

## DNP Capstone Projects: Exemplars of Excellence in Practice

What is a DNP?

The Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, or DNP, is a terminal degree in nursing because there is no higher level of education available for practice-based training in nursing. Nurses who have their DNP are sought after for positions in nursing leadership focused on clinical applications and are considered key players in the future of healthcare in the United States.

The Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) is ultimately designed to produce leaders in nursing. Such nurses possess the highest level of nursing expertise and work either in a clinical setting or leadership role upon obtaining the required credentials.

They possess adept knowledge to influence healthcare outcomes through organizational leadership, health policy implementation, and direct patient care.

If you're considering a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree, you might be having a hard time deciding if it's the right degree for you. There are strong opinions on the degree throughout the nursing community and while some are true, there are also a lot of myths. Before I decided to pursue my DNP, I heard all sorts of comments,

• "The DNP is a watered-down Ph.D."

• "The DNP is another excuse to squeeze more money out of nursing graduates"

• "The DNP is not worth it"

You may have found this article as a brand new researcher who knows very little about the DNP. I'm here to share the first-hand experiences I received while trekking toward and completing my degree including,

Debunk myths and false information about the DNP degree

Provide valid resources regarding the DNP

Discuss the career outlook - benefits, salary, job growth, specialties, requirements

5 Things to Know Before Pursuing a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP)

1. The DNP is a Degree, Not a Role

For example, other degrees include a Doctorate of Philosophy in Nursing (Ph.D.), Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Examples of roles are Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), or Registered Nurses (RN). You need a certain degree to fulfill these requirements of these roles and to sit for each of the required certification exams.

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### 2. Earning Your DNP Does Not Make You a Physician

The training of a doctorally educated Nurse Practitioner versus a physician is very different. Both are imperative and valuable to patient care, but they are not the same.

### 3. Not all DNP Programs are Created Equal

Do extensive research on your program to make sure you will meet the educational requirements of the APRN Consensus Model if you plan to practice as an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) upon graduation.

### 4. You Can Have a DNP and Not Practice as an APRN

APRNs include Nurse practitioners, Nurse Midwives, Nurse Anesthetists, and Clinical Nurse Specialists). However, many nurses with DNPs do practice as APRNs, hence it is a practicing doctorate.

### 5. You Can Still Earn a Masters for APRN Training

Although the AACN is suggesting all master's in nursing programs transition to Doctorate programs for APRN training, some master's programs still remain for APRN training. Also, APRNs are currently allowed to sit for certification exams with a master's degree.

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Where Do DNPs Work?

DNP-prepared nurses generally work in one of two settings:

Leadership and administration Advanced Practice Nursing (APRN) - direct patient care

Leadership and Administration DNP Roles

DNP-prepared nurses who choose to work in leadership and administration play a key role in strengthening executive nurse leadership roles, as well as directly influencing healthcare outcomes through scientific findings.

They play an essential role in creating innovative care programs that are not only sustainable but, economical as well.

In the workforce, you may find DNPs in the following roles,

Nurse Management

Organizational leadership

Health policy - state and national

Health informatics systems

DNPs in Advanced Practice Nursing - Direct Patient Care

DNP graduates who take the advanced practice nursing (APRN) pathway will provide direct care to patients that include managing, assessing, and evaluating care.

DNPs who focus on advanced practice nursing are required to sit for the advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) certification exam. They may also be required to sit for advanced specialty certification as well.

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Is a DNP Different From a Ph.D.?

There are only two doctoral-level degrees in the nursing profession - the Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) and the Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Both degrees are terminal degrees, this means that neither is considered more "advanced" than the other. However, it's important not to get the two confused.

Upon earning the proper credentials, both DNP and Ph.D. graduates are eligible to work as nurse practitioners. If you're planning to work as a Nurse Practitioner after graduating and you earn a Ph.D. you'll typically need a post-graduate certificate. The Ph.D. degree is heavily research-focused and is generally pursued by those who are interested in scientific and scholarly work.

Although both are terminal degrees in the nursing profession, a practice-focused degree will place more focus on translating and implementing evidence into practice. While both degrees require extensive research reported in a final DNP Project or dissertation, practicing doctorates generally include integrative practice experiences and the manuscript is like "telling the story" of research implementation.

#### My Experience Earning My DNP

The purpose of my DNP project was to initiate palliative care consultations for end-stage heart failure patients in the cardiac critical care unit. I had a foundation of research, and heart failure guidelines, known as a literature review, strongly suggested palliative care consultations were necessary to provide the best care for patients.

Easy, right? Not exactly.

The DNP walked me through the process of making the current research become reality while taking into consideration stakeholders, unit culture, organizational behaviors, financials, and measurable outcomes. My research was not considered generalizable and was most beneficial to my institution. My manuscript encompassed my original plan, plus the story and the difficulties I encountered.

#### Is a DNP Worth It? Reasons to Earn a DNP

The doctorate degree may soon be the standard entry-level requirement for certification and licensure in advanced nursing practice. In 2004, members of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), voted to increase the requirements of advanced practice nursing from a master's degree to a doctorate level.

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by including training in evidence-based practice, systems leadership, informatics, and quality improvement. Meaning, the DNP is ultimately designed to produce "leaders" in nursing. The current healthcare environment demands nurses possess a comprehensive skill set of scientific knowledge, outcome measurement, and leadership qualities, to assure the best patient outcomes.

wledge, outcome measurement, and leadership qualities, to assure the best patient outcomes. Doctorally educated nurses are needed to address shortages of doctorally prepared nursing faculty, increasing educational expectations, and national concerns about healthcare quality. Of note, a practicing doctorate is not new in other professions, nursing is simply moving in the same direction. Pharmacists obtain the PharmD, Psychologists can obtain a PsyD, Physical Therapists obtain the DPT, Audiologists obtain the AudD, etc.

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that were previously unattainable to those without a DNP degree from private practice to hospitals to universities and more. DNPs will continue to see increased salary and pay for years to come. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, advanced practice nurses earned an average annual salary of \$117,670 in 2020.

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How I Decided to Earn My DNP

My certainty regarding the DNP did not come full circle until the beginning of my third year. At times, I did not exactly understand what I was doing, but at my core, I knew I wanted to help lift the profession to the next level.

I learned to trust the process and not only grew as a researcher, leader, and clinician but grew exponentially as a human being through the degree.

I feel equipped to educate new nurses, lobby for nursing policy, implement evidence into practice, and I have a better understanding of the historical aspects of nursing that have led us to our current state.

How Do You Get a DNP?

Most DNP programs have multiple specialties to choose from including, adult acute/primary, pediatric acute/primary, women's health, family medicine, emergency medicine, neonatal, psych, and nurse anesthesia. These programs can be completed in three, four, and sometimes five years.

There are several tracks one can take toward earning a DNP:

BSN-DNP: I completed a BSN to DNP program with a specialty in Adult-Geriatric Acute Care (AGAC). Upon completion, I met the requirements to sit for my AGAC-Nurse Practitioner and AGAC-Clinical Nurse Specialist certification exams. Therefore, once I pass both exams, I will be a doctorally educated, dual board-certified APRN (it's confusing, I know).

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MSN-DNP: One can already have a master's degree, be working as a board-certified APRN in a given specialty, and go back to school to complete their DNP coursework.

One can already have a master's degree, be working as a board-certified APRN in a given specialty, and go back to school to complete their DNP coursework. Post-Master's DNP: Options are available for administrators or educators who work in healthcare to get their DNP without repeating coursework. This option is beneficial for applicants with

MPH, MBA, or MPA.

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Why The DNP Was Worth It For Me

I wholeheartedly believe in the training of this degree and would not change my academic path. I feel pressure to deliver as an expert clinician first and foremost, but then to expand upon my leadership abilities to promote and professionally represent the DNP. I plan to use my inclusive education to its full extent in the future and feel equipped to tackle clinical, academic, organizational, and systemic challenges to advocate for the nursing profession.

Completing the BSN-DNP AGAC-NP/CNS track was my hardest academic challenge to date, but graduating was my proudest moment.

Keep in mind that much of the advice regarding the DNP that is currently available to the general public is often written by people who do not have one. Therefore, check sources before believing what you read. Below are some trusted sources with information on the DNP:

DNP Programs

Check out these articles on DNP programs to learn more about your options.

DNP FAQs

What do you call a nurse with a doctorate degree? Nurses that have earned a terminal degree or a doctorate degree should be referred to as Doctor. It is important that these nurses identify to their patients that they have earned their Doctorate in Nursing and are not Medical Doctors.

What can you do with a doctoral degree in nursing? Doctorate-prepared nurses can treat patients, either independently or within a medical team, educate other advanced practice nurses, conduct research, or work for government agencies.

Why do nurses get a DNP? Nurses obtain a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) to gain advanced practice knowledge to provide safe and effective care for patients. This is a terminal degree for advanced practice nurses to continue to expand their knowledge which will generally include evidence-based research and teaching.

Which is better: a DNP or PhD in Nursing? This will depend on an individual's career goals. Both are considered terminal degrees and demonstrate clinical excellence in the field of nursing. A DNP is focused on clinical practice and a PhD is research-focused.

What is the salary of a DNP? According to Payscale , nurses with a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree earned an average base salary of \$107K as of June 3, 2022.

Looking to advance your leadership and management skills? Check out some of these master's degrees that can get you there:



## Reference

[Independent Movement and Travel in Blind Children: A Promotion Model \(PB\) \(Critical Concerns in Blindness\)](#)

[Data Analysis for Experimental Design](#)