

Request to Re-classify Academic Program

Name of College: College of Nursing

Program: Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)

Proposed Change: Re-designate program as professional graduate degree

Justification for proposed change:

The College of Nursing requests that the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree be re-designated as a professional graduate degree program as a result of ongoing examination of the nature of the degree and its requirements, the national accreditation environment for the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, and evolving nature of the WSU Health Sciences Spokane community. The request for this re-designation follows multiple stakeholder conversations over the past year and the unanimous support for this change across administrative leadership and program faculty. This request is based on professional and academic best practices that provides increasing clarity about the nature of the program for students as well as the policies that students/faculty must follow in program administration.

Program alignment with WSU definition of professional graduate programs:

Chapter 14 of the 2022-23 Graduate School Policies and Procedures document describes the characteristics of professionally oriented masters programs. While professionally-oriented doctoral programs are not addressed in this document, the descriptors for professional doctoral programs (i.e., PharmD, MD, DPT) mirror those described in 14A. Professional programs:

- prepare students for a particular profession,
- emphasize competencies in a set of skills needed to practice in that profession,
- are licensed or regulated by government agencies,
- require external professional accreditation,
- rely on curriculum that includes internships, practica and clinical hours,
- require a capstone project that applies professional KSAs to a practice-focused problem.
- do not require a research experience or a thesis.

The Doctor of Nursing Practice degree embodies all of these characteristics. The DNP degree is described by the American Association Colleges of Nursing (2022) as a program that prepares nurse leaders at the highest level of nursing practice to improve patient outcomes. Key content areas include evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and systems leadership, as well nursing care specialty in an advanced practice discipline. AACN distinguishes the DNP from research-focused doctoral programs in nursing (e.g., PhD or DNSc) stating this program is designed for nurses seeking a terminal degree in nursing practice preparing Advanced Practice Registered Nurses to implement evidence developed by nurse researchers. DNP programs require a practice-focused area of specialization which have been identified as Nurse Practitioner (Family, Psychiatric Mental Health, Pediatrics, Neonatal, Adult-Gerontological Acute Care), Nurse Midwife, Nurse Anesthetist, Clinical Specialist (Oncology, Adult-Gerontological Medical Surgical, Population Health), Systems Administration/Nurse Executive, and Nurse Informaticist.

Each of these advanced practice roles are specific specialties with documented Scopes and Standards of Practice as well as clinical guidelines that specify clinical competencies. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF), in partnership with the National Council State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), and the National Taskforce on Quality Nurse Practitioner Education (NTF) set forth educational essentials and standards, clinical practice standards and competencies, and educational standards that all DNP programs must meet to achieve accreditation. In addition, the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) and the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) set forth educational and practice competencies and standards that all DNP programs must adhere to in order to be recognized in the state of Washington. Graduates from all DNP programs must graduate from a nationally accredited and a state approved program in order to qualify for the national certification exam and practice in any state in the nation. The WSU College of Nursing DNP program currently prepares Nurse Practitioners with specialties in Family and Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing as well as Clinical Specialists in Population Health. We anticipate adding the Adult-Gero Acute Care NP and the Neonatal Nurse Practitioner in partnership with our clinical partners. The WSU program has been externally accredited by CCNE and approved by the Nursing Care Quality Commission (NCQAC) since its inception. In 2021-22, our graduates have had a 100% pass rate on all national certification exams.

All of our DNP programs have required clinical elements. Currently, students enroll in 1,000 hours of direct and indirect advanced practice clinical education precepted by APRNs already certified in the same specialty discipline that the student is enrolled in. We anticipate that national standards will increase the experiential practice requirements to 1500 hours within the next year. In addition, students are required to demonstrate interprofessional practice competencies (determined by the National Center for Interprofessional Practice and Education (<https://nexusipe.org/>)) and acquire high risk/low frequency advanced practice skills through Healthcare Simulated Practice as guided by standards promulgated by the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (<https://www.inacsl.org/healthcare-simulation-standards>).

All students engage in a capstone Practice Improvement Project as described by AACN <https://www.aacnnursing.org/DNP/Tool-Kit>. This project integrates across the DNP competencies to

- propose 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;
- demonstrate feasibility by addressing fiscal, system or political sustainability;
- complete an evaluation of processes and/or outcomes (formative or summative) suggesting practice and/or policy changes necessary to effect lasting change that address a significant clinical practice gap at a local, regional or national level.

This project reflects scholarship or integration and application (Boyer, 2000) rather than scholarship of discovery that our PhD students are engaged in. Upon graduation, DNP graduates continue to engage in these types of scholarly endeavors, often serving as consultants or co-investigators responsible for application of novel interventions within the clinical arena.

Finally, re-designation of the DNP as a professional program better aligns with admission, progression and graduation requirements identified by both state regulation and national accreditation. Most

importantly, the WAC requires that DNP students graduate within five (5) years of matriculation to ensure that all coursework is current and that graduates are prepared to practice safely within their chosen discipline. Further, certification boards require that professional certification (the requirement for clinical practice) be achieved within a similar time frame to ensure that preparation is consistent with clinical practice standards and guidelines and that treatment strategies align with current evidence. Given the rapid rate of scientific discovery and practice change, the current degree requirement timelines set by the WSU graduate policies (10 years) is not applicable to the DNP. In addition, admission, progression and dismissal need to be re-aligned to better reflect the critical nature of the clinical courses and practica as well as the didactic courses that underlie and inform the students' clinical practice knowledge.

Program alignment with similar Health Sciences disciplines

Re-designation of the Doctor of Nursing Practice program as a professional graduate degree also aligns this program with similar health sciences programs both at a local (WSU), state (Washington), regional (WICHE) and national level. The DNP is similar to other professional health sciences graduate/doctoral degree programs at WSU Health Sciences, including the Doctor of Medicine degree program at the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine and the Doctor of Pharmacy degree offered by the College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. In addition, the DNP has been offered as a professional degree program at the University of Washington School of Nursing since 2007. In the western region of the U.S., the DNP is offered as a professional degree program in approximately 50% of the universities and colleges with the remainder offering the degree through graduate schools and colleges, consistent with the national trend. U.S. News and World Report (2020) reports that 60% of DNP programs in the U.S. are offered as professional graduate programs, similar to other doctoral programs that include Doctor of Physical Therapy (DrPT) and Occupational Therapy (OTD).

Summary

The College of Nursing requests that the DNP program be re-designated as a professional doctoral program to better align this program internally and externally with peer programs in the WSU Health Sciences and to ensure that state regulatory and national accreditation requirements and best practices are followed. With the recent re-organization of the support units (e.g., creation of the Center for Student Excellence with enhanced admission and enrollment management processes, the Center for Experiential Learning, and the Department of Clinical Placements and Affiliations), additional executive academic leadership and staff hires, and adoption of the Centralized Application System for Nursing which aligns with AACN/CCNE requirements we are now fully prepared to assume the administration of the DNP and support of students and faculty.