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**Abstract Category:** DNP in Academic Leadership

**Title:** DNP Capstone Projects: Pathways to Evidence-based Clinical Excellence

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to share one program’s approach to the implementation of the capstone project, a requirement of the DNP program.

**Objective 1:** Discuss various pathways available for DNP students to complete the capstone project.

**Objective 2:** Differentiate between evidence-generating projects and knowledge-generating research.

**Objective 3:** Identify the various components for the capstone projects.

**Abstract:**

The purpose of this project is to share one program’s approach to the implementation of the capstone project, a requirement of the DNP program. Podium presentations and the literature report a wide-spread variety in nature and quality of capstone projects. The Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing (IVMSON) has a 34-credit, one year DNP program in the focus areas of administration or advance practice. There are four credits devoted to the capstone project although core course content on theory and evidence-based practice provide the foundation. In order to ensure consistency and quality the program has developed three capstone pathways which enable doctoral students to navigate a capstone project that best fits their area of advance practice: Project planning, project implementation, and evidence-generating. One pathway is for capstone projects that require a significant amount of planning. An example of this type of capstone is the development of a strategic plan to implement shared governance within a nursing department. Projects of this magnitude include the development of detailed time lines, resource planning, approval process and budgets. The second capstone pathway involves the implementation of evidence into practice. An example of this pathway is the implementation of the COPA model for a competency based new nurse orientation. The third pathway is for projects where there is little evidence available and requires an evidence generating project such as a needs assessment or gap analysis. All projects include a description of the problem at the local, regional, and national level; the purpose of the capstone project; the significance of the project to nursing practice, nursing education, and nursing research; a review and evaluation of the literature; and
project plan. Depending on the capstone pathway, one or more theoretical frameworks may be appropriate. Students frequently utilize a change theory framework as well as a framework which guides the focus or content of the project. Every project also includes an evaluation component. Projects within each of the pathways may require Institutional Review Board approvals and all projects require the development of proposals which must be approved prior to development or implementation. All projects, regardless of pathway, are chaired by a faculty member qualified to facilitate the student’s project. The chair, a member of the faculty, has doctoral preparation as does at least one other member of the committee. Other individuals may serve as ad hoc members providing content expertise as needed. During the first capstone course students work with their advisor to refine their project and determine which pathway is most appropriate. Students appreciate the flexibility as well as the clearly defined options.