Overview

A hallmark of the practice doctorate is the successful completion of a scholarly project demonstrating the synthesis of the student’s experiences. The scholarly project embraces the synthesis of both coursework and practice application, a deliverable product reviewed and evaluated by a faculty mentor/advisor and scholarly project committee. Dissemination modes are a public scholarly defense and the preparation of an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The nature of the scholarly projects will vary. Projects are related to advanced practice in the nursing specialty and benefit a group, population, or community rather than an individual patient. Projects most often evolve from practice and may be done in partnership with another entity, e.g., clinical agency, health department, government agency, community group. Types of scholarly projects may include: quality improvement initiatives; implementation and evaluation of evidence-based practice guidelines; policy analysis; the design and use of databases to retrieve information for decision-making, planning, evaluation; the design and evaluation of new models of care; designing and evaluating health care programs.

DNP students identify an inquiry within their practice area at the time of their applications. During the first semester students work with faculty to begin exploring concepts related to their inquiries while evaluating sources of evidence related to the problem/need. The inquiry will be further defined during the four integrative application courses with the guidance of the advisor/committee chair and committee members. A design appropriate to the purpose of the inquiry will be developed based on the evaluation of the evidence, needs assessment, overall project goals, outcomes, and process objectives. During the course of the program, the project will be implemented integrating economic, political, ethical and legal factors as appropriate. Evaluation of the process and outcomes of implementation and dissemination of findings complete the scholarly project process.

Students work closely with their scholarly project committee, under the direction of the Committee Chair, who most likely is the student’s advisor. The Committee Chair is engaged in all aspects of the process.

Scholarly Project Committee

After identifying the project topic, a Scholarly Project Committee is appointed with the guidance of the advisor and the DNP Program Director as necessary. Each committee must have at least two members inclusive of the Chair, one of which is faculty of the University of Cincinnati and hold doctoral degrees in their areas of expertise. Students can select one member from outside the University. Each student will identify a faculty member from the College of Nursing to serve as Chair. The Committee Chair will assume the role of academic advisor for the remainder of the student’s tenure. The Chair is selected matching the scholarly interest and/or method of inquiry identified by the student. Students will identify their Committee Chair and members by the end of the Advanced Clinical Reasoning course. The Chair will help the student identify potential
committees within the College of Nursing. Once the committee is identified, the student must complete the Scholarly Project Committee Appointment Request form, obtaining appropriate signatures. The original form is forwarded to the DNP Program Director who will obtain the signature of the Associate Dean. If the Chair or other Committee member is unable to continue working with the student, the student will coordinate with the DNP Program Director and/or the Associate Dean regarding an action plan. Changes in the Committee must be submitted in writing to the DNP Program Director and a new form completed. The Scholarly Project Committee is responsible for the following activities:

The Scholarly Project Committee is responsible for the following activities:
- Guiding the student in the development of the scholarly project
- Critiquing the readiness of the project proposal for presentation
- Mentoring the student during the implementation and evaluation phases of the project
- Evaluating the student’s performance on both the proposal and final project presentations through formal defense.

The Chair of the committee will evaluate all written work, once it has been evaluated by course faculty. It is not the responsibility of the other committee members to thoroughly critique or edit written work. Their expertise is to be used in formation of ideas, mentoring through DNP process steps and evaluation of the Capstone project as a whole.

Committee Meetings

The progression of the DNP student throughout the project process is monitored by the committee during meetings at least once per practicum course, either in person or via Centra conferencing, Skype, conference call or other acceptable method. The student is responsible for scheduling these meetings and advised to document the agenda, actions, and target dates. This documentation will be included in the student’s portfolio under ‘Project’. Meetings are a graded requirement for practicum courses. The following are guidelines for committee meetings:

- Guiding the student in the development of the scholarly project
- Critiquing the readiness of the project proposal for defense
- Mentoring the student during the implementation and evaluation phases of the project
- Evaluating the student’s performance on both the Proposal and final Project defense.

Practicum Courses

Students complete three practicum courses, which offer mentored opportunities to identify, develop, implement, evaluate and disseminate the independent, analytical scholarly project. Each course assumes the synthesis of knowledge gleaned from subsequent/concurrent DNP courses and the unique practice expertise of the DNP student. Although these courses are separate entities, course objectives and student’s individual objectives may transition into a subsequent practicum course reflecting the student’s progress with the project in collaboration with the
Committee Chair and course faculty. Throughout these three courses, the student is expected to practice a minimum of 500 hours in an area related to their practice inquiry.

Scientific Basis of Clinical Reasoning/ Applications
- Identification and refining of topic of interest
- Submission of Scholarly Project Committee Appointment Request form
- Documentation of meeting DNP competencies and practice hours in electronic DNP student Portfolio

Practicum I
- Beginning Project Development
- Successful completion of written proposal
- Successful defense of the Project Proposal
- Submit Approval of DNP Scholarly Project Proposal form signed by Committee Chair and members to the DNP Program Director who will obtain the signature from the Associate Dean.
- Submission Institutional Review Board documents
- Documentation of meeting DNP competencies and practice hours in electronic DNP student Portfolio

Practicum II
- Implementation of scholarly project
- Documentation of meeting DNP competencies and practice hours in electronic DNP student Portfolio

Practicum III and Capstone
- Successful completion of final paper
- Successful defense of Scholarly Project
- Submit signed DNP Scholarly Project Defense Evaluation Form to the DNP program Director who is responsible for obtaining signatures from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
- Documentation of meeting DNP competencies and practice hours in electronic DNP student Portfolio

Submission of approved final paper to the DNP office must be completed within 7 days of expected graduation.

Project Progression

Students are expected to meet the requirements for completing the scholarly project in conjunction with the practicum courses. These three courses provide a mechanism for formal grading of progress through the scholarly project. If extenuating circumstances prevent the student from meeting the expectations for completion of the project during the final semester, the student will receive an incomplete for Capstone. A student receiving an incomplete will need to
enroll the following semester in an independent study. The student must receive a grade of B in the independent study in order to progress.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

All scholarly projects require approval from the University of Cincinnati and/or the UC Medical Center Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the implementation of the project. In order to protect human subjects, IRB approval is indicated. Because dissemination of findings from the project is an expectation of the DNP program graduate, IRB approval is required as well. IRB Determination forms may be completed to determine need prior to full IRB proposal submission.

Completion of the Human Research Curriculum (CITI –Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) is required prior to the submission of the online application. This web-based training is available on the UC IRB web site: http://researchcompliance.uc.edu/irb/. The CITI training is usually completed in conjunction with practicum courses. The IRB application is submitted only after the Chair and Committee have formally approved the student’s project proposal and the Chair has reviewed and approved the application. A copy of the letter of approval must be submitted to the Chair before implementation of the project. Additional IRB approvals and CITI training may be required from the agency or institution in which the project will be implemented. The student needs to ascertain this requirement prior to the submission of the UC IRB.

Scholarly Project Evaluations

To graduate from the DNP program, the student must successfully defend the project proposal as well as the final project during enrollment in the practicum sequence.

Project Proposal

Students collaborate with their Chair on the development of the written proposal. Contracting with Committee members regarding expectations throughout the process is encouraged. Once the proposal is finalized and reviewed by the Committee Chair, the student delivers a 20-30 minute oral presentation using Power Point to their committee describing the key components of their project proposal. The presentation may be at the College of Nursing or using distance technology, e.g., Centra. The student is responsible for scheduling this defense after coordinating with the Chair and other Committee members. The DNP student must pass the proposal defense in order to meet course requirements and progress in the program. A written evaluation with recommendations as appropriate will be given to the student at the completion of the defense. All members of the committee will sign the Approval of DNP Scholarly Project Proposal form. A copy must be submitted to the DNP Program Director who will forward it to the Associate Dean. If a student fails to pass the Defense, a plan for remediation and second proposal defense will be developed by the Committee, the DNP Program Director, and the student. This plan will be submitted to Associate Dean for approval within one week of the date of the meeting. Failure to
successfully pass the second proposal defense will result in failure of the appropriate practicum course.

Timeline for Written and Oral Scholarly Project Proposal
- Submit a first draft of the proposal to the Committee Chair three weeks before the scheduled Proposal Defense.
- Submit a revised draft of the paper and slide presentation to Committee Members following Committee Chair’s approval two weeks before scheduled Proposal Defense. The final copy of the proposal paper and slide presentation should be submitted to the Committee Chair and all members one week before scheduled Proposal Defense.

Format for Written Project Proposal

The proposal should be written in APA format (6th edition) using a 12 font. The length of the proposal will vary, e.g., 20-30 pages. The title page must include the name of the scholarly project, student name and academic credentials, and University of Cincinnati College of Nursing. An electronic copy of the proposal must be submitted to the committee at least 7 days before the scheduled defense. The organization and content of the proposal will vary according to the project and recommendations of the Chair and Committee members. The following components of the proposal are recommended:

I. Introduction to problem
- Background & significance of problem to health care/nursing
- Purpose/specific aim(s), e.g., what is your product
- Concepts and definitions used in project
- Relationship of project to advanced nursing practice
- Discussion of how identified practice setting will support project’s development
  - Identify key stakeholders
- Benefit of project to practice clinical area

II. Theoretical foundation or framework for the project
- Appraisal of relevant evidence
- Review and critique of relevant theory-based literature

III. Project plan and methodology
- Methods for achieving purpose, e.g., study design, needs assessment, target population
- Expected outcomes
- Project timeline
- Project budget and justification
- Other resources needed for project completion
IV Plan for implementation
   Data collection tools
   Plan for data analysis

V Plan for formative and summative evaluation
VI Plan for dissemination of information

Project Defense

The DNP student must successfully complete the Scholarly Project Defense to be eligible for graduation. The oral presentation using Power Point may take place at the College of Nursing or via synchronous conferencing, e.g., Centra. The defense will be open to the public. All committee members are expected to be in attendance. Practice mentors and stakeholders are encouraged to attend.

All presentations must be scheduled ahead of time in coordination with the Chair, Committee Members and the DNP Program Director. The presentations will be posted the on the College of Nursing calendar. The Defense will be facilitated by the Committee Chair. The candidate will make a thirty minute presentation of his/her project, after which the Chair will open the floor for questions/discussion from the Committee and audience. Following questions and discussion, the audience will be excused and the Committee may pose additional questions about the project to the candidate. The candidate is then excused while Committee members deliberate on the outcome of the Defense. A written evaluation with recommendations as appropriate will be provided to the student. All members of the committee will sign the DNP Scholarly Project Defense Evaluation Form. A copy must be submitted to the DNP Program Director who will forward it to the Associate Dean in the College of Nursing. If a student fails to pass the Defense, a plan for remediation will be developed by the Committee, the DNP Program Director and the student. This plan will be submitted to Associate Dean in the College of Nursing, for approval within one week of the date of the project defense. Failure to pass the second defense will result in dismissal. The project must be successfully defended at least two weeks prior to semester end for the student to be eligible for graduation.

Once the Committee has agreed that the student has met all the requirements for graduation, the student will submit an electronic version of the final written paper.

Timeline for Scholarly Project Defense & Paper

- Date and time requests for the Defense submitted to DNP Director no later than 4 weeks after the first day of the final semester. All committee members must agree and be available on the evaluation date.
- First draft of the paper to the Committee Chair at least three weeks before the scheduled Defense.
- Submit a revised draft of the paper and slide presentation to Project Committee Members following Committee Chair’s approval at least 2 weeks before scheduled Final Defense.
- Schedule a mock defense presentation with the Committee Chair and/or other committee members 1-2 weeks before scheduled Defense.
- The final copy of the paper and slide presentation should be submitted to the Committee Chair and all members 1 week before scheduled Final Defense.

The final presentation/defense dates must be coordinated with the DNP Director following confirmation with Committee members. Additional information will be provided in practicum courses.

Format for Written Scholarly Project Paper

The final paper should be written in APA format and in accordance with the format described under the guidelines for the written proposal. As noted in the proposal discussion, the organization and content of the final paper will vary according to the project and recommendations of the Chair and Committee members. The following components of the proposal are recommended:

I
- Introduction to problem
- Background & significance of problem to health care/nursing
- Purpose/specific aim(s), e.g., what is your product
- Concepts and definitions used in project
- Relationship of project to advanced nursing practice
- Discussion of how identified practice setting will support project’s development
  - Identify key stakeholders
- Benefit of project to practice clinical area

II
- Theoretical foundation or framework for the project
- Appraisal of relevant evidence
- Review and critique of relevant theory-based literature

III
- Methods for achieving purpose
- Expected outcomes
- Project timeline
- Project budget and justification
- Other resources needed for project completion
IV
- Project results
- Evaluation and/or plan for evaluation

V
- Discussion of project results
- Relate project to theoretical framework as appropriate
- Discuss significance of results to practice setting, advanced nursing practice, health care
- Strengths and limitations of project
- Suggestions for improving project and further evaluation

Appendices
IRB approval
Letters of support
Data collection instruments