

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

The D.N.P. program is strongly positioned to prepare students to improve the quality of health care delivery and patient outcomes. 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. 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.

The 39-credit online post-master's to D.N.P. pathway is designed to accommodate master's-prepared nurses already established in advanced practice registered nurse or nurse executive positions. The program prepares these nurses to lead change in the clinical setting. The online format with students coming to campus three times per year provides working nurses a flexible option.

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. Synthesize knowledge from nursing and other sciences to lead efforts to promote health and improve outcomes of individuals, populations and systems
2. Demonstrate integration of population health concepts in systems-based care delivery models designed to promote quality, safety and excellence in advanced nursing practice
3. Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of policy initiatives to improve quality and safety in health care systems
4. Translate and disseminate evidence-based practices toward improving health care outcomes and reducing disparities
5. Lead innovative approaches in the application of health information technology that supports delivery and evaluation of patient-centered care
6. Apply principles of ethical and moral reasoning in advanced practice roles to lead sustainable change in health care

7. Demonstrate advanced levels of clinical and ethical judgement, systems thinking and accountability in designing, delivering and evaluating evidence-based care to improve patient outcomes

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** 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.

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.

Graduation requirements

As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements.

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 or spring	Rolling admissions	

Note: No admissions test is required for this program.

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 \(http://www.cgfn.org/\)](http://www.cgfn.org/) and the [Virginia Board of Nursing \(https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/nursing/\)](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 \(https://www.vcu.edu/admissions/apply/international/undergraduate-applicants/\)](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.

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