportunity for students across the program to meet and exchange ideas and to share their work.

A detailed rubric for completion of final papers is provided in N723. Again, the Progression Committee will review papers and presentations. The Progression Committee deadlines are repeated again below:

Progression Committee approval is required for each of the following stages of Capstone Project development, implementation, and presentation.

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The Progression Committee will review submissions and provide feedback to students.  

- **Students who receive an approval** from the Progression Committee have successfully completed the requirements necessary for graduation with regard to the Capstone Project, presentation, and final paper.  
- **Students who are asked to revise and resubmit** must address each of the committee’s concerns satisfactorily and resubmit to the Progression Committee within two weeks until approval is received.

Dissemination and Authorship

All students are encouraged to pursue publication once final approval is received for the Capstone Project. This process begins with a discussion with the Capstone Chair. Since Capstone Projects are a collaborative endeavor, students, Capstone Chairs, and Practice Mentors would be included as co-authors.
The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE, 2014) discusses guidelines for authorship including order of authors and distinguishing authorship from contributor status. This discussion should take place prior to preparing the final paper for submission to a journal. (See ICMJE website: http://wustl.edu/policies/authorship.html).

When authorship has been determined (generally student as first author, Capstone Chair as second author), the student must determine the journal and obtain the author guidelines. Author guidelines give explicit instructions about manuscript format:

- Acceptable topics
- Manuscript length
- Style (i.e. APA, AMA, etc.)

Prepare your manuscript according to the instructions given and forward to your Capstone Chair (and any other co-authors) for approval. Once all authors are satisfied with the manuscript, submission to the journal is acceptable.

Please note, that the same process should be followed with regard to poster presentations. Abstracts and posters should be reviewed and approved by co-authors prior to submission and/or printing.

**Summary**

The Capstone Project is a substantial undertaking. It requires diligence, focus, and the support of your mentors. Though it is challenging work, it is also a richly rewarding experience for both students and faculty alike. Congratulations on your decision to embark upon the life changing process of doctoral education. We look forward to supporting your success through each step of this endeavor.

**References**


Appendices are included in a separate document.