Steering Students in Producing Stellar DNP Projects

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Evolution of DNP
How We Came to Be

- Need for DNP identified
- AACN Position
- NONPF Position
- Other leadership groups
  - IOM

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AACN 8 Essentials

- Scientific underpinnings for practice
- Organizational and systems leadership for quality improvement and system thinking
- Clinical scholarship and analytical methods for evidence-based practice
- Technology and information for the improvement and transformation of patient-centered health care

AACN Essentials cont.

- Health care policy for advocacy in health care
- Inter-professional collaboration for improving patient and population health outcomes
- Clinical prevention and population health for improving the nation's health
- Clinical Advanced nursing practice for improving the delivery of patient care

AACN on Final Project

"Doctoral education, whether practice or research, is distinguished by the completion of a specific project that demonstrates synthesis of the student's work and lays the groundwork for future scholarship".

PhD Education Model is Well Established

- Creation of new knowledge through research
- A well established paradigm
- Students mentored through program progression
- Culture of PhD nursing research shared and nurtured

DNP – New Model

- Provides broad knowledge required for application to advanced clinical practice
- Program length shorter when contrasted with PhD
- Projects need clinical focus
  - Caution with educational projects
- Rigor must represent doctoral education
  - AACN 8 essentials

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Our MS-DNP Program

- Began in 2007 – Cohort is executive format
  - First graduating cohort December 2008
  - Total graduates to date – 55
  - Additional students currently enrolled - 45

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Our BS-DNP Program

- BS-DNP began in 2008
  - First cohort of 29 to graduate May 2011
- Students heading for capstone or final project
  - 67 students in primary care NP program
  - 18 students in acute care NP program
  - 10 students in Women's Heath NP and Nurse Midwife
  - 12 students in Neonatal NP program

Program and Challenges

- **First MS-DNP cohort 2007**
  - 32-36 credits
  - 4 semesters
  - Final project in last 2 semesters (6 credits)
- **MS-DNP**
  - Short time frame
  - Some students without specific academic skills
    - Need refresher skills for literature searches and reference management, information technology
  - Accomplishing projects in limited time frame

Program and Challenges

- **First BS-DNP cohort 2008**
  - ~75 credits
  - 8 semesters
- **BS-DNP**
  - Lack of clinical experience in advanced practice role
  - Difficulty conceptualizing a potential project in advance practice role
  - Students are focusing on mastery of advanced practice skills

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Committee Structure

- Began with traditional committee
- Moved to supervisory committee model
  - Chair, Program Director & Executive Director of Clinical Graduate Programs
- Use content experts to guide specific areas of student project

Lessons Learned

- Timely completion of project greatest barrier to program completion
- First MS-DNP cohort
  - 11 of 31 students completed in anticipated time frame
- Second cohort – change in process of introducing capstone
  - 25 of 28 completed program in anticipated time frame, remaining 3 completed with addition of one semester

Planting the Seed

- Pre-admission interview - topic of final project is discussed

- Initial orientation - students are encouraged to begin to explore areas of special clinical interest

- Professors point out possible project topics in individual courses

Establishing a Time Line

- 2 semesters before beginning final project students submit possible topics

- Advisor begins process of assisting student in clarifying and narrowing topics

- By beginning of first semester of the final project course (2 semesters) students articulate a problem statement for project

Provide Examples

- List of titles of final projects posted for student review

- List of possible clinical questions

- Executive summaries of projects posted for student review

- Students attend defenses of preceding cohort

Keys to Success

- Dedicated faculty as project chairs
- Clearly defined expectations
- Content experts with clearly defined roles
- Blending resources of clinical and research
- Students choose topics they are passionate about
- Chairs oversee content
- Students use professional editors

Chair

- The chair of the DNP student's project
  - Understands the difference between PhD and DNP
  - Encourages the student in clinical focus
  - Provides guidance
  - Assists in collegial networking

Content Expert

- Selected by student

- May be recommended by chair

- Approved by chair

- Identified expert or specialist in specific area related to final project

- Provides mentoring and guidance in specific area of expertise

- Often provides professional networking

Final Project

- Represents clinical immersion in topic
- Results of scholarly inquiry
- Uses evidence to improve practice or patient outcomes
- Contribution to nursing in:
  - Leadership
  - Policy
  - Evidence-based practice
  - Program planning and evaluation
  - other

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Final Project Course Outline

- **First semester (3 credits ~ 180 hours)**
  - Problem statement
  - Literature review
  - Manuscript draft
- **Second semester (3 credits ~180 hours)**
  - Implementation
  - Evaluation
  - Final manuscript and deliverable product

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Survey of Graduates

- 71.9% of respondents (23 of 32) reported that final project provided the basis for future scholarly work following graduations
  - 46.9% professional presentations
  - 31.3% poster presentations
  - 18.8% publications

Discussion

- Discussion on thoughts and strategies used by attendees in guiding final clinical immersion projects