This course supports the assessments for DJT2. The course represents 3 competency units.

Introduction

This job aid has been designed to give you an overview of the tasks found in the Written Capstone Report, and to help guide you through the submissions process. If you have any questions, please visit the Graduate Nursing Capstone Community. There you may interact with the Community Facilitator if you have additional questions. You may also seek additional guidance from the Capstone Evaluator once you have begun to submit tasks and an evaluator has been assigned.

You will be assigned a Capstone Facilitator/Evaluator when you have been actually enrolled in the Capstone. Please plan on working with your assigned Capstone Facilitator/Evaluator to complete and pass the final Written Capstone before scheduling your Oral Capstone Defense. You will probably be able to successfully present your Oral Capstone if you complete and pass the Written Capstone by the 15th of your final month. However, this can only be accomplished if you submit and pass all of the Oral Capstone-related tasks and have a dry run scheduled (with webcam) by the 25th of the month. Requests for the Oral Capstone Defense appointment cannot be accommodated unless these criteria have been met.

The Capstone requires that you write academically at the graduate level, while adhering to APA and articulation standards. Please bear in mind that your Capstone is the culminating project of your graduate degree program. When archived, its artifacts will become viewable to other students, faculty, administrators, and accreditors. Thus, it should represent your best scholarly writing. To meet these standards WGU has prepared the following instructions and template:

- APA Student Guidelines
- MSN Capstone Template

At this time, adherence to the 6th edition of the APA Publication Manual is expected. If you have not already purchased the APA 6th edition Style Manual, you should to do so at this time. Here are also two useful APA format websites you may wish to consult:

- Purdue OWL
- Vanguard University

You will need to complete task 1 before submitting task 2. Work in the capstone is sequential, with each task building on the previous one. Should you wish to work out of sequence, please contact your assigned capstone facilitator for guidance.

Prospectus Task (Task 1)

In the Capstone Prospectus task, written in future tense, you will briefly outline the problem that you intend to investigate, describe the participants in your study, and state your research questions. You will then describe the data you intend to collect, and the data analysis you propose to conduct once you have gathered the data. This task and the next one, IRB approval
(which you should prepare simultaneously) will need to be approved prior to your moving forward on the remaining tasks found in the Capstone Project assessment.

**Topic Selection:** MSN students have a variety of options for the type of research they conduct in their Capstone Project. Students may choose to do Action Research, Quantitative Research, Qualitative Research, Experimental Research, and/or Mixed-Method Approaches.

**Quantitative research** is used to learn how people in a particular population share similar characteristics or ideas/perceptions. Quantitative research is directed at uncovering and examining relationships and cause and effect. It is designed to produce accurate and reliable measurements through the use of statistics. Quantitative research should be used when you want to profile a group of people based on shared characteristics (such as demographics).

**Qualitative research** should be used when you really want to understand in detail why an individual or a group acts, thinks, or feels in a particular manner. Qualitative research is used to discover meaning rather than cause and effect. It is also used to identify the full range of responses or opinions that exist within a given population. Qualitative research can help a researcher identify issues and understand why the issues are important. Qualitative projects might include in-depth interviews or focus groups of nurse educators, nurse administrators, staff nurses, patients or students.

**Action research** is inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. It is a model of inquiry in which all individuals involved in the study usually are knowledgeable and contributing participants. Examples of Action Research projects might include nursing curriculum or an instructional strategy intervention in a classroom or clinical education setting.

**Mixed methods** include a research approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods. By combining both forms of research design, the overall strength of a study is greater than if either form is used alone. Mixed method approaches might include collecting quantitative data on a particular curriculum project and also collecting qualitative data, such as through journals, nurse leader observation, nurse educator interviews, etc.

A. Provide a brief introduction (suggested length of one paragraph) that explains the rationale for the proposed project by doing the following:

1. Present your topic. You should convince your reader that you have a worthwhile, interesting research topic and plan. It introduces the reader to the problem and background, and provides a motivation for your study. Include a "road map" for the organization of the remainder of the paper. Focus on the purpose of your study in the narrative, without using your own personal feelings, opinions, or experiences. Provide a rationale for your project by describing what you propose to do, why you chose this project, why it is important, how it relates to appropriate theory for the discipline, and how your Capstone Project fits into nursing practice, education, or leadership.

2. Describe the participants in your proposed study, to include demographic information.
and any additional relevant characteristics of your target population such as cultural factors, learning styles, educational levels, prior learning, motivation, etc.

B. Explain the **problem** and your **proposed solution** *(suggested length of 3-4 paragraphs)* by doing the following:

1. Outline the problem. Your **problem statement** describes the problem and its possible causes, providing background information to understand how the problem relates to teaching and learning and/or leadership in the nursing field. Discuss why the issue is a problem, and briefly address how this problem has been addressed in academic discourse.

2. Describe possible causes of the problem. Provide background information on the problem. Discuss significance of the identified problem.

3. Describe your proposed solution to the problem. Include research questions that flow logically from the problem statement. For quantitative studies, include a hypothesis statement. Qualitative, action research or mixed methodology studies may discuss possible outcomes. Include statement of assumptions and limitations. If needed, provide a definition of terms used in your study.

C. Present your **research question(s)**. Your research question(s) should be drawn from the need that you have identified in your literature review and from your observations. Review questions you identified during your research courses of study and refine them, if necessary. If you are researching an issue without a curriculum product, include a discussion of the specific measurable questions to be answered by the research, an account of how you will know that each question has been answered, and a statement of the goal of the research project. If you are researching the effects of a curriculum product, include a list of the specific measurable questions to be answered by the research, a description of what the learner will be able to do if the curriculum is effective, and how the goals of the project relate to the identified problem(s).

D. Describe how you intend to answer your research questions *(suggested length of 3 paragraphs)* by addressing the **methodology**, **instruments** and **data analysis** of your project:

1. Describe the **data** you will collect. This section should include the following elements: a description of the demographic information that you obtained through your needs assessment or analysis of the target population and relevant group characteristics; a description of the participants' prior knowledge of the topic or issue, and any prior knowledge or skills required for successful participation in your study. If prior knowledge is required, describe whether the learners have such knowledge/skills; a description of the participants' attitudes and/or motivation toward the topic or issue; a description of additional information on educational levels, learning styles, and/or orientations; and, a description of cultural characteristics of the target population.

2. Describe the **instruments** and other methods you will use to collect the data. This section is a description of at least two to four instruments or methods of data collection,
along with a description of qualitative and/or quantitative data collection instruments or methods employed in the research, and a description of both the validity and the reliability of the instruments and of the research in general. If you are using pretests, posttests, surveys, questionnaires, performance tasks, observation checklists, focus group protocols, or anything else, that are used to measure if the objectives have been met, include these items in an appendix. Be sure to direct the reader to see such appendices.

3. Include a section that describes the materials you need to complete the project. Such materials might include, but are not limited to, technology tools, worksheets, artifacts, visuals, etc. Include copies of such materials in the appendices, if applicable.

4. Implementation: Describe how you will proceed to implement the project. Include an account of the process for carrying out the research project in enough detail that another person could replicate the research study, including the process for collecting data to answer each of the research questions, and when and how data will be collected. Describe how the integrity of the data will be maintained, and how you will obtain permissions and maintain participant anonymity. Include a timeline showing when each component of the research will be completed.

5. Describe the data analysis techniques you will use to analyze the data you collect. What kinds of procedures, statistical tests, or tools will you use? If your study is qualitative, describe your plan of processing, coding, and presenting your data. Consider how you will check for reliability and validity. What issues or problems might be encountered? Use your data analysis plan to provide the rationale for choosing quantitative or qualitative analysis, including a discussion of validity and reliability (for qualitative research, triangulation). Identify and clearly describe techniques that will be used to analyze data (e.g., statistical analysis for quantitative research; inductive analysis for qualitative research). Select appropriate techniques to analyze data for the research questions and/or hypothesis (statistical tests or qualitative interpretation). Describe how study results will be presented. If you have followed the above guidelines with care, your final Prospectus should be in a good shape and should not require significant revisions. Otherwise, bringing the final Prospectus fully into line with the rubric standards may require one or more revisions. You should expect to make multiple edits of the Prospectus and your Capstone Project. It is rare that a first draft is adequate even for an experienced professional researcher.

You have already been working on securing approval for your proposed study. You will need to acquire written permission from the facility where you will be conducting your Capstone study and also WGU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). This task is described below.

**IRB Task (Task 2)**

Before you can begin any research activity (e.g., data collection and/or intervention) associated with your study and its Prospectus, your Capstone Project must have the written approval of both WGU's IRB and the organization identified in your study using the proper documentation.
Download and complete the Organizational Study Approval Letter Template to initiate this process.

IRBs exist at universities and other institutions to ensure the protection of all human subjects involved in research conducted under the auspices of the institution. Protection of human subjects requires informed consent from all participants, along with evidence of informed consent, which is the signature of a participant or a participant's parent or guardian on a detailed informed consent form. Implied consent is not sufficient for legal or ethical purposes.

**Task**

**A.** You will download and complete the Informed Consent Form. Once complete, upload to TaskStream.

**B.** Fill out the IRB Worksheet. Once complete, upload to TaskStream.

**C.** Complete the Organizational Study Approval Letter. Once complete upload to TaskStream.

**D.** Go to the Protecting Human Research Participants website and complete the National Institutes of Health (NIH) online Protection of Human Subjects training program. The NIH online program is available at no cost and consists of four user-friendly modules that can usually be completed within two hours. Upload a copy of your NIH certificate of completion to TaskStream. For Task 2 you will upload a total of **4 documents** to TaskStream: 1) Informed Consent, 2) IRB Worksheet, 3) Organizational Study Approval Letter, and 4) NIH Certificate of Completion.

Once you have submitted all four documents to TaskStream, they will be reviewed to see if they meet expedited IRB criteria. If so, you will pass Task 2, meaning you have been granted WGU IRB approval to conduct your study. However, you may not begin data collection yet (that authorization comes after completing and passing Task 4, your Methodology Chapter). If your study does not meet expedited IRB criteria, you will be notified.

Once you have passed the Prospectus and IRB tasks, you are ready to begin working on the first two chapters of your written capstone.

**First 2 Chapters (Introduction and Problem Statement, and Literature Review) (Task 3)**

In this task, you will provide an introduction to the problem that you have identified, and that you intend to research during your Capstone Project. You will also state and provide the context for your research questions, via a review of relevant literature.

**A.** Provide an introduction (suggested length of 4-6 pages) that explains the rationale for the project by doing the following:

1. Present your topic.
2. Explain why you chose the topic.
3. Discuss why the project is important to your discipline.
B. Problem Statement: Explain the problem (*suggested length of 3–5 pages*) by doing the following:

1. Outline the problem.
2. Provide background information of the problem.
3. Discuss possible causes of the problem.

C. Present your research question(s).

D. Create a well-organized, comprehensive, and integrated literature review of *25-30 professional sources* by the following these statements to guide the development of your literature review:

- Your literature review is comprehensive and scholarly (peer-reviewed).
- Your reference citations are complete and accurate using APA 6th edition formatting standards.
- The majority of your sources are primary.
- Your sources are current (recent-less than five years old). If you use older sources (or if sources are not well-known) they must be justified.
- Your literature review is well organized (logical flow) and you use subheadings.
- Your literature review provides analysis and synthesis.
- Your literature review concludes with a summary and interpretation of the literature as well as a discussion of implications of the problem being investigated.

Your literature review forms an empirical, theoretical, or practical rationale for your study. Use your problem statement and research question(s) to guide your literature review. Your literature review builds a case for why you are proposing the research in your Capstone Project. Keep in mind the following guiding questions when developing your literature review:

- Why is your research necessary?
- What is the need for its results?
- What have others done in the area, or is it an area that has not really been researched?

1. Outline research for best practices for your topic.

2. Summarize the professional literature relevant to the topic you have chosen. Discuss what others have done about the problem you have identified, and then explore the literature within the parameters of your study. Keep returning to your problem statement and research questions to remain focused.

3. Provide a conclusion that interprets how the literature applies to the problem being investigated. You will use the literature review to revisit your problem statement, shifting your focus if necessary. Be sure to discuss any changes in your problem statement/hypothesis with your Capstone Facilitator/Evaluator.

4. You will also come back to the literature to compare to your own study findings or
implementation results. You will be able to discuss later whether your own study findings or implementation results are indeed supported by the literature or not.

E. Provide your preliminary reference list. Include each reference on the list uses in an in-text citation. List all references in APA 6th edition format. You will submit the introduction and literature review to be scored as two different tasks. It is scored first for APA/articulation and second for content.

Submit your “Introduction and Problem Statement” and “Review of Literature” Chapters as Task 3

The 3rd Chapter (Methodology) (Task 4)

As you begin to write the methodology section of your Capstone, provide a rationale for your choice of methodology. Consider citing a specific resource that guided you in this methodology, and that may help you justify your methodology for your study. Your methodology plan serves to restate your problem statement, research questions, and, in quantitative studies, the hypothesis. It provides a description of and rationale for the chosen methodology, and demonstrates that you have chosen designs and procedures that are appropriate for examining the research question(s).

You will describe the size and major characteristics of the population sample or participant selection, and describe and correctly apply data collection procedures, tools, and/or instruments. You will define variables clearly (for quantitative studies) or study parameters and role of researcher (for mixed or qualitative studies). Address procedures for validity (triangulation for mixed or qualitative studies), and list and explain study assumptions.

Discuss the methodology you used for your project by doing the following:

1. Describe the evaluation methods and tools you used. Discuss the reliability and validity of the evaluation methods and tools you used. For qualitative studies, data might come from interviews, questionnaires, observations/field notes, focus groups, writing samples, formative test data, archived data, documents, etc.
2. Discuss how the integrity of data and data use will be maintained. Discuss how data will be stored during the study and plan for destruction after the study, if applicable.
3. Discuss your research design. You may want to include a graphic that outlines the design and research timeline.
4. Explain your research methods, including validation of why you adopted these research methods. Support with a citation.
5. Describe the participants. Maintain subject confidentiality.
6. Summarize how you obtained any needed permissions.

Submit your Methodology Chapter as Task 4
Add Chapter 3, “Methodology” to your submission of all previous revised chapters (1-2) as
Task 4.

Once your Methodology chapter (Task 4) is approved, you may proceed with data collection. **Last 2 Chapters (Data Analysis, Results, and Conclusions) (Tasks 5 and 6)**

**Data Collection or Project Implementation**

With your methodology in place, you can move forward with data collection or project implementation. Because your ability to do this depends on a number of timing factors, it makes sense to disregard the specific order associated with particular activities. However, once the implementation is complete, you are encouraged to complete the remaining activities as nearly as possible within the indicated time frame.

It is important to protect the integrity of your data collection and your study overall. You can accomplish this by ensuring that your data is collected as you have predetermined and that all information is kept safely stored and confidential. The integrity of your research depends on implementing the Capstone Project as proposed. Do not change how the data is collected, but do maintain consistency.

Be sure your Capstone Facilitator/Evaluator knows the status of your project implementation, so that the Capstone Facilitator/Evaluator can provide any necessary assistance, and also simply so your Capstone Facilitator/Evaluator is aware of the beginning and the ending of your project implementation.

Present the results of your project. Create visual aids (e.g., tables, charts, graphics) to display results.

1. Outline how results will be organized and presented.
2. Provide a data-driven general statement of the results.
3. Analyze each set of data.

Your data analysis section should include the results of data only, not your conclusions or conjectures. You will provide a general statement of results that is data driven (e.g., "Analysis of the quantitative data indicates students' posttest scores were above 80.0%"), and include data tables and charts that show actual analysis of data to answer each research question. Remember to include introductory and explanatory text immediately preceding every table or figure so the reader follows well. Describe the results of quantitative data and/or qualitative data, and describe themes, categories, and patterns in the quantitative and/or qualitative data (if both types of data are included, describe both). You should also include evidence of qualitative data results, which may contain multiple pieces of evidence and artifacts that show how you determined results. This may be student work, observation documentation sheets, surveys and/or interview statements (if your research did not include qualitative data, you should indicate this). Describe how you triangulated the data. Finally, summarize your results.

Submit your Data Analysis Chapter as Task 5
Add Chapter 4, “Data Analysis” to your submission of all previous revised chapters (1-3) as Task 5.

Your **project discussion** is a general discussion of your Capstone Project. For this section, write an overview of the study that restates the general purpose and briefly describes how the results were obtained, provides a brief summary of the findings, and describes what the results suggest based on the data.

This section moves beyond data presentation to describe or interpret what the results mean. Describe the **implications**, **limitations**, and **recommendations** of your study:

- **Implications**: Describe how the research can be used to address the problem, how nurse educators or nurse leaders can use the results of the research to inform education or practice in your particular setting, and what information the research provides to the general nursing community.
- **Limitations**: Describe what problems you noted with the research, what may have hindered or affected the findings, things that needed to be changed during the study, and things to be changed for the future. Describe also strengths and weaknesses of the project, and any factors that may have skewed your results.
- **Recommendations**: Describe recommendations for future research based upon your findings. Recommendations should also be based upon your noted implications and limitations.
  1. Discuss how the study could be improved, and recommend areas of your topic that could be further investigated. Explain how you would conduct the study differently if you were to conduct it again with justifications.
  2. Critique your master’s degree experience by reflecting upon the experience and how the experience and the skills you have gained will be applied in your work environment. This will be discussed in the Oral Capstone defense scheduled upon completion of the Written Capstone Project.

**D. Finalize the reference list** of all the References you cited in your Capstone Project report. The same standards of good writing and APA style apply to the final Capstone Project as you applied to the Prospectus. Look for errors in grammar, spelling, and style. Specifically, make sure that you follow APA 6th edition guidelines, especially with your in-text citations and your reference list.

**E. Create an Appendix** for your project that includes the following:

1. Materials and exhibits important to the project that are referenced in the report.
2. Data-gathering instruments (e.g., surveys, questionnaires).
3. The IRB Approvals you received and a sample of the “Informed Consent Form” that you used.

**G. Include all in-text citations and references in APA 6th edition format.** You will submit the final three chapters (methodology, data analysis, results and conclusions) to be scored as two different tasks. It is scored first for APA/articulation and second for content.
Submit your Results and Conclusions Chapter as Task 6
Add Chapter 5, “Results and Conclusions” to your submission of all previous revised chapters (1-4) as Task 6.

Final, Complete Written Capstone Report (Task 7)

Now you have everything you need to move forward and complete your final written Capstone Project Report, including all of the elements listed above, and with the addition of those sections including in the project implementation, methodology, data analysis, and presentation. In this task you will create a **single document** that contains your final Written Capstone Project Report in its entirety, including appendices to contain any curricular materials you designed; any assessments; all data collection instruments and other materials used.

Create an **Abstract** *(suggested length minimum 120 words)* that is self-contained, concise, and coherent by doing the following:

1. Discuss the problem that led to your research question.
2. Describe the participants.
3. Discuss methodologies for data gathering and analysis.
4. Summarize the results.
5. Propose next steps in relation to the problem. Provide a summary of study recommendations and conclusions.

Be sure to recast the future tense used in your Capstone Introduction, Problem Statement, and Literature Review into past or present tense in your final version, as appropriate, in order to accurately reflect the fact that the project has now been carried out and completed. You will also include, in the Appendices, all of the materials you used in the completion of your Capstone Project. This includes any curricular materials you developed, any assessments used, survey or interview protocols, etc.

*Note: Please do not save word-processing documents as *.rtf (Rich Text Format) files as they are often too large to download and cannot be edited. Save a back up on an external hard drive.*

Congratulations! Once this final task has been passed, you will be able to prepare for and then schedule the Oral Defense of your Capstone Project.

While you await the evaluation of your written report of your final Capstone Project, you can prepare for the Oral Capstone Defense by making an outline and a multimedia presentation (e.g., Microsoft PowerPoint, Apple Keynote) based on your project. Because the Oral Defense of your written Capstone Project includes an exploration of nursing content knowledge, you can prepare for this also.

The Oral Defense will consist of your creation of a slide show presentation that outlines your Capstone Project. The slide show will provide an overview of such topics as: the problem you investigated; your research questions; a brief summary of the literature you reviewed; the participants in your study; your methodology; the data you collected; the results of your data
analysis; implications, limitations, recommendations, and your conclusions. You will then present your slide show to your Capstone Evaluator via teleconference. Further details can be found in the Oral Capstone COS, found under the link that is the code for that assessment in your Student Degree Plan (SDP).

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.

Feedback

If you have any feedback on this Job Aid, please send it to Dr. Tori Canillas-Dufau at tcanillas@wgu.edu.