

Frequently Asked Questions about Northwestern's BSN-to-DNP Program

What is a Family Nurse Practitioner? A family nurse practitioner (FNP) is an advanced practice nursing role. FNPs provide primary care for patients of all ages in a variety of settings. FNPs attend to common health problems and focus on preventive care. They manage patients with chronic illnesses and disorders such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, arthritis, and menopausal problems, to name just a few examples. They provide preventive services such as well child checks, well woman exams, sports physicals, and DOT physicals for truck and bus drivers. They know when a patient should be referred to a specialist, and collaborate with specialists and other healthcare providers not limited to pharmacists and physical therapists in providing evidence-based care for their patients.

There are various types of nurse practitioners, such as psych/mental health NPs, women's health NPs, adult/gerontological NPs, emergency department NPs, and pediatric NPs, to name a few. A nurse practitioner has to practice within his/her scope of education. In other words, if a nurse practitioner is certified as an adult/gerontological NP, they cannot legally care for pediatric patients. The Family Nurse Practitioner is educated to work in a primary care role and as such, are not allowed to work in Emergency or Acute Care settings in many states without further certification.

What is a DNP? The DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice) is an earned degree. It is a terminal degree for nurses that want to practice in an advanced practice nursing role, teach, or provide leadership in various healthcare settings. There are various foci of DNP programs, and not all DNP programs prepare nurse practitioners.

What does Northwestern's BSN-to-DNP Program educate nurses to be? Northwestern recognized the need to educate family nurse practitioners to practice in the traditionally underserved rural areas.

Does Northwestern's BSN-to-DNP program educate nurses to be other kinds of nurse practitioners? At this time, Northwestern offers only the family nurse practitioner track.

Is Northwestern's BSN-to-DNP program an online program? Northwestern's program is a hybrid program – not an online program. The didactic content is delivered online, while the clinical practicums are completed with preceptors selected and supervised by the Program Faculty. Students are required to attend a 6-day residency session on the Alva campus before starting clinical courses. This is an intensive week of validating physical assessment skills, teaching common office procedures, interactive discussion about the role of the doctorally-prepared FNP, and exploring and discussing the legalities of practicing as an FNP.

What nursing background should I have to apply to the program? Students come into FNP programs with a variety of backgrounds. Being an FNP means that you will be an expert generalist; therefore, you need to know a little bit about a variety of nursing specialties. Students who have worked in the emergency department, urgent care, or in medical-surgical nursing seem to have the easiest transition into FNP practice. RNs who have worked in more specialized areas such as labor and delivery, surgery, or other specialties with a narrower scope of practice may find the program more challenging but not impossible. The only requirement to apply for admission to the program is clinical nursing practice within the last 5 years in any direct or indirect patient care environment. Faculty have noted that students with a minimum of 2-3 years of full time RN practice seem to transition into graduate FNP education easier than applicants who have less experience. So much of what we do as RNs provides a firm foundation for assessment, care planning, and communication with patients, so applicants who are new RN graduates without this base of practice sometimes struggle with course content

How do I become an FNP? There are two routes to accomplish this. For many years, FNPs were educated in Master's degree programs. In recent years, there has been a push to require the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree as the entry point into advanced practice nursing. The following links are worthwhile exploring to understand this evolution:

Why Pursue a DNP?

<https://www.nursepractitionerschools.com/faq/why-pursue-a-dnp-degree/>

DNP Fact Sheet

<https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Fact-Sheets/DNP-Fact-Sheet>

Entry to Nurse Practitioner Practice by 2025

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.nonpf.org/resource/resmgr/dnp/v3_05.2018_NONPF_DNP_Stateme.pdf

Other than nursing experience, what skills do I need to be successful in graduate school? *Reading, writing and time management skills are the 3 major keys to success!* You need to be able to read efficiently. In addition to the course texts, class work involves skimming through journal articles and other resources quickly to determine if they are worthwhile to use for course work.

You need to be able to write clearly and succinctly. You may have completed high school and college courses and received good grades on your writing. Doctoral-level writing is a different story, and you will be surprised to find that your previous writing skills are now being critiqued more harshly.

Time management is key to your success. This program is geared towards adult learners, meaning you will have to take the initiative to schedule the time you need to study, complete assignments, and take quizzes and tests on time. This can be a hard transition for those who are used to sitting in the traditional classroom. It is a good idea to speak with friends and colleagues who have been through a graduate level program to get some advice.

How much time am I expected to study? The traditional ratio is that for *every graduate credit hour* that you are taking, you will be studying 4 hours a week. Graduate courses are more difficult than baccalaureate courses! As a traditional graduate student, if you were taking a part-time load (6 credit hours or less), you would expect to be sitting in class 6 hours per week, and then studying about 24 hours per week. In the hybrid learning environment, you should expect to be engaged in your course work 30 hours a week. If you are enrolled full-time (9 credit hours), expect to be engaged in coursework approximately 42 hours per week. Most of the courses have quizzes and tests, and all of them have papers and other written assignments that take additional time to complete.

Can I go to graduate school and work full-time? This depends upon your social support system, your family, other life obligations, and the flexibility of your job. Starting a family, unexpected illness, change in work demands, and family emergencies have caused many graduate students to drop out of school. Sometimes it is just not the right time in your life to undertake such a big goal. This is one reason why time management is so important. There are students who have been successful juggling life's demands while working full-time and enrolled in school full-time, but some of our students who have started out working full-time and going to school full-time have pulled back to either part-time/prn work or part-time school.

Do we get any days off?

During the school year, there are a few days off you can plan on:

Fall breaks: 2 days off, then 2 days off for Thanksgiving

Spring break: 1 week

Typical between semester breaks:

4 weeks off between Fall and Spring semesters

3 weeks off between Spring and Summer semesters

3 weeks off between Summer and Fall semesters

What is the DNP Project? This is a scholarly Project that takes 4 semesters to complete. As a doctorally-prepared FNP, you are educated to be a leader in providing excellent primary care skills in clinic settings and to develop methods of improving patient outcomes. The DNP Project includes deciding on a topic, completing a needs assessment, forming a project team with faculty and other advisors, implementing and evaluating your project and its results, and presenting it as your final assignment before you complete the program. Here is a link to the description of the DNP Project:

<https://www.doctorofnursingpracticednp.org/capstone-project-guide/>

Can I make a lot of money as a nurse practitioner, and can I work anywhere? You can search advanced practice nurse salaries and the average salary varies by state. Remember that as an RN, you have most likely clocked in and clocked out on the job as a non-exempt employee. As an FNP, you are more likely to be salaried (exempt), or if you own your own clinic, you will be working as much as you need to support your clinic income. Just like any other salaried position, you will likely work in excess of 40 hours per week. Until recently, family nurse practitioners have been able to work in emergency departments and as hospitalists caring for inpatients. That is rapidly changing, and state boards of nursing are requiring additional education and certification (usually about 1 year) if you will be working in an acute care setting.

How can my family help? Sometimes, when students have been accepted into the program, families are enthusiastic and supportive at the beginning. Then, when more family and household responsibilities fall upon them, their enthusiasm decreases. On the other hand, some family members try to be extra supportive and try to get students to take a break and get their mind off things in the middle of the semester. As nice as that is, it will likely cause more stress on the student and make it harder to complete assignments and study. The time to have a candid discussion with your family is before you apply to a graduate program. This will help you decide if the time is right to proceed with your education and it will help your loved ones know what will and will not help you while you are completing your program.

Is the program accredited? Northwestern's BSN-to-DNP program has received a accreditation from the Commission for Collegiate Education in Nursing (CCNE) completed in November 2019. The report indicated that Northwestern's program met all the accreditation criteria and standards.

So why would I come to the NWOSU DNP Program? Our emphasis is on improving the health of rural communities. The skills you gain will translate into any urban, suburban, or rural practice setting. We have excellent preceptors and provide support for you in securing the preceptors. The didactic portion of each course is taught online, and we take pride in being interactive and available to students so that they do not feel lost in cyberspace. We are recognized for providing education in procedures and skills that many of our FNP preceptors were not exposed to in their programs. Many of the DNP faculty members engage in regular practice as APRNs (Nurse Practitioners or Clinical Nurse Specialists), so are well qualified to provide “real life” examples in teaching the content.

What if I want to become a family nurse practitioner now, and maybe return to get the DNP later?

All of the Family Nurse Practitioner programs in Oklahoma are now DNP-level programs. There are some programs in the nation that still grant a Master’s degree upon graduation; however, those are becoming less popular since the DNP is targeted to be the entry-level degree for nurse practitioners.

Northwestern was the first public university in Oklahoma to offer the BSN-to-DNP for Family Nurse Practitioners in 2017. We accept advanced standing students who have earned a Master of Science degree in Nursing (MSN) as a Family Nurse Practitioner. These are certified family nurse practitioners that have been practicing and decided to get the DNP degree. They can apply to the program, and the FNP core and clinical courses will be accepted towards the Northwestern BSN-to-DNP curriculum. Up to 9 additional credits of other Master’s level courses such as research, leadership, health policy, etc., may also transfer depending whether the content of the course is equivalent to the Northwestern course, AND the age of the course. The advanced standing student must also meet all the Northwestern program’s admission requirements. Once accepted into the program, advanced standing students typically have 2 semesters of clinical plus all the other doctoral courses to complete. All MSN transcripts for advanced standing students are evaluated on an individual basis.

Other nurses who have completed a MSN and are NOT certified as FNPs are required to complete the entire curriculum with a maximum of 9 credits from the previous MSN work applied. Transcripts are evaluated on an individual basis.

Faculty advisors are available for phone consultations upon request. Please email the DNP office (dnp@nwosu.edu) to request an appointment.