The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing

Qualifying Examination Procedures and Guidelines for DNP Students
(Revised 4/30/20)

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the qualifying exam (QE) is to ensure all Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) students are progressing in their ability to think critically, analyze, and synthesize content from the core areas of practice-based inquiry, theory, and leadership. This content is covered in courses listed below, depending on the student’s plan of study:

- NURS 778 Interpreting Research Reports
- NURS 874 Improving Quality, Safety, and Outcomes in Healthcare Systems
- NURS 921 Theoretical Principles of Evidence-Based Practice
- NURS 922 Critical Appraisal of Evidence
- NURS 941 Practice Inquiry Seminar I

All students must successfully complete courses from the list above specific to their plans of study before taking the QE. The Assistant Dean-MSN/DNP Program may exempt MSN-DNP students from NURS 778 upon successful completion of a comparable course in a prior graduate degree program (see Transfer policy in DNP Handbook).

Qualifying Exam Committee (QEC)

Responsibilities. The DNP Executive Committee (DNPEC) is responsible for writing the QE questions, and the QEC will administer the exam annually at the scheduled time as determined by the DNPEC. A set of general instructions developed for the QE will be provided to the students.

Constitution of the QE Committee. The QEC is comprised of at least three School of Nursing faculty members who hold status as Regular Graduate Faculty or hold a Special Appointment to the Graduate Faculty and meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Actively mentor DNP students as an academic advisor
- Serve as a DNP Project committee chair or member
- Actively engage in the DNP Program (e.g., serving on DNPEC, DNPAC, Committee Chair, teaching a DNP level course)

The size of the QEC will be evaluated annually. As student enrollment increases, the size of the QEC will increase to balance workload. The Committee will not include faculty who have taught NURS 921, 922, or 941 during the academic year in which the QE is administered.

The DNP Lead Faculty will serve as the QE Chair and will solicit faculty volunteers via e-mail to serve on the QE. The names of faculty volunteers who meet the above criteria will be presented to the DNPEC for informational purposes and will then be submitted in writing by the DNPEC Chair to the Assistant Dean-MSN/DNP Programs.
Should the pool of volunteers be inadequate, the DNPEC Chair will make personal appeals to individuals meeting the QEC criteria.

**QE Structure**

The QE is a written exam. All students will take a uniform QE and respond to a common set of exam questions that focus on broad concepts that can be applied to individual areas of interest. This approach provides a consistent assessment of students’ knowledge.

The QE will be offered annually at the end of the fall semester, at the conclusion of the first semester of full-time study for MSN to DNP students and conclusion of the third semester of study for BSN to DNP students and part-time MSN-DNP students. All students must be registered during the fall semester in which the examination is taken, in accordance with Graduate School policy.

Any student who encounters extenuating circumstances that would prevent them from taking the exam as scheduled may request an individualized plan developed by the QEC in collaboration with the Chair of the QEC and the Assistant Dean-MSN/DNP Programs.

A grading rubric developed by the QEC and approved by the DNPEC, will be used to ensure consistent evaluation of exams for all students. This grading rubric will be made available to students at the time of the exam.

**Administration of QE**

- Early in the fall semester, the DNP Lead Faculty/QE Chair will discuss the policies and procedures for the QE with all eligible students. Documents (3) describing the QE Policy, general instructions, sample title page, and study guide will be made available to DNP students on the Sakai site.
- The DNP Lead Faculty/QE Chair will post the QE and Grading Rubric to all students through the secure Sakai site, and/or provide a hard copy to students who request one in writing.
- The QE exam will be released at 5:00 pm during the final two exam days of the fall semester. Students will have **two days (48 hours)** from the time the QE is released to complete the examination and submit their responses.
- Exams will be blinded with regard to student names; students will submit their QE using their PID as identification. The DNP Division Manager will submit the blinded QE to the QEC by noon on the first business day following the closing of the exam.
- The QEC will grade and submit their responses to the DNP Lead Faculty/QE Chair through Sakai within 5 working days following receipt of the blinded QEs from the Division Manager.
- Three QEC members will read each student’s response to questions and rate each response as “Pass” or “Unsatisfactory”. Each student response to the three QE questions must receive a rating of “Pass” from two of the three QE Committee reviewers in order to pass the QE.
- Students who receive a “Pass” on all three QE questions will pass the QE. If one of the three questions is unsatisfactory (did not meet expectations), the student will have the option to rewrite and resubmit the question within 48 hours from the time of notification. Students with two or more questions rated as unsatisfactory will fail the exam.
• As soon as grading is complete, the DNP Lead Faculty as QE Chair will submit the results for each individual student to the Assistant Dean-MSN/DNP Programs. The Assistant Dean, or a designee, will email the results of the QE to students. Students will be informed of their results prior to the first class day of the spring semester.
• If a student is required to rewrite a question, a 48-hour exam time will begin at 5 pm of the day the student receives email notification that a rewrite is required. The re-written question will be graded by the QEC members who requested the re-write. For the student to pass the re-write, they must receive a rating of “Pass” from two of the three QEC members. A student’s Project Chair or Primary Advisor is not allowed to assist the student with the rewritten submission.

Re-taking the QE

If a student fails the QE, the grading rubrics with reviewer comments will be emailed to the student and copies placed in the student’s file in OAA. Students are strongly encouraged to share a copy of the exam and grading rubrics with reviewer responses with their DNP Project Chair or in the absence of the Chair, the academic advisor.

A student may not re-take the examination a second time until at least three months after the first attempt according to Graduate School policy.

• Students who retake the QE a second time in the subsequent spring semester will be allowed to enroll in courses during the spring semester only.
• Students will not be able to enroll in courses in the summer semester following a failed QE until they pass the exam.
• The re-take QE will be graded by the QEC members using the procedures outlined above.
• The QEC members will complete grading the re-take two weeks after the receipt of students’ exam response, and students’ final grade will be submitted to the Assistant Dean-MSN/DNP by the Committee Chair.
• The Assistant Dean-MSN/DNP will immediately notify students and their advisors by email regarding the student’s performance on the re-take QE.
• Students who fail the re-take QE will be academically ineligible to continue in the DNP program.
• Those students who seek reinstatement into the DNP program must follow the procedures in accordance with the Graduate School Handbook.

Students who do not retake the QE at the end of the three-month period (March) are ineligible to retake the exam until the next formal exam period (December). If they have registered for N994 during the spring semester, but do not re-take the exam at the end of the three-month period, they will be required to drop N994. Students will not be able to progress to N994 until they have passed the QE.