George Mason University
School of Nursing

2024 - 2025

Student Handbook
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in NURSING PROGRAM

Latest update: May 06, 2024

DISCLAIMER

This Handbook is neither a contract nor an offer to make a contract. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information enclosed, this Handbook is updated only once each year prior to the start of the fall term. No student handbook can anticipate every circumstance or question regarding university or program policies. George Mason University (Mason) School of Nursing (SoN) reserves the right to make changes at any time with respect to admission requirements, course offerings, degree requirements, services, policies, or any other subject addressed in this handbook. The information enclosed is provided solely for the convenience of the reader, and Mason SoN expressly disclaims any liabilities that may otherwise be incurred.

This Handbook supersedes all previous versions of the Handbook. Students are accountable for familiarizing themselves with the handbook contents and for compliance with the policies and procedures contained herein.

We wish you the best in your course of study and look forward to helping you reach your goals.

Sincerely,

Mason School of Nursing Faculty and Staff

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The School of Nursing (SoN) PhD Student Handbook is a compilation of information and policies specific to the SoN PhD program. It is updated, if necessary, by the PhD Program Director in collaboration with PhD Program faculty. This Handbook is designed to provide SoN PhD students with a readily available source of information about their program, procedures, and resources. The handbook augments, and is not a substitute for, other university, college, and school sources of information. Section AP.6 of the University Catalog explains Graduate policies. The Nursing PhD program is one of many graduate programs offered by George Mason University (Mason). As such, all the policies governing graduate education at Mason apply to this program.

2. SCHOOL OF NURSING

2.1 Mission

The mission of the School of Nursing is for faculty and students to contribute to the health of all populations through innovative and impactful education, research, practice, and service.

2.2 Vision

Our vision is to produce the next generation of nursing leaders empowered and focused on addressing the challenges of a complex and diverse healthcare environment.

2.3 Core Values

- Excellence
- Integrity
- Inclusiveness
- Social Justice
- Collaboration

2.4 Program Leadership

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3. PHD PROGRAM OVERVIEW

3.1 PhD in Nursing Degree

In their seminal report, *The Research-Focused Doctoral Program in Nursing: Pathways to Excellence*, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) described the intended purpose of the PhD in Nursing degree:

> The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) represents the highest level of formal education for a career in research and the scholarship of discovery. It prepares scholars for the expression and communication of the knowledge base in the profession. The PhD graduate develops the science, stewards the profession, educates the next generation of nurses, defines its uniqueness, and maintains its professional integrity. In the academic setting, the PhD is the highest academic degree and is required for success as a scientist in the multiple disciplines represented within educational institutions. In the scientific arena within and beyond the Academy, the PhD is the beginning preparation for the development of independence in scientific pursuit. Post-doctoral study is recommended for depth in a field. Attainment of the PhD requires a strong scientific emphasis within the discipline; an understanding of the science of related disciplines and translation science; dissemination of innovations; and interdisciplinary collaboration. (2011, p. 2)

3.2 Program Objective

- Lead research inquiry to advance and investigate emerging sciences of nursing.

- Contribute innovative solutions to address important problems that impact health and well-being at the individual, community, population, and policy levels.

- Engage in multi-sector collaborations to promote health for all that is ground-breaking, equitable, evidence-based, and quality-driven.

3.3 Program Outcomes

Upon graduation from the Mason PhD in Nursing program, students will be able to:

1. Develop innovative and theory-based research strategies to address health needs and gaps at the individual, community, population, and policy levels.

2. Systematically evaluate, critique, and synthesize the literature in a focused area of inquiry that addresses a national or international health priority.

3. Develop a problem statement and study purpose that addresses a gap in the knowledge base or relevant scientific literature.

4. Construct a research design that is congruent with the problem statement, research question, and conceptual model or theory, and addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

5. Utilize appropriate study measures, data collection methods, and data management and analysis techniques to address the research question.

6. Conduct research that is ethical, respectful, culturally sensitive, and includes multidisciplinary collaborations.

7. Appraise the findings in light of the literature, conceptual/theoretical model, and emerging science.

8. Formulate strategies to implement research findings through multiple modes of dissemination to advance equitable quality-driven practice and contribute to innovative solutions.

3.4 Program Oversight

Most of the academic programs of Mason's School of Nursing (i.e., BSN, MSN, and DNP) are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). PhD programs in nursing are generally not accredited. Instead, Mason's PhD in Nursing program receives an Academic Program Review (APR) by the Office of the Provost every 7 years conducted by an external review team. The last APR review occurred in 2022.

4. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Time Limits

A summary of the degree requirements and allotted time limits are provided in the following table. These time limits are consistent with the 2024-2025 University Catalog PhD in Nursing program requirements and AP 6.10.1. Each student is held to the specific requirements set by the University Catalog for the year in which they matriculated and should refer to that specific catalog year for guidance.

	Degree Requirements	Time Limit*
1.	**Program of Study:** Complete all required coursework (except dissertation credits) as outlined in the program of study.	--
2.	**Advance to Candidacy:** Pass written, doctoral candidacy, comprehensive examination after completing all required PhD coursework (except dissertation credits).	4.5 years
3.	**Complete Teaching and Research Residencies**	--
4.	**Oral Dissertation Proposal Defense:** Submit a dissertation proposal approved by the doctoral dissertation committee and pass the oral dissertation proposal defense within 2 years of advancement to candidacy.	6.5 years
5.	**Final Oral Dissertation Defense:** Prepare a written dissertation and pass the final oral dissertation defense.	--
6.	**Submit Final Dissertation to Library:** Final approval of the dissertation must be given by the doctoral dissertation committee, the PhD Program Director, the Director of the School of Nursing, and the Dean of the college. Dissertation must be submitted to the University's Library in the approved format.	--
7.	**Application for Graduation:** Complete application materials for graduation in accordance with the prevailing Mason policies.	9 years

*From matriculation

Students who will not meet published time limits because of circumstances beyond their control may petition for an extension. Extension requests are not guaranteed and may be granted for a maximum period of one calendar year. An extension to the time limit for advancement to candidacy is only granted for extraordinary circumstances and is not routine. The one-year extension granted to advance to candidacy will run concurrently with the 4.5 years provided to complete the dissertation. Students who are given permission to re-enroll following an absence from Mason may not count the time limits as beginning on the date of re-enrollment.

4.2 Required Credits

The PhD in Nursing Program requires completion of a minimum of 78 credits, of which up to 30 credits may be awarded with approved corresponding coursework from previous graduate studies at other institutions or taken at Mason in non-degree status (see AP.6.5. Credit by Exam or Transfer). All transfer credits must be approved by the PhD program director. AP.6.5.3. Transfer of Credit The remaining credits will include 27 credits of Core Courses, at least 9 elective credits, and 12 credits toward dissertation requirements. Under the guidance of their Academic Advisor, the student completes the "Reduction in Credit" form in the *Forms* folder located in the *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* Blackboard organization site. Students must complete a minimum of 48 credits beyond their master's degree following the curriculum outlined in the Program of Study.

4.3 Registration

Prior to registering for coursework each semester, students must have their plan of study reviewed and approved by their Academic Advisor. Continuous registration in fall and spring semesters to maintain full or half-time status must be maintained by all PhD students from admission until graduation. Registration in summer term is recommended to support progression but is not required to maintain full-time status (AP.6.2 Full-Time and Half-Time Status Classification). Prior to completion of the comprehensive exam, PhD students are considered full-time if they are enrolled in at least 9 graduate credits per semester or hold a full-time assistantship (total 20 hours a week) and are enrolled in at least 6 graduate credits per semester. PhD students are considered half-time if they are enrolled in at least 4.5 graduate credits per semester.

Doctoral students, who have completed required coursework and are enrolled in dissertation credits (either 998 or 999), are considered full-time if they are enrolled in at least 3 credits per semester, regardless of whether they hold an assistantship. Doctoral students who have advanced to candidacy and have completed the minimum 12 credits of 998 and 999 required by the university are considered in status (either full-time or half-time) if they are registered for at least 1 credit of 999 and the student along with their advisor and department chair certify and communicate to the Office of the University Registrar each semester that they are working full-

time or half-time on the dissertation. See university policies [AP.6.10.6 Dissertation Registration (998, 999)](#) and [AP.6.2 Full-Time and Half-Time Status Classification](#) for more information.

To be considered as full-time during registration for NURS 998 or NURS 999, a student must complete and submit the Full-Time Equivalent Status [Form](#) to the Office of the University Registrar prior to the first day of classes for the semester. Different requirements for full-time and half-time status may apply depending on F1/J1 visa status, scholarships, financial aid, and other benefits. International students should consult the [Office of International Programs and Services](#) to ensure compliance with Visa requirements. Additional assistance may be received by contacting [Student Accounts](#), the [Office of the University Registrar](#), and [Financial Aid Services](#), for more information. Note that the official designation of time status for all students is determined by the Office of the University Registrar.

4.4 Leave of Absence

A student may encounter life circumstances that result in a necessary leave of absence for one semester. The student should discuss such situations with their Academic Advisor/Dissertation Chair to determine the best options for the benefit of the student. Guidelines for obtaining a leave of absence from George Mason University are discussed in the [University Catalog](#). Final approval of all leave of absences requests is provided by the PhD Program Director. If the leave of absence extends to two academic semesters (summer not included), the student must re-apply to the PhD program.

4.5 Academic Termination

A degree-seeking student can be terminated from the PhD in Nursing program for reasons including, but not limited to, the following:

- After earning unsatisfactory grades (below a 3.00) in two core courses. Any core course in which a student earns a grade below a 3.00 must be repeated and may prevent the student from progressing any further in coursework; a core course may be repeated only once. A student may not repeat more than one core course. Any elective course in which a student earns a grade below 3.00 will not be counted towards the 9 credits needed to meet the elective requirement for the PhD program.
- After not passing the comprehensive exam on the second attempt.
- After demonstrating a significant lack of progress as determined by the student's advisor and the PhD Program Director.
- A finding that the student has violated the university Honor Code with sanctions resulting in program dismissal.
- Failure to meet the time limits or to secure approval of an extension request.

6

- Failure to enroll for two consecutive academic semesters (not including summer).

5. PROGRAM OF STUDY

The PhD in Nursing program of study builds upon the student's interests and career goals. A student develops their program of research in collaboration with and under the direction of their Academic Advisor. To complete the program, a minimum of 48 graduate credits must be earned beyond the master's degree. The courses are categorized as *Core*, *Elective*, or *Dissertation* credits.

5.1 Core Courses

The PhD in Nursing core courses include 27 credits of material covering research theory, policy, study design, measurement, data analysis, and dissemination. The content builds on previous coursework; therefore, it is advised students adhere to the prescribed Study Plan for completing core courses (see Study Plans for Full and Part-time Students). The list of core courses is provided in the following table.

Course ID	Course Title	Credits
NURS 804	Advanced Quantitative Data Analysis for Healthcare Research I	3
NURS 805	Advanced Quantitative Data Analysis for Healthcare Research II	3
NURS 814	Theory and Design in Health Science	3
NURS 860	Measurement Theories in Healthcare Research	3
NURS 910	Using Research in Nursing and Health Care	3
NURS 920	Qualitative Research in Nursing and Health Care	3
NURS 930	Quantitative Methods in Nursing and Health Care	3
GCH 700	Social and Ecological Determinants of Health	3
PH 810	Systematic Reviews of Health Research	3
	Total Credits	27

5.2 Elective Courses

Students must complete a cohesive set of doctoral-level (700 or higher) elective courses that contribute to their program of research. A student's **selection of elective courses must be made in collaboration with and by approval of their Academic Advisor or the PhD Program Director**. A minimum of 9 credits of elective courses must be completed prior to graduation.

5.3 Dissertation Courses

During the process of writing the dissertation proposal, students must initially register for a minimum of 3 credits of NURS 998 Doctoral Dissertation Proposal; the student may repeat NURS 998 for variable credit until the proposal is successfully defended. After completing the dissertation proposal, the student will register for an initial semester of at least 3 credits of NURS 999 Doctoral Dissertation. Once the student has completed a combined required minimum of 12 credits of NURS 998 and/or NURS 999, they must register for at least 1 credit per semester of NURS 999 until they have successfully completed the dissertation. Additionally, the student must be enrolled in at least one credit of 999 in the semester in which they intend to graduate, including the summer. The University guidelines [AP.6.10.6 Dissertation Registration (998, 999)](#) provide additional guidance.

5.4 Alternative Courses

The substitution of core courses with alternative courses is done according to university guidelines and **only with the approval of the Academic Advisor**. Final approval of the PhD Program Director is required to ensure substitute core courses meet program requirements.

5.5 Research Residency

The research residency is an important pedagogical aspect of PhD education regardless of funding source or student status (full or half time). Students will commit to a research residency for one semester. The purpose of the research residency requirement is to provide research training and experience that will facilitate embarking on a career of research and scholarship. Publication is a vital outcome of any PhD program, and the research residency mechanism serves as an opportunity for publication. Not all research training experiences will be the same.

Research training experiences **must be approved by the advisor and PhD Program Director**. There are several relevant guidelines:

- The research mentor should be PhD-prepared.
- An average of 10 hours per week for one semester should be devoted to the research residency, with a total goal of 150 hours.
- The research residency may begin after the student has completed a minimum of 18 credits of core courses, unless otherwise approved by the Program Director and Advisor.

- Research residency can be completed in any semester, including the summer, and may be completed outside of Mason if an appropriate mentor can be identified and is approved by the PhD Program Director.
- The range of experiences may include but are not limited to: conceptualization of a study, grant writing, review of literature, data collection, data management, data analysis, preparation of manuscripts, presentations, and laboratory experiences.

Evaluation: Realistic and objective goals and outcomes should be established by the student and mentor to ensure there are meaningful research training experiences for each semester the student is a research trainee. Upon completion of the research residency, the student and mentor are expected to submit a written evaluation to the PhD Program Director. Completed evaluations will be considered for future paid GRA assignments.

5.6 Teaching Residency

Every PhD student will serve as Teaching Assistant (TA) for one course without compensation prior to graduation. The required TA experience will be up to 150 hours total. After completing the required TA residency, students may apply to work as a paid GTA for additional courses.

The purpose of the TA experience is to advance the student's socialization into the teaching role. The PhD Program Director will assist with matching the student to a TA position in the School of Nursing or elsewhere at Mason. Specific learning objectives for the required TA experience will be developed by the student with input from the student's PhD advisor and the mentoring faculty member Learning activities may include but are not limited to:
- Curriculum development,

- Accreditation,

- Program evaluation,

- Course planning and syllabus development,

- Lecturing,

- Leading interactive learning exercises,

- Using of information technologies to facilitate learning,

- Measuring student mastery of knowledge and skills,

- Test construction and item analysis,

- Grading papers,

- Development of teaching strategies for a class with students of varying abilities,

- Determining student grades,

- Evaluating student satisfaction,

- Participating in curriculum planning and evaluation meetings,

- Working with others to plan and conduct an educational research project, and

- Working with others to publish a paper on a course or teaching method.

Evaluation: Upon completion of the teaching residency, the TA and the faculty member of the course are expected to submit a written evaluation to the PhD Program Director. Completed evaluations will be considered for future TA assignments. TAs and the respective faculty member are encouraged to include metrics in their course evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the TA.

5.7 Study Plans

The study plans on the following page are recommended for full and half-time students. Core courses are typically scheduled based on this study plan. Any modifications of the study plan **must be discussed with the student's Academic Advisor and approved by the PhD Program Director**. Reasons for modification may include course failure, transfer credits, accommodating important elective course(s), etc. Modification of the study plan may result in core courses being unavailable for student registration until the following year.

5.6 Taking More Courses than Study Plan

The study plans presented above outline the minimum coursework required prior to being eligible for advancement to candidacy. Under the guidance of an Academic Advisor, a student is encouraged to take additional electives to meet educational goals necessary for their dissertation topic. These additional credits may be completed before advancing to candidacy or during their dissertation period. A student may also seek to register for more than 9 credits in a semester (i.e., register for an additional elective course). This can only occur after careful consideration and approval of the Academic Advisor. Taking more than 9 credits is not advised for students who are struggling academically or who have not made progress in developing their research focus.

Semester	Full-Time (9 credits/semester)	Half-Time (6* credits/semester)
Fall 1	NURS 804	NURS 804
	NURS 814	NURS 814
	GCH 700	
Spring 1	NURS 920	NURS 920
	NURS 930	NURS 930
	NURS 805	
Summer 1**	Practicum/Elective	Practicum/Elective
Fall 2	NURS 860	NURS 860
	PH 810	NURS 805
	Elective	
Spring 2	NURS 910	NURS 910
	Elective	Elective
	Elective	
Summer 2**	Practicum/Elective	Practicum/Elective
Fall 3	Comprehensive Exam***	GCH 700
	NURS-998	PH 810
Spring 3	NURS-998	Comprehensive Exam***

* A minimum of 4.5 credits per semester is required to maintain half-time status.
**Summer registration is encouraged, but optional.
**Comprehensive exams are scheduled prior to the start of the semester.

5.7 Independent Study Courses

Under the guidance of their Academic Advisor, a student may use an independent study (NURS-940) to satisfy an elective course. Because faculty are not typically provided workload credit for independent studies, the student must first secure a faculty member who is willing to mentor the independent study (IS). A proposal of the independent study should be prepared by the student and faculty to include the following information:

1. A title for the IS that is not currently used by an existing Mason course;
2. Purpose and rationale for the IS and how it will contribute to the student's research topic;
3. At least three learning objectives to be achieved by the completion of the IS;
4. Method(s) of evaluation (e.g., assignments) to assess the student's progress in meeting the learning objectives;
5. Frequency of anticipated faculty contact by student during the IS;

6. Anticipated readings or other course materials in which the student is responsible; and

7. If practicum, a one-credit independent study must result in approximately 60 hours of work.

Final approval for the IS is required from both the PhD Program Director and the School of Nursing Director.

5.8 Transfer Courses

Nine (9) doctoral-level credits (700 level or higher) may be transferred with approval of the PhD Program Director and the University and applied to the 48 graduate credits required for the PhD in Nursing program. Courses taken as a "non-degree student" at Mason prior to admission to the doctoral program may be counted as transfer credits. To be accepted for transfer, previous credits must have been earned with a grade of B or above within six years prior to admission to the PhD program. Completion of courses does not automatically guarantee transfer acceptance. Credits previously applied toward an awarded degree at Mason or at another institution are not allowed as transfer credits. Additionally, credits from the graduate-level statistics course required for admission to the PhD program cannot be applied toward the 48 credits required for the PhD program. Credits earned through the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area are considered resident credits, are exempt from transfer credit conditions or limitations, and treated as electives.

6. ADVISING

6.1 Academic Advisor

Each student is assigned an Academic Advisor at the start of the PhD program. The purpose of the Academic Advisor is to help the student set and achieve academic goals, acquire relevant information and services, and make responsible decisions consistent with interests, goals, abilities, and degree requirements. Advising is an interactive process which requires communication between both parties at least once-per-semester. The responsibilities of the Academic Advisor will shift to the Dissertation Chair at the appropriate time once one has been selected.

The Academic Advisor has the following responsibilities:

- Meet with the student every semester;
- Interpret PhD program requirements and policies for the student;
- Assist the student in setting goals and objectives for doctoral study and clarifying career goals;

- Guide the student in planning a Program of Study (including selection of electives) in accordance with program requirements, individual research interests, and career goals;

- Monitor the student's academic progress through meeting with the student, communication and discussion with faculty teaching doctoral courses, and checking grades;

- Assist the student in selecting a dissertation research topic (general area for the research) and Dissertation Chair;

- Document annually the student's progress using the Doctoral Student Progress Report Form;

- Maintain student's *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* Folder (Blackboard);

- In conjunction with the student, determine his or her readiness to take the comprehensive examination; and

- Communicate the student's academic progress to the student and the PhD Program Director each semester.

6.2 Individual Advising Folder

On Blackboard Organization, *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising*, each student has an Individual Advising Folder and is responsible for storing documents demonstrating their progress in the PhD program. The title to this folder is the student's name. Access to the folder is limited to the: 1) student, 2) Academic Advisor and/or Dissertation Chair, 3) PhD Program Director, and 4) program Administrator. Any of the above-listed individuals can upload files to the folder's "file exchange." The following rules should be followed when uploading a file:

- File should be in a commonly accepted format (e.g., .doc, .docx, .pdf, .ppt, .xls, .jpg).

- File name should include the following: what it is, student last name, and date uploaded (e.g., "CV-Kyeung Mi Oh-May 30 2020," "Program of Study-Kyeung Mi Oh-May 30 2020)."

- Consolidate multiple related files into a single file (e.g., publication acceptance should include email acceptance notification and manuscript)

- Do not remove old files without discussing with the Academic Advisor/Chair.

Files demonstrating progress, productivity, and scholarship during the PhD program should be stored in the Individual Advising Folder. The following list of recommended and required items is not exhaustive.

- Current CV/resume

- Current PhD Program Progress Report form

- Current Course Plan or Program of Study form

- Accepted Conference Presentations during PhD Program

- Accepted Publications during PhD Program

- Grant applications and acceptance notifications

- Completed and signed PhD Program Forms (see Blackboard Organization tab "Forms")

- Letter of passing of Comprehensive Exam

- Current Dissertation Proposal

- IRB approval letter for dissertation research

- Final Dissertation

- Dissertation proposal/defense slides

6.3 PhD Student Responsibilities

The PhD student has the following responsibilities:

- Communicates <u>any</u> changes to their Program of Study or student status, **in writing,** to the PhD Program Director;

- Meets with faculty adviser at least once each semester to discuss progress and consult and obtain approval of program plan and selection of electives. This may be done either by email, telephone, Zoom, or in person.

- Selects a Dissertation Chair, in consultation with the Academic Advisor and the PhD Program Director;

- Selects, in collaboration with the Dissertation Chair and subject to approval by the PhD Program Director, members of the Dissertation Committee;

- Communicates personal information changes, especially phone, address and email in a timely manner to the Mason Registrar, the Academic Advisor, and the program Administrator. Doctoral students must maintain an active Mason email account. All communications will be distributed to doctoral students via their Mason email accounts.

- Submits course transfer request documents per policies;

- Reads written communications and adheres to University policies and procedures, which are subject to change during a student's enrollment;

- Initiates written requests in advance for accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act;

- Meets all deadlines for requests, forms applications including documents related to internships, progression in the program, and the Comprehensive Examination;

- Reports problems that delay progress in completing degree requirements to the PhD Program Director; and

- Requests appropriate approval by the PhD Program Director, and ultimately the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for CPH, when unusual problems have been encountered in meeting specific deadlines.

7. ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY

7.1 General Information

Students are required to successfully pass the doctoral candidacy comprehensive exam after completing all PhD core courses (except GCH 700, NURS 998 Doctoral Dissertation Proposal, and NURS 999 Doctoral Dissertation) to advance to candidacy and progress to the dissertation. The purpose of this written examination is to evaluate the student's mastery of integrated knowledge that is essential for conducting scholarly, scientific inquiry in Nursing. A student is eligible to take the comprehensive exam upon completion of all required core courses (except GCH 700). Students must be registered the semester prior to the examination and have all incompletes cleared from their record to take the comprehensive examination. The examination is administered twice-a-year prior to the start of the fall and spring semesters.

7.2 Application for Exam

A student is responsible for implementing the candidacy examination application process. The "Doctoral Candidacy Comprehensive Examination Application" form is available in the Forms folder on the *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* Blackboard Organization site. A student is required to meet with their Academic Advisor to review their academic record to establish eligibility and to obtain the advisor's signature.

A student must provide the examination application form to the PhD Program Director at least 60 days prior to the date in which the exam is to be held. The date of the exam is determined by the PhD Program Director.

7.3 Administration of Exam

The doctoral comprehensive examination is an in-person, proctored exam. It is an open book and open note exam, but without internet access. During the exam, no discussions are allowed except with the proctor, and cell phones and devices are collected. The exam consists of two sections, each lasting 3 hours, with different questions for each section. The time limit considers the reading time for any provided materials. Candidates must submit their completed documents to the proctor after each section. If a student is seeking accommodations for the exam, they should first visit the Disability Services website to register and then discuss their approved accommodations with the PhD Program Director at the time of their exam application.

7.4 Grading of Exam

The comprehensive examination for the PhD program is evaluated using the Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail grading system. Each exam is assessed by two faculty reviewers who utilize an established rubric aligned with the program's competencies and course objectives. In cases where the final grades from the two reviewers differ, a third faculty reviewer will evaluate the exam to

ensure fairness and consistency. Students may have the opportunity to review their graded comprehensive exam by scheduling an in-person meeting with the PhD Program Director. Results of the comprehensive exam will be communicated to students through a letter from the Director within two weeks following the examination.

7.5 Conditional Pass

A conditional pass is issued for the comprehensive exam if there are only limited deficiencies in the student's examination. In this case, the conditions to remove those deficiencies before the student can receive a passing grade will be provided by the student's Academic Advisor or the PhD Program Director. The deadline for resubmission is typically before the registration deadline for courses the semester following the comprehensive exam.

7.6 Retake of Exam

Students must pass each competency in order to pass the exam. If a student does not demonstrate a particular competency, the PhD Program Director will put a remediation plan into place, to achieve and demonstrate competency in that area. At the discretion of the Program Director, the student may be required to re-take all or part of the comprehensive exam. Students must complete all remediation requirements prior to retaking the examination. The student may retake the exam once but only during a time in which the exam is offered. The repeat examination must be completed within 4.5 years of matriculation. The second failure will result in the student's termination from the PhD Program.

7.7 Advancement to Candidacy

Upon passing the comprehensive exam, the student will complete the "Program of Study" form available in the *Forms* folder on the *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* Blackboard organization site. The student's Academic Advisor will submit this form to the PhD Program Director for review and approval. The PhD Program Director will then recommend advancement to candidacy to the Director of the SoN, who will render final approval for candidacy. **Please note:** The use of PhD(c) in a byline is not a valid credential and should be avoided.

8. DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

A dissertation is required for the PhD in Nursing degree. The dissertation is a written piece of original research that demonstrates a candidate's mastery of the subject matter, methodologies, and conceptual foundations, with relevance to the discipline of nursing.

8.1 Dissertation Committee

The PhD dissertation committee is composed of a Dissertation Chair and at least two additional members. The committee has the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Works with the student to guide the development of the dissertation proposal;

2. Conducts a formal proposal defense to judge the student's readiness to proceed to the dissertation;

3. Guides and directs the research, data analysis, and writing of the dissertation;

4. Evaluates the student's performance during the oral defense of the dissertation;

5. Makes recommendations for revision/changes in the dissertation based on the oral defense; and

6. Confirms the final written dissertation meets criteria for graduation and is of sufficient quality to demonstrate to the scientific community the student's competence as an independent researcher.

8.1.1 Dissertation Chair

The selection of the Dissertation Chair is done in collaboration with the student's Academic Advisor and, ideally, before advancement to candidacy. The Chair must be 1) employed full-time, 2) Graduate Faculty at Mason, and 3) core faculty of the PhD program within the SoN. Additionally, they must have sufficient expertise to guide the student's proposed area of research. The Dissertation Chair may or may not have served as the Academic Advisor. Upon selection, the Chair assumes all student advisement responsibilities, including academic advisement and direction of the dissertation research project. The Dissertation Chair has the following additional responsibilities:

- Guide the student throughout the dissertation research process, including developing the proposal, proposal defense, execution of the research, preparation of the dissertation, and final defense;

- Assist the student with the selection of a dissertation advisory committee;

- Serve as Principal Investigator on the student's Institutional Review Board application and on any research funding awards received by the student and administered through the University;

- Approve and sign the final version of the dissertation;

- Recommend to the Director of the School of Nursing, via the PhD Program Director, the membership for the student's Dissertation Committee; and

- Submit the dissertation defense form to the PhD Program Director.

8.1.2 Other Committee Members

With the advice of the student's committee chair and approval from PhD program director, the student will select the remaining two members of their dissertation committee - Member #1 and Member #2. These committee members will likely provide expertise related to a substantive area of the student's dissertation project. Students may consult with several qualified faculty to determine who are the most appropriate in terms of expertise and working styles.

Both members must be PhD-prepared, have Graduate Faculty status, and be relevant to the student's field of study. In addition, Member #1 must be full-time faculty at George Mason University. Member #2 may be from George Mason University or external to the University. Our PhD students often receive mentoring from qualified scientists (within and outside the university) who do not come from the discipline of nursing but who have the expertise needed to complete the research. Other Mason faculty, as well as individuals from outside the university, may be appointed as additional members to the committee (in addition to Members 1 and 2). Such appointments are made where the additional member's expertise and contribution add value to the dissertation, and appointment does not require Graduate Faculty status. Because the proposal and final defenses can be conducted remotely from the SoN campus, it is not necessary for external member(s) to travel to serve on the dissertation committee.

The student will nominate their dissertation committee by completing the "Dissertation Committee Nomination" form located in the *Forms* folder in the *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* Blackboard organization site. If a dissertation member is nominated from outside the university, the Chair must follow required CPH procedures for the Dean to request the member receive Graduate Faculty and Affiliate Faculty status in accordance with university policy (contact the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs for assistance). Final dissertation committees are approved by the PhD Program Director and the Director of the SoN.

8.1.3 Changes to Dissertation Committee Members

Changes in committee membership must be approved by the Dissertation Chair and the student. Requests for a change in Dissertation Chair must be addressed to the PhD Program Director and may be initiated by the Chair or the student without prejudice to either party. If the Dissertation Chair is the PhD Program Director, the request should be made by the student to the SoN Director. A change in Dissertation Chair is recommended if the student's research area changes substantially.

8.2 Dissertation Proposal

8.2.1 Proposal Development

The candidate begins development of their dissertation proposal during coursework with the assistance of their Academic Advisor and/or Dissertation Chair. The proposal is finalized during NURS 998 Doctoral Dissertation Proposal under the guidance of the dissertation committee and course faculty. If an acceptable proposal cannot be completed and defended within the first semester of NURS 998, the candidate may continue working on the proposal, registering for at least one credit of NURS 998 each semester until the proposal is approved.

It is not necessary for the candidate to consult committee members equally about each aspect of the dissertation proposal. Members should be consulted primarily on those aspects directly related to their areas of special competence. Additional faculty or resource persons may be consulted as needed. It is the joint responsibility of the candidate and the Dissertation Chair to make the final decisions on problem and approach, even if decisions are made that one or more committee members believe to be less than optimal. The committee's responsibility is to act in an advisory capacity rather than as directors of the research. It is up to the student to recognize useful advice and to integrate it into a coherent whole.

8.2.2 Content of Proposal

The proposal should identify the major substantive and methodological issues of the research problem and be written in excellent form. Preferences regarding the format of the dissertation proposal may vary with the committee members, so it is important to gain an understanding of members' expectations. The written proposal generally consists of the first three chapters of the dissertation, which includes the introduction, literature review, and proposed methods. The following table provides suggested content for these chapters with final guidance to be provided by the Dissertation Chair.

Chapter	Content
Chapter 1: Introduction	- Describe the significance of the problem and its context. - Define important concepts. - State clearly the study purpose and research question(s)/aim(s) - Explain how the dissertation builds on existing theories, methods and/or arguments within nursing and other disciplines. - Explain why the dissertation will make a significant contribution to the field of nursing. - Offer a brief overview of the written dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review	• Synthesize a systematic, integrative, or comprehensive narrative literature review justifying the topic or approach. • Use a methodology for literature review that adheres to accepted standards. • Support the dissertation with a clearly presented gap in knowledge.
Chapter 3: Methods	• Provide comprehensive details of the proposed study methods that assures the student's readiness for implementation and possible future replication. • Include basic headings such as study design, setting, sample, instruments, data collection, data management, and data analysis. • Discuss human subjects' protection, as appropriate. • Analyze strengths and weakness of methodological approach(es).
Appendices	• Instrument(s) • Permission to use instrument(s) • Timeline • Budget and budget justification • Other items as required by dissertation committee

In addition, the candidate should consider including potential funding sources and anticipated manuscripts and other dissemination products. The length and content of the dissertation proposal is intended to include enough detail for committee members to understand the proposed scope, research aims, theory or framework, and methods and measures; however, committee preference for detail may vary by content area or the type of dissertation (e.g., historical research, ethnography, secondary analysis, informatics data mining).

8.2.3 Secondary Data Analysis

If secondary analysis of faculty data is planned, an agreement between that faculty and the student must be established regarding the ownership of the data, findings, and manuscripts that are either not submitted or not revised and resubmitted in a timely manner.

8.2.3 Oral Proposal Defense

After the dissertation committee approves the proposal, the candidate schedules the oral proposal defense with the committee members and Chair. The purpose of the oral proposal defense is for the candidate to demonstrate to the committee their mastery of the content and approach related to their dissertation research. Once a date for the defense is confirmed, the Chair communicates the date to the Department Manager, who arranges a room and/or remote communication with any external members of the committee. The final proposal must be sent by the candidate to the committee **at least 14 days prior to the oral proposal defense**.

The oral proposal defense is moderated by the Dissertation Chair and begins with the student presentation of their proposal approximately 20-30 minutes in length. Copies of the presentation slides should be made available to the committee at the time of the defense. The committee will then ask questions of the candidate and once satisfied, excuse the candidate during deliberation. The oral defense of the proposal is not a public event; only the dissertation committee is in attendance. A mock proposal defense with the Chair and other doctoral students is encouraged.

During deliberation, the committee members will determine whether the candidate has demonstrated mastery of the content and approach and readiness to conduct the research independently. Outcomes of the oral proposal defense include the following:

- **Pass:** A *unanimous* vote of the committee is needed to pass the oral proposal defense. The committee may make recommendations for the conduct of the proposed research that do not affect the outcome of the defense. If so, the Dissertation Chair will oversee incorporating such recommendations into the proposal. The candidate is eligible to register for NURS 999 Doctoral Dissertation the following semester. The faculty who instructed the candidate's most recent NURS 998 course will submit a grade change request to convert the "IP" (in progress) course grade to "S" (satisfactory).

- **Conditional Pass:** A conditional pass may be issued to the candidate if the committee *unanimously* feels they are close to passing but the dissertation requires more than minor changes. A list of changes to the proposed dissertation will be provided to the candidate in writing. Once the candidate has completed all the proposal revisions to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee, they are eligible to register for NURS 999 Doctoral Dissertation. Until the candidate completes the revisions to the approval of the dissertation committee, they must continue to register for NURS 998.

- **Fail:** If the committee does not unanimously vote to pass the candidate, a remediation plan will be developed by the Dissertation Chair and PhD Program Director (in consultation with the dissertation committee), provided to the student in writing, and executed under the supervision of the Dissertation Chair. Once the committee is satisfied that the candidate is ready to proceed again with the oral defense, a new date is scheduled. Candidates who do not pass their oral proposal defense must remain in NURS 998 during their remediation.

8.3 Ethical Review of Proposed Research

All proposed research being conducted by students and faculty that may be associated with human subjects (either directly or indirectly) conducted on or off campus must be submitted to the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) to determine whether it meets federal requirements for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additional ethical review of the proposed research may also be required to be completed at the location where the study is occurring, such as healthcare institutions or a country's Ministry of Health. Human Subjects review guidelines must be met and approval received in writing from the ORIA (and other external agencies, as appropriate) before any study procedures are initiated, including data for a pilot study.

Before the research can begin, the **candidate** must do the following:
- Verify that their Human Subjects Ethics Training (Citi Training) is not expired, which is provided for free by ORIA.
- Complete all required Mason ORIA/IRB forms (and those of other external agencies, as appropriate) ensuring their accuracy.
- Obtain written administrative approval to conduct research at the proposed study sites(s) or access data sets.
- Upload Mason IRB approval letter to the file exchange in the *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* folder.

Before the research can begin, the **Dissertation Chair** must do the following:
- Guide the candidate through the procedures required for submission of the proposed research to ORIA/IRB.

- Verify the accuracy of the information being submitted to the IRB/external agencies.

- Serve as the Principal Investigator on the IRB submission related to the student's dissertation research.

- Verify letters have been received from the Mason IRB/external agencies, either indicating the study's approval or designating the study is exempt from review.

- Verify written administrative approval was obtained to conduct research at the proposed study sites(s) or access to data sets.

All PhD students must promote the ethical treatment of human subjects including obtaining informed consent, assuring anonymity and confidentiality, guaranteeing fair treatment of subjects, and minimizing risks. Research may not begin until all written permissions and approvals are obtained from the participating institutions. Students must adhere to federal requirements and university policies directed at protecting human subjects, as well as animal care and use (if relevant).

8.4 Dissertation Research

After the dissertation proposal has been approved and after receiving IRB approval, the process of data collection may begin. It is strongly recommended that candidates maintain regular contact with their Chair and other students in the program during this time. Most students at this stage in the dissertation are no longer taking coursework and many no longer visit campus on a regular basis. Because of this, it is easy to feel isolated and this may be quite different from one's educational experiences up to this point. Joining writing groups at this stage is encouraged.

8.5 Dissertation

The dissertation is a written report of original research in a content area of significance to the discipline of Nursing. As defined by the university, the dissertation demonstrates the candidate's mastery of the subject matter, methodologies, and conceptual foundations in their chosen field of study.

8.5.1 Format of the Dissertation

The University requires the format of the dissertation to adhere to the template set by the Mason Libraries' University Dissertation & Thesis Services. The written dissertation usually consists of five chapters, though this number can vary based on committee recommendations or to accommodate manuscripts. The PhD in Nursing program requires the inclusion of two publishable manuscripts associated with the dissertation research and approved by the dissertation committee. The two included manuscripts should both be prepared in consideration for submission to scholarly journals. Submission of the manuscripts before graduation is highly encouraged, but not required. **At least one manuscript included in the dissertation is required to be data-based.** The two manuscripts may consist of either 1) two data-based articles or 2) one data-based and one data-informed article. Examples of data-informed scholarly articles include a concept analysis, systematic literature review, methodology development, or policy or clinical implications paper. Preambles to chapters containing manuscripts are helpful to integrate its contents into the overall dissertation.

The Dissertation Chair will guide the student in the appropriate organization and content of the dissertation's chapters based on the study design and chosen manuscripts. Additional appendices should include funding sources and ethical review approval letter(s). Candidates should develop a plan with their Dissertation Chair for getting feedback on chapter drafts. In most instances, the expectation is that only the Chair reviews dissertation drafts until they believe it is ready to be forwarded to the whole committee for review. However, certain committee members may be asked—or may ask—to read particular chapters where their expertise is sought before the dissertation is completed. The SoN follows the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), current edition, for dissertation writing.

The following are several **examples** of how the dissertation could be organized based on the study design and types of manuscripts. The Dissertation Chair will guide the student in the appropriate organization and content of the dissertation's chapters based on the study design and chosen manuscripts. The following are several **examples** of how the dissertation could be organized based on the study design and types of manuscripts.

Dissertation: 2 Data-based Manuscripts
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Literature Review
Chapter 3: Methods
Chapter 4: Manuscript One
Chapter 5: Manuscript Two
Appendices

Dissertation: 1 Data-Based Manuscript & 1 Implications Manuscript
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Literature Review
Chapter 3: Methods
Chapter 4: Manuscript One (Data-based)
Chapter 5: Manuscript Two (Implications)
Appendices

Dissertation: 1 Systematic Review (SR) & 1 Data-based Manuscript
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Manuscript One (SR)*
Chapter 3: Methods
Chapter 4: Manuscript Two
Appendices

*May need an additional chapter or addendum to update literature review at the time of final defense.

Dissertation (Mixed Methods): 2 Data-Based Manuscripts*
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Literature Review
Chapter 3: Methods
Chapter 4: Manuscript One (Quant.)
Chapter 5: Manuscript Two (Qual.)
Appendices

*This is just one example. Other examples may combine Quant and Qual results in one manuscript or include a 6th chapter to triangulate findings if not covered in manuscript(s).

8.5.2 Authorship of Manuscripts

The doctoral student must have the primary role in the design and execution of the dissertation study, as well as the analysis, the interpretation of the data, and the writing of the papers. Papers submitted in publishable format may have multiple authors with the candidate as first author and the Dissertation Chair or others who have contributed as co-authors, in accordance with the *Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in*

Medical Journals (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors [ICMJE], 2024). The Dissertation Chair and committee should encourage and support the student to revise and resubmit their manuscripts.

The student must adhere to professional and ethical standards in publishing, such as those provided by ICMJE. Permission should also be obtained from any individuals identified in the acknowledgements. Finally, comments from journal editors or reviewers regarding the revision or rejection of a manuscript should be shared with co-authors. Final approval of the manuscript should be obtained from all co-authors of any original or revised manuscripts submitted for publication.

8.5.3 Inclusion of Published Manuscripts

To comply with copyright law, the candidate should obtain written permission to include any published manuscripts in the dissertation. The dissertation should include the word processing format (i.e., Microsoft Word) of the published manuscript. If the journal requires the article to remain in its published format (i.e., pdf journal proof), the article should be placed in the appendix. The full citation for the manuscript, indicating whether it has been published, accepted for publication, or is under review, should be provided in the dissertation (e.g., preamble).

8.6 Final Oral Dissertation Defense

When the dissertation committee is in agreement that the candidate is ready to defend their dissertation, the Chair and PhD Program Director will schedule a final public defense. The purpose of the final oral defense is for the candidate to defend their dissertation research to the committee and the public as an original and significant contribution to the field of Nursing.

The candidate must be registered for NURS 999 Doctoral Dissertation during the semester in which the dissertation is defended AND submitted to the library. Candidates who defend in the summer semester must be registered for at least one credit of NURS 999 for that summer semester.

8.6.1 Timeline for Defense

Candidates should verify important deadlines with the registrar and University Dissertation and Thesis Services (UDTS). The following table provides a general calendar of these deadlines.

Activity	Spring	Summer	Fall
Deadline to Apply for Graduation	February	June	September
Dissertation Due to Committee (≥ 2 weeks prior defense)	March	June	Early November
Final Defense of the Dissertation (latest)	Early April	Early July	November
Completed UDTS Format Review Due	April	July	November
Final Dissertation Due to UDTS	April	July	Early December
Graduation	May	August	December

8.6.2 Preparation for Defense

The Office Manager arranges for a room and remote communication for members of the Mason external members of the committee. An announcement of the defense is circulated to the broader University community **at least two weeks** prior to the defense date. Candidate's family and friends are permitted to attend. A copy of the dissertation must be provided to the PhD Program Director and dissertation committee members **at least two weeks** before the scheduled final dissertation defense. A mock oral defense with the Chair and other doctoral students is *required*. Current PhD students are encouraged to attend the final defense.

In preparation for the final oral defense, the **candidate** is responsible for the following:

1. Submit the approved draft of the dissertation at least 14 days prior to the oral dissertation defense to all committee members and the PhD Program Director;
2. Create a program for the oral defense with guidance from the Dissertation Chair;
3. Have slides reviewed by the Dissertation Chair;
4. Complete a mock dissertation defense with the Chair and doctoral students; and
5. Provide copies of the slides to members of the committee on the day of the defense.

8.6.3 Day of Defense

The final oral defense is organized as follows (*times are approximates*, but usually does not exceed 2 hours). A celebration following the final dissertation defense is customary and is be coordinated by the Dissertation Chair in collaboration with PhD Program Director and Office Manager.

Estimated	Activity

Time	
5 min	The Dissertation Chair introduces the candidate, committee members, and any leadership/special guests in attendance and informs the audience of procedures. A short summary of the candidate's bio is presented.
30 min	The candidate presents their final dissertation. Copies of the presentation slides should be made available to the committee at the time of the defense.
15-20 mins	Members of the audience and dissertation committee will then be able to ask questions of the candidate.
45+ min	The dissertation committee will then adjourn for a private session with the candidate. The committee will continue to ask any remaining questions of the candidate germane to the dissertation research and to assess competencies expected of a PhD graduate. Any necessary revisions to the dissertation are also identified.
15 min	Once all questions are answered satisfactorily, the Dissertation Chair will then excuse the candidate for deliberation. The committee makes a final judgment regarding approval of the dissertation and discusses their decision with the candidate.

8.6.4 Outcome of Defense

During deliberation, the committee members will determine whether the candidate sufficiently answered questions while demonstrating an understanding and appropriate reasoning for the selection of methodology, interpretation of findings, methodological rigor and strength of findings, and choice of implications. Outcomes of the final oral dissertation defense include the following:

- **Pass:** A *majority* vote of the committee is needed to pass the final oral dissertation defense. The committee may make minor recommendations for changes to the dissertation (e.g., edits to a manuscript to increase readiness for journal submission) that do not affect the outcome of the defense. If so, the Dissertation Chair will oversee incorporating such recommendations into the dissertation prior to its submission to the University Library. The *Final Dissertation Approval* form, which is obtained from the Dissertation Chair, will be signed by the committee at the time of the defense (2 copies).

- **Conditional Pass:** The committee may require more than minor changes to the dissertation prior to its submission to the University Library. A list of these changes will be provided to the student in writing. The *Final Dissertation Approval* form will be signed by the committee once all members are satisfied that the revisions are complete.

- **Fail:** A candidate may fail their final oral defense if: 1) a majority of the committee does

not vote to pass or conditionally pass the candidate at the time of the final oral defense, or 2) the candidate does not complete the required revisions requested during a conditional pass. When this happens, the Dissertation Chair and PhD Program Director will meet with the candidate to develop a remediation plan (in consultation with the committee). The plan will be provided to the student in writing and will be executed under the supervision of the Dissertation Chair. Once the committee is satisfied that the candidate is ready to proceed again with the final oral dissertation defense, a new date is scheduled. Candidates who do not pass their final oral proposal defense must remain in NURS 999 during their remediation.

9. DEGREE CONFERRAL

After the candidate passes the final oral defense, the two copies of the "Final Dissertation Approval" form, previously signed by the committee, are then signed by the 1) PhD Program Director, 2) the Director of the SON, and 3) the Dean of CPH. One copy will be submitted by the student to the University Library with their dissertation and one copy will be retained in school records. The student must be registered for at least 1 credit of 999 during the semester in which the degree is conferred (including summer).

The **candidate** must complete the following to graduate:

- Adhere to all University deadlines required for graduation. Failure to meet the required deadlines (e.g., submission of final dissertation to the University Library) will result in the student not graduating during the intended semester.

- Complete the online Graduation Application form on Patriot Web by the required deadline.

- Have the formatting of their dissertation reviewed and verified by the University Library. This step is required prior to the dissertation's final submission to the Library.

- Submit their final dissertation with the signed Final Dissertation Approval form to the University Library. The University Library's written confirmation of receipt of the final dissertation is required for graduation.

- Provide a pdf of the final submitted dissertation to the Dissertation Chair, other committee members, and the PhD Program Director.

- Pay any outstanding fees to the University.

The **Dissertation Chair** must complete the following for the candidate to graduate:

- Verify any changes to the dissertation, recommended or required by the committee, are completed by the candidate prior to its submission to the University Library.

- Confirm all signatures are obtained for the Final Dissertation Approval form.

- Initiate a grade change request for each completed semester of NURS 999 to convert "IP"

(in progress) to "S" (satisfactory).

- Verify all procedures outlined in the candidate's IRB application for the disposition of identifiable and de-identified data were followed. As PI, the Dissertation Chair should maintain a copy of the data and the informed consents for the length of time dictated by IRB application and/or University policy.

10. STANDARDS OF PROGRESSION

10.1 Grading

Throughout the semester, students are assessed on how well they have met course objectives. Consistent with the university, the PhD in Nursing program does not provide a D grade. With the exception of 998/999, final grades for all PhD in Nursing courses are submitted to the university as letter grades. A grade of "IP" (in progress) is granted each semester for NURS 998 and NURS 999 until the successful proposal defense or dissertation defense, respectively; then all the grades will be changed to "S" (satisfactory).

Grade	Percent	Quality Points	Graduate Courses
A	90 – 100%	4.00	Passing
B	80 – 89%	3.00	Passing
C	70 – 79%	2.00	Failing
F	≤ 69%	0.00	Failing

10.2 Academic Standing/Progression

Good academic standing is a cumulative GPA of B or above, including electives. Receiving a C or F results in an Academic Warning per University Catalog (AP.6.6). Receiving more than one C or F in a core course will result in termination from the program.

Students must demonstrate continued progression in the PhD program. This includes passing the doctoral candidacy comprehensive exam, developing their research proposal, passing their oral proposal defense, executing their research, completing their dissertation, and passing their final oral dissertation defense. Lack of progress demonstrated towards meeting any of these goals may result in an unsatisfactory grade for that semester in NURS 998 or NURS 999 and thus, an Academic Warning. Failing the comprehensive exam is also evidence of lack of progress.

Students who have received an Academic Warning or who are not making progress in the program may not be eligible to be a Graduate Research Assistant/Graduate Teaching Assistant without approval by the PhD Program Director. A significant lack of progress is grounds for termination.

10.3 Grade Appeals

Although faculty members are generally the best judges of student performance, there may be times when a student chooses to appeal a grade. In such cases, first ask the faculty in writing (email is acceptable) to reconsider the grade and include a rationale for the grade appeal. The claim must pertain to fairness of grading policies or how procedures were applied to all students in class. Student preferences for certain teaching styles, testing methods, or faculty feedback will not be considered as a basis for appeal. It is important to note that the purpose of an appeal is not to regrade any student work within the course.

In the case that the student and the instructor are unable to agree, the student may appeal their case using the CPH Grade Appeal Process. The appeal should be submitted in writing to the Director of the SoN using the CPH Grade Appeal Form, which can be obtained by contacting the CPH Office of Student Affairs.

10.4 Incomplete Courses

A grade of incomplete (IN) is a temporary grade received by a student who, under exceptional circumstances, requests and is granted before the end of the term additional time beyond the course end date to complete outstanding coursework. Per University Catalog, this grade is only given to students who are passing a course but who are unable to complete scheduled coursework for a cause beyond reasonable control. A grade change will be made after the student completes all the required work based on the deadlines prescribed by the University.

10.5 Non-Academic Withdrawal

Requests for non-academic withdrawal from a course or semester is considered only under exceptional circumstances. Students should notify their advisor and the PhD Program Director of any circumstance in which a non-academic withdrawal may be necessary. Students should then review the University Catalog AP.1.5 Withdrawal policy and follow the CPH procedures outlined on their website for Course Withdrawal.

10.6 Notice of Concern

When a student is not meeting course objectives/requirements or dissertation progression, the course faculty/Academic Advisor/Dissertation Chair will initiate a Notice of Concern (NOC). The faculty will meet with the student to review the concern and develop a plan to resolve the concern with the goal to support student success. The NOC form will describe the concern and action plan, with details describing the steps to be taken by the student and/or faculty to resolve the concern, along with a timeline for completion. The NOC will be sent to the PhD Program Director and remain in the student's file until graduation.

To be considered as full-time under the aforementioned clauses, a student must complete and submit the Full-Time Equivalent Status Form to the Office of the University Registrar prior to the first day of classes for the semester. Different requirements for full-time and half-time status may apply for F1/J1 visa status, tuition, verification, loan deferral, and financial aid. Contact Student Accounts, the Office of the University Registrar, and Student Financial Aid, respectively, for more information. Note that the official designation of time status for all students is determined by the Office of the University Registrar.

11. ADDITIONAL PROGRAM POLICIES

11.1 University Policies

The student is responsible for abiding by all University Policies and the University Catalog.

11.2 Honor Code

The Honor Code is an integral part of George Mason University and upholds a tradition that has existed in Virginia since 1842. Each doctoral student has the responsibility to take the Honor Code Pledge and conform to and uphold the university's Honor Code. Attempted or actual cheating, plagiarism, lying, and/or stealing of academic work constitutes a violation of the Honor Code. The student is responsible for reviewing the Honor Code and its associated definitions of

sanctions, appeals, and procedural rights. **Any suspected violation will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.**

11.3 Professional Conduct

All students in the School of Nursing are expected to adhere to the [Professional Conduct Policy](#) of the College of Public Health.

11.4 Mason ID

All students should have access to their [Mason ID](#). This ID badge is an all-in-one card used to access Mason Money, meal plans, campus facilities, residence halls, Mason shuttles, social and athletic events, and more. Students can choose between a physical ID and the Mason Mobile ID available for iOS and Android devices.

11.5 Email Communication

Mason uses email to provide official information to students. All email communications between students and faculty should be done through the Mason email system. Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their [Mason email account](#) and are required to activate that account and check it regularly. All members of the Mason community, including students and instructors, are expected to communicate in a courteous and respectful manner. All verbal, written and electronic communications should be thoughtful and professional in execution (see [Writing Center Resource](#) for guidance).

11.6 Technology Requirement

Hardware: Students are required to have regular and reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system with at least 4 GB of RAM. Recommended operating systems include Windows 10 or an Apple supported Mac OSX system (current version or two versions older). Chromebooks are not supported. When considering Hard Disk Space, allow for: a) the storage needed to install any additional software and b) space to store work that you will do for the course.

A larger screen is recommended for better visibility of course material. You will need speakers or headphones to hear recorded content. Students are also required to have a device with a functional camera and microphone.

Internet: Students are required to have regular and reliable access to a fast and stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc.) with a consistent 1.5 Mbps

[megabits per second] download speed or higher.

Software: Courses in the School of Nursing use Blackboard as the learning management system. You will need a browser and operating system that are compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available on the myMason portal. Some courses may use additional learning management systems. Check the syllabus or contact the instructor for details.

Courses typically use Acrobat Reader, Java, Windows Media Player, QuickTime, Videolan Media Player, and/or Real Media Player. Your computer should be capable of running current versions of those applications. Also, make sure your computer is protected from viruses and malware. Antivirus protection is available on the ITS website. If you are using an employer-provided computer or corporate office for class attendance or coursework, please verify with your systems administrators that you will be able to install the necessary applications and that system or corporate firewalls do not block access to any sites or media types.

11.7 Doctoral Workspace

All PhD students in the college share access to dedicated PhD student computer workspaces in Peterson Hall. The managed desktop includes, but is not limited to, Windows 7, MS Office Professional (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access), and SPSS. Availability of PhD workspaces is first-come, first-served and personal belongings should not be left in the workspace. Wireless internet access is available throughout Peterson Hall for use on personal wireless devices.

11.8 SafeAssign

Certain written assignments in the course may/will be submitted to SafeAssign, a plagiarism prevention tool, to allow faculty to check the originality of your written work. After a submission is processed, a report is generated detailing the percentage of text in the submitted paper that matches existing sources. This percentage is a warning indicator only and does not provide an actual indicator of plagiarism. Papers are then reviewed individually by faculty to see if the matches are properly attributed. Additional plagiarism detection software (e.g., Turnitin.com) may be used as needed.

11.9 Protection of Academic Files

All students are required to do their due diligence in the protection of their course-related work. Coursework includes both electronic files and hard-copy documents of examinations, papers, and other assignments. Unauthorized sharing of or collaboration involving such documents constitutes cheating which is a violation of the Mason Honor Code. Due diligence in the

protection of course work includes but is not limited to: logging off all public campus computers, not leaving your own computer unattended or unsecured, not posting your documents in the public domain, maintaining current antivirus protection on your own computer, safeguarding your USB and other portable hard-drives, and not uploading or emailing your files to someone else's computer. If you have lost your computer, USB, paper documents, etc. and/or suspect that unauthorized access has been gained to your electronic or hard-copy files, notify your professor immediately. It is your responsibility to protect your hard work.

11.10 Use of Editorial Assistance

A student preparing written work to meet academic requirements may, when appropriate, use the assistance of an editor, provided that (1) the student receives approval from the professor of the course for which the written work is being submitted; (2) that editorial assistance provided be limited to only use of language and not to subject matter, content or meaning; and (3) that all editorial assistance be described and acknowledged in the report [assignment]. Description should include name, company (as appropriate), and credentials of the editor. The student must ensure that any assistance does not endanger the academic integrity and originality of the work. Please review the Mason Honor Code for further information.

11.11 Audio/Video Recordings

Faculty and students cannot record (audio or video) other students/faculty without their permission. If recording is necessary, every effort should be made to provide options for attendees who do not want to be recorded. Some classes will be recorded per faculty preference but only with notification of students. Recordings cannot be made available outside academic settings without permission of all involved.

11.12 Representation of the School of Nursing

Student scholarship is celebrated by faculty for both its valued learning experience and to support future academic careers. However, the student should discuss with their course instructor, Academic Advisor, or Dissertation Chair (as appropriate) any planned submission of material to be published or presented resulting from coursework or research conducted during their PhD program. Doing so will allow the faculty to advise the student furthering the report's success and representation of the School. By obtaining permission from faculty, the student can also use the George Mason University branding on presentations and poster materials. Authorship of any scholarship, whether publication or presentation, should abide by the guidelines set forth by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. The PhD

Program Director should be notified of any accepted scholarly publication or presentation abstract, with a copy uploaded by the student to their *PhD in Nursing Individual Advising* Folder.

11.13 Responsibilities of External Funding

Students interested in obtaining external funding to support their doctoral education, research, and/or scholarship should discuss their intentions with their advisor or Dissertation Chair. The advisor/Chair should seek clarification with the Office of Sponsored Research (OSP) or CPH Associate Dean of Research to determine whether such an application requires university notification. If University involvement is required (e.g., federal or foundation grants), the advisor/Chair must serve as the faculty principal investigator of internal record for OSP to process the request.

Students who have received external funding in support of their doctoral education (e.g., training grant) and/or research, must comply with the academic or reporting requirements of that award. The student should maintain careful records of their activities. Any deviations to the planned activities of the award should be communicated to the Dissertation Chair or faculty PI in a timely manner. Students who are successful in obtaining funding for their dissertation research or training must acknowledge this support in all subsequent publications, presentations and posters resulting from the award. This includes support from extramural and intramural/University awards. For example, for a NRSA this is usually worded: "This research was supported in part by a grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research F31 NRG 000000".

12. STUDENT RESOURCES

12.1 Funding Sources

Various intramural and extramural scholarships, grants, and funds are available to support PhD students. The table that follows provides a list of possible funding opportunities. It is not exhaustive. Students are also encouraged to explore professional organizations in their specialty area and consult with their academic advisor or PhD Program Director regarding the appropriateness of a particular grant mechanism. Due to changing deadlines, students should read the funding opportunity announcement, program announcement, or foundation's website for specific deadlines.

Intramural Funding	
Graduate Assistantships	See PhD Program Director for more information
CPH Scholarships	https://publichealth.gmu.edu/students/scholarships
Presidential Scholarship Program	https://graduate.gmu.edu/faculty-staff/supporting-graduate-students/presidential-scholars
Office of the Provost Awards & Grants	https://graduate.gmu.edu/financial-support/grants-fellowships-awards

Extramural Funding	
NIH F31: Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award (NRSA)	https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/fellowships/F31
NIH R36: Dissertation Award	https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/research-education/r36
AHRQ Grants for Health Services Research Dissertation Program (R36)	https://www.ahrq.gov/funding/training-grants/r36.html
Minority Fellowship Program (MFP)	https://www.samhsa.gov/minority-fellowship-program
NIJ Graduate Research Fellowship	https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/o-nij-2023-171521

Nurse Educator Scholarship Program	https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-equity/virginia-nurse-pme-incentive-programs/
HRSA Faculty Loan Repayment Program	https://bhw.hrsa.gov/funding/apply-loan-repayment/faculty-lrp
Southern Nursing Research Society (SNRS)	https://snrs.org/research-grants-funding-program/research-funding/snrs-dissertation-research-grant/
American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)	https://www.aacnnursing.org/Students/Financial-Aid https://www.aacnnursing.org/foundation/scholarships
Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI)	https://www.sigmanursing.org/advance-elevate/research/research-grants
American Nurses Foundation (ANF)	https://www.nursingworld.org/foundation/programs/nursing-research-grants/
National League for Nursing (NLN)	https://www.nln.org/nln-foundation/foundationoverview/nursing-education-scholarship-awards
Nurses Educational Funds (NEF)	https://www.n-e-f.org/how-to-apply.html
American Educational Research Association (AERA)	https://www.aera.net/Professional-Opportunities-Funding/AERA-Funding-Opportunities
Ford Foundation Fellowship Programs	https://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/FordFellowships/PGA_166320

12.2 Library Resources

The University Library at Mason has a wealth of resources, including access to databases, interlibrary loans, free reference management software, data management assistance, and statistical support. Additional library resources include:

Information	Access
Accessing Course Reserves	https://library.gmu.edu/reserves
Nursing Subject Guide	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/nursing
Global and Community Public Health	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/GCH
Digital Scholarship Center	https://dsc.gmu.edu

Research Support	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/research-support
Systematic Reviews	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/SR
Data Management	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/data-management
Qualitative Research & Tools	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/qual

12.3 Statistics Resources

12.3.1 Statistical Software:

IBM SPSS is currently the required statistical platform used by the core courses in the PhD in Nursing Program. Students may choose to purchase a license for SPSS under the guidance of course faculty or they may access the software for free using the resources below. Additional statistical software may be required for certain elective and alternative courses.

Resource	Access
Software for Digital Scholarship	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/software
Citrix Virtual Lab	https://its.gmu.edu/service/citrix-virtual-lab/
Mason Computer Labs	https://its.gmu.edu/service/computer-labs/
Digital Scholarship Center Computer Lab	https://dsc.gmu.edu/hours/

12.3.2 Statistics Support:

Resource	Access
Debby Kermer, Data Services Research Consultant	dkermer@gmu.edu
Intro Statistics	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/statsclass
Digital Scholarship Center	https://dsc.gmu.edu
Data Visualization	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/data-visualization
Statistics Consulting Center	https://statistics.gmu.edu/connections/consulting-center

Mason and CPH have access to many local, national, and international datasets to support research questions. The following resources may be helpful:

Resource	Access
Wendy Mann, Director, Digital Scholarship Center	wmann@gmu.edu
Health Statistics	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/healthstats
Dataset Archives	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/find-data/datasets
International Data	https://infoguides.gmu.edu/intlstats

12.4 Data Collection Platforms

CPH provides graduate students with free access to two research data collection platforms: Qualtrics and REDCap. Qualtrics is a web-based survey tool to conduct survey research, evaluations, and other data collection activities. REDCap is a robust HIPAA compliant longitudinal data collection platform that supports both online and offline data capture. Students interested in accessing these resources should contact their advisor/Chair.

12.5 Writing Support Services

Writing well does not just entail proper writing mechanics (i.e., grammar, spelling, etc.). A good writer must develop a style that communicates not only their message, but the author's status as a leader in his/her field. Mason has a wealth of writing resources available on campus for students who need assistance, and students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of these services. The University Writing Center offers free in-person and online tutoring and workshops for students in addition to online writing guides, reference guides, and style manuals. They assist students at every point of the writing process, from brainstorming to polishing. They have specific resources available for graduate and international students.

12.6 Disability Support Services

Both the SoN faculty and Disability Services at George Mason University are committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If a student is seeking accommodations for a

class, they should first visit the Disability Services [website](#) for detailed information about the the registration process. The student should then discuss their approved accommodations with their course faculty.

12.7 Mental Wellbeing

Faculty and advisors/Chairs are available to speak with students about stress related to coursework or program progression. If a student is experiencing feelings of anxiety, panic, depression, sadness during the semester, Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services Offices (703-993-2380) provides a range of resources to assist and support you. Students can call 703-993-2831 or walk-in during open hours to schedule an appointment to talk with a healthcare provider. If you or someone you know experiences a mental health crisis or emergency, seek help immediately. Call 911 for local emergency services, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (741-741) anytime.

12.8 Nursing Student Organizations

12.8.1 Sigma Theta Tau International, Epsilon Zeta Chapter

The goal of the honor society is to foster excellence, scholarship and leadership in nursing. With George Mason's strengths in diversity and more than 300 active members, Epsilon Zeta is a strong chapter within the international organization. Students are strongly recommended to become a member of this chapter and get involved in the activities.

12.8.2 Graduate Student Organization (GSO)

All doctoral students are automatically a member of the GSO. GSO meets monthly to support and enhance the learning, knowledge, and professional development of doctoral students in both the PhD and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs.

12.9 Opportunities to Volunteer in the School

The SoN Bylaws provide for opportunities for PhD students to volunteer on standing committees. We value student input as we continuously strive to improve the quality of our academic programs. The following standing committees may receive student volunteers:

- SoN Curriculum Committee
- SoN Student Matters Committee

12.10 Opportunities for Employment at Mason

Handshake is Mason's job search site, where students can find on-campus, part-time, internships, and full-time jobs related to their major, interests, and skills.

12.11 Other Student Resources

- Office of International Programs and Services
- Student Accounts Office
- CPH Student Affairs
- Student Health Services

Portions of this Handbook were adapted from the following sources:

Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing 2019-2020 Student Handbook and Academic Catalog, University of Virginia School of Nursing PhD Academic Policies and Procedures (September 2020), University of Maryland School of Nursing Student Handbook (2021), Columbia University School of Nursing 2019-2020 PhD Program Student Handbook, and University of Minnesota School of Nursing PhD Student Handbook (2016) .