PhD in Nursing Program

Proposed Change: The PhD in Nursing Program will include a Faculty Advisor/Student Annual Review Period from March 1-31 of each year. Students will update their academic and professional accomplishments in the Project Concert database by March 1. The faculty advisor will  review student records and complete advisor sections (e.g., advising summary, rating of student progress, date of advising) in Project Concert by March 31, then foward to PhD Director to review and sign.

Rationale: The annual review is an opportunity for students to meet with their advisor to discuss their progress over the last academic year and plan their program of study for the next year. Project Concert is used by other graduate programs in the SON to document academic progress.

2. Proposed change: Remove admission criteria of US Registered Nurse license.

Rationale: Many schools in the US require only that international students have a post-secondary degree in Nursing equivalent to US BSN and be licensed as Registered Nurses or the equivalent in their country of origin. The current policy places UD SON in a noncompetitive position, regionally and nationally. Admitting PhD students without a US RN license will not violate any DE Board of Nursing regulations since the PhD is not a clinical/professional practice degree.

3. Proposed change: Nine of the 24 cognate (elective) credits required of BSN to PhD students will be dedicated to bridge coursework: NURS 813 Leadership & Innovation in Population Health, NURS 844 Population Healthcare Informatics, and NURS 881 Population Health I. These are existing graduate nursing courses.

Rationale: It is standard policy in many other PhD programs to either dictate specific foundational courses for their BSN to PhD students or require the student earn a Master’s degree in their program before beginning PhD coursework. The 3 selected courses will help level BSN-prepared with master's-prepared students in the PhD program.

4. Proposed change: To acquire interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, at least 6 credits of total cognate requirements must be taken in departments outside of nursing. Post-master’s students take at least 6 credits and post-BSN students take at least 9 credits of cognate coursework.

Rationale: The intent of requiring cognate coursework is to prepare PhD students to collaborate with scholars in other disciplines.

5. Proposed change: Students are required to complete 3 credits in a research practicum. One credit hour for 15 weeks of independent study represents 3-4 hours per week of supervised and/or independent practice, which computes to 45-60 hours/semester/credit hour. Students will register for NURS 892. Research practicum mentors may be, but are not required to be, UD SON faculty. Mentors must be doctorally-prepared.

Rationale: PhD students need an opportunity to participate in research activities of mentors who are actively conducting research.  A faculty-supervised research practicum allows students to hone research skills before conducting independent research.

6. Proposed change:Students who do not have significant experience teaching in an academic nursing program beyond adjunct clinical teaching are required to devote 3 cognate credits to an independent study teaching practicum. One credit hour for 15 weeks of independent study represents 3-4 hours per week of supervised and/or independent practice, which computes to 45-60 hours/semester/credit hour. Students will register for NURS 891: Teaching Practicum. Teaching practicum mentors may be, but are not required to be, UD SON faculty. Mentors must be doctorally-prepared.

Rationale: The American Association of Colleges of Nursing identify the art and science of teaching and learning as one of many core curricular elements of research-focused doctorate education. There is also an urgent need to increase the number of PhD-prepared faculty members in academe to develop the science, steward the discipline, and educate the next generation. Although our current curriculum includes a didactic course in nursing education, to retain learning, students need opportunities to make a connection with the concepts learned in the classroom and apply the learning in real-life.

7. Proposed change: The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is to evaluate the student’s 1) mastery of knowledge essential for conducting research and knowledge of specific substantive area, 2) ability to integrate and synthesize ideas across theoretical, methodological, and substantive areas, and 3) readiness to develop the dissertation research proposal. The Comprehensive Examination includes a written and oral component, distinct from the written and oral dissertation proposal defense. Satisfactory completion of the comprehensive exam is required before the dissertation proposal may be defended and the student admitted to candidacy.

The student’s faculty advisor (dissertation chair) will lead the Comprehensive Exam committee. Two members of the SON faculty who have agreed to serve on the student’s dissertation committee will also serve on the Comprehensive Exam committee. The student, with approval of their faculty advisor and committee members, selects one of the following formats for the written examination:  
1. Completion and submission of a research proposal for external funding;

2. Publishable scholarly paper, in the form of a concept analysis, research report, or state of the science paper related to the student’s substantive area;

3. Written answers to committee-developed questions that address theory and modes of inquiry, research methods, substantive area of interest, and proposed dissertation research area.

For both Options 1 and 2, most of one semester is permitted to write these documents. During the Comprehensive Exam semester, the student may seek advice from their faculty advisor about the process and timeline of completing the examination. Together, the student and faculty advisor will develop a schedule for submission and review of designated sections of either document. The schedule and specific deliverables will be documented on the Comprehensive Examination Contract (internal SON form).

Option 3: Traditional take-home exam. The Comprehensive Exam Chair and committee members prepare questions at the request of the chair. The Chair ensures the following areas are addressed in the questions: Nursing and healthcare theory analysis and development, research methods and analysis, and substantive/cognate area of interest. The faculty advisor is responsible for delivering the examination to the student at the agreed upon date and time as a Word document in either hard copy or email attachment. Upon receiving the exam questions, the student is provided an opportunity to clarify with their faculty advisor the intent of the questions. Following that initial clarification, the student must complete the exam without further discussion within **two weeks** of exam distribution.

The oral examination for all Comprehensive Examination formats must be scheduled within a four-week period following completion of the written examination. Faculty will have at least two weeks to read the written examination prior to the oral exam. The oral exam must be held prior to the last class day of the semester in which the student is enrolled.

The semester preceding the Comprehensive Exam semester:

• The student meets with their faculty advisor to plan the timing and format of the Comprehensive Exam.

• The faculty advisor will call the initial meeting of the committee to meet with the student to explore his or her level of preparedness.  The faculty advisor and committee members must approve the format of the Comprehensive Examination and the topic addressed for Options 1 and 2 above.

• The student may meet with the committee to review an outline and draft of the proposal or scholarly paper.

• The faculty advisor notifies the PhD Program Director of the format and schedule planned for the Comprehensive Exam.

Rationale: The revised Comprehensive Examination structure and process positions the SON to 1) remain current with process of other national and regional nursing PhD programs and, 2) offer students a useful deliverable (grant proposal or publishable manuscript), 3) align responsibility of assessing student readiness and scheduling exam belongs to those faculty who know the student best - the advisor/committee, and 4) optimize continuity for the student by having the exam committee be comprised of the same content and methods experts that will serve on the student’s dissertation committee.

New courses:

NURS891: Teaching Practicum

NURS892: Research Practicum