This course supports the assessments for DHT2. The course represents 3 competency units.

**Introduction**

Welcome to the MSN Written Capstone. This course of study will provide you with an overview of the tasks found in the Written Capstone Course and guide you through the task submission process. It is designed to be completed in 16 weeks (4 months). If you have any questions, please visit the Graduate Nursing Capstone Community. The course community provides many valuable learning resources and allows you to interact with the Course Instructor Team if you have additional questions. You may also seek additional guidance from your assigned Capstone Course Instructor—you will have the same Course Instructor for the MSN Written Capstone course and the Multimedia Presentation course that follows.

In this capstone course, you are required to write academically at the graduate level. You will be required to adhere to the most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) and articulation standards around the capstone. Your research study and written report is the culmination of your graduate degree program. When archived, your capstone paper will become viewable to other students, faculty, administrators, and accreditors; therefore, it should represent your best scholarly writing. To meet the articulation and APA standards, please refer to the following instructions: [APA Student Guidelines](#)

Work in the capstone course is sequential, with each task building on the previous task(s). All capstone tasks must be submitted to Taskstream in order and one at a time. If a task is submitted out of order, it will be returned to you without an evaluation being provided until the previous task is evaluated and released as a pass.

**Preparing for Success**

The information in this section details the resources available for you to use as you complete this course. The course is designed in a weekly paced format that permits you to work through the readings and assignments for the week. The content for each week is foundational and will help you build knowledge in preparation for the assessment. You are encouraged to work through each week and remain on task in an effort to complete the course in a timely fashion.

**Learning Resources**

The learning resources listed in this section are required to complete the activities in this course. For many resources, WGU has provided automatic access through the course. However, you may need to manually enroll in or independently acquire other resources. Read the full instructions provided to ensure that you have access to all of your resources in a timely manner.

**Automatically Enrolled Learning Resources**

You will be automatically enrolled at the activity level for the following learning resources. Simply click on the links provided in the activities to access the learning materia

The Written Capstone

The topics in this course will guide you through the process of writing and submitting your capstone.

Weeks 1-4, Task 1, Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Problem

This task is the first of six tasks comprising the capstone written assessment. In this task, you will briefly identify your research topic, explain the problem associated with your topic that you intend to investigate, identify the purpose of your study, describe the participants in your study, and state your research question(s). You will then describe the setting for your study, the instruments you will use to collect data, and the procedure you will use to collect the data. Finally, you will briefly describe how you will analyze the data you plan to collect. This task will need to be passed before you move forward with the remaining capstone tasks.

Note: You will need to include 25 – 30 sources/articles to support your literature review. Also, you will need additional sources to support development of Chapter 1. Sources should include scholarly articles from reputable sources, including peer reviewed journals and publications published within the past five years, and websites from professional organizations or governmental web sites (American Nurses Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Census Bureau).

Research Fundamentals:

Research is the systematic collection and analysis of information (data). You must carefully plan and organize your research before it is conducted. The information or data that you collect and analyze may be numeric (quantitative) or non-numeric (qualitative). Regardless of the research method (quantitative or qualitative), the purpose of research is to describe, explain, or predict a phenomenon of interest and generalize the findings to other situations.

Topic Selection:

The topic you select will provide the foundation for your capstone research proposal and your completed research study. To ensure an appropriately focused capstone research study, your capstone research topic should be:

- Feasible (ensure your study is consistent with capstone course competencies and timeframes)
- Related to a problem in your specific area that is meaningful to you
- Measurable
- Manageable (not too broad or too narrow)
- Relevant to your program goals (Leadership & Management vs. Nursing Education track)
- Relevant to the facility or facilities that will be supporting your study (if conducting your study in a facility).

Researcher Bias:

The description of the research topic and proposed study should identify potential bias and steps taken to address bias concerns. Potential areas of bias might include your relationship
Research Problem:

You will need to provide an explanation of the problem associated with your research topic. This will include the following:

- Provide a broad discussion of the scope (overview) of the problem.
  
  Example:
  Nurse turnover is a global concern that is both costly for health-care organizations and, in the context of the work environment, affects quality and safety (in-text citation).

- Discuss what is known about the problem (the background information).
  
  Example:
  Nurse turnover is disruptive to patient care delivery (in-text citation), jeopardizes patient safety (in-text citation), and results in decreased staff productivity and additional training costs (in-text citations).

- Discuss factors that contribute to the problem (i.e., causes of the problem) – include at least 3 factors.
  
  Example:
  Nurse turnover has been attributed to poor relationships between nurse managers and staff nurses (in-text citation), rotating shift requirements (in-text citation), and inequitable salary and benefit structures (in-text citation).

- Discuss possible solutions to the problem as proposed by other researchers – include at least 3 possible solutions.
  
  Example:
  Graduated salary structures, flexible time off, and onsite child care have had limited impact on decreasing nurse turnover rates in specific circumstances (in-text citation).

- Discuss what you propose as a possible solution to the problem.
  
  Example:
  Formalized nurse mentoring programs (in-text citation) and extended preceptor experiences (in-text citation) have demonstrated the most promise in decreasing nurse turnover rates.

Research Purpose:

You will need to have a clear understanding of what you hope to accomplish with your research study. Your purpose statement ties your topic, problem, and research method (approach) into clear focus for your reader.

Example:
The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that contribute to job turnover for nurses
working in a neonatal intensive care unit.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between a formal mentoring program and nurse job turnover for nurses working in a neonatal intensive care unit.

**Research Question(s):**

You will need to identify *at least one* methodologically congruent research question. Methodological congruence means the research question is consistent with the topic and problem identified and the method you will use to evaluate or measure the problem.

**Example:**

**Problem:** High nurse turnover rates generate higher operating costs for hospitals in the United States (in-text citation).

**Research Purpose:** Examine the factors that contribute to job turnover in nurses

**Research Question:** What are the perceptions of nurses around the factors that contribute to nursing job turnover?

**Research Method:**

- Quantitative approach: Measure factors that contribute to nurse turnover using an existing scale with high validity and reliability.

- Qualitative approach: Describe factors that contribute to nurse turnover by using a semi-structured interview guide of open ended questions to summarize what nurses perceive to contribute to turnover (decision to terminate employment).

**Research Setting:**

You will need to describe the setting for your proposed study, including where you will collect your data. Begin by providing a description of the facility where your study will be conducted.

**Example:** Acute care, long term care, community clinic, or university

- Describe the specific department or unit if appropriate
- Describe the study participants (patients or clients) characteristics (age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.).

**Study setting:**

**Location:** Acute care hospital in the Midwest  
**Facility:** 200 bed acute care hospital  
**Unit:** Level III Neonatal Intensive Care  
**Participants:** Registered nurses of varying education, age, gender, and ethnic backgrounds

**Research Instruments (Tools):**
You will also provide a detailed description of the instruments/tools you will use to collect the data to answer your research question(s). The discussion will include a description of your participant demographic survey and qualitative and/or quantitative data collection instruments. Instruments (tools) include, but are not limited to the following: surveys, questionnaires, interview guides, performance tasks, observation checklists, focus group protocols, pretests, and posttests. Each instrument will be included as an appendix at the end of your completed Task accordance with the MSN Capstone Template.

**Data Collection Plan:**

You will need to identify how you will collect your data. This includes a complete description of the procedure you will follow to collect the data. Your description should include a step by step discussion of the process that you will use to collect data.

You will also discuss the permissions required to conduct the study (organization approval, WGU IRB approval, external IRB as applicable, and participant informed consent form).

When you discuss where and how the data will be collected you should also describe how you will access participants (sampling techniques) and preserve their anonymity (ethical considerations for research involving human subjects).

Specifically, you will describe how you will:

- Obtain informed consent from the participants
- Distribute the data collection tool to participants
- Collect the completed data collection tool
- Preserve the integrity (maintain confidentiality and secure storage) of data and informed consents in both hard copy and electronic forms such as secure log-in accounts, and password protected electronic files

There are special considerations for using online surveys. When using an online survey you must describe how you will:

- Obtain informed consent from the participants
- Distribute the online survey link
- Preserve participant anonymity
- Preserve, organize, and download the data

Preserve the integrity (maintain confidentiality and secure storage) of data and informed consents in both hard copy and electronic forms such as secure log-in accounts, and password protected electronic files.

**Data Analysis Plan:**

The final step in completing Chapter 1 involves providing a description of your data analysis plan. For this section, you will need to describe how you will analyze your collected data. Recall, your data includes two components: Participant demographics and study data that serve
to answer your research question(s). You will need to describe in detail how you plan to analyze each set of data. This includes the type of data analysis that will be used.

Quantitative Studies:

For quantitative studies, you will want to include a description of how you will analyze the following data:

Participant Demographics:

- Descriptive statistics
- Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) when describing the study sample

Study Data:

- Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) when reporting scores or survey results
- Statistical tests that will be used, if applicable (Pearson’s Correlation, Student’s t-test, Reliability
- Software that will be used to organize and analyze data

Qualitative Studies:

For qualitative studies, you will want to include a description of how you will analyze the following data:

Participant Demographics:

- Descriptive statistics
- Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) when describing the study sample

Study Data:

- Identify the qualitative approach that you plan to use (i.e., historical, descriptive qualitative ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, or narrative)
- Describe your plan for developing summaries and identifying themes, categories, or patterns that will emerge from the qualitative data.

Note: For mixed method studies, you will analyze the data as described above. Identify the quantitative statistics and qualitative approaches that you plan to use to analyze data and to answer the research question(s).

Week 5-7, Task 2, Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A literature review is a summary and interpretation of the literature on your topic. It is
comprehensive survey of publications in your field of interest. Your literature review should be a survey of what others have already done or have discovered about your topic.

A review of literature is done for several reasons:

- to learn more about your topic if you are not a subject-matter expert
- to find out what other researchers have learned about your topic
- to modify or adjust your research proposal based on what has been learned from others
- to learn more about how others have tried to solve a problem you may have identified
- to review current trends and issues

As part of your review of the literature, you will need to summarize research that describes the best practices for your capstone topic. Be sure to examine systematic reviews and or evidence based practice guidelines that may exist around your topic of interest and study problem.

Note: You will need to include 25 – 30 sources/articles to support your literature review. Sources should include scholarly articles from reputable sources, including peer reviewed journals and publications published within the past five years, and websites from professional organizations or governmental web sites (American Nurses Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Census Bureau).

Weeks 8-9, Task 3, Chapter 3 - Methodology
Research Methods:

There are various options related to the research methods that can be used to conduct your capstone research study. You may choose to do quantitative research, qualitative research, or a mixed-methods approaches.

Quantitative research is used to describe a phenomenon using numbers or quantification, uncovering and examining relationships, and exploring cause and effect. It is designed to produce accurate and reliable measurements through the use of statistics. Such research should be used when you want to profile a group of people based on shared characteristics (nurses who decide to terminate employment – nursing turnover).

Qualitative research should be used when you want to examine why an individual or a group acts, thinks, or feels in a particular manner. This type of research is used to discover meaning generated through words, rather than cause and effect that can be objectively measured. It is also used to identify the full range of verbal responses around a phenomenon of interest that exists within a given population. Engaging in qualitative research can help a researcher identify issues and understand why the issues are important. Typically, qualitative studies include in-depth interviews or focus groups of nurse educators, nurse administrators, staff nurses, patients or students.

Mixed methods research is an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods. By combining both forms of research approach, the overall strength of a study is greater than if either form is used alone. A mixed method approach might include
collecting quantitative data on a particular curriculum project and also collecting qualitative data through journals, nurse leader observations or nurse educator interviews.

**Research Instruments (Tools):**

This section involves a more detailed description of the instruments (tools) you will use to collect the data to answer your research question(s), including the patient demographic survey and qualitative and/or quantitative data collection instruments that will be used.

You should clearly indicate whether you will be using an existing instrument or an investigator developed instrument (a survey or quiz that you develop). An existing instrument is one that has been developed by an expert researcher using highly specific instrument development techniques and requirements, and tested in multiple studies to ensure validity and reliability. If you elect to use an existing instrument, you will need to obtain permission from the author to use the instrument, unless the instrument is available in the public domain.

Investigator developed instruments (survey or quiz that you create) are certainly acceptable for use in your capstone study. However, investigator developed instruments will not have documented validity or reliability, which greatly diminishes generalizability of the research findings.

When addressing the instrument reliability and validity, you will want to consider the following:

**Reliability:**

Reliability refers to the extent to which the instrument (tool) or the data being collected consistently measures the topic of interest and will answer the research question. Another key consideration is whether the tool is understandable.

Reliability of an investigator developed tool cannot be confirmed within the scope of the capstone course. Therefore, you should indicate that establishing reliability of an investigator developed instrument is beyond the scope of this capstone project.

**Validity:**

Validity refers to the degree to which the survey or data being collected measures what it is intended to measure. A valid instrument will provide data required to answer your research question(s).

Issues to consider around the face validity of investigator developed instruments include:

- How will the survey questions be generated?
- How will you confirm the understandability of the questions prior to distributing the survey to your participants?

For example: To ensure content or face validity, you should have content experts review your instrument. This process should be described in detail.
Note: You will need to include a copy of each instrument that you will use as an appendix at the end of your completed Task.

Data Integrity:

For this section, you will need to discuss the measures or precautions that will be taken to ensure the security and integrity of the data that is collected. This will include a discussion about how the data will be stored during the study (hard copy and electronic) and how access to the data will be limited.

Research Methods:

You will need to provide an explicit re-statement of your research methods and provide an explanation of why you are adopting these research methods.

You will also need to provide a detailed discussion around the research design that you will be using (descriptive quantitative, descriptive qualitative, one group only pretest-posttest, or correlation).

Ethical Considerations:

You will also need to discuss how you will be working with the participants in your study. If your study will include human subject participants, you should describe your anticipated sample characteristics (nurses working in a neonatal intensive care unit). Also be sure to include an explicit description of how you plan to protect and ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of your study participants.

Required Permissions:

Finally, you will need to describe the process that you will use to obtain any needed permissions. This should include, but not be limited to obtaining organization approval, WGU IRB approval, and how you will obtain or address obtaining informed consent from your study participants.

Week 10-11, Task 4, Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application

In this Task, you will address the issue of human subjects in research. This includes completing an “Informed Consent Form,” which is available in Taskstream. The IRB Form explains how your research will address and manage issues concerning human subjects.

In this Task, you will submit the following four required documents, which are available in Taskstream:

- Include a completed “Informed Consent Form”.

  Indicate if you will obtain participant signatures on the informed consent or whether the participants will provide implied consent in an electronic platform. If an electronic implied consent form will be obtained, remove the signature line and add, "Click here" to take survey option (stating clicking here and taking survey implies consent).

  For example the consent statement will read:
By clicking “Next” you are agreeing that you have read the above information and that you are voluntarily participating in this research study. If you do not wish to participate, please close this window.

Complete all sections of the informed consent form specific to the proposed study. Clearly list possible benefits to the study participants as well as state that there may be no direct benefit to the study participants. Also, informed consent needs to address risks (if any) or state that there are no foreseeable risks as a result of participating in this study.

- Include a completed “Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application Worksheet”.

Address all of the numbered items without removing the question headings.

*Note: Remember to disclose and discuss your relationship with study participants, if applicable. Also, remember to state clearly if you are using a SurveyMonkey® to recruit participants.*

- Include a completed “Organization Study Approval Letter”.

Requirements for the organization approval letter include:
- Letter must be on official organization letterhead
- Letter must have an original ink signature
- Letter must be signed by someone with the authority to approve research within the organization
- Letter must clearly state name and contact information of the person signing the letter
- Upload a photocopy of the letter with the organization representative’s signature
- Also include any external organization IRB documentation (as applicable)

- Include a certificate of completion of a Human Subject Protection Training course from the National Institutes of Health Protection of Human Subjects Training Course (NIH certificate) or the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI certificate). You will need to upload a photo copy of the training certificate that includes your signature.

**Week 12, Data Collection**

You may begin your data collection only after receiving written WGU IRB approval (successful completion of Task 4) and external IRB approval (as applicable).

**Weeks 13-14, Task 5, Chapter 4 - Data Analysis**

When submitting Task 5 you will need to ensure your entire manuscript is written in the past tense. You will need to revise Chapter 1, 2, and 3 and convert those Chapters to the past tense.

**Data Analysis:**

This section involves the thoughtful and methodical examination of the data that you collected during your study. Specifically, you will need to describe how you analyzed the data you collected. Recall, you will have at least two sets of data, including:
participant demographics
study data used to answer your research question(s)

You will need to describe in detail how you analyzed each set of data. This includes the type of data analysis that you used.

Quantitative Studies:
For quantitative studies, you need to include a description of the following:

Participant Demographics:

- Descriptive statistics that you used
- Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) you used to describe the study sample

You will need to provide a summary of your sample using descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency.

Example:
The sample was comprised of 21 female and eight male nurses. The education level of the nurses included 12 BSN (41%) and 17 ADN (59%) prepared nurses. Ages of the nurses ranged from 19 to 63 years of age, with a mean age of 32 years.

Study Data:
You will need to provide a summary of your study data using measures of central tendency and other statistical tests, based on the study design that was used.

- Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) when reporting scores or survey results
- Statistical tests that were used, if applicable (Pearson’s Correlation, Student’s t-test, Cronbach Alpha Reliability Estimate)

Qualitative Studies:

For qualitative studies, you will need to include a description of how you analyzed the following data:

Participant Demographics:

- Descriptive statistics
- Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) when describing the study sample

You will need to provide a summary of your sample using descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency.
Example:
The sample was comprised of 21 female and eight male nurses. The education level of the nurses included 12 BSN (41%) and 17 (59%) ADN nurses. Ages of the nurses ranged from 19 to 63 years of age, with a mean age of 32 years.

Study Data:

- Identify the qualitative approach that you used (i.e., historical, descriptive qualitative ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, or narrative)
- Describe how you developed your summaries and identifying themes, categories, or patterns from the information you obtained from your participants.

For mixed method studies:
As described above, identify the quantitative statistics and qualitative approaches that you used to analyze data and to answer the research question(s).

You will need to include data tables and charts (visual aids) that show actual analysis of data and discuss how the data answers each of the research question(s).

For clarity, and to enhance the reader’s understanding, you will need to provide an introductory and explanatory discussion immediately preceding every table or figure. Your explanation should include the results of any statistical tests or a complete discussion of your qualitative findings (summaries, themes or patterns that emerged from the data).

Each table or figure should be titled and labeled appropriately.

Example:
Table 1

Participant demographics

You will also need to provide specific and explicit information about how the findings generated from the data answered your research question(s). An important issue to address is whether your data was able to answer your research question(s). If not, why not?

References:

Finally, you will need to provide a complete list of references that were used to conduct your study, (include all sources cited in your paper) using APA style.

Week 15-16, Task 6, Chapter 5 - Result and Conclusions
Task 6 provides a general discussion of your capstone study that moves beyond the data presentation and provides you with an opportunity to describe or interpret what the results indicate. Specifically, you will create Chapter 5, which will discuss the results and conclusions of your capstone research study. This task must be written in past tense.

Study Overview:
You will need to provide an overview of the study that is a restatement of the general purpose and briefly describes how the results were obtained.

You will also provide a brief summary of the findings of your study by describing what the results suggest based on the data.

**Study Implications:**

You will need to discuss implications and limitations of your study by doing the following:

- discuss strengths of your study
- discuss weaknesses of your study
- discuss problems you noted with your study
- discuss any factors that may have skewed or influenced your study findings (researcher’s bias, researcher’s relationship with the participants, etc.)

**Study Improvements:**

You will need to discuss how your study could be improved if you or another researcher elected to replicate your study.

- Recommend areas of your topic that could be further investigated.
- Explain what you would do differently if you or another researcher were to conduct the study again in the future.

**Reflection:**

You will need to critique your master’s degree experience by reflecting upon the experience and how the experience and the skills you have gained can or will be applied in your work environment.

**References:**

As you put the finishing touches on your capstone report, you will finalize your reference list, which should include all the sources you cited in your capstone report. The same expectations around scholarly writing and APA style apply to the final capstone report. Look for errors in grammar, spelling, and style. Specifically, make sure to follow the most current edition of APA style guidelines, including in-text citations and reference list.

**Appendices:**

You will need to include appendices for your final capstone report, including the following:

- materials and exhibits important to the study that are referenced or described in the report
- data-gathering instruments (e.g., surveys, questionnaires)
- copies of permissions received to conduct the study
  - organization approval letter
  - WGU IRB approval letter
  - your informed consent form
Abstract:

Create an abstract (no more than 250 words) that is self-contained and concise by doing the following:

- Discuss the problem that led to your research question.
- Describe the participants.
- Discuss the research methods used to collect and analyze your data.
- Summarize the study results (result of data analysis).
- Provide a summary of study recommendations and conclusions.

The Capstone Archives

Western Governors University (WGU) has developed Capstone Archives to display final Capstone written work and presentations. When WGU archives your final Capstone documents, these documents will be made available to current students, mentors, and evaluators after you have graduated. You will be able to determine whether you wish to participate in the Capstone Archive by completing a copy of the Capstone Waiver and Release Form at the conclusion of your Capstone Oral Defense Task. By participating, your scholarship and effort at WGU will be recognized, and you will have the satisfaction of contributing to the advancement of WGU and its students.

Since your final Capstone project will be shared with the WGU Academic Community, you should make sure it represents your best work—rigorous scholarship, research, and pedagogy. WGU has taken great care to ensure that safeguards are in place to guard the academic authenticity and the exposure of sensitive information. When you submit the Capstone release statement, you agree to voluntarily remove confidential information. This includes not only your own personal details and contact information, but also information identifying co-workers, organizations, and their contact information.

Here is further information about how your final Capstone documents are protected in the Archive.

You will want to go to the Model Capstone Archive to see examples of competent student work in your own program that represent some variety in the way students approach project requirements. Some of the materials are artifacts produced along the way to the final Capstone materials so you can see what is involved during the process you are about to undertake.

You can also search the Comprehensive Capstone Archive to examine the final artifacts from Capstones across the University that may be in research topics in which you are interested. Please beware that many of these did not follow the model outlined in this course of study.

Writing Assistance - MSN Capstone Writing Specialist

If you need assistance with any part of the writing or revision process, please contact the MSN Capstone Writing Specialist, Dr. Sophia Von Holden. Whatever your needs—writing anxiety, grammar, general college writing concerns, APA questions, or ESL language-related writing
issues—the Writing Specialist is available to assist you. Moreover, Dr. Von Holden offers personalized individual sessions and weekly group webinars. For an appointment, please click on the following link:

- [Dr. Sophia E. Von Holden's Calendar](#)

### Student Support

WGU values your input! Please submit any feedback you have using the following form:

![Course Feedback](#)

Access the WGU Library 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

![WGU Library](#)

Visit the Student Success Center to access a variety of topics that will help you succeed at WGU:

![Student Success Center](#)

Contact the WGU Writing Center for help with any part of the writing or revision process:

![WGU Writing Center](#)