

SECTION **I**

The Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree



CHAPTER 1

Setting the Stage for the Doctor of Nursing Practice Scholarly Project

Katherine Moran

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to help the student recognize the value of doctoral education and the practice doctorate and understand the significance of the doctor of nursing practice (DNP) project. This will be accomplished by introducing the student to concepts that will be discussed throughout this textbook and by highlighting a framework that students can use to complete the scholarly project, which reflects attainment of the DNP *Essentials*.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After completing the chapter, the learner will be able to:

1. Describe the DNP scholar
2. Conceptualize the evolutionary nature of the scholarly project
3. Discern the purpose of the DNP project

TAKING THE JOURNEY

It is well known that the healthcare needs of our nation are becoming more complex, the cost of health care is increasing, and the quality of health care is being questioned. Many Americans are concerned about how these issues will be resolved. Recognizing these challenges, two reports were released from the Institute of Medicine, *Crossing the Quality Chasm* and the *Future of Nursing*, making an urgent call for fundamental change in healthcare delivery.

In many ways, the DNP degree was designed to help meet these and other challenges within health care. The DNP possesses *advanced competencies* for increasingly complex clinical, faculty, and leadership roles; enhanced *knowledge* to improve nursing practice and patient outcomes; and enhanced *leadership* skills to strengthen practice and healthcare delivery; in addition, the DNP gives nursing parity with other health professions, most of which have a doctorate as the credential required for practice (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2004). In essence, DNP-prepared nurses have been called to lead and manage collaborative efforts with other healthcare practitioners to improve health care.

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It should be no surprise, then, that the decision to enter a DNP program marks the beginning of what will become a *transformative experience* for many students. The program is both challenging and

rewarding. Through the process of personal development, one begins to recognize the need to view the world through multiple lenses, to continue the quest for new nursing knowledge, to apply that knowledge in a practice setting in a meaningful way, and to collaborate with other healthcare practitioners to meet the ever increasing and complex healthcare needs of the nation. It is a journey where the student travels conceptually from one place in his or her clinical practice to a new place in practice. The insight gleaned through the process gives the student a new frame of reference to continue to build a more comprehensive understanding of nursing praxis, which will ultimately benefit nursing as a profession and society as a whole.

It is important to recognize that the DNP degree is in a state of evolution and that *all DNP-prepared nurses need to influence the outcome*. The practice doctorate must demonstrate through knowledge synthesis, skill refinement, and the completion of the DNP project that they are prepared for doctoral nursing practice. DNP-prepared nurses will need to continue to make a concerted effort to demonstrate those nursing-specific improved healthcare outcomes that establish the value of the practice doctorate and elevate the science-based *practice* of the

nursing profession. Only then will society begin to see the impact of practice scholarship and, therefore, the associated benefit of the practice doctorate.

Soon after the student begins the doctoral program, he or she will begin the work on the final program deliverable: the DNP project. Each doctoral-level course provides an opportunity for the student to gain new knowledge that will help him or her complete the project. Through this journey, the student may refine original project ideas, or the student may end up going in an entirely new direction. Be assured that this is part of the process. In the end, the scholarly project will be a carefully selected project that not only meets program requirements but also fulfills the student's professional goals, the organization's goals (where the project is implemented), and contributes to the overall goals of the DNP-prepared nurse as a healthcare professional: to *positively influence health care now and in the future*.

After graduating from a DNP program and completing a scholarly project as a final deliverable to prepare us as practice scholars, the authors want to share their experience and personal insights regarding the topic of the DNP project. Our hopes are to help future DNP students on their journey, to be a guide on the side that lends a helping hand when needed. The goal of this textbook is to give the student a frame of reference when embarking on the DNP project. However, because there are virtually limitless DNP project ideas being developed, it is impossible to speak to the needs of each of these specifically. Therefore, this textbook was designed to include the potential requirements for the most comprehensive project even though some DNP projects may not require such detail. This is not meant to suggest that all projects should mirror the examples provided; rather, this text is intended to be a reference or a framework that allows the student to choose items that will help inform his or her project and challenges the student to consider new perspectives that foster creativity and the development of innovative ideas. At the same time, it is our hope that doctoral nursing educators, team members, and other healthcare professionals interfacing with DNP students find this textbook helpful when guiding the DNP student through the scholarly project process.

Developing the DNP project is not a linear process; it is created through a series of explorations that result in a comprehensive, well-thought-out project plan. As such, the student should recognize that

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although the topics in this textbook are presented in a stepwise framework to help him or her through the process, some of the work may occur simultaneously because of the evolutionary nature of the project.

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Many different DNP programs are available across the United States. All of the programs meet the needs of the community they serve; however, they may accomplish this via different methods. As a result, *program structures will vary*; some may include a formal DNP project team while others may use a completely different approach. For example, some universities may use a model that requires only one faculty advisor who guides the DNP student through the process, while others may use a dyad approach that includes one faculty member from the university and one representative from the community. The same is true regarding the final program deliverable requirements. In an attempt to better understand the characteristics of these programs, the authors have collaborated with many individuals either providing DNP education in programs throughout the United States or informing DNP education, such as the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), to better understand the needs of DNP students, faculty, and others working with students to complete the DNP project. We have learned that DNP education and the recommended requirements of DNP projects and teams are continuing to evolve (see Chapter 3, Defining the Doctor of Nursing Practice: Current Trends). Recognizing this, the authors sought to meet the various scholarly requirement needs of these programs by providing a wide variety of options and perspectives for the student to consider and reference where applicable. While there are many examples, templates, and other formats provided as tools for the journey, the intent is to give the student options, not be directive.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SCHOLARLY PROJECT

A debate has been ongoing for many years regarding what one should consider as *scholarship*, especially in academe. Many learned individuals have weighed in on this debate over the years, including Ernest L. Boyer, a well-known educator who at one point served as the United States Commissioner on Education. In 1990, Boyer, then president of the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching, suggested that for “America’s colleges and universities to remain vital a new vision of scholarship is required” (Boyer, 1990, p. 13). It is clear that the scholarship debate began long before the DNP degree; however, since the introduction of this degree, the discussion has shifted to include *practice scholarship*.

In an effort to contribute to the richness of this dialogue, a discussion regarding the evolving scholarship of practice is provided in Chapter 4, Scholarship in Practice.

A *scholar* is a learned person, who is specialized in an area of knowledge; one who has gained mastery in a particular discipline (“Scholar,” 2015).

For the purposes of introduction to the DNP project, though, it is important to recognize, from a very literal sense, that the term *scholar* is defined as a learned person, who is specialized in an area

of knowledge; one who has gained mastery in a particular discipline (“Scholar,” 2015). Taking this definition and applying it to the DNP project helps one recognize that this project provides the student with a vehicle through which he or she can demonstrate advanced knowledge in a particular area. This is in alignment with AACN, which believes that the final DNP project should demonstrate “synthesis of the student’s work” and that it should lay the groundwork for future scholarship (2006, p. 20). Certainly, the project should demonstrate the student’s achievement of the eight DNP *Essentials of Doctoral Education* for advanced nursing practice, as outlined by the AACN. A detailed discussion regarding these competencies and current trends in DNP education is provided in Chapter 3.

It should be clear that the DNP project is many things: a required program deliverable, the demonstration of doctoral competencies, and a means to achieve professional goals as well as the goals of the organization where the project is implemented; in addition, it is hoped that the project is only the beginning of many future scholarly contributions by the DNP-prepared nurse that lead to improvement in health care and add to nursing knowledge. Therefore, the DNP project plays a very important role in doctoral education; it affords the DNP student an opportunity to *launch into scholarly practice*. The DNP-prepared nurse will have many opportunities to transcend current barriers and positively impact health care in the United States as we know it today—to build a bridge between research and practice, as well as between theory and practice. These are indeed exciting times!

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In many ways, the creation of this textbook is an example of DNP scholarly work. The authors collaborated with thought leaders in the field, demonstrating the skills attained in Essential VI: *interprofessional collaboration for improving patient and population health outcomes*. Then, using the skills garnered in DNP Essential III: *clinical scholarship and analytical methods for evidence-based practice*, the authors reviewed the current literature and resources available for students

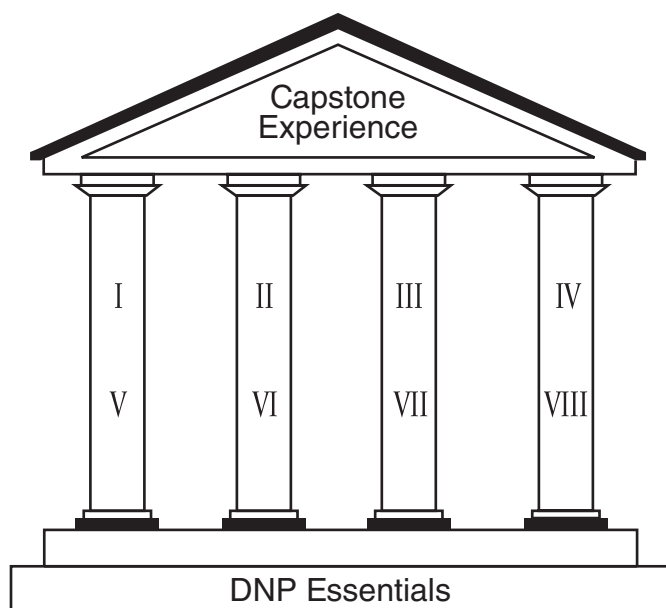
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on this topic. The authors also collaborated with other practice experts across the United States, considered their personal experiences as DNP graduates, and determined that a resource designated specifically for the completion of the DNP project would be a useful resource for DNP students, DNP faculty, and members of healthcare organizations.

In essence, the authors formed a *scholarship team* and worked together to meet the perceived needs of DNP students in programs throughout the country to provide the final deliverable, which correlates with DNP Essential VIII: *advanced nursing practice*.

CHAPTERS AT A GLANCE

The reader will note that each chapter begins with an image of Greek Ionic style columns that symbolize the cumulative doctoral work and overall achievement of the DNP student. The columns represent the eight DNP Essentials and corresponding knowledge and skills that are developed or strengthened by completing a practice doctorate program. Finally, the *capstone* that rests on the top of the structure represents the highest point of achievement, when the student successfully completes the final doctoral project.



The DNP Essentials are referenced in each chapter where they apply to the chapter discussion. As mentioned in the preface, the student will also note that significant points of the discussion are highlighted in *boxes* throughout the chapter, and *key messages* are reiterated at the end of each chapter. To facilitate learning and to help move the student along in the development of the DNP project, each chapter begins with learning objectives and concludes with an action plan and *helpful resources* (where applicable).

Section I: The Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree

Every good framework begins with a solid foundation. To that end, the focus of the first section of this textbook is providing an overview of the DNP degree that includes the history leading to the degree, the purpose of the degree, and the current trends, as well as defining the purpose of the DNP project and the current view of potential projects. The student is reminded that both the practice- and research-based doctorate will need to collaborate to impact nursing and health care and that the collaboration between the two doctoral levels of preparation will determine the future of nursing and its impact on health care.

The goal of this section is to help the student develop an understanding of scholarship as it relates to the practice doctorate, to conceptualize the types of projects that can be and are being considered by DNP students in programs across the United States, to examine potential topics of interest in relation to the appropriate level of scholarship, and recognize the ultimate significance of the DNP project—to *validate the effectiveness of the DNP-prepared nurse*.

Section II: The Scholarly Project

Section II is devoted to guiding the reader through the DNP project process. The complex nature of nursing practice is discussed, as well as how practice provides many opportunities to explore nursing phenomena. The student is introduced to a variety of strategies to help him or her select a phenomenon of interest and to explore the topic comprehensively. The value of identifying a project that will lead to an improvement in clinical practice is stressed. Further, the DNP student is introduced to elements of a scholarly project that need to be considered early in the development phase, including conducting a literature search, writing a literature review to support the value and/or the need to study the phenomenon of interest, performing a needs assessment, formulating a problem statement, defining the project goal and project scope, and developing a project framework.

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Nationally, nurses are being called to actively collaborate within interprofessional teams to improve quality, cost-effective, and efficient care and improve outcomes (Institute of Medicine, 2003). Therefore, another focus of this section is to help the student understand that (1) the DNP project provides him or her with an opportunity to attain and refine the competencies needed for collaborative team participation and leadership; (2) the DNP student will need additional resources to assist in assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the DNP project; and (3) this is best achieved through collaboration.

The student is guided through these and other processes that influence the development and implementation of the DNP project by the faculty mentor and/or project team. Therefore, the composition and roles of the project team, including the faculty mentor and other members, are reviewed. This information is important because project team dynamics, including making the most of team meetings and resources to form a cohesive and collegial team that will work together, is vital to the student's success in completing the DNP project.

Another important component of project development is the project plan. A broad overview of points to consider when preparing for project implementation is provided, such as taking into consideration the client and personnel, monitoring requirements, problem solving/troubleshooting demands, the need to communicate with key stakeholders, and the characteristics and skill set of effective leaders. Samples of a variety of tools are provided for the student to use throughout the scholarly project development and implementation cycle to help ensure a successful outcome. Further, the value of the practicum is stressed in this section to help the student recognize (1) how the experience will support the development of DNP competencies and professional scholarly growth and (2) the potential to use the practicum in preparation for implementation of the DNP project. The project plan provided as an example is fairly detailed to capture the elements needed in a complex or comprehensive project. However, the student is reminded that *all the elements presented may not be applicable to every potential project*.

Finally, this section concludes with a discussion regarding how the DNP project proposal represents the student's intellectual ability, knowledge in the subject area, and contributions to nursing. To help the student with the proposal writing process, information is provided to (1) help the student recognize early in the process when he or she may need some additional writing support, (2) introduce the student to the components included in a sample project proposal, and (3) provide a reference for writing the DNP project proposal.

Section III: Doctor of Nursing Practice Outcomes

The last section of this textbook, Section III, concludes by reaffirming the importance of the DNP project and the need to disseminate the results. A review of the various approaches used to obtain data and the methods used to work with the data received is provided. Various formats for disseminating the results are reviewed, such as public presentation, a defense of the project, a written manuscript for the university, and a manuscript submission to a scholarly journal. To this point, valuable insight is offered from several journal editors who share their advice on how to successfully submit a manuscript for publication. The importance of communicating and disseminating the results of the DNP project is stressed not only because it may be a required program deliverable but also because of the knowledge translation that occurs; benefiting both nursing as a profession and, even more broadly, the health of our nation. The student is reminded that the scholarly project is a product of DNP education that reflects the attainment of knowledge and skills that launches the DNP graduate into scholarly practice. The point is made, however, that it is important to recognize the need to evaluate the outcomes of this doctoral degree in nursing for effectiveness in accomplishing the goals of improving the nursing profession and health care and meeting societal needs. Recognizing that this will be an important focus for the DNP, an evaluation strategy is proposed using a framework based on the Donabedian model, the gold standard for defining quality management.

Finally, in many of the chapters, there is an excerpt from the perspective of the DNP student regarding the topic of discussion in the specific chapter. For instance, in Chapter 5, *The Phenomenon of Interest*, the student shares her experience of narrowing the topic related to her clinical expertise, the societal need, data from the organization, and the evidence in the literature.

These examples are included to showcase aspects of the DNP project, to show the potential for the DNP scholarly project as a program deliverable, to provide evidence of healthcare transformation, and to illustrate the impact of the practice doctorate in nursing. Although it is evident that these projects certainly contribute to the health of individual populations, as a whole, they demonstrate that doctorally prepared nurses provide more than protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities; these nurses facilitate healing and wellness through human connection. DNP-prepared nurses are *demonstrating* their value to society through practice scholarship that improves healthcare outcomes. As a result of these efforts, society is beginning to see the impact of practice scholarship and the associated benefit of the practice doctorate.

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The first excerpt, provided by Dr. Deonne Brown Benedict, focuses on her work as a nurse practitioner entrepreneur and the impact that a single nurse practitioner can make in meeting the needs of the community.

Nurse Practitioner Entrepreneurship
Deonne Brown Benedict, DNP, ARNP, FNP-BC

My DNP project was a three-pronged undertaking. It evaluated consumer perspectives on nurse practitioners (NPs), interviewed NP entrepreneurs to determine success factors for NP clinic ownership, and studied NP business knowledge. I also evaluated a variety of other local factors for clinic start-up. With these data, I was able to determine many of the components that lead to a successful clinic venture. After completing my DNP degree, I studied several potential clinic models, including free clinics and the “ideal medical practice model.” These efforts culminated in the development of a unique hybrid model for my practice, allowing me to meet the needs of both insured clients and uninsured clients who may not be able to afford typical care. This clinic model does not require outside grant support but is able to serve the needs of insured, uninsured, and Medicaid clients, many of whom were previously not receiving adequate care. It also allows for longer visits, valuable time for establishing rapport, educating clients, and living out the philosophy and ideals of NPs.

In 2009, I opened a nurse-owned and managed clinic based on this low-overhead, high-tech, and high-touch model. The clinic paid off its start-up costs in several months and has provided me with a wonderful opportunity to serve my community while maintaining a rewarding job with a reasonable income. I no longer see 20–30 patients a day, but rather spend an hour with new patients and 30 minutes in follow-ups for chronic conditions. Patients love the “concierge” type care they receive (really just great NP care), and the paperless office and secure electronic communications make my job easier. I have used the knowledge I gained in the process to consult with NPs across the country with tips for getting their own practices started and have published and spoken to university NP students and NP groups in support of nurse entrepreneurship.

SUMMARY

The journey to the DNP degree may still be via a winding and rugged road; however, given the potential for DNP graduates to improve healthcare outcomes and to positively impact the nursing profession, these authors hope that more and more of our nursing colleagues recognize the value of doctoral education and join us on the journey. For the current DNP student, our hopes are that this textbook will provide a broad view of the scholarly project and shed light on the DNP project journey.

Finally, where healthcare reform is concerned, it is evident that the Institute of Medicine has recognized nurses as valuable players in this process. Therefore, it is time for nurses, especially DNP-prepared nurses, to see health care as something we shape—DNPs are called to lead and manage collaborative efforts with other healthcare practitioners to improve health care.

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Key Messages

- The decision to enter a DNP program marks the beginning of what will become a transformative experience for many students.
- Developing the scholarly project is not a linear process; it is created through a series of explorations that result in a comprehensive, well-thought-out project plan.
- The DNP project is a required program deliverable that demonstrates achievement of doctoral competencies and advanced knowledge in a particular area.
- The DNP project is a means to achieve professional goals and marks the beginning of many future scholarly contributions.

Action Plan—Next Steps

1. Consider the value of the DNP scholarly project.
2. Open the mind to a variety of potential project topics.
3. Take advantage of learning opportunities.
4. Enjoy the journey!

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