



**ASPEN**  
UNIVERSITY

**2024-2025**

**Master of Science  
in Nursing  
Handbook**

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# MSN Handbook

# Statement

All students must abide by the Academic Catalog in addition to the programmatic guidelines outlined in this handbook. Both the catalog and handbook are updated annually at a minimum. Students should check back regularly for updates.

To find additional information about this program, please see the program page with the Academic Catalog and university website.

Certified as true and correct in content and policy by

Kevin Thrasher, Provost

February 10, 2025

- Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)
  - Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) with a specialization in Forensic Nursing
  - Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) with a specialization in Informatics
  - Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) with a specialization in Administration and Management
  - Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) with a specialization in Nursing Education
  - Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) with a specialization in Public Health
- Master of Science in Nursing (RN to MSN)
  - Master of Science in Nursing (RN to MSN) with a specialization in Forensic Nursing
  - Master of Science in Nursing (RN to MSN) with a specialization in Informatics
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  - Master of Science in Nursing (RN to MSN) with a specialization in Nursing Education
  - Master of Science in Nursing (RN to MSN) with a specialization in Public Health

## Program Administration

### Dean of Nursing & Health Sciences

Dr. Jenny Erkfitz, EdD, MSN, RN

### MSN Nursing Program Director

Dr. Shakeeka Misher, DNP, MSN, RN, NE-BC, MNN

# Advisory Board Information

## Program Advisory Board

**Purpose:** The Program Advisory Board acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to promote, assist, and perpetuate the goals and objectives of Aspen University nursing program. This board meets twice per year.

**Functions:**

- Identify emerging health care needs that may require programmatic and institutional response
- Provide an opportunity for the exchange of viewpoints between business/professional persons, alumni, and academicians as they relate to nursing education.
- Provide a direct liaison between faculty and the community for the purpose of promoting the activities and mission of the Aspen University nursing program and the nursing profession.
- Advise and inform the EAC on local, state, and national perceptions regarding nursing education and the nursing profession, suggest possible avenues for marketing the program.

**Membership:** The dean and various members of the community of interest: current student, alumni, nurses, leaders in health care

# Academic Policies

All Aspen University students are held to the policies, including policies regarding admissions requirements, transfer credit, and graduation requirements, outlined in the Academic Catalog.

will not be permitted to progress to the next course in the program sequence. Likewise, students must complete the Practicum course(s) prior to entering Capstone.

In addition to the policies in the Academic Catalog, MSN students must abide by the following grading policy for Practicum courses.

## Practicum Grading Policy

The practicum courses N550, N552, and N586 have unique grading policies that deviate from the general Aspen University policies. These courses have a practicum component with a preceptor within the student's home community. The additional details on specific requirements for these practicum courses as well as practicum evaluation criteria and tools are discussed under the practicum section.

Evaluation of the student's practicum performance is the responsibility of the faculty with input from the preceptor. These practicum evaluations are comprised of a preceptor evaluation, a self-evaluation, and review by the faculty of practicum experiences with appropriate documentation and satisfaction of the minimum required practicum hours. The practicum performance is graded as "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory." In the practicum setting, students are expected to function with independence and increasing complexity as they progress through the course.

Unsatisfactory practicum performance encompasses an array of behaviors and attitudes. Examples include unprofessional attire, failure to submit required practicum documents, "no-show" at the practicum setting, cross-cultural issues, and functioning at a level inconsistent with expectations. In the event that a preceptor detects performance moving in an unsatisfactory direction, a conference with the student will be prompted, the result of which will be development of a plan of action to correct the deficiency. This plan of action will be the responsibility of the student working in coordination with their preceptor and the Practicum Coordinator.

Students must pass practicum course(s) in order to pass the course. Students who do not satisfactorily pass practicum

# Governance

## Governance

Students have input into the workings of Aspen University and the MSN program through a variety of mechanisms.

Input is sought at the completion of each course, through course evaluations. At the end of the RN to MSN or MSN programs, graduates are provided an opportunity to share about their overall program experience through an end-of-program survey taken during the Capstone course. A final way the student has course and program level input is their participation in biannual data dialogues with faculty and program leadership. You are encouraged to participate in these opportunities.

Formal committees at Aspen University and within the MSN program provide another avenue for student input. The two MSN committees that have student representation include the Curriculum Committee and the Program Advisory Board. Descriptions of these two committees follow:

### Program Advisory Board

#### Purpose:

The Nursing Program Advisory Board acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to promote, assist, and perpetuate the goals and objectives of Aspen University MSN program. This committee meets twice per year.

#### Functions:

- Identify emerging health care needs that may require programmatic and institutional response
- Provide an opportunity for the exchange of viewpoints between business/professional persons, alumni, and academicians as they relate to nursing education.
- Provide a direct liaison between faculty and the community for the purpose of promoting the activities and mission of the Aspen University MSN program and the nursing profession.
- Advise and inform the Dean of Nursing on local, state, and national perceptions regarding nursing education and the nursing profession, suggest

possible avenues for marketing the program.

#### Membership:

Dean of Nursing, and various members of the community of interest: current student, alumni, nurses, leaders in health care.

### Curriculum Committee

#### Purpose:

The Curriculum Committee is responsible for the curriculum, specifically to develop, implement, and evaluate the MSN curricula. This committee is a subcommittee of the MSN Faculty Committee. This committee meets twice a year or as needed.

#### Functions:

- Monitor and formulate policies governing the curriculum of the MSN program.
- Lead the evaluation of the curriculum according to the MSN program evaluation plan
- Recommend mechanisms for implementing the MSN program to the parent committee
- Recommend curricular revisions for the MSN program to the parent committee
- Recommend new MSN program options based on input from the community of interest

#### Membership:

Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences, at least 2 faculty members as dictated by curricular needs, 1 student from each MSN specialty tract.

# Master of Science in Nursing Program

## School of Nursing and Health Sciences Mission Statement

The mission of the Aspen University School of Nursing and Health Sciences is to enhance the health and quality of life for individuals, families, and communities at local, state, and national levels through excellence in teaching, scholarship and practice.

## Graduation Requirements

To complete the MSN degree, students must complete all degree requirements as outlined in the Academic Catalog. General graduation requirements can also be found in the Academic Catalog.

## MSN versus RN-MSN

There are two entry options for students wishing to pursue the MSN degree. The first entry option is for applicants who already have a BSN. These students would enter the traditional MSN program. The second entry option is for applicants who have an associate degree or diploma in nursing. These students would enter the RN-to-MSN Program.

## Program Description, Specializations, Course Descriptions, & Program Learning Goals

The Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program prepares nurses to assume leadership roles in management, education, forensics, public health, informatics, and clinical practice within a diverse society and across a spectrum of healthcare settings.

Theory courses combine the foundation of traditional education in a convenient distance-learning format, enabling practicing nurses to meet their academic, professional and personal goals. Practicum courses are performed in a clinical practice or academic setting allowing students to apply learned concepts under the supervision of a Preceptor.

This program offers students five areas of specialization. These specializations are Forensic Nursing, Informatics, Administration and Management, Nursing Education, and Public Health.

For information about each MSN Specialization's specific program description, course descriptions, and program learning goals, please see the School of Nursing and Health Sciences page in the Academic Catalog.

# RN-MSN Bridge Program

## Overview

Aspen University offers an online RN-to-MSN degree program for registered nurses who have an associate degree or diploma in nursing and wish to pursue a graduate degree. Students do not receive a BSN degree, but instead progress toward graduating with the MSN degree in a specialty area. Built upon a liberal arts foundation, this “bridge” program begins with 21-credits of undergraduate nursing courses that are designed to prepare students for the rigor of a master's level nursing program. After the completion of core masters nursing courses, students select a focus in one specialty track, completing 36 credits of graduate-level course work. All courses in the RN-to-MSN degree program are completed online, and practicum experiences are mentored by a local preceptor, which eliminates travel.

## Liberal Arts Foundation

The Aspen University MSN curriculum builds on a foundation comparable to baccalaureate- level nursing knowledge. A solid base in liberal education provides the distinguishing cornerstone for the study and practice of professional nursing. Liberal education enables the nurse to integrate knowledge, skills, and values from the arts and sciences to provide humanistic, safe quality care; to act as advocates for individuals, families, groups, communities, and/or populations; and to promote social justice (Baccalaureate Essentials, AACN, 2008, p. 12).

Students in the RN-to-MSN program are required to have completed a broad spectrum of liberal arts education course work, which includes both the sciences and the arts. Nursing courses are not considered as part of this requirement.

# Nursing Practicum and Capstone

## Practicum

The purpose of the practicum's individualized learning experience is to enable you to develop an original comprehensive quality improvement project on a topic of professional or personal interest. Your project design should focus on the quality improvement of a process, policy, or procedure. The practicum is project-based and during the practicum, you will focus on an issue, and then develop and implement a quality improvement initiative that is a substantial original applied project of your authorship. This course requires inter-professional collaboration with disciplines outside of nursing and nursing practicum experience within a practice environment and must include inter-professional collaboration. The nursing education, forensic nursing, and public health nursing specialization tracks must include a minimum of 20 hours of direct-care experience which may include direct patient education.

## Capstone

The purpose of the Capstone course is to create a written explanation of your Practicum Project and offer you the opportunity to describe your Practicum Project in detail. You may enroll in the Capstone course after you have completed all other courses within the MSN curriculum and Practicum courses. The capstone project will include five Chapters, utilize a minimum of 35 sources, and an overall length of 30 written pages excluding the title, abstract, references, and appendices pages.

The following sections should be included in your Capstone:

- Title page
- Abstract
- Table of Contents
- Chapter 1 - Introduction (Background, Significance, Justification, Purpose)
- Chapter 2 - Literature Review
- Chapter 3 - Method (as appropriate for your project--- may include project design, procedures, evaluation methods, etc.)
- Chapter 4 - Discussion of Findings and Recommendations
- Chapter 5 - Conclusion
- References
- Appendices, as appropriate

Throughout the Capstone course, you will need to submit iterations of the chapter sections as you complete them to your Capstone Instructor for feedback. The Oral Presentation of your Capstone should be about 30 minutes and will be facilitated via synchronous telecommunication such as video conferencing media.

## Practicum Facilities

### Specific Policies for Students in Practicum Facilities

- Students must adhere to requirements stipulated in the practicum contact or Memorandum of Understanding from the practicum site.
- Professional apparel that meets agency guidelines is expected. Conservative and professional dress clothing and a lab coat are the norm. No jeans or shorts or running shoes or bare midriff or low-cut clothing are allowed in an agency or agency library.
- The student will work within the policies of the agency and maintain a constructive relationship with the agency.
- The student is required to supply health information to Practicum sites/facilities as requested.
- If requested by the practicum site/facility, the student should wear a student ID which identifies her or his status as an Aspen University graduate nursing student. To obtain a student ID, please contact your Academic Advisor.

### General Guidelines Regarding Practicum, Practicum Site and Preceptor

- Participation in approved practicum experiences at the required number of hours for each specific course; student must be prepared, active, informed, accountable, and professional.
- Demonstration of effective and appropriate

communication skills.

- Demonstration of effective and appropriate documentation on client's records, dictation, and practicum logs, including correct spelling.
- Completion of practicum hours logs documenting variety of experiences using the required system.
- Attendance at required practicum conferences with preceptor and instructor.
- Completion of personal/professional objectives along with self-evaluation of progress.

### Attendance at Practicum Experiences

Students are to negotiate acceptable hours with the preceptor prior to starting practicum. The student is expected to accommodate the preceptor's availability and schedule. Students are expected to treat the agreed upon practicum hours as they would a place of employment. If the student is to be absent for a scheduled practicum day due to illness or emergency, the preceptor should be notified prior to the beginning of the practicum day. The student should negotiate the procedure for contacting the preceptor in case of absence prior to starting practicum. Make-up hours are then to be negotiated. Students also must contact the faculty member promptly.

Students will document practicum hours in ProjectConcert. The student will run an audit report of hours logged and present this to the preceptor for signature during the course. If the student is not attending practicum as scheduled, the faculty member needs to be notified promptly.

## Practicum Forms and Evaluation Tools

Practicum Site Agreement

Preceptor Agreement

Student Profile

Student Performance Evaluation

## Practicum Setting Selection

Choosing the right practicum site is crucial for the success

of your MSN program and Aspen University has the Office of Field Experience to assist students with identifying and selecting an appropriate practicum site and preceptor. Through working with the Office of Field Experience - many students utilize their place of employment as their practicum site.

Here are the key criteria to consider when selecting a practicum site:

**Preceptor Affiliation:** The Registered Nurse preceptor needs to be affiliated with the practicum site and possess a master's degree with the necessary expertise relevant to your chosen MSN specialty track.

**Adequate Resources:** Verify that the practicum site offers sufficient space and resources to enable you to meet the practicum requirements of your MSN track specialty effectively. This includes access to relevant equipment, technology, and facilities.

**Ongoing Support:** The practicum site should be committed to providing ongoing support to both you and your affiliated preceptor throughout your practicum experience. This support should encompass guidance, mentorship, and resources to ensure your success.

**Documentation Completion:** It is essential to complete all required documentation to obtain the Practicum Approval Letter. The required documentation includes any agreements, contracts, or forms necessary for your placement at the site and with your preceptor.

Here are some specific recommendations for practicum site considerations based on the various MSN specialty tracks:

**Administration and Management:**

- Acute, sub-acute, assisted-living, skilled nursing healthcare facilities.
- State professional organizations.
- Hospital and clinic systems.
- Union headquarters.
- Magnet facilities.
- Educational institutions, among others.

**Nursing Education:**

- Acute, sub-acute, assisted-living, skilled nursing healthcare facilities.
- State professional organizations.

- Hospital and clinic systems.
- Staff education departments in healthcare facilities.
- Companies specializing in continuing education for nurses.
- Public health departments, and more.

#### Public Health:

- Local health departments.
- Medical reserve corps.
- Organizations like the American Heart Association and MADD.
- Home health agencies.
- School nurse offices.
- State health departments.
- Population-specific outreach programs, and others.

#### Forensic Nursing:

- Emergency departments.
- Fire departments.
- Emergency medical services.
- Law enforcement agencies.
- Search and rescue teams.
- Hospital emergency departments.
- Correctional facilities.
- Law offices.
- Agencies involved in risk management.
- Environmental protection agencies and departments.
- Medical examiner's offices.
- Certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and trainers.
- The court system, and more.

#### Informatics:

- Acute care facilities.
- Sub-acute care facilities.

- Ambulatory care centers.
- Outpatient clinics.
- Community health organizations.
- Home health agencies.
- Other healthcare service providers' informatics departments.
- Health Information Management service providers, and others.

## Site and Preceptor Evaluations

### Site Evaluation – Completed Electronically in ProjectConcert

#### Student directions:

1. In Week 7 of courses N550, N552, and N586, the Site Evaluation will appear under Evaluations. There are two ways to navigate to it. First, there will be a notification in your dashboard alerting you of the evaluations that are ready for you to complete. Click on the “Evaluations” link and it will take you directly to the evaluations.
2. The second way to access is to click on Evaluations on the left menu. Both options take you to the evaluations and you click on “Select” to complete.
3. When you click “Select,” the evaluation will open. Type in the Clinical Site name. There will be 13 multiple choice questions. When you finish, click on “Submit.” The following questions will be asked:
  - a. Adequate space?
  - b. Adequate numbers of clinically competent staff?
  - c. Autonomy and accountability for nursing practice?
  - d. Nursing control of nursing practice and the practice environment?
  - e. Adequate compensation commensurate with responsibilities, education, and performance?
  - f. Opportunities to follow-up with nursing problems of interest?
  - g. Access to education, research, and appropriate

technologies?

- h. Promotion of evidence-based practice?
- i. Nursing and educational support staff that are accepting of student's role?
- j. Does the philosophy of the organization as directed in a healthy work environment and improved patient outcomes?
- k. Does the organization use procedure and protocol manuals, educational materials, and have personnel to adequately support a student?
- l. Are community resources, other agencies, and professional disciplines involved with client welfare?
- m. Would this site be recommended for future student placement?

### **Preceptor Evaluation – Completed Electronically in ProjectConcert**

#### **Student directions:**

- In Week 7 of courses N550, N552, and N586, the Preceptor Evaluation will appear under Evaluations. There are two ways to navigate to it. First, there will be a notification in your dashboard alerting you the evaluations are ready for you to complete. Click on the Evaluations link and it will take you directly to the evaluations.
- The second way to access is to click on Evaluations on the left menu. Both options take you to the evaluations and you click on "Select" to complete
- Type in your Clinical Site and Preceptor name. Answer the 21 multiple choice questions that appear. When you finish, click on "Submit."

# Office of Field Experience

Aspen University's School of Nursing & Health Sciences offers programs that require immersion, practicum, or internship experiences. Before participating in a course requiring an immersive/practicum hours experience, students will have to meet complete specific documentation and obtain an approval letter before they can begin the immersion, practicum, or internship course. The staff in the Office of Field Experience (OFE) at Aspen

University coordinate and address questions for student immersion, practicum and internship sites, and preceptor arrangements.

The OFE can assist students with questions and expectations for the immersion site and preceptor requirements in addition to addressing questions and support for document requirements. The OFE also supports questions related to ProjectConcert®

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