

"BSN-DNP Curriculum: What have we learned?"

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Background: The dramatic increase in the number of Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs is timely as DNP graduates are equipped with the leadership skills to collaborate with interprofessional teams to improve quality, cost and access. The challenge is preparing large numbers of specialty students with the skills to practice as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) and the leadership skills that will enable them to drive positive changes in the health care system. The College of Nursing (CON) transitioned all Specialty Programs to the DNP degree in the fall of 2012. The curriculum was designed and sequenced to culminate in the final year with the implementation of the DNP Project and the direct care clinical hours. Moreover, it was recognized that the students' socialization as doctoral students and scholars required a structured approach.

Objectives: 1) To promote students' socialization as doctoral students and scholars; 2) To facilitate students' development as leaders; 3) To promote intellectual curiosity and scholarly thinking, and 4) To establish a systematic approach to DNP Project identification and implementation.

Leadership Strategies: The strategies implemented included: 1) establishing a doctoral seminar, 2) collaborating with clinical partners to identify projects that link to the organization's strategic goals and quality and safety metrics, 3) systematically matching projects with student interests, 4) establishing an advisor/second reader mentorship of the project, and 5) developing the site facilitator role.

Formative Evaluation: A survey was distributed to 26 Adult-Gerontology DNP students and 12 DNP Faculty Advisors in September 2014, 2 years into the BSN-DNP Curriculum. The purpose of the survey was to solicit perspectives on the DNP Curriculum, the DNP Project Process and the DNP Seminars.

Faculty Results: Eighty-three percent (10/12) Adult-Gerontology DNP Faculty Advisors completed the survey. 80%(8/10) felt confident or very confident that they provide knowledgeable guidance to help their advisees develop the DNP Project; 80%(8/10) felt confident or very confident that they establish a community of scholars promoting intellectual curiosity; 70%(7/10) felt confident or very confident that they could answer questions posed by their advisees on the DNP curriculum; 70%(7/10) felt confident or very confident that they were able to describe the DNP Project Process.

Student Results: Seventy-seven percent (20/26) Adult-Gerontology students completed the survey. Fifty-five % were acute care students and 45% were primary care students.

100% (20/20) students identified that faculty often or very often challenged them to think critically beyond the level at which they entered the program; 90% (18/20) students agreed or strongly agreed that their advisor provided knowledgeable guidance about the DNP Curriculum; 75% (15/20) students agreed or strongly agreed that the sequencing of courses seems appropriate; 65% (13/20) students agreed or strongly agreed that Project Planning A helped them refine their problem statement; 80% (16/20) agreed or strongly agreed that the DNP Seminar was helpful in facilitating their development as a Doctoral student and scholar.

Lessons Learned: 1) A DNP seminar series provided the structure to promote student formation as scholars and facilitate the DNP Project Process; 2) Partnering with agencies to identify “real world problems” for students to address as their DNP Projects was effective; 3) Orientation and support of the DNP Project Facilitator role was helpful; 4) The timing of project development versus the needs of the organization to address the problem in a timely fashion poses a challenge; 5) It is challenging for students to develop the project in an unfamiliar setting; 5) Scholarly skills such as the “analysis and synthesis of the literature” to substantiate the problem and project plan was challenging for students; 6) Ongoing support for DNP Faculty Advisors was essential as the first cohort developed their projects; 7) Faculty supervision of the project that includes a first and second reader was effective; 7) The program directors experienced an increase in administrative time (establishing the DNP seminars; partnering with agencies; supporting the DNP advisors).

Recommendations: 1) Consider a structured approach such as a Doctoral Seminar to promote the socialization of students as Doctoral students and scholars; 2) Develop a strategy to partner with agencies that will support DNP students and projects; 3) Plan for DNP faculty advisor support and development; 4) Plan for additional administrative time for the Program leadership; 5) Establish clear guidelines for project development while maintaining some flexibility as projects evolve in some settings.