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Doctoral Project Prospectus

The *Doctoral Project* is the final component of the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program and focuses on addressing improvement of health care delivery. Students are given an opportunity to demonstrate competence by constructing, designing, and completing an evidence-based scholarly project related to the advancement of nursing practice. As such, this project must reflect critical-thinking skills; application of principles of inquiry; synthesis of knowledge and skills learned and developed during the DNP program; recommendations for future initiatives; and outcomes for benefitting individual patients, groups of patients, communities, or systems.

DNP doctoral projects are scholarly contributions that must address the needs of the practice setting and the nursing profession. Relying on a model of evidence-based decision-making, the primary purpose of the doctoral project is to create the overall design and provide the framework for the use of existing evidence to address local problems in nursing practice. The doctoral project may be a response to a needs assessment, an organizational goal, a clarification of approaches to injuries/illness, an identified need in the health care system that has not been previously addressed locally, or it may be in response to a need identified by a professional health or nursing related organization. Ethical, legal, political, and economic factors may be integrated as appropriate.

**Examples of acceptable types of doctoral projects** include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Evaluation of existing quality improvement projects
- Staff education projects
- Clinical practice guidelines development
- Systematic review of the literature

Manuals are available for the four project types listed above. Each manual contains the required steps for that project type, as well as the forms/procedures that *must be used* if the student wants to take advantage of Institutional Review Board (IRB) preapproval. Additional details about doctoral project requirements are presented in the *DNP Project Process Guide* and the *DNP project checklist*. Please note that if a student wants to use an alternative approach to the DNP project process or add more data points (such as observations or interviews), the manual’s data/evidence collection procedures/agreements and the IRB preapproved manuals cannot be used. The student will need to follow the standard ethics approval request process.

**Purpose of the Prospectus**

The DNP *Doctoral Project Prospectus* is used in two ways:

- To **identify a preliminary topic** for your DNP Doctoral Project. This topic should be the product of initial investigation on your part but will be subject to change and refinement as you develop your proposal.
- To help **identify the faculty members** who will guide the development of your *DNP Doctoral Project Proposal*. 
Completing the Prospectus

The Doctoral Project Prospectus consists of 10 parts: title, problem statement, practice-focused question(s), social change, context for the doctoral project, sources of evidence, approach or procedural steps, ethical, alignment, and references. The annotated outline provided on pages 3–5 can be used to create your prospectus document.

Your primary goal for the prospectus is to narrow your topic such that you have provided a general sense of the direction of your doctoral project. At the prospectus stage, you do not need to know everything about the doctoral project, especially the details of the approach and procedural steps you will use. Those decisions are made during proposal development.

This prospectus is intended to be succinct. It is used to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of the doctoral project prior to development of the full DNP Doctoral Project Proposal. Your prospectus should be three to five pages in length, follow Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (sixth edition) guidelines, and be saved in either .doc, .docx, or .rtf file formats.

Submitting the Prospectus

The prospectus will be completed in NURS 8700 under the direction of your committee chair. Once the prospectus is ready for further review, the chair will request that the DNP research coordinator set up a doctoral committee for you. After your NURS 8700 faculty member and your newly assigned committee member approve your prospectus, you will upload your prospectus to the Committee Prospectus Rubric Analysis in Taskstream for formal review by your chair and committee member using the DNP Prospectus Rubric (located at the end of this guide).

Once the prospectus has been approved by the committee chair and member, it will be reviewed by the DNP program director or designee. Upon approval of your prospectus by the DNP program director or designee, you should continue to work with your DNP committee to develop the DNP Doctoral Project Proposal.

My Doctoral Research (MyDR)

As you are working on your DNP Doctoral Project Prospectus, you should also begin familiarizing yourself with the My Doctoral Research (MyDR) system resources and other useful resources on the Center for Research Quality website. The MyDR system was designed to assist you and your supervisory committee in navigating your doctoral capstone journey, from the very beginning through the final approval. The various landing pages in MyDR will track your progress and will serve as a central location for resources to support that progress. The Taskstream element of the MyDR system is used to establish a process flow tool in which you exchange and store DNP committee evaluations of and feedback on your work as you progress along that journey.
An Annotated Outline

The *Prospectus* document includes a title page (page 1) followed by pages containing the required elements. Please use the *Prospectus* template on the DNP page of the Doctoral Capstone Form and Style website.

**Title Page**

The recommended **title length** is 12 words or fewer to include the topic and the critical keywords from the project. Double-space the title if it is more than one line of type, and center it under the word “Prospectus.” Capitalize each major word in the title.

Include your name, your program (Doctor of Nursing Practice), and your Student ID number—double spaced and centered under the title. Use the prospectus template on the DNP Resources page.

Please note that your doctoral project title will likely change as the project evolves, so allow yourself the flexibility to adapt your title, as necessary.

**Title**

Start with “Prospectus” and a colon, and then include the title as it appears on the title page. Double-space if it is more than one line of type, and center it at the top of the page.

**Problem Statement**

State the practice focused problem that your project will address. Provide a one- to two-paragraph statement that establishes the relevance of this problem:

1. Summarize preliminary, supporting evidence that provides justification that this problem is meaningful and relevant to the local setting as well as the broader field of nursing practice, citing key scholarly sources.
2. Explicitly state the gap in nursing practice or problem that will be the focus of this doctoral project.
3. Describe the problem as it relates to the target population for the project.

*Note:* Students may not work directly with patients in a clinical setting, with patient interventions, or with students or faculty in academic settings.

**Practice-Focused Question(s)**

Describe the meaningful gap-in-practice that this doctoral project addresses. State the guiding practice-focused question(s) for the doctoral project. Briefly explain the practice focused question as it is relevant to the identified gap in practice.
Social Change

Describe how this project will impact social change for healthcare consumers, organizations, and the profession. State how this project supports Walden University’s mission to promote positive social change.

Specify **who** might benefit from the project and **in what ways** the information from the project might result in positive social change.

**Context for the Doctoral Project**

Briefly describe the intended setting for the doctoral project. Explain how this project can be accomplished in the identified setting or context.

*Note:* Students may not work directly with patients in a clinical setting, with patient interventions, or with students or faculty in academic settings.

**Sources of Evidence**

Include relevant evidence that supports the need to address the identified problem at the local and broader context. Examples of evidence include current EBP guidelines, literature preferably from the past 5 years, and de-identified anecdotal data (refer to the DNP manuals for IRB approved data sources for specific project types). Describe how the evidence justifies that this problem is important to the nursing profession.

**Approach or Procedural Steps**

Identify your possible approach/procedural steps, summarize *possible* strategies to obtain the data and resources needed to complete the doctoral project. Examples may include anonymous participant questionnaires (for more information see DNP IRB approved data types for each of the four project types in the DNP manuals). Is this project from among the acceptable types listed on the DNP Resources page?

*Note:* Evidence or data cannot be collected prior to approval by the full committee and the IRB.

**Ethical**

Describe how this project will provide protection for human subjects.

*Note:* Direct patient interventions or projects in an academic setting with students or faculty are restricted due to DNP program certification requirements.

Describe the region of the data source(s) without stating the specific location. Withhold descriptors of participants such as titles, demographics, etc. to ensure that participants are not identifiable. (Check with the IRB if unsure.)
State any potential ethical issues that may present problems for the completion of this project. If none, clarify.

*Note:* See IRB section of the respective DNP manual to determine ethical requirements.

**Alignment**

Do the various aspects of the prospectus align overall? State what credible sources support the practice problem. Describe how the practice-focused question(s) and the approach or procedural steps will address the practice problem you describe in the problem statement.

**References**

Use American Psychological Association (APA) format for this prospectus. Include a minimum of five APA-formatted peer-reviewed references to support in-text citations in the *Doctoral Project Prospectus*.

*Note:* References should be within the last 5 years.
Ten Tips for Writing a Quality Prospectus

Prospectuses tend to be as unique as the students writing them, so specific strategies are hard to offer. Based on a recent institutional analysis of prospectuses, the following general tips are provided to support successful approval. Students should ask themselves the following questions:

1. *Is it complete?*
   
   One of the most common reasons that a prospectus is sent back is one of the simplest to fix: Some pieces are missing. You should ask yourself, “Did I *effectively* respond to every item on the annotated outline?”

2. *Is it well written?*
   
   Your prospectus is the first time that your scholarly writing style is on full display for your committee. The prospectus needs to be a preview of what they can expect when they agree to work with you. Certainly, if your writing is unclear, your supervisory committee will have a difficult time ascertaining whether you have met the quality indicators. If you need added support with your writing, now is the time to find it. The [Walden Writing Center](https://www.walden.edu) offers webinars and multimedia resources to help students improve their academic writing, and the [Academic Skills Center](https://www.walden.edu) offers courses to help students improve their writing skills. If you need refreshers and support with key research concepts, the [Center for Research Quality](https://www.walden.edu) site has additional resources.

3. *Are the parts and sections aligned?*
   
   Of all the quality indicators, alignment tends to be one of the more challenging because it transcends the content in the prospectus. Some examples of misalignment include reviewing the evidence on children when the project is concerned with adults, identifying a target group or organization that does not seem appropriate to provide information to address the identified problem or gap in nursing practice, and identifying an approach or procedural steps that will not address the project question. Importantly, all the parts—not just some—need to align.

4. *Is the topic relevant to my discipline and program of study?*
   
   Doctoral students are encouraged to explore scholarship from a variety of disciplines as they formulate their questions. When choosing their actual project topic, however, they need to be especially careful to not go beyond their own disciplinary program of study area.

5. *Did I answer the “So what?” question?*
   
   Too often what is obvious to the student is not always captured in what is written in the prospectus. Ironically, one area that seems to get neglected is the social change statement, because the writer assumes that the reader understands the full impact of the situation and how this project will have potential for a positive impact. Make sure you are clear on why
so many people, including your committee and your participants, need to invest their time in this project.

6. *Is the prospectus presented in an objective manner?*
   Students are encouraged to develop a deep understanding of the problem and the people affected by it. When coupled with experiences gained through one’s work as a practitioner, however, it is tempting to lose sight of your own objectivity. You should not offer solutions before the project has been completed (“I know what needs to happen here”) or suggest an answer before you have started the project (“I know this guideline will improve practice”). Scholarship has a way of humbling us and showing us the error in jumping to conclusions.

7. *Did I do my “homework”?*
   Although the prospectus sets the stage for a more in-depth examination of your project topic, students are still expected to conduct a preliminary literature review. Be careful to not equate “Here’s a gap in the evidence” with “I haven’t looked at the evidence.” Students are sometimes shocked at how much scholarship has already been done on a topic after they start digging into it, even if more scholarship is needed.

8. *Have I identified a project question?*
   A common mistake that new scholar-practitioners make is to confuse the broader social problem with the project question that will be the focus of the DNP project, because the two are related. Although much is often known about the scope and nature of the problem, less information is available on how to address the problem; otherwise, it would not be a problem or gap in practice. What is often lacking in the situation is some piece of information or understanding that can be used to address the problem. *That* question or gap is what your project will address.

9. *Is my topic too broad?*
   Most doctoral students have overly ambitious project goals at the beginning, and we rarely have to ask someone to “do more.” Usually, the struggle is to identify a focused, doable question that fits within the expectations of a doctoral project. Exploring the evidence-based literature is one way to see how other scholar-practitioners have shaped their questions. Keep in mind that a focused, tightly conceived, well-executed project on one project question is better than a project that tries to answer a bunch of tangentially related questions with a variety of approaches.

10. *Have you considered the feasibility of the project?*
    The prospectus is a plan to develop the proposal, and the proposal is where many key project decisions are finalized. Still, it is never too early to start thinking about feasibility, which is why it is one of the quality indicators for your prospectus. Like all the indicators, feasibility is a quality that you will revisit as the project evolves. At the prospectus stage, you need to show your supervisory committee that you are considering your choices in light of previous scholarship and what you have learned about the scholarly process in your courses.
Self-Check Item on Partner Site Masking

Walden capstones typically mask the identity of the partner organization. The methodological and ethical reasons for this practice, as well as criteria for exceptions, are outlined in *Guidance on Masking Partner Organizations in Walden Capstones*.

If you perceive that your partner organization’s identity would be impossible to mask or if there is a strong rationale for naming the organization in your capstone, the program director must review your request for an exception. If granted, that exception will need to be confirmed by the IRB during the ethics review process. The IRB will also ensure that your consent form(s) and/or site agreement(s) permit naming the organization.
## DNP Project Prospectus Rubric

The key indicators in the *DNP Project Prospectus* are used to assure the overall quality of the DNP project at this point in the development process. **Students** should use this rubric to guide development of their *DNP Project Prospectus*. **Committee members** should use the rubric to give ongoing feedback and to document their final acceptance of the prospectus.

### Faculty Instructions

For each item, choose “met” or “not met” if the *DNP Project Prospectus* meets that quality indicator. For items marked “not met,” please indicate ways in which the prospectus can be improved to meet the standard and forward the rubric to the student.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Met</th>
<th>Not Met</th>
<th>Complete?</th>
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<td><strong>Does the prospectus contain all the required elements?</strong> Refer to the Annotated Outline in the <em>DNP Project Prospectus Guide</em> to review the required parts of the <em>DNP Project Prospectus</em> document.</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, which items are missing?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Meaningful?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Has a meaningful problem or gap in nursing practice been identified and explicitly stated?</strong> In other words, is addressing this problem the logical next step, given the previous evidence on this issue.</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, what is the reasoning for this assessment?</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td><strong>Social Change Impact?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Does this proposed project have potential to affect positive social change?</strong> The anticipated findings should have the potential to support Walden University’s mission to promote positive social change.</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, how could the project address social change more directly?</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td><strong>Alignment?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Do the various aspects of the prospectus align overall?</strong> The problem should be supported by sources of evidence and should align with the practice-focused question and the approach or procedural steps.</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, in what areas is additional evidence needed?</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Met</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Feasible in This Context?</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td><strong>Is it feasible to accomplish this project in the identified setting or context?</strong> The student has considered access to resources, data, and participants needed for the project.</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, in what ways could the context of the project be better described?</td>
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<th>6</th>
<th>Met</th>
<th>Not Met</th>
<th>Supported With Evidence?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td><strong>Do the sources of evidence support the need to address the identified problem?</strong> There is relevant evidence to support the identified problem, and the evidence justifies that this problem is important to the profession.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, what issues are identified with the sources of evidence?</td>
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<th>7</th>
<th>Met</th>
<th>Not Met</th>
<th>Ethical?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td><strong>Will this project provide protection for human subjects?</strong> Any potential ethical issues that may present problems for the completion of this project have been identified. (i.e., ability to meet Walden IRB requirements, approval from your organizations’ IRBs, access to the organizations’ deidentified data)</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, how could this project be changed to provide for protection of human subjects?</td>
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<th>8</th>
<th>Met</th>
<th>Not Met</th>
<th>Appropriate Approach or Procedural Steps?</th>
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<td>☐</td>
<td><strong>Are the identified approach and/or procedural steps appropriate to the problem?</strong> The proposed strategies demonstrate that the student has selected the best approach that has potential to address the problem. Is this project from among the acceptable types listed on page 1 of the DNP Prospectus Guide?</td>
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<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, how could the project be changed to demonstrate an appropriate approach or procedural steps?</td>
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<th>9</th>
<th>Met</th>
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<th>Writing?</th>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td><strong>Does this prospectus meet the minimum standards for professional writing?</strong> Are appropriate references included? Has APA been correctly utilized?</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong> If <em>not met</em>, please refer student to the Walden Writing Center resources.</td>
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