

**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
SCHOOL OF NURSING**

**ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAM**

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**TITLE OF POLICY:** DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE CAPSTONE PROJECT  
DEVELOPMENT AND COMPLETION

**ORIGINAL DATE:** JULY 2009

**LAST REVIEWED/REVISED:** JANUARY 2018

**POLICY:**

Doctoral education is distinguished by the completion of a specific project that demonstrates synthesis of the student's acquired knowledge and lays the groundwork for future scholarship. For the DNP Program the scholarly work is the Capstone Project. The DNP primarily involves mastery of an advanced specialty within nursing practice.

The Capstone may take a number of forms, such as a program or practice evaluation, a quality improvement project, research utilization, or development and testing of a clinical protocol. Whatever the form, all DNP Capstone Projects include completion of a portfolio containing documents that attest to the student's accomplishments during the DNP program of study.

The theme that links these forms of scholarly work is the use of evidence to improve practice and patient outcomes. The final DNP project produces a tangible and deliverable academic product that is derived from the educational immersion experience and is evaluated and approved by the Capstone Committee. The final DNP product documents outcomes of the student's educational experiences, provides a measurable medium for evaluating the immersion experience, and summarizes the student's growth in knowledge and expertise.

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**PROCEDURE:**

1. The student submits a Capstone Project Topic to the DNP Sub-committee on Capstone Projects for approval
2. A School of Nursing faculty member who is a registered nurse and prepared at the doctoral level serves as the Capstone Chair and is selected by the student and her/his academic advisor.
3. Once approved, the student and Capstone Chair agree upon a Capstone Committee. This committee consists of the Capstone Chair and at least two other members, one of which is faculty in the School of Nursing. The Capstone Chair and other member from the School of Nursing must be prepared at the doctoral level. Additional members may be added at the discretion of the Capstone Chair, for example those with clinical, content or statistical expertise.
4. The academic advisor reviews the requirements for the capstone proposal with the student utilizing the Capstone Project Guidelines. The student submits a proposal for the capstone project to the Capstone Committee.
5. Once the proposal is approved by the Capstone Committee, the Capstone Chair determines the timeframe for initiation and completion of the project. The student registers for the capstone courses according to the curriculum plan.
6. Prior to initiation of the project, it undergoes review and approval by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) or other organizational review process.

7. At project completion, the Capstone Chair schedules the defense and the student presents and defends the project to the Capstone committee in an advertised public forum.
8. A manuscript is submitted to a peer reviewed journal for publication after the public defense and approval by the Capstone Committee and prior to graduation.
9. Copies of the Portfolio, public presentation documents, and manuscript are submitted prior to graduation to the DNP Coordinator to be kept in the DNP file, which is housed in the Department of Health Promotion and Development.
10. The Capstone Project Completion form is signed by the Capstone committee members and Coordinator of the DNP program and a milestone form is submitted to Student Affairs and Alumni Relations.

Reviewed: 09-10, 17-18

Revised: 11/2009

Revisions Approved by Total Faculty: 11/23/2009