NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF NURSE PRACTITIONER FACULTIES STATEMENT

TITLING OF THE DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE PROJECT
2013

Introduction

The purpose of this white paper is for the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) to recommend a consistently used title for the final Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) project. We recommend the generic title of **DNP Project** for use by DNP programs to designate the final program project. NONPF also recognizes that many schools are experiencing challenges in the development of DNP curricula related to the DNP project. Therefore, NONPF also recommends a collaborative national dialogue be started with APRN stakeholders to:

- delineate and clearly communicate the essence of the DNP Project,
- delineate and clearly communicate acceptable forms of the DNP Project, and
- clarify and unify standards for DNP Projects.

The evolution of the DNP degree provides new opportunities for innovation and collaboration in a variety of areas such as patient centered care, system influences on care providers, and population focused healthcare.   The 2006 AACN DNP Essentials clearly identify pivotal curricular areas and a final DNP project as a key element of the DNP degree.   Swift implementation of DNP programs, and divergent faculty understanding of the final project, have contributed to the current variability in the title and focus of the DNP project across schools. Brown and Crabtree (2013) noted that wide variability exists across DNP programs for project titles with 31 title variations (see partial list in Appendix A). We have now reached a critical crossroads in DNP curricular evolution where swift coalescence to indicate a clear direction for a practice doctorate projects will benefit students, faculty, and community acceptance of the degree. Decisions can now be based on both implementation data and a refined vision of the needs of future practitioners. Due to the urgency of DNP project clarification, we recommend action steps to ensure a common understanding of the purpose and nature of the final project required for the practice degree.

NONPF has provided decades of leadership and created nurse practitioner core competencies and curriculum guidelines which have evolved to the DNP level (NONPF, 2012). Our assessment is that consistent titling, language, and student outcomes for the DNP project are absolutely essential to clearly communicate the value of the DNP in preparation of advanced practice nurses who will assume a vital role in the improvement of health care quality and safety.

Developmental Challenges in the DNP Curricula

As background to this paper, listed below are some challenges that have been identified in the development of DNP curricula related to the DNP project.

- Aspects of the DNP curricula and project are undergoing expected refinements and transitions.

- Wide variability exists in approaches to conceptualize and implement the DNP project.
  - ➢ The diversity of titles currently used by academic institutions to describe the DNP project reflects a varying understanding and interpretation of educational and clinical outcomes.
  - ➢ Examples of titles: DNP Capstone Project, Clinical Dissertation, Practice Improvement Project, Quality Improvement Project, Scholarly Project (see Appendix A and Brown & Crabtree, 2013)

- Circumstances and resources available for the DNP Project vary across schools, institutions, and clinical settings where DNP students practice.
  - ➢ Many advanced practice master's programs have expanded and converted to DNP programs, and the number of programs considering DNP programs steadily increases.
  - ➢ Some practice doctorates (for example: DSN, DNS, ND) in nursing were converted to DNP degree programs while others moved to PhD programs. Educational institutions had variable previous experience with doctoral education.
    - ▪ Programs with and without master's advanced practice or PhD programs in nursing launched DNP programs.
  - ➢ The DNP program is the first professional doctorate or the first doctorate offered at some campuses.

- As with any new advanced degree, considerable time will be required to prepare adequate numbers of graduates to fulfill the needs of schools for DNP-prepared faculty.
  - ➢ Currently there is an insufficient number of DNP-prepared faculty available to guide practice oriented projects.
  - ➢ A similar trajectory was observed during the early decades of the PhD in Nursing programs.

- Most universities require doctoral preparation for supervision of doctoral students.
  - ➢ Faculty prepared in PhD programs are most knowledgeable in traditional research approaches to scholarship.
  - ➢ New research methods with an emphasis on evidence based practice, practice change and system improvement have only recently begun to be integrated into doctoral education.
  - ➢ Many current faculty have not been involved in advanced practice or had the opportunity to develop expertise in the type of clinical scholarship most relevant for projects in DNP programs and the articulation of practice scholarship.

Curricular Issues for DNP Projects

Resources
- The expectation that PhD prepared faculty will guide DNP projects in an intensive tutorial approach is not cost-effective in part because of the large number of DNP students.

- This expectation also results in unsustainable workloads for advanced practice faculty who must also maintain a clinical practice for licensure and national board certification.

Curricular Variability
- Variable outcomes in expertise related to practice change are found among DNP graduates.

- A need exists for a clear distinction between a practice-oriented doctoral degree and a research focused doctoral degree as a foundation to conceptualize the DNP final project
  - ➢ Practice doctorate projects designed to implement clinical scholarship differ from PhD student dissertations that use traditional research approaches to generate of new knowledge.
  - ➢ Many DNP projects result in clinical dissertations and intervention studies which is not the original intent of the DNP according to DNP Essentials (AACN, 2006).

- Variability and disparity in DNP projects may prompt concerns about nursing's ability to clearly communicate expectations of DNP graduates.
  - ➢ This could adversely impact the acceptance of graduates with DNP degrees by professional colleagues and the public.

DNP Project Dissemination Issues

The lack of a consistent title for DNP final projects creates challenges in widespread dissemination because university libraries are often not able to archive these projects as a category separate from PhD dissertations. Utilizing a common title will likely facilitate library cataloging of the projects, enhance searchability, and facilitate dissemination of the final products of the projects.

Rationale for a National Dialogue

"A paradigm shift in the thinking of faculty and the profession is necessary to achieve the purposes for which the DNP degree was developed" (Brown & Crabtree, 2013).

The impetus of the DNP program is to close the research –practice gap by applying evidence in practice to benefit the health of the population and to improve systems of care and the process of knowledge translation. NONPF proposes the following suggestions and comments to further a national dialogue on future directions and resources related to the DNP project.

- Focus on the creation of practice knowledge (Crabtree, 2012).

- Create a dialogue and process to encourage consensus in titling and outcomes of DNP projects, utilizing foundational work published on the NONPF website (NONPF, 2006) and disseminated at conferences and in publications.

- Consider NONPF's (2012) identified core competencies for advanced practice nurses citing the competencies (listed below) as part of the scientific foundation for practice of the NP who:
  - critically analyzes data and evidence for improving advanced nursing practice;
  - integrates knowledge from the humanities and sciences within the context of nursing science;
  - translates research and other forms of knowledge to improve practice processes and outcomes; and
  - develops new practice approaches based on the integration of research, theory, and practice knowledge.

- Participate in on-going dialogue and actions with APRN and DNP program stakeholders to clarify and unify standards for final projects that meet/fulfill the original intent of the DNP.
  - Promote a vision for final projects focused on practice for DNP students that require intra-professional and inter-professional collaborative efforts and welcomes these partnerships.
  - Focus DNP projects on generation of practice knowledge and the translation of evidence into practice.

- Address requirements of some academic institutions that require final doctoral products to be named dissertations and archived accordingly. A change in these institutions' policy to appropriately name the final DNP project is important to reinforce the distinction between research and clinical scholarship.

- Propose that "DNP Project" is added as a keyword in library databases to search for DNP projects.

The guidance in the AACN DNP Essentials provided a landmark opportunity to enhance consistency of DNP programs in the early stages of their development. As DNP curricula across the nation have evolved, different interpretations have emerged.

Summary

NONPF recommends the generic title of **DNP Project** for use by DNP programs to designate the final project. This title is inclusive, generic, and provides a foundation for future directions. Although this recommendation refers to the title of the project, NONPF does not at this time recommend a specific reporting format for the DNP Project. Based on an institution's unique policies, project outcomes and products, and DNP faculty/program requirements, the DNP Project may be reported and shared through a variety of modalities (e.g., written papers, public

presentations, published manuscripts). It will be increasingly important however for DNP students to master communication approaches most appropriate for facilitating change in practice settings. NONPF as an established leader in nurse practitioner education will continue to further discussion among DNP faculty and stakeholders as we move towards a consistent and unified understanding of the DNP Project.

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Prepared by:

Marie Annette Brown, PhD, RN, ARNP, FNP-BC, FAAN, FAANP
Katherine Crabtree, PhD, FAAN
Gary Laustsen, PhD, APRN (FNP), FAANP
Marva Price, DrPH, RN, APRN (FNP), FAANP, FAAN

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Appendix A

A listing of titling variations for the final DNP project (Brown & Crabtree, 2013)

- Research Utilization Project
- Scholarly Inquiry in Nursing Practice
- Practice improvement project
- EB mentoring applied project
- Comprehensive Study
- Synthesis project
- Scholarly leadership project
- Advanced Nursing Project
- Clinical immersion project
- Translational Research Project
- System change project
- Advanced clinical project
- Administrative project
- Translational research scholarly initiative
- Portfolio
- Clinical scholarship portfolio

- Clinical research
- Capstone project
- DNP project
- Dissertation
- Doctoral Thesis
- Clinical Practice Dissertation
- EBP project
- Clinical inquiry project
- Practice project
- Leadership project
- Scholarly project
- DNP clinical project
- Residency project
- Scholarly Capstone project
- Clinical Scholarship: Capstone
- Clinical Scholarship project
- Doctoral project