

NURSING PRACTICE, DOCTOR OF (D.N.P.)

Building on the strength of the Magnet-designated VCU Health System and the School of Nursing's Langston Center for Quality, Safety and Innovation, this program is strongly positioned to prepare students to improve the quality of health care delivery and patient outcomes. The Institute of Medicine's 2011 report "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health" noted that nurses have a critical role in transforming today's increasingly complex health care system and called for increased education to provide nurses with key knowledge and skills to expand their influence. In order to meet this charge, graduates of the D.N.P. program at VCU will be prepared to improve health care delivery by critically appraising scientific evidence to inform practice, sharing clinical expertise in collaborative and dynamic environments, leading interprofessional teams, providing systems leadership for sustainable best practices in clinical settings and influencing health policy.

Further, graduates of VCU's School of Nursing D.N.P. program will be prepared to engage in evidence-based, clinically focused scholarship. With support from the Langston Center, students will design, implement and evaluate innovative projects that advance quality and safety science.

Designed to accommodate master's-prepared nurses already established in advanced practice registered nurse or nurse executive positions, the D.N.P. program is planned as a post-master's degree requiring completion of a minimum of 39 credits. While the traditional plan of study follows an eight-semester format, an accelerated option is also available. The program will employ an online format with students coming to campus three times per year.

The D.N.P. offers is a solution-focused program designed to prepare nurses to lead interprofessional efforts to develop patient quality and safety innovations, influence policy change in the transformation of health care systems and ensure ethical stewardship in practice. The program seeks to foster and broaden inquiry that sparks new insights as students make connections across disciplines to improve health care and its delivery. Building on the university's mission to improve human health, VCU D.N.P. graduates will translate evidence that leads to sustainable practice change for improved patient quality and safety outcomes.

Program goals

Students will achieve D.N.P.-level competencies by demonstrating:

1. Use of quality and safety outcomes to evaluate practice improvement initiatives
2. Skills in using evidence-based practice to achieve sustainable practice change
3. Advanced decision-making skills founded in ethics and the highest level of nursing practice
4. Leadership strategies to influence health policies
5. Interprofessional collaboration in health care systems

Student learning outcomes

At the completion of the D.N.P. program, students will have the knowledge and skills to:

1. Demonstrate strategic management skills in systems-based care delivery models and approaches designed to promote quality, safety and excellence in nursing practice
2. Assume a leadership role in the development, implementation and evaluation of health policies that improve quality and safety in health care systems
3. Translate and disseminate evidence-based practices to improve health care outcomes and reduce disparities
4. Integrate professional intra- and interdisciplinary best practices to create collaborative sustainable practice change
5. Integrate knowledge of specialized nursing practice with knowledge from other sciences as the basis for the highest level of nursing practice
6. Lead efforts to preserve, promote and improve the health of specialty populations
7. Use health information technology to promote best practices in health care systems
8. Ensure fiscal accountability when planning practice initiatives that will improve the quality of care delivery
9. Demonstrate advanced levels of ethical and moral judgment and decision-making

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs

The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the Graduate School website (<http://www.graduate.vcu.edu>) and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students. (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs>)

Degree candidacy requirements

A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master's or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student's graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student's faculty regarding the student's academic achievements and the student's readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the **academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements**. (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/candidacy>)

Other information

VCU School of Nursing Student Policy and Information handbooks (<http://nursing.vcu.edu/about-us/resources>) are located on the school's website.

Our international and non-native English-speaking students bring different perspectives and new thinking to our nursing programs. To ensure that all incoming student are prepared for the school's academic rigor, all international applicants and non-native English speaking applicants without a degree from a U.S. high school, college or university must provide additional information with their applications according to the English language proficiency guidelines on the program admission tab.

Visit the **School of Nursing website for program-specific application instructions** (<http://nursing.vcu.edu/admission/application-instructions/dnp>).

Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
D.N.P.	Fall	Jan 15 (Nov 1 early action deadline; after Jan 15 consideration is given on a space-available basis)	
	Spring	Sep 15 (after which consideration is given on a space-available basis)	

To be considered for admission to the School of Nursing, applicants must:

1. Be eligible for readmission or be in good standing at the last college or university attended
2. Meet the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements>)
3. Submit a complete application with all required materials to the School of Nursing
4. Have an earned master's or doctoral degree with a cumulative GPA of 3.0
5. Have an earned nursing degree at the baccalaureate level or above from an accredited nursing school (e.g. ACEN, CCNE, CNEA)
6. Have a current, unrestricted R.N. license from a U.S. state or territory at the time admissions application is submitted (Applicants without a current R.N. license in the U.S. should consult with the **Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools** (<http://www.cgfns.org>) and

the **Virginia Board of Nursing** (<https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/nursing>) for the steps needed to obtain a Virginia R.N. license.)

7. Provide additional information with the application according to the English language proficiency guidelines for applicants who are international or non-native English speakers without a degree from a U.S. high school, college or university (Additional information can be found on the 'Required materials' tab of the **VCU International Admissions website** (<https://www.vcu.edu/admissions/apply/international/undergraduate-applicants>).
8. Complete a personal interview

Note: Requests for exceptions to the above criteria will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Degree requirements

A minimum of 39 graduate credit hours are required for the Doctor of Nursing Practice program.

In addition to general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info>), a candidate for the D.N.P. degree must be recommended by the faculty and must:

1. Meet academic requirements of the Graduate School
2. Complete all requirements for the prescribed curriculum within six calendar years of the first registration for work to be credited toward the degree
3. Earn a minimum grade of B or pass grade in all nursing courses
4. Earn a minimum cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in all work presented for graduation
5. Conform to School of Nursing policies in respect to pass/fail grading for course work and D.N.P. project

The degree will be granted only after all requirements have been fulfilled and all fees to the university have been paid. Degrees are not granted in absentia unless written request is made to the dean and permission is granted.

Curriculum requirements

Course	Title	Hours
NURS 605	Statistical Methods for Quality Improvement	3
NURS 606	Evaluating Evidence to Improve Health Outcomes	3
NURS 607	Epidemiology and Population Health	3
NURS 608	Quality Improvement in Practice	3
NURS 610	Health Information and Emerging Health Care Technologies	3
NURS 621	Leadership and Organizational Systems	3
NURS 638	Health Policy Leadership and Advocacy	3
NURS 664	DNP Residency: Mentored Practicum	12
NURS 665	DNP Project I: Proposal Development	3
	Elective chosen with adviser approval	3
Total Hours		39

The minimum total of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 39.

Practice hours/residency requirement

“The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice” specifies the completion of 1,000 hours of practice post-baccalaureate as part of a supervised academic program. For post-master’s D.N.P. programs, each institution is responsible for assessing how many relevant graduate clinical hours a student enters with and how many additional hours are required for the student to achieve the 1,000 clinical hour minimum upon degree completion. These hours are structured into the curriculum via 12 credits of residency courses. At the post-master’s D.N.P. level, practice hours focus on developing the skills needed to lead efforts to improve care outcomes rather than direct clinical practice skills, as is the focus at the master’s level. Experiences will be varied depending upon the student’s abilities in relation to the D.N.P. essential competencies. For example, students may work with the quality improvement team in a particular setting to develop and implement an improvement initiative; they may develop an evidence-based practice guideline for a patient problem; or they may develop a policy change initiative in concert with their professional association. Practice experiences, settings and the focus of residency hours are individualized and developed mutually by the student and faculty adviser. Each residency course has individualized objectives, assignments and products that demonstrate student achievement of specific D.N.P. essential competencies. Qualified preceptors, based on their expertise and experience, will be identified to provide supervision as needed to support particular practice experiences. Students, preceptors and faculty advisers will all contribute to evaluation of student success in meeting the identified objectives developed for each residency course; final evaluation of all residency requirements is the responsibility of the faculty adviser for the course. Residency courses are graded on a pass-fail basis. The school has identified criteria that will trigger an adviser’s decision to travel to the site for direct observation, such as preceptor concerns regarding student performance or unsatisfactory communications with student or preceptor that cannot be resolved by telephone or video conference. The completed assignments from each residency course culminate in a professional portfolio that demonstrates achievement of all residency course objectives by the completion of the 12 required residency credits.

Project requirements

The D.N.P. program culminates in the successful completion of a scholarly work called the D.N.P. project. In collaboration with faculty and their project team, students design, implement and evaluate a quality/safety project that is focused in their specialized clinical area. The final product is a scholarly manuscript describing the project that is suitable for publication in a professional journal. The project teams consist of doctorally prepared content experts, one of whom must be from the practice site, and select faculty. The curriculum is designed so that students begin planning their D.N.P. project during initial course work and complete the project in their final semester of study. Dissemination of the D.N.P. project findings occur during the final semester as part of the course work.

Graduate program director

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Program website: nursing.vcu.edu/programs/dnp (<http://www.nursing.vcu.edu/programs/dnp>)