PHILOSOPHY OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

The Master of Science in Nursing degree program prepares the graduate to assume advanced nursing roles in education, administration and informatics. The graduate applies acquired knowledge and skills in a variety of healthcare-related settings. The graduate has proficiency in systematic inquiry and use of evidence-based knowledge that will support contributions to society and the profession of nursing. This program provides a foundation for doctoral study, life-long learning and continued scholarship.

MSN PROGRAM OUTCOMES:

1. Synthesize knowledge and concepts from nursing and related disciplines as a foundation for advanced nursing roles.

2. Facilitate evolving leadership roles utilizing effective decision making that promotes quality nursing practice.

3. Integrate verbal, written and technological communication in implementing advanced nursing roles in the healthcare environment.

4. Utilize critical inquiry and judgment to evaluate the design, implementation and outcomes of strategies developed for learning and healthcare systems.

5. Exemplify professional values, scholarship, service and global awareness that support professional and personal development.

6. Incorporate human caring and legal and ethical principles within the concepts of person, health, environment and nursing for the benefit of society and the profession of nursing.

7. Advocate for healthcare policy to meet the needs of a diverse society in a changing healthcare environment.

8. Manage human and physical resources in a fiscally responsible manner to support effective decision making.

9. Contribute to the body of nursing knowledge through participation in systematic inquiry, utilization of evidence-based practice and dissemination of findings to support innovative change.
MENTOR ROLE INTRODUCTION

Knowledge, attitudes and skills are foundational to developing competence in any professional. As a mentor, you have a unique opportunity to share your knowledge, attitudes and skills with a fellow nurse who has limited experience in your area. As the mentor, you are the expert and have the opportunity to facilitate someone learning about your professional practice setting.

Being a mentor refers to establishing a one-on-one professional relationship between a clinically-skilled individual and a novice (Ferguson, 1996). Mentoring implies a relationship between one who is an expert and another who looks to the expert for knowledge, consultation and advocacy (Sword et al. 2022). By being a role model, socializer and educator (Alspach, 2000) the mentor assists the student to acquire professional skills in a time-limited relationship. Since nursing is a practice-based profession, the student is able to increase competence and confidence in practicum skills, decision making and application of knowledge in a specific practicum setting.

The mentor serves as a role model for the student. A role model allows the student to see and experience what you, the expert, do on a daily basis while encouraging the student to ask questions. The mentor challenges, guides and directs. Fundamental to this process is the mentor’s willingness to share professional values, beliefs and skills while incorporating legal, ethical and professional practice standards. While your student is a professional nurse, he/she is new or unfamiliar with your practice area. This is your opportunity to share your knowledge.

Your willingness to share your knowledge and skills — to let someone see and experience nursing through your eyes, hands and mind — is of the utmost importance. You will practice nursing as your student is watching, participating and learning. While the idea of someone watching can make you nervous, remember that you are the expert and the student is learning. So relax, teach the learner what you know.

As a guide in this practicum setting, you allow the student to learn under your supervision. You and the student decide on the specific practicum experiences selected to meet learning objectives. Graduate students develop their Learning Contract, with specified outcomes and methods to achieve these outcomes. Remember, the student is under your guidance or supervision, so work closely together while providing interesting and challenging opportunities. Attendance at a continuing education program or professional organization meeting related to the practicum setting may also be counted as practicum experience. The student’s instructor will collaborate with you and the student to develop learning objectives and a practicum project. The instructor gives final approval.

Lastly, the mentor needs to recall that the student is an adult learner and is motivated by professional and personal attributes. While the learner may be experiencing some anxiety and uncertainty, he/she is there to learn. By facilitating the adult learner, the energy of the student is released.

Knowles (1990) identified the characteristics of an adult learner. These are briefly summarized in the following statements.

- Adults prefer to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it
- Adults will invest considerable energy to something that they want to learn and perceived value in learning
- Adult learners wish to be treated with respect
- Adults are capable of self direction
- Adults bring with them a volume of past experiences with learning — these experiences can be positive or serve as a barrier
- Adults want to learn materials that have practical application they want to learn in real-life situations

With these characteristics, it becomes useful to review some helpful teaching methods for adult learners. You already know many of these methods from personal and professional experiences. There is no one way or method to teach practicum skills, but rather, it is a process of choosing from a repertoire of methods depending on the learner and practice setting.

It is important that the instructional methods involve active participation in learning. The following outlines possible teaching methods:

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Since nursing is a practice discipline, experience is the most common method of learning. It provides for direct experience that may include client management, education and varied healthcare organizations and environments, but also interaction with other disciplines. While the graduate student may never professionally work in this practicum practice setting, thinking processes are developed as the individual confronts unfamiliar situations.

When considering the practicum assignments for the learner, you, the mentor, should consider: the student’s learning goals, practicum preparation and your ability to provide adequate supervision. Always look for “windows of opportunity” to meet the student’s priority learning needs as well as infrequent events that broaden the student’s experience. Activities to supplement experiential learning include having the student read journals specific to the practicum setting, develop support tools and evaluate resolution of issues encountered in the setting. It is possible to involve other staff members in these instructional activities.
Another method of experiential learning involves written assignments. As a mentor, you are not required to grade this work, but you may be asked to provide an appropriate practicum experience that serves as the basis of the written work.

Often with experiential learning, a diary or learning log/journal is kept by the student. Generally this involves the student recording thoughts about one’s practicum experience. In addition, the student may be required to respond to questions identified by the course faculty. If a learning log is part of the course, it will be evaluated by course faculty.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving is a teaching method that allows the learner to analyze a practicum situation in depth. Problem solving is often initiated by having students clearly explain the specific problem, consider multiple interventions while applying practicum knowledge and then make a decision recognizing their own beliefs and values. It is helpful to have students distinguish between facts, assumptions and inferences. Gaps in the needed information should be identified.

CONFERENCE

A conference is a discussion frequently involving multiple persons. Once again, problem solving is encouraged as well as the development of communication and group process skills. Problem solving, time management and knowledge application are all possible areas for conference topics. Conferences can be discussion that occurs in a relaxed atmosphere.

OBSERVATION

Observation allows students to experience an area on a short-term basis. At times, the experience can be a participatory observation where the learner contributes by performing some limited activities. Observation allows students to view interaction in a professional role. It is important to have students express their thoughts before the experience and then after the experience to identify any changes in perception.

Tools to help make all of these suggested teaching methods work include:

• Asking questions
• Answering questions
• Facilitating discussion
• Demonstrating new or unfamiliar procedures
• Providing feedback
One very specific area in which the mentor will participate is discussion with course faculty about the student’s learning experiences. Informal feedback to the student is also encouraged.

Feedback should be:

- **Specific rather than general**
- **Factual rather than opinionated**
- **Descriptive rather than judgmental (Alspach, 2000)**

In addition, feedback should be provided in a timely and appropriate manner. Recall that the message sent isn’t always the one received; therefore, clarity and completeness is important. The purpose of feedback is always to improve and not to destroy. Negative feedback given constructively can improve the knowledge, attitude and skills of the student.

**Remember, as a practicum mentor, you:**

- Are responsible for guiding the learning experience of the student
- Develop a clear and specific plan of what aspects of the role you expect the student to assume
- Continuously communicate with the learner
- Provide informal feedback to the student

Toward the end of the practicum experience, the student will have the opportunity to evaluate the experience and complete a mentor evaluation form. These are submitted to the course faculty who will share the results with you. There will also be a mentor survey for you to complete evaluating the practicum experience and the student. These are submitted to the practicum coordinator.

**REFERENCES**


MENTOR GUIDELINES

Chamberlain College of Nursing defines mentors as qualified individuals who work one-on-one with graduate students in a focus area to promote attainment of student learning objectives. Mentors are currently licensed, master’s in nursing prepared, registered nurses who have at least five years of experience, three of which must be in the area of practicum specialty for which the mentor is used. Mentors are not responsible for evaluation of student performance.

Mentors are utilized in culminating practicum courses in the graduate program and serve as role models, guides and/or direct supervisors of students in the focus area. Mentors do not replace faculty, but work closely with faculty in facilitating student success. The faculty maintain the responsibility for final student evaluation.

Course faculty are responsible for developing guidelines specific to the practicum for mentor use. In order to be consistent with mentor policy and provide clarification of roles, the following responsibilities are identified:

COURSE FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Assume responsibility for the overall coordination of the student’s practicum experience
- Discuss with agency personnel the coordination of the practicum experiences
- Provide the mentor with course outcomes and directions on how to assist students in meeting these outcomes
- Maintain communication between practicum mentor and student
- Be available to practicum mentors to discuss any issues that may arise
- Counsel with practicum mentor and student during the course
- Meet with the student and mentor to discuss student’s progress and exchange ideas and/or suggestions to better achieve outcomes. These meetings will occur by telephone, chat room and/or email exchanges.
- Provide the student with the opportunity to evaluate the practicum experience
- Discuss with mentor any information from student concerning ways to improve the practicum experience for future students
- Provide the final student evaluation and assignment of performance rating or grade, incorporating data from discussions with the student and mentor and written materials submitted by the student

PRACTICUM COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Make contact with agency and confirm all needed compliance forms
- Confirm compliance is in place between the site and the student prior to practicum
- Make contact with mentor providing course syllabus, mentor manual, practicum handbook for reference and contact information of faculty and practicum coordinator
- Be a conduit if mentor changes are requested
- Follow up with mentors, students and faculty as to overall practicum experience upon the completion of the term
PRACTICUM MENTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

• Orient student to the practicum setting including identification of facility policies and procedures
• Serve as a role model as a practitioner, teacher and mentor
• Supervise the student in the practicum practice setting
• Provide suggestions that will assist and improve the student’s ability to meet learning contract outcomes
• Contact course faculty member concerning any issues that may arise

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

• Adhere to all practicum facility policies and procedures
• Adhere to all Chamberlain policies and procedures identified in the Chamberlain Academic Catalog and/or Student Handbook (failure to exhibit integrity, ethical conduct or professional standards may warrant dismissal from Chamberlain).
• Collaborate with course faculty and practicum mentor concerning learning goals for this practicum experience
• Comply with health and other professional requirements of the practicum facility prior to the start of the practicum experience
• Dress in a professional manner consistent with practicum facility guidelines
• Be prepared to work in the practicum setting in a manner that demonstrates professional standards
• Attend all established practicum days or notify practicum mentor of absence and establish practicum make-up experience

BENEFITS TO AGENCY

1. Provides opportunities for challenging growth experiences of mentors.
2. Promotes consensus in service/education’s perceptions of the graduate nurse competencies.
3. Provides opportunity to collaborate on issues of mutual concern.
4. Promotes positive recognition of staff members’ accomplishments.
5. Provides for recruitment for staff nurse positions.

BENEFITS TO NURSING EDUCATION

1. Enhances relationships between the College and agency.
2. Facilitates recruitment of nurses to return to further their education.
3. Broadens student’s experiences in the community.
4. Prepares graduates more realistically for an advanced role in nursing practice.
5. Promotes new learning for faculty as they help students and mentors grow professionally.