RUSH UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF NURSING
DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE PROGRAM
PROJECT GUIDE

Introduction

This Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) project guide serves as a reference for the DNP student, but does not replace the *College of Nursing (CON) Student Guidebook*. Doctoral education, whether practice or research, is distinguished by the completion of a scholarly project that demonstrates synthesis of the student's work and lays the groundwork for future scholarship (AACN, 2006). Research-focused graduates (PhDs) are prepared to generate knowledge through rigorous research that may be generalizable; practice-focused graduates (DNPs) are prepared to generate new knowledge through innovation of practice change, the translation of evidence, and the implementation of quality improvement processes in specific practice settings, systems, or with specific populations to improve health or health outcomes (AACN, 2015). For further clarification regarding what constitutes a student's own work, please consult the following policy on *Academic Honesty.*

It will be clear as you progress through the DNP program that not all projects are the same. Each DNP student and their project can be expected to move at a slightly different pace. This document is intended to be a guide, not a prescription. When in doubt, contact your DNP advisor. (Please note that this information is subject to change.)

DNP Project Description/Purpose

The DNP Project is the scholarly product required by all DNP Programs. The goal of the project is to translate current best evidence to improve the quality of healthcare outcomes. The process includes the design, implementation, and evaluation of a program/project that addresses a real-world clinical problem, population health issue or health systems challenge and aligns with the strategic goals and pertinent quality metrics of a health related organization.

DNP Core Competencies

The RUCON DNP is built upon the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) *Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice*

There are two components to the *Essentials:*

1. DNP Essentials 1 through 8 are the foundational outcome competencies deemed essential for all graduates of a DNP program regardless of specialty or functional focus.
2. Specialty competencies/content prepare the DNP graduate for a particular specialty. Competencies, content, and practica experiences needed for specific roles in specialty areas are delineated by national specialty nursing organizations.

The *Essentials* document outlines and defines the eight foundational essentials (shown below) and provides some introductory comments on specialty competencies/ content. The specialized content, as defined by specialty organizations, complements the areas of core content defined by the DNP Essentials and constitutes the major component of DNP programs:

Essential I: Scientific Underpinnings for Practice

Essential II: Organizational and Systems Leadership for Quality Improvement and Systems

Thinking

Essential III: Clinical Scholarship and Analytical Methods for Evidence-Based Practice

Essential IV: Information Systems/Technology and Patient Care Technology for the Improvement and Transformation of Health Care

Essential V: Health Care Policy for Advocacy in Health Care

Essential VI: Interprofessional Collaboration for Improving Patient and Population Health Outcomes

Essential VII: Clinical Prevention and Population Health for Improving the Nation's Health

Essential VIII: Advanced Nursing Practice

DNP Project Team

Purpose of the Team: The purpose of a project team is to support the student as they design and implement the DNP project. Project team members will communicate regularly with the student throughout the development of the project. The DNP project entails collaboration among the advisor, second reader, facilitator and student. It is important to remember that all DNP student project teams are not the same. Variations exist within and between tracks. In general, the roles described apply to all DNP projects.

The Student: The student is the leader of the project team. The student works closely with the advisor/first reader and second reader as they identify ideas and develop, implement and evaluate the DNP project. It is important that the student take the initiative to communicate with the advisor/first reader regularly regarding the progress of project planning and implementation.

Academic Advisor/First Reader: For most DNP students, the academic advisor and the first reader are the same faculty member. Occasionally, a student will be assigned an advisor, but will work with a different faculty member for the DNP project. Overall, the academic advisor/first reader promotes the scholarly thinking and intellectual curiosity of the student. This is accomplished through ongoing feedback to the student from course faculty and the academic advisor/first reader. The advisor/first reader gives final approval of the DNP proposal, which must be obtained before the project is implemented. The advisor/first reader gives final approval of the final paper.

Second Reader: A second reader is assigned to every project and in collaboration with the advisor/first reader approves both the proposal and the final paper. The second reader may be a faculty member or may be a professional expert in the student's content area. Students will send their proposal or final paper to the second reader as directed by the advisor/first reader. The second reader provides general feedback, identifies gaps, and poses questions, but will not edit the paper unless requested by the advisor/first reader.

Project Facilitator: A project facilitator is someone who works at the project site and agrees to support the student and help to navigate the site's system. In some programs, the student will be asked to identify a project facilitator at the agency's site and give the name and contact information to the advisor. In some programs, the facilitator is assigned based upon the project focus. The following are responsibilities of the project facilitator:
- Help the student navigate the system within the organization/site
- Support the student to identify data to define a problem

- Assist the student in selecting realistic goals and objectives
- Provide oversight and support during the project planning and implementation phases of the project
- Ensure that key stakeholders in the organization/site are aware of the student's project
- Provide input and feedback to the student and Rush faculty as needed
- Assist the student with ensuring project sustainability in the organization/site when appropriate

Questions About the Project

If you have questions regarding the project, contact your advisor/first reader or facilitator depending on type of questions. In general, questions about the project site would go to the facilitator. All other questions would go to your advisor/first reader. You cannot go wrong by beginning with your advisor/first reader.

It is important to maintain ongoing, regular, and frequent contact with your advisor/first reader. In some cases, your advisor will request regularly scheduled meetings throughout your program. You also may request a regularly scheduled meeting with your advisor. We highly encourage you to request a meeting if you have questions or are having difficulty with any aspect of the project.

Development of an Idea

When thinking about the DNP project, the student may propose project ideas based upon their area of clinical interest or specific population of interest. The project idea should be generated from an identified problem or need, with supporting data, in a clinical setting or with a population (See Appendix A Evolution of an Idea). Faculty will assist students with identifying a suitable project. Good projects to consider are those without a time imperative imposed by the institution. This allows the student to learn through application of the course content in an organized manner.

Courses that Support the Project

Biostatistics/Epidemiology and the DNP core courses are foundational to the development of the DNP project. Below are the course descriptions for these courses. Exceptions are noted.

NSG 522: Applied Epidemiology and Biostatistics for Nursing Practice (Applies to BSN to DNP students and students who have not taken an equivalent course in their MSN program)
This course develops students' ability to apply epidemiological and statistical concepts to guide evidence-based practice in a dynamic health care environment at the micro and mezzo level. Students use public data sources, data management software, and the published literature to understand and address health concerns in populations, and in evaluating economic evidence of health interventions and programs.

NSG 600:   Leadership in Evolving Healthcare Environments
This course guides students in exploring leadership in evolving healthcare environments. Students complete an assessment and analysis of their leadership style. Leadership trends, styles, and competencies are applied to specific leadership scenarios and challenges. In addition, students develop

a leadership e-portfolio including a vision statement, goals, and specific strategies for attaining these goals.

NSG 602: Healthcare Economics, Policy, Finance
This course examines current trends in healthcare policy and economics and their impact on financing and care delivery in the US. Using informatics as a tool, costs associated with specific health care delivery systems are analyzed at the organizational level.

NSG 566: Population Assessment and Health Promotion Frameworks (Applies to APHN, FNP and Population Health students)
This is the first of two sequential courses in population assessment and intervention planning. The course focuses on an application of the concepts and methods for conducting an in depth assessment of health status among populations, which serves as the foundation for the health planning process. Principles of epidemiology and assessment frameworks are applied in analyzing population and organizational level data to provide understanding of population needs and resources. Students examine health promotion frameworks in relation to effective approaches to guiding population level interventions

NSG 567: Population Intervention Planning, Implementation & Evaluation (Applies to APHN and Population Health students)
This is the second of two sequential courses in population health assessment and program/intervention planning. The course is organized around planning as a method of decision-making. Various theoretical frameworks are applied to the development of a plan to meet the health needs of selected populations at-risk, based on an in-depth population assessment. Formulation of implementation strategies and evaluation schemes for sustainable program/intervention development are discussed. Emphasis is on implementation and evaluation methods for innovative nursing practice with communities/ populations. *For the purposes of this course, the term population is defined to include the traditional public health population and clinical populations/aggregates.

NSG 608 Program Evaluation (Applies to all students except those who take NSG 567)
This course provides students with the information and tools needed to strategically evaluate change initiatives and outcomes in practice and health care environments.

NSG 609A: DNP Project Practicum A (Applies to all tracks except APHN and Population Health, who work on their project as part of their NSG 606-09 practica)
This course is the first of a series of three DNP project practicum courses focused on providing students with experience in the application of advanced nursing practice and systems level knowledge in a healthcare setting. In the entirety of the practicum series, students will translate current best evidence and use collaborative skills, leadership skills, and knowledge of informatics to design, implement, and evaluate a project to improve health outcomes. The focus of this course is conducting a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the context, organization, population, and problem.

NSG 609B: DNP Project Practicum B (Applies to all tracks except APHN and Population Health, who work on their project as part of their NSG 606-09 practica)
This course is the second in a series of three DNP project practicum courses focused on providing students with experience in the application of advanced nursing practice and systems level knowledge in a healthcare setting. In the entirety of the practicum series, students will translate current best evidence and use collaborative skills, leadership skills, and knowledge of informatics to design, implement and evaluate a project to improve health outcomes. The focus of this course is the implementation of a project that is evidenced-based, feasible, and acceptable to key stakeholders.

NSG 609C: DNP Project Practicum C (Applies to all tracks except APHN and Population Health, who work on their project as part of their NSG 606-09 practica)
This course is the final in a series of three DNP project practicum courses focused on providing students with experience in the application of advanced nursing practice and systems level knowledge in a healthcare setting. In the entirety of the practicum series, students will translate current best evidence and use collaborative skills, leadership skills, and knowledge of informatics to design, implement, and evaluate a project to improve health outcomes. The focus of this course is project evaluation and dissemination.

NSG 610: Project Planning and Implementation (Applies to all tracks except APHN and Population Health)
This course examines implementation science theories, models and frameworks intended to improve health care quality. Complex factors that influence an effective and sustainable implementation initiative will be analyzed through critique of research in the field. This course provides students with the information and tools required to plan a strategy that evaluates and/ or improves quality and patient safety in complex healthcare environments.

NSG 615: DNP Project Proposal Seminar (Applies to all tracks except APHN and Population Health)
This seminar focuses on the development of the DNP proposal. Students are guided by their DNP project advisor/project lead in the development of their project proposal and in the integration of core content obtained throughout the DNP program. Upon completion of this seminar, the student will have developed and received the required approvals on a project proposal and presentation and will have submitted necessary Institutional Review Board requirements.

NSG 605: DNP Scholarly Project (Applies to APHN and POPLEAD tracks)
The DNP Project provides students with a faculty guided experience in the application of advanced Clinical practice and systems level knowledge and skill in a practice setting. The project represents a Synthesis of knowledge gained in all previous coursework and involves development, implementation, and evaluation of a process for change in health care delivery for individuals, groups, or populations. The project should be of such a nature that it serves as a foundation for future scholarship. The student's chosen program of study will inform the scope and complexity of practice change for the project. This course is taken during the term students intend to do their public presentation.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What if the advisor does not agree with the project selected by the student?**
  Students sometimes struggle between identifying a problem versus proposing a solution. The student's advisor/first reader will assist the student in identifying a practice problem. The project must represent a true problem, be supported by evidence, have stakeholder support, be feasible and measureable, and be of sufficient scope for a doctoral project. All projects must receive advisor/first reader approval. No project can move forward without it.

- **When and how often should students meet with their advisors regarding their projects?**
  Most programs recommend meeting on a monthly basis with the advisor while developing the project. Ask your advisor what they prefer and work with them to find a mutually agreed upon schedule. Some of the tracks have regularly scheduled videoconferences.

- **How does the student find a DNP project site and site facilitator? What are things to look for to ensure a positive working relationship with them and easier site-specific data access?**
  Each program approaches project site and facilitator selection somewhat differently. Your program director and advisor can help you.

  Acute Care Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (AC PNP) & Neonatal Nurse Practitioner (NNP): Students complete projects in their home hospitals. They are asked to meet with unit medical, nursing, and QI leadership to identify project ideas. Specifics are discussed during the videoconferences based on these initial queries.

  Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner (AGACNP) & Adult-Gerontology Critical Care Clinical Nurse Specialist (AGCCCNS): Most students complete projects in their work sites. For students who are Rush employees, program leaders have partnered with hospital leaders to identify DNP projects that are in line with the strategic goals and initiatives of the medical center. Students are matched with projects based on their interests. We provide guidance and support to students who are not employed by Rush, to solicit interest and support for conducting a DNP Project at their work site.

  Adult-Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner (AGPCNP) & Adult-Gerontology Clinical Nurse Specialist (AGCNS): Program leadership partners with systems to identify DNP Project sites for students. The majority of students are matched to a site and facilitator in a primary care setting. There are some students who work in ambulatory settings or volunteer in primary care settings. We provide guidance to them to solicit interest and support for conducting a DNP Project at their site.

  APHN & Population Health: APHN students complete projects in their APHN clinical sites. Population Health students can choose to complete their projects in the primary care work site;

if this is not feasible, the student and advisor will determine another primary care site for clinical and project work.

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA): Faculty meet with the anesthesia students to discern their interest, provide an overview of the project and DNP scholarship, and identify resources available in this geographic area.

FNP: Students work directly with their advisor to identify a project site and facilitator in a community/primary care setting.   The FNP faculty has relationships at a number of agencies that welcome students but most students seem to have ideas of their own.   We provide students with questions to ask the agency to help them determine if the site will be a good fit.

Pediatric Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) & Neonatal Clinical Nurse Specialist (NCNS): Some students complete projects in their home hospitals while others may engage in projects in other sites. Students should meet with unit medical, nursing, and QI leadership or site leadership to identify project ideas. Specifics are discussed during videoconferences based on these initial queries.

Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (PNP): Students complete their project at their current worksite or in a primary care clinical assigned to them. Students complete a needs assessment at the site to identify project ideas. DNP projects are first approved by the advisor then presented to the leadership at their site in order come to an agreement and timeframe for completion. Projects are based on the need of the site and approved by their DNP advisor.

Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP): Although most students complete project in home hospitals, some want projects in other sites. Talk to your advisor about the best way to identify project ideas.

Transformative Leadership: Systems (Systems): Students enter the program with a project idea in their work setting, which becomes refined. Talk to your advisor about refining the project idea.

- **Exactly what time is included for DNP project hours**?
  The hours at the sites for the DNP project are not direct care clinical hours, but are included as part of the total clinical hour requirement for the DNP program. The time at the site is to learn about the site, determine what problems exist, do an assessment of the site/organization and/or population, collect data, review charts, meet with the site facilitator, meet with employees and other stakeholders, conduct literature reviews, etc. As you learn to develop, implement and evaluate your project, you will also identify what to do at the site to complete your project. Site related activities depend upon the goals of the project. As with other questions, talk with your project advisor to determine if an activity counts toward the project hours.

- **Can you quantify how much time to spend at the site throughout each term?**
  Minimum amount of time (clock hours) is calculated as the credit hours for the clinical course (NSG 609A, 609B and 609C or NSG 606 and 607) times 14 times 6. The time spent will vary during the development and implementation of the project. See your advisor for more details.

- **How do students track DNP hours?**
  In general, students will track practicum hours related to their project in the DNP project log. Your program director will let you know if there is a different mechanism for tracking DNP hours.

- **Where can the student refresh their memory regarding content they learned in earlier courses?**
  Development of the project is an iterative process. We recommend that students download written documents. In most of the project planning courses, there are resources to help refresh your memory about important topics or skills. Also, textbooks/ articles/ web resources required throughout the program will serve as important resources in developing the project.

- **Who decides whether the DNP project is complete?**
  There are four milestones (DNP project written proposal, DNP proposal presentation, DNP final presentation and DNP final written report). There are guidelines and grading rubrics which clearly articulate a passing grade on a project. The advisor/first reader and second reader have the ultimate responsibility to evaluate and approve these milestones. Be sure to review the grading rubrics carefully.

- **Are there examples of DNP projects for each specialty?**
  Samples are posted in courses. Potential projects are discussed with the advisor/first reader.

- **Is IRB formal review required for all DNP projects?** All projects must be cleared through both the originating healthcare organization IRB and Rush IRB prior to implementation. The originating organization either has a form the student uses to submit to the IRB or, if the organization does not have an IRB, submits a letter of support on the organization's letterhead. Most DNP projects are considered non-human subjects research and qualify as quality improvement projects.

  At Rush, students complete a form, *Determination of Whether an Activity Constitutes Human Subjects Research RA-IRB-118,* which can be submitted electronically using the following link: [Quality Improvement](). Students need to have their faculty advisor sign the form. To do this, the investigator/student creates the form and clicks the "Save and Return Later" button at the bottom of the form 118 screen. The student will also need to save or write down the Return Code. Then the student enters the faculty advisor's email address and clicks "Send Survey Link".

The advisor will receive a link and then clicks on the link received, inputs the Return Code, reviews and signs the submission, and informs the student that they have done so. Once the advisor signs the admission, the form can be submitted by the investigator/student.

The student will receive an email from the IRB if the IRB has comments or after the project has been reviewed by the IRB. To inform the faculty advisor that the project was reviewed by the IRB, the student needs to email the faculty advisor the information they received from the IRB about their project

For any questions regarding what may qualify as non-human subjects research or how to fill out the new Form 118, please feel free to contact your advisor, Research Regulatory Operations at 312-942-3606, or email Reva T Wymbs, IRB Consultant in the office of Research Affairs at Reva_T_Wymbs@rush.edu.
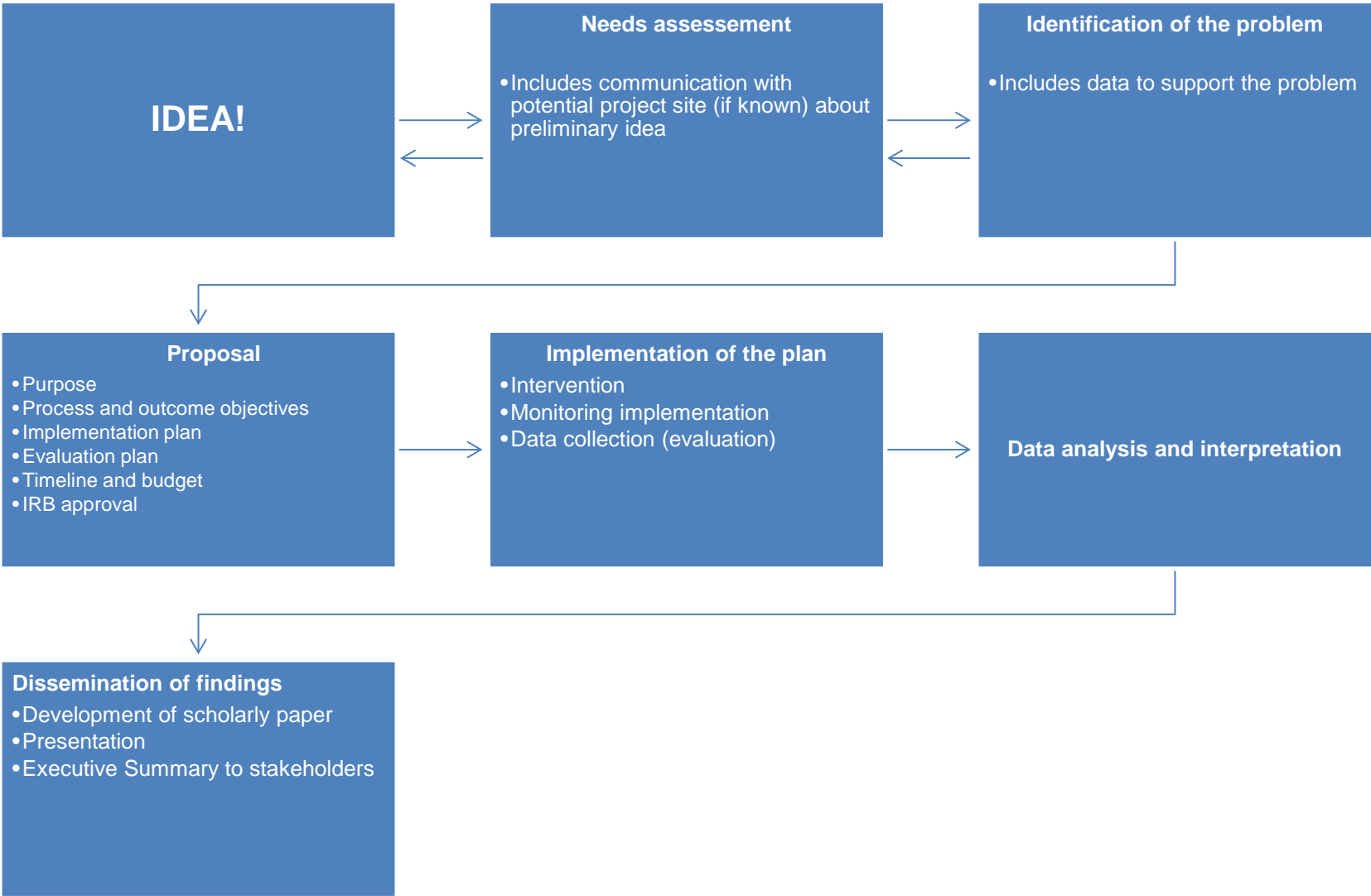
- **How does the student create an interprofessional team and what purpose does it serve?**
  Every student needs site staff to help them with planning and implementation of the project. The student is "leading" the project at the site in the sense that success in the project requires input from the agency. Depending on the project this input may come from healthcare professionals, administrators, IT staff (often needed if an EMR change is to be made), social workers, community organization members, community members, etc. Leading an interprofessional team is an important DNP degree outcome.

- **Where can the student find a literature review table for both the population assessment period and the intervention literature review?**
  These review materials are provided in your courses. A literature review matrix table example is provided in Appendix D Literature Review Matrix Template. It is important to remember that there is not one correct way to construct literature tables. A literature table is a tool to facilitate organizing the literature. How you organize the articles depends on what information you want to highlight from the articles. For example, if you want to emphasize the evidence supporting the problem, that literature table will look different than one in which you want to compare interventions.

Needs assessement

- Includes communication with potential project site (if known) about preliminary idea

Identification of the problem

- Includes data to support the problem

IDEA!

Proposal

- Purpose
- Process and outcome objectives
- Implementation plan
- Evaluation plan
- Timeline and budget
- IRB approval

Implementation of the plan

- Intervention
- Monitoring implementation
- Data collection (evaluation)

Data analysis and interpretation

Dissemination of findings

- Development of scholarly paper
- Presentation
- Executive Summary to stakeholders

Appendix B
Timeline for Project Development

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NSG 606-09 with          NSG 606-09 with          NSG 606/607 or           NSG 605 or 609C
566/567 or               567 or NSG 615           609B
NSG 609 A and 615
        |                        |                        |                        |
        ↓                        ↓                        ↓                        ↓
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- STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
- PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION
- INITIAL PROJECT PLANNING

DNP PROJECT PROPOSAL PRESENTED AND APPROVED

DNP PROJECT IMPLEMENTED

DNP PROJECT COMPLETED AND PRESENTED

GRADUATION!!
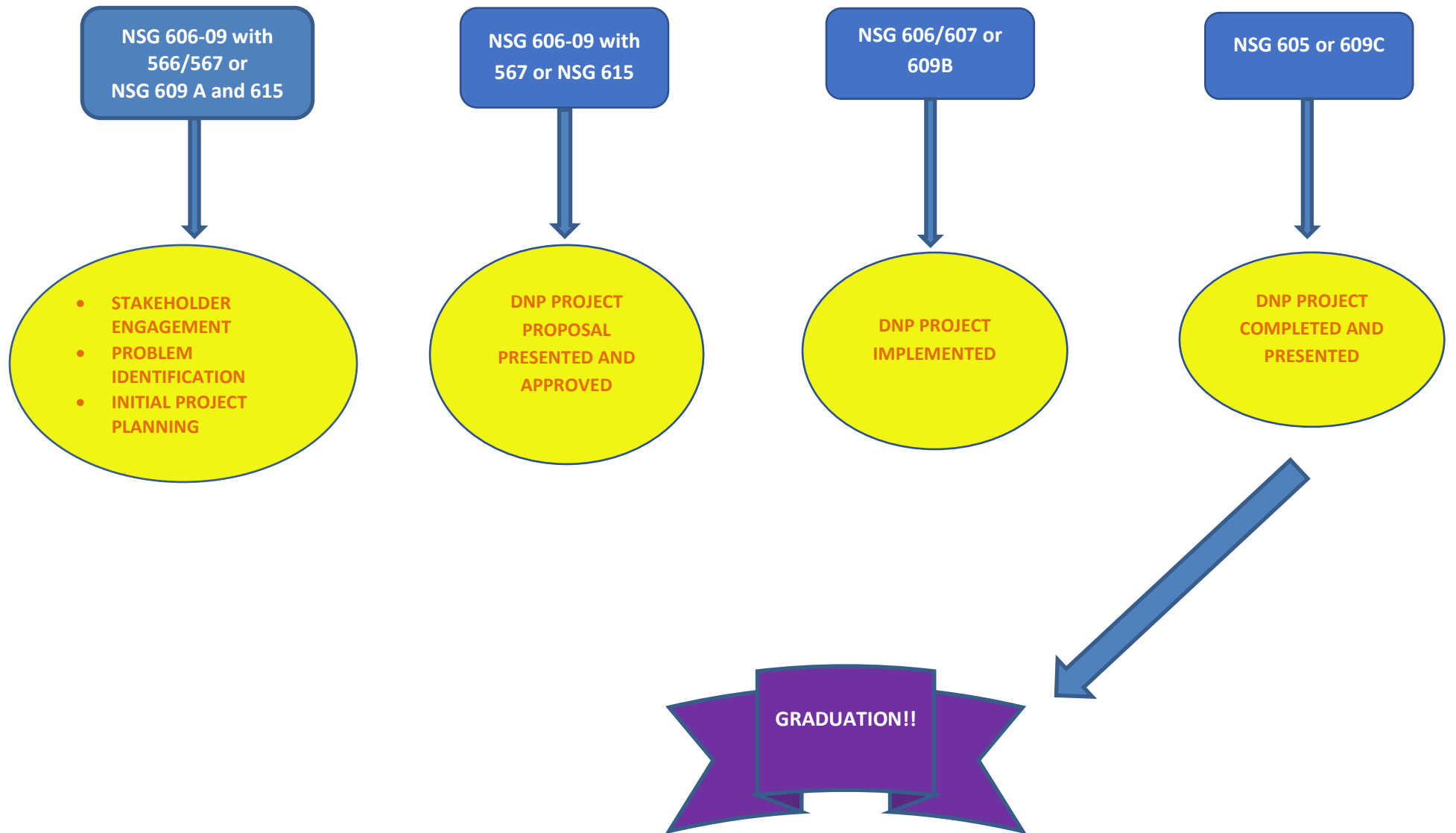
Appendix C
DNP Project Proposal and Final Project Checklist

NSG 566* **NSG 608 and 610	Complete Course Requirements Communicate with Advisor				
Course	**Date/initials**	**Requirement**	**Course**	**Date/initials**	**Requirement**
NSG 609A		Site engagement Problem statement Purpose Background Environmental Context CITI Training Facilitator evaluation			
**NSG 615		Submit completed project design plan, project scope, implementation plan, timeline and budget Obtain IRB approval	*NSG 567		Submit completed project design plan, project scope, implementation plan, timeline and budget IRB approval
**NSG 609B		Implement and evaluate project Log all project hours Facilitator evaluation	*NSG 606 and 607		Implement and evaluate project Log all project hours
**NSG 609C		Final paper approved Final presentation Submit final paper to advisor and program coordinator using this format: DNP_termfinished_LastnameFirstname	*NSG 605		Final paper approved Final presentation Submit final paper to advisor and program coordinator using this format: DNP_termfinished_LastnameFirstname

* Courses taken by APHN and Population Health students
**Courses taken by all students except APHN and Population Health