



ASPEN
UNIVERSITY

2023-2024

**Master of Science
in Nursing
Handbook**

4615 East Elwood Street
Phoenix, AZ 85040

Introduction

Welcome to the Aspen University Master of Science in Nursing Handbook. This handbook will provide you with information about the MSN and RN-MSN program and to assist students and faculty members in the tasks associated with Practicum instruction, assessment, and completion.

Information on Aspen University's History, Mission, and Goals can be found in the Academic Catalog.

Information on Aspen University's Accreditation can be found on the Aspen University Website.

We understand the demands and constraints associated with trying to fit education into an already busy work and life schedule. Harnessing the power of the Internet and distance education collaboration, Aspen has created interactive, flexible, facilitated, online courses designed to fit around your lifestyle. Education is a journey of professional growth. The starting point is you, here and now. The ending point is you, with the skills and knowledge to compete and win in a world where business and technology are inextricably intertwined.

Dr. Marcos Gayol, Dean, School of Nursing and Health Sciences- Distance Education

Certified as true and correct in content and policy by

Joanne Weiss, Provost

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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.

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

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.

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

The purpose of the practicum's individualized learning experience is to enable you to develop an original comprehensive nursing capstone project on a topic of professional or personal interest. The practicum is project-based and during the practicum you will focus on an issue, create a viable solution through research, design and development quality improvement initiative that is substantial original applied project of your own 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.

Enrolling in the Capstone

You may enroll in the Capstone Project after you have completed all courses within the MSN curriculum and Practicum courses. Upon enrolling in the Capstone course, you will be assigned a Capstone Instructor who will remain with you throughout the remainder of your program. Your Capstone Instructor will be a select member of the Aspen faculty whose area of expertise has been chosen to most closely align with your Capstone Project interests. The Capstone Project course is comprised of:

- **Project Proposal:** Your project design should focus on a quality improvement of a process, policy or procedural. You will create a proposal or presentation focused on a specific issue and with a focus on a specific target audience.
 - Design or develop a curriculum
 - Implement and evaluate an educational activity
 - Create a systemic review of the literature to support evidence-based change
 - Design and implement a change project (e. g. proposal for a change in process)
 - Write a grant
 - Develop a policy and work with leaders to implement it.
 - Analyze systematically the healthcare system in

another geographic region

- Develop or revise an existing business or marketing plan within a nursing or healthcare organization
- Advocate for legislative change for an issue important to nursing
- Write a publishable journal article
- Create a professional conference poster
- Design an informatics solution to a nursing problem

When you have chosen a topic, and received approval from your Capstone Instructor, you can proceed to complete the capstone proposal template. The template is designed to guide you through specific steps that will become the blueprint to follow for the rest of your project. The template includes project title, description, rationale, personal and professional expectations, project goals, analysis of the literature, procedure, and evaluation. Refine your proposal based upon input from your Capstone Instructor. This step can be accomplished through classroom communication until the Capstone Instructor is satisfied that all requirements for the proposal have been met. The final proposal can be submitted through the classroom drop box for formal approval and acknowledgement that it is complete in all aspects.
- **Capstone:** The final Capstone Project/Master's Thesis manuscript will be graded by the Capstone Instructor; however, he or she may select to forward your project to either the Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences or Director of Graduate Nursing Programs for a second opinion and evaluation. The capstone project will include 5 Chapters, utilize a minimum of 35 sources, and overall length will be 30 written pages excluding the title, abstract, references and appendices pages.
- **Weekly Updates:** Although sections of your capstone project are submitted via the classroom drop box to your Capstone Instructor as you complete them and you must to participate in the classroom and share your reflections and progress with classmates through required activity reports are certain junctures as required in the classroom assignments.

The Oral Presentation of the Capstone Project will be conducted during the Capstone Course. The Oral Presentation marks the culmination of many months of formal study and intensive research on the part of the student. This Oral Presentation affords the student an opportunity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of his/her knowledge in a field of specialization, ability to conduct research and to present the findings before his or her Capstone Instructor and sometimes invited guests. The Oral Presentation, the audience will have the opportunity to question the work, critically.

The Oral Presentation should last about 30 minutes and will be facilitated via synchronous telecommunication such as video conferencing media. Other faculty and administrative members of Aspen University might also be present. It is recommended that individuals within your community who have an interest in the topic or who may be impacted by the findings be invited to attend. For the first twenty minutes, you will present your Capstone Project, summarizing the aspects of the project that were reported in the formal paper. Visual aids must be included, and may be either a PowerPoint®, Prezi® or poster board. For the final ten minutes, the Capstone Instructor and any Aspen faculty present will have an opportunity to question you about various aspects of the project. At this time the portfolio may also be discussed, and preparation for the comprehensive exam considered. If time allows, other audience members may also ask questions/seek clarification.

If the oral presentation is unsatisfactory, the student will be given one opportunity to improve performance but the Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences or her designee will join the Capstone Instructor. If a second “unsatisfactory” presentation is delivered, you will receive a failing grade for this course, which falls under the policies and procedures of Aspen University.

- **Final Capstone Project:** Your Final Capstone Project/Master’s Thesis submission must be professionally prepared and free of typographical, spelling and grammatical errors. The formatting protocol of the American Psychological Association (APA) is the approved format for Aspen University. The specific length of the formal document may vary somewhat depending upon the topic selected, the use of tables, matrices, graphs, or other visual

supplements.

The following sections should be included:

- 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
The Final Capstone Project/Master’s Thesis submission for dissemination should be prepared using the Microsoft Office suite (Word®, Excel®, and PowerPoint® as appropriate), appropriately paginated using a twelve-point standard style font such as Times New Roman, Century Schoolbook, etc. Although the foregoing project format requirements may suffice for most capstone projects, there may be some appropriate variations approved by your Capstone Instructor.

Throughout the Capstone course, you will need to submit iterations of the chapter sections as you complete them to your Capstone Instructor for feedback. Do not wait until the end of the course to submit one completed paper and expect it to meet the rigorous expectations of this course.

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

Practicum Setting Selection

The criteria for practicum site selection are as follows. The site should be able to provide: (1) a preceptor who is affiliated with the practicum site; (2) space and adequate resources for the student to complete the practicum experience according to the curricular requirements of the MSN track in which the student is enrolled; (3) completion of the documentation prior to the start of the practicum; and (4) support for the affiliated preceptor and student throughout the practicum experience. The student will submit all documentation relating to site/facility selection and preceptor for approval by the Nursing Practicum Coordinator, utilizing ProjectConcert for all submissions.

The Nursing Practicum Coordinator is dedicated to student success and is available to discuss appropriate sites for your Practicum experience. Here are some suggestions for the various specialty tracks of the MSN:

Administration and Management: All healthcare facilitates with MSN working in Administration positions, State professional organizations, hospitals and clinics, union headquarters, Magnet facilities, educational institutions, etc.

Forensic Nursing: Fire departments, EMSs, Law Enforcement, Search and Rescue, Hospital emergency departments, correctional facilities, law offices, agencies

that address risk management, Environmental protection agencies and departments, medical examiner's office, Certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and trainers, and the court system, etc.

Informatics: Acute, sub-acute, ambulatory, outpatient, and community health, home health, and other health care service provider's informatics department, Health Information Management service providers, etc.

Nursing Education: Nursing programs, online, state (public) schools, public universities, Allied Health programs, staff education in facilities, companies that create continuing education for nurses, public health departments, etc.

Public Health: Local health department, medical reserve corps, American Heart, MADD, home health agency, school nurse office, state health department, and population-specific outreach programs, etc.

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®