



**ASPEN**  
UNIVERSITY ...*Education - Delivered*



# Master of Science in Nursing

## 2018 Student Handbook



**Aspen University**

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We understand the demands and constraints associated with trying to fit education into an already busy work and life schedule. Harnessing the power of the Internet and online collaboration, Aspen has created interactive, flexible, facilitated, online courses designed to fit around your lifestyle. Education is a journey of professional growth. The starting point is you, here and now. The ending point is you, with the skills and knowledge to compete and win in a world where business and technology are inextricably intertwined.

Re-create yourself at Aspen University—the award-winning, accredited University where you can earn your degree online—without setting foot in a classroom.

## **A Higher Degree of Education!**

Aspen University has always been an online University—effectively leading the way in online education. By reaching the learner in his or her real world, and real work environment, distance learning programs enhance the way individuals learn best: through experience, reflection, implementation, and experiment. By stepping out of the known environment of classroom-centered instruction, Aspen University's distance learning programs consider what needs to be gained or changed through the learning process. Aspen's programs provide its graduates with an advantage to excel in the challenging professional work environments of today and tomorrow.

Aspen University understands your educational needs as a working professional and your desire to have relevant opportunities for lifelong learning. We also understand the pride you have in your accomplishments, in your proven capabilities to direct your own life, and in your potential as someone who can grow in today's rapidly-changing work environments.

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### **Flexible**

Log on day or night and you're in class. Network as you learn. Interact with respected technology leaders and fellow professionals from around the globe, or opt for even more flexibility with courses facilitated one-on-one with the instructor. Then apply what you've learned right away in your professional environment.

### **Tailored for the Adult Learner**

Aspen University understands your educational needs as a working professional in this business climate and your need to have relevant opportunities for lifelong learning. All Aspen courses are facilitated by industry-expert instructors with advanced degrees, so you can be assured of a high level of relevant and meaningful feedback.

### **Discover Aspen University**

Join us at Aspen University. Apply online at <https://admin.aspen.edu/index.html> or call our admissions office at: 303.333.4224 or Toll-free in the United States at 1.800.373.7814.

"Earning my Master degree in Nursing has been a goal that I've always wanted to accomplish for more than twenty years and I just never had the right combination of time, money and motivation at the same time. Aspen University made that possible by assisting with two of those barriers. Combined with my self-motivation and Aspen's low cost and flexibility to accelerate, I obtained a high-quality education and achieved my goal."

"The program was affordable and self-paced. Specifically, what I liked about Aspen University's program was I could take two courses at the same time, so I finished my degree quicker."

**Dr. Marcos Gayol, RN**  
MSN Alumnus  
Nursing Education specialty  
(2012)

## Philosophy/Mission

Aspen University is dedicated to offering any motivated college-worthy student the opportunity to receive a high quality, responsibly priced distance-learning education for the purpose of achieving sustainable economic and social benefits for themselves and their families. This is accomplished by achievement of the following goals:

The **Academic Achievement Goal** is to transition motivated learners to higher levels of productive citizenship by providing a readily accessible education that teaches knowledge and skills of enduring value.

The **Economic Responsibility Goal** is to offer tuition rates low enough that a majority of our students will not incur debt through utilization of federal financial aid, and ensure alumni have achieved a return on investment benefit following earning a degree from Aspen University.

## Accreditation

Aspen University is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC). DEAC is listed by the U.S. Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency, and is a recognized member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.



Distance Education Accrediting Commission  
1101 17<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 808  
Washington D.C. 20036

The baccalaureate and master's degrees in nursing at Aspen University are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Officially recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as a national accreditation agency, the CCNE is an autonomous accrediting agency contributing to the improvement of the public's health. CCNE ensures the quality and integrity of baccalaureate and graduate education programs preparing effective nurses.

Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE)  
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 530  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 887-6791



# Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)



## Mission Statement

The mission of the Aspen University School of Nursing is to enhance the health and quality of life for individuals, families, and communities at local, state, and national levels through excellence in teaching, scholarship and practice. The Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program prepares nurses to assume leadership roles in management, education, and clinical practice within a diverse society and across a spectrum of healthcare settings.

Theory courses combine the basic foundation of traditional education in a convenient distance-learning format, enabling practicing nurses to meet their academic, professional and personal goals. Practicum courses are performed in a clinical practice or academic setting allowing students to apply learned concepts under the direct supervision of a Preceptor.

## MSN Program Goals

**The goals of the MSN program are to prepare nurse leaders, educators, and advanced practitioners who emulate the following characteristics and behaviors:**

- **Background for Practice from Sciences and Humanities**  
Integrates scientific findings from nursing, biopsychosocial fields, genetics, public health, quality improvement, and organizational sciences for the continual improvement of nursing care across diverse settings.
- **Organizational and Systems Leadership**  
Demonstrates leadership skills that emphasize ethical and critical decision making, effective working relationships, and a systems-perspective because organizational and systems leadership are critical to the promotion of high quality and safe patient care.
- **Quality Improvement and Safety**  
Articulates methods, tools, performance measures, and standards related to quality, and applies quality principles within an organization.
- **Translating and Integrating Scholarship into Practice**  
Applies research outcomes within the practice setting, resolves complex practice problems, works as a change agent, and disseminates results.

- **Informatics and Healthcare Technologies**  
Using patient-care technologies, delivers and enhances care and using communication technologies, integrates and coordinates care.
- **Health Policy and Advocacy**  
Intervenes at the system level through the policy development process and employs advocacy strategies to influence health and health care.
- **Interprofessional Collaboration for Improving Patient and Population Health Outcomes**  
As a member and leader of interprofessional teams, communicates, collaborates, and consults with other health professionals to manage and coordinate care.
- **Clinical Prevention and Population Health for Improving Health**  
Applies and integrates broad, organizational, client-centered, and culturally appropriate concepts in the planning, delivery, management, and evaluation of evidence-based clinical prevention and population care and services to individuals, families, and aggregates/identified populations.
- **Master's-Level Nursing Practice**  
Integrates the advanced level of understanding of nursing and relevant sciences with nursing practice to create nursing practice interventions

### **Anticipated Student Learning Outcomes**

At the completion of the MSN Program, graduates will have the knowledge and skills to:

- Assume responsibility for leadership in health-oriented and educational systems.
- Advocate for health care and health care systems that reflect sensitivity to diversity and a view of clients as holistic beings.
- Demonstrate intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and motivation toward continued learning.
- Examine one's own practice for evidence of a theoretical and research base.
- Communicate effectively integrating a caring collaborative professional approach.
- Competently assess, interpret, and communicate information using oral, written, and electronic methods.
- Demonstrate attitudes, values, ethics, and competencies consistent with the practice of professional nursing.
- Practice nursing research through appraisal, synthesis, and generation of evidence.
- Develop, maintain, and evaluate organizational and educational systems to facilitate the delivery of care within diverse settings, and change where indicated based on best practices.
- Create a professional practice environment that fosters excellence in nursing and meaningful strategies to maximize the professional development.
- Ensure the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, and

services that are evidence-based and consistent with professional standards and values.

### **Program Admission Requirements**

There are two entry options for students wishing to pursue the MSN degree. The first entry option is for applicants who already have a BSN. These students would enter the traditional MSN program. The second entry option is for applicants who have an associate degree or diploma in nursing. These students would enter the RN-to-MSN Program.

## **RN-to-MSN degree program**

Aspen University offers an online RN-to-MSN degree program for registered nurses who have an associate degree or diploma in nursing and wish to pursue a graduate degree. Students do not receive a BSN degree, but instead progress toward graduating with the MSN degree in a specialty area. Built upon a liberal arts foundation, this “bridge” program begins with 21-credits of undergraduate nursing courses that are designed to prepare students for the rigor of a master's level nursing program. After the completion of core masters nursing courses, students select a focus in one specialty track, completing 36 credits of graduate-level course work. All courses in the RN-to-MSN degree program are completed online, and practicum experiences are mentored by a local preceptor, which eliminates travel. Full-time students can complete the RN-to-MSN program in as little as two years, enabling them to quickly achieve their educational goals and increase their options for career mobility.

### **RN-MSN Program Goals**

**The goals of the RN-MSN component of the MSN program are to provide nurses with a foundation for the successful transition into graduate nursing education who emulate the following characteristics and behaviors:**

- **Professional Behavior/Ethics**  
Develop a personal values system and value-based behaviors that include the capacity to make and act upon ethical judgments
- **Cultural Competence**  
Recognize the need for evidence-based knowledge and sensitivity to variables such as age, gender, culture, health disparities, socioeconomic status, race, and spirituality
- **Research and Evidence-based practice**  
Use research findings and other evidence in designing, implementing, and evaluating care that is multidimensional, high quality, cost-effective and leads to improved patient outcomes
- **Leadership/Advocacy**  
Work within organizational and community arenas to promote high quality patient care through organizational and systems leadership, quality improvement, and safety

- **Technology**

Design and implement measures to modify risk factors and promote healthy lifestyles, utilizing emerging advances in science and technology

### **Anticipated Student Learning Outcomes**

The undergraduate courses within the “bridge” component have been designed to meet the AACN *Baccalaureate Essentials* and to support the transition into the graduate-level nursing courses. In addition to the existing MSN program goals, the unique goals of the RN-to-MSN program are to prepare associate-degree nurses with the knowledge and skills to be successful in graduate-level nursing courses. Upon transition to the graduate-level courses, students should be able to:

- Analyze the impact of economic, demographic and technological forces on health care delivery, and the concerns relating to ethical, legal, and social issues that influence nursing practice.
- Apply a solid foundation of research and theory, focusing on the interrelationships and application of these concepts to nursing practice, education, and leadership
- Improve population health across the lifespan and across the continuum of healthcare environments through health promotion and disease prevention strategies
- Understand leadership and management concepts that directly and indirectly influence the nature and functioning of the healthcare system and professional nursing practice.
- Assess health among a diverse patient population, devising strategies for the prevention and early detection of disease across the life span.
- Integrate professional values, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors into nursing practice

### **RN-to-MSN Program Admission Requirements**

- Associate Degree in Nursing or diploma from a nursing school, with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater.
- Provide documentation of a current, unencumbered license to practice as a registered nurse.
- A minimum of one year of nursing experience completed within the past 5 years.
- A current resume.

### **Liberal Arts Education Requirements**

The Aspen University MSN curriculum builds on a foundation comparable to baccalaureate-level nursing knowledge. A solid base in liberal education provides the distinguishing cornerstone for the study and practice of professional nursing. Liberal education enables the nurse to integrate knowledge, skills, and values from the arts and sciences to provide humanistic, safe quality care; to act as advocates for individuals, families, groups, communities, and/or populations; and to promote social justice (*Baccalaureate*

*Essentials*, AACN, 2008, p. 12).

Students in the RN-to-MSN program are required to have completed a broad spectrum of liberal arts education course work, which includes both the sciences and the arts. Nursing courses are not considered as part of this requirement. Examples of recommended liberal arts courses include:

### **Communications**

- English
- Writing

### **Medical Management**

### **Sciences**

- Physical sciences
- Mathematical sciences
- Social sciences

### **Arts**

- Humanities

## **RN-to-MSN Program Degree Completion Requirements**

The “bridge” component of the RN-to-MSN program is comprised of 7 courses (3 cr. ea.), spanning content normally acquired in upper-division bachelor-degree nursing programs. Following successful completion of the seven bridge courses, students will transition into the MSN courses. Grading policies for the seven “bridge” courses are consistent with other undergraduate courses.

**\*\*A proctored examination is required at the completion of the 400-level RN-MSN courses to demonstrate mastery of the student learning outcomes. At the completion of the core MSN courses, a second proctored exam is required.**

All financial obligations to Aspen University, including the graduation fee, must be satisfied before a diploma and final transcript can be released.

# Traditional MSN degree program

## **MSN Program Admission Requirements**

Please refer to the Aspen University Catalog for detailed information on admission standards and procedures. The following information is specific to the MSN program. Admission requirements include:

- A Baccalaureate degree in nursing (BSN) from a nursing school, with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater on a 4.0 scale.
- Provide documentation of a current, unencumbered license to practice as a registered nurse.
- A current resume.
- A minimum of one year of registered nursing experience completed within the past 5 years.

## **MSN Degree Completion Requirements**

Graduate-level degree candidates must successfully complete all required courses with an overall GPA of 3.0 and must also pass any required examinations. **There is a proctored comprehensive examination at the end of the MSN core program, in addition to an oral Presentation of the Capstone Project.** Core courses and focus track courses (36 semester credits total) are required in the MSN program. All financial obligations to Aspen University, including the graduation fee, must be satisfied before the degree can be conferred and a diploma and final transcript can be released.

\*Practicum courses are performed in a nursing work environment under the supervision of a preceptor. The preceptor is generally a Master's or Doctorally-prepared Registered Nurse working with the student in a supervisory position. **Practicum courses are charged an additional Practicum Fee of \$250 per course.**

## **COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

### **RN-to-MSN Bridge Courses**

#### **N490 Issues and Trends in Professional Nursing**

*Issues and Trends in Professional Nursing* analyzes the impact of economic, demographic and technological forces on health care delivery, and the concerns relating to ethical, legal, and social issues that influence nursing practice. A historical background gives perspective to current nursing problems, and future trends are considered in terms of their impact on roles and practice. Issues impacting professional nursing are examined within a framework set forth by the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) five core competencies on quality and healthcare. The potential transformation of nursing practice in response to societal changes will be explored as well as the new opportunities these challenges have for career development.

#### **N491 Concepts and Theories in Nursing**

*Concepts and Theories in Nursing* provides an introduction to theory and reasoning in nursing. The significance of theory for nursing as a profession is explored, thus providing students with a foundation for professional nursing practice and research. This course provides an overview of theory, theory development, important nursing theories and nursing theorists, as well as a method for critiquing theory. Students are guided to develop a foundation of reasoning skills that are necessary to integrate the components of knowledge, skills, values, meanings, and experiences into nursing practice.

#### **N492 Community Health Nursing I**

*Community Health Nursing I* provides a solid foundation in community and public health nursing concepts and interventions for individuals, families, and communities. Various roles of the nurse are explored in relation to primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention with target populations across the lifespan. The impact of political, economic, social, environmental, and cultural concerns on the health of populations is examined. Health promotion and disease prevention concepts are integrated into the multifaceted role of population-focused, community-oriented nursing practice.

#### **N493 Community Health Nursing II**

*Community Health Nursing II* builds upon the foundation provided in N492 *Community Health Nursing I*. From a theoretical and scientific framework, the concepts of epidemiology and disease transmission, comprehensive assessment of risk factors and health problems, program planning and intervention, environmental health, and collaboration with the interdisciplinary team are explored. A community health project focuses upon developing and evaluating health promotion programs, family assessment, community assessment, and community-based home care within the context of the community. The nursing process is applied with the goal of promoting and preserving the health of populations. *It is anticipated that sixty hours of community interaction will be required to complete this health promotion project.*

### **N494 Essentials of Nursing Research**

*Essentials of Nursing Research* introduces the steps of the research process and the role of research in the practice of professional nursing. The methods and analytical tools required to critically evaluate nursing research literature are emphasized. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are highlighted. The focus of this course is on accessing and analyzing current nursing research literature to enable the professional nurse to apply research to current practice and issues. The skills of using technology to locate research information are developed, and the essential role of databases is explored. An understanding of ethical research practices is explored. This course prepares students to be critical consumers of evidence based research, and serves as a foundation for graduate-level nursing research courses.

### **N495 Health Assessment**

*Health Assessment* focuses on the complete health assessment, the nursing process, and its relationship to the prevention and early detection of disease in diverse patients across the life span. The process of health assessment is introduced, including: interviewing, history-taking, and physical assessment. Health assessment occurs within the context of the family and community and incorporates cultural and developmental variations and needs of the patient. Normal findings and cultural and age variations are emphasized. Incorporated throughout the course is the importance of communication and collaboration with patients and health care professionals. This course prepares the professional nurse to apply the concepts, knowledge and skills necessary to complete a health assessment for patients in all age groups, emphasizing the major elements, sequence and methodology of health assessment. This course also serves as a foundation for a graduate-level health assessment course.

### **N496 Nursing Leadership and Management**

*Nursing Leadership and Management* provides broad and comprehensive coverage of leadership and management theories and processes that are critical to the creation of a work environment that is efficient, cost-effective, and committed to quality nursing care. The emphasis is on understanding the key skills employed by highly successful nurse leaders/managers such as critical thinking, effective communication, conflict resolution, successful delegation, team building, controlling resources, quality improvement, stress management, utilization of information technology, and leading change. Students are engaged with opportunities to participate in learning activities that integrate knowledge about the activities, roles, and responsibilities of nurse managers/leaders and enable students to practice conceptual, technical, and interpersonal management and leadership skills. This course prepares the student for an entry position into the professional nurse manager role, and serves as a foundation for graduate-level leadership and management courses.

## **MSN Course Descriptions**

### **N502 Health Care Systems**

This graduate-level course introduces students to the historical development, structure, operation, and current and future directions of the major components of the American health care delivery system. It reviews the historical evolution of the health care system's features and examines the ways in which health care services are organized and delivered, the influences that affect health care public policy decisions, factors that determine priorities for the allocation of health care resources, and the relationship of health care costs to measurable benefits. The course enables students to assess the role of organized efforts to influence health policy formulation, and the contributions of medical technology, research findings, and societal values on our evolving health care delivery system.

### **N507 Theoretical Foundations in Nursing**

This graduate-level course begins by providing the foundation necessary to understand what nursing theory is and how it is used in nursing. The development, analysis, and evaluation of nursing theory will be emphasized. Grand and middle range theories will be discussed, with an overview of several of those currently in use. Shared theories from other disciplines --- such as the sociological, behavioral, and biomedical sciences— will also be included. The focus of this course is on the application of theory in nursing practice, nursing research, nursing administration and management, and nursing education.

### **N508: Theory and Research for Advanced Nursing Practice (3 credits)**

This graduate-level course is designed to develop and refine the knowledge and skills necessary to critique theory and research from nursing and related fields. The focus of this course is on the examination of the research process with applicability to advanced nursing practice. Emphasis is placed on the critique, evaluation, and utilization of nursing and related research that applies to advanced nursing practice and a comprehensive approach to care. Ethical aspects and technological aspects of scholarly inquiry are explored. This course supports the development of the research design, theoretical framework, methods of analysis, and abstract for the capstone project proposal.

### **N510: Advanced Pathophysiology (3 credits)**

This course will build on your previous pre-licensure anatomy and physiology courses, and your own life experiences to solidify a foundation of advanced pathophysiology that you will use as an advanced practice nurse. If you should have any questions about this course, please contact your instructor immediately. If you should have any concerns about your instructor, please contact your academic advisor immediately. We wish you all the best in your journey to grow as a reflective scholar as you learn new concepts, and hopefully even reinforce some knowledge and skills you already possess.

### **N511: Advanced Pharmacology (3 credits)**

This course will build on your previous pre-licensure pharmacology course, and your own life experiences to solidify a foundation of advanced pharmacology that you will use as an advanced practice nurse. If you should have any questions about this course, please contact your instructor immediately. If you should have any concerns about your instructor, please contact your academic advisor immediately. We wish you all the best in your journey to grow as a reflective scholar as you learn new concepts, and hopefully even reinforce some knowledge and skills you already possess.

### **N512 Diverse Populations & Health Care**

This graduate-level course provides an in-depth study of cultural diversity, delineating ethnocultural congruent health-care practices in a pluralistic society. Assessment, planning, and interventions for health promotion and maintenance, illness and disease prevention, health restoration, and health policy are explored. The course examines the meanings of health and illness across ethnocultural groups and communities.

### **N517 Research Design**

This graduate nursing course focuses learning on evidence-based practice using the body of scientific knowledge in the areas of advanced nursing practice, nursing education, and nursing management. Learners develop an understanding of evaluating healthcare research and integrating the results into professional practice. The learner will develop a proposal that addresses a nursing or healthcare issue and provide a strategy to research the proposal. Content is discussed in terms of nursing research problems and application to clinical, academic, and management settings. Strategies for research utilization and dissemination in advanced nursing roles are developed.

### **N518: Advanced Physical Assessment (3 credits)**

This graduate level course focuses on advanced health/physical assessment and includes the comprehensive history, physical, and psychological assessment of signs and symptoms, pathophysiologic changes, and psychosocial variations of the patient (individual, family, or community). This course will prepare students by providing an in-depth knowledge of core general assessment content, in addition to geriatric, pediatric, genetic, social, cultural, and community-specific needs. Appropriate screening and diagnostic testing methods will also be included. Content knowledge will be reinforced through a series of virtual reality patient encounter simulations. This will culminate with a precepted virtual reality comprehensive physical assessment.

### **N520 Legal and Ethical Issues in Healthcare**

This graduate-level course focuses on the legal and ethical rights, responsibilities, and obligations of the practicing nurse in a changing health environment. It is intended to provide graduate nursing students with the theory, knowledge and application necessary to deal with pressing legal and ethical issues in nursing practice. Learners will develop a framework for working through increasingly complex legal and ethical issues that affect nurses. This framework and broadened perspective will help practitioners recognize and respond to dilemmas within diverse health care settings and nursing roles. This course will provide an overview of regulatory action and the legislative and judicial processes, enabling learners to become familiar with changes affecting the health care system such as patient rights, technological advances, and managed care. Within an ethical framework, ethical and professional issues affecting the individual, the practice of professional nursing, and the profession will be explored.

### **N522 Modern Organizations and HealthCare**

This graduate-level course contains both theoretical content as well as an examination of processes involved in human behaviors in the healthcare organizational setting. Students will become more aware of the dynamics of group processes and acquire skills (i.e., motivation and leadership skills, conflict management, negotiation skills, etc.) to improve their group performance. This course examines (1) individual behaviors, (2) leadership, and (3) intrapersonal and interpersonal issues. Specific areas included in this course are diversity, perceptions and attitudes, communications, decision-making, power, leadership, motivation, stress and conflict management. Additionally, we will discuss strategies for facilitating learning experiences in a multicultural environment.

### **N537 Health Care Informatics**

This graduate-level course covers the history of healthcare informatics, current issues, basic informatics concepts, and health information management applications. Health informatics is the intersection of information science, computer science, and health care. It deals with the resources, devices, and methods required optimizing the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information in health care settings. Health informatics tools include not only computers but also clinical guidelines, formal medical terminologies, and information and communication systems. This course focuses on the application of health care informatics from a nursing perspective. Based on the Foundation of Knowledge model, this course demonstrates how nursing and healthcare informatics relate to knowledge acquisition, knowledge processing, knowledge generation, knowledge dissemination, and feedback, all of which build the science of nursing.

### **N538: Advanced Health Care Informatics (3 credits)**

This course will build on previous informatics courses to problem-solve complex nursing informatics problems through applying and executing solutions. Issues that we will address include interoperability, integration, health information exchange, quality, meaningful use, electronic health records, education, underserved populations, public health and evidence-based practice.

### **N542 Health Care Finance and Economics**

This graduate-level course will help nurse managers to understand and implement processes for management of financial issues in health care. Finance is an often confusing part of providing healthcare in the United States. Regulatory bodies, multiple payer sources, and complicated reimbursement schedules are just a few of the things that contribute to the state of healthcare finance in the 21st century. This course will introduce the concepts of reimbursement based on meeting the needs of the client rather than meeting the bottom line. Budgetary considerations, cash flow, cost to benefit analysis, and salaries are discussed in a forthright and comprehensive manner.

Understanding how clients view healthcare and then understanding the role of healthcare payment will assist nursing leaders to make quality decisions that will benefit the patient and the facility. This course will assist the nurse manager to implement financial considerations into quality patient care.

### **N547 Health Care Strategic Management and Planning**

This graduate-level course provides in-depth coverage of strategic thinking, strategic planning, and managing the strategic momentum. This course demonstrates how strategic managers can become strategic thinkers with the crucial skills to evaluate the changing environment, analyze data, question assumptions, and develop new ideas. Students will be introduced to methods to develop and document a plan of action through strategic planning and illustrate how, as managers attempt to carry out the strategic plan, they evaluate its success, learn more about what works, and incorporate new strategic thinking into future planning. Diverse strategic situations will be presented in case study format, which enhances the applicability of the concepts.

### **N550 Nursing Administration Practicum I**

This practicum experience focuses on the analysis, synthesis, and application of principles and theories related to nursing administration and leadership. It is designed to provide the student with the opportunity to integrate theory in a context of the nurse executive's role. During the practicum experience, students observe, analyze, and participate in the role of the nurse executive in a designated health care delivery system under the supervision of a preceptor. Experiences are designed and arranged by the student and approved by the faculty to provide executive level exposure to nursing administration operations and local business health policies and procedures. Within the asynchronous classroom environment, students will explore concepts pertinent to enactment of the nurse executive role, with an emphasis on application of leadership/management theory, effective supervision, problem solving, organizational theory and structure, personnel and operations management, and communication. (80 practicum hours are required for N550).

### **N552 Nursing Administration Practicum II**

This practicum experience focuses on the analysis, synthesis, and application of principles and theories related to nursing administration and leadership. It is designed to provide the student with the opportunity to integrate theory in a context of the nurse executive's role. During the precepted practicum experience, students observe, analyze, and participate in

the role of the nurse executive in a designated health care delivery system. Experiences are designed and arranged by the student and approved by the faculty to provide executive level exposure to nursing administration operations and local business health policies and procedures. Within the asynchronous classroom environment, students will explore concepts pertinent to enactment the nurse executive role, with an emphasis on application of leadership/management theory, effective supervision, problem solving, organizational theory and structure, personnel and operations management, and communication (100 practicum hours are required for N552).

### **N555 Advanced Pathophysiology A**

This graduate-level course focuses on developing advanced knowledge of human pathophysiological functions and responses to altered conditions, and includes integration of this knowledge into evidenced-based nursing practice. This course will prepare students to function in advanced practice and nurse educator roles by providing an in-depth understanding of pathophysiologic processes, enabling the student to predict clinical manifestations, select evaluative studies, initiate appropriate therapies, and anticipate potential complications. Insights into the underlying disease process will prepare the practitioner and educator for integration of new and innovative interventions and pharmacotherapeutics. Appropriate screening and diagnostic testing methods will also be included. Emphasis will be placed on important pathophysiological concepts needed to support the goals of *Healthy People 2020* to improve clients' quality of life and reduce health disparities.

### **N556 Advanced Pathophysiology B**

This graduate-level course focuses on developing advanced knowledge of human pathophysiological functions and responses to altered conditions, and includes integration of this knowledge into evidenced-based nursing practice. This course will prepare students to function in advanced practice and nurse educator roles by providing an in-depth understanding of pathophysiologic processes, enabling the student to predict clinical manifestations, select evaluative studies, initiate appropriate therapies, and anticipate potential complications. Insights into the underlying disease process will prepare the practitioner and educator for integration of new and innovative interventions and pharmacotherapeutics. Appropriate screening and diagnostic testing methods will also be included. Emphasis will be placed on important pathophysiological concepts needed to support the goals of *Healthy People 2020* to improve clients' quality of life and reduce health disparities. Advanced Pathophysiology B builds upon the foundation established in Advanced Pathophysiology A, and continues in a systems approach.

### **N580 Issues in Nursing Education**

This graduate level course explores foundational principles of the scholarship of teaching as the basis for examining the role of the nurse educator in academic, clinical, and community settings. Characteristics of learners with diverse learning styles and backgrounds are explored, with emphasis on assessing learning style preferences, critical thinking abilities, and literacy. Current trends in nursing education are examined, including the evolving role of technology, the influence of demographics, and educational policies that impact the learner, the teacher, and the learning environment. This course concludes

with an analysis of legal and ethical issues that relate to client/staff education as well as the academic performance of students.

### **N582 Teaching Strategies for Nurse Educators**

This graduate level course introduces the principles of teaching and learning among a diverse population of learners in academic and clinical environments. A variety of strategies to facilitate learning in cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains will be explored. Students will develop learning activities for the traditional, non-traditional and online learning environments in academic and clinical settings, utilizing evidence-based resources to support teaching and learning. Integrating educational technology within the learning environment is also a component of the course. Various methods for designing, conducting, and analyzing assessments and evaluations of learning outcomes will be appraised.

### **N584 Curriculum Development, Implementation, and Evaluation**

This graduate level course focuses on designing nursing curriculum in diverse learning environments using evidence-based theories and concepts as well as relevant standards and criteria for evaluation. The relationship of nursing curriculum to the parent institution's mission and philosophy is analyzed. Development, implementation and evaluation of a continuing education program for staff, patient or public education also is emphasized.

### **N586 Nurse Practicum**

This graduate level course focuses on the implementation of the specialist nurse role through the application of theoretical concepts and strategies for a selected learner population in an academic, legal, or clinical setting. Emphasis is on effective communication and sensitivity to varying needs of the learner based on cultural and educational background. The specialist nurse role will be analyzed and applied in collaboration with a master's or doctoral-degreed registered nurse preceptor with experience in the specialty. Evidence-based strategies will be developed into a comprehensive activity or teaching plan to engage learners in active learning and implemented to meet mutually determined outcomes. Activities might include, but are not limited to: creating toolkit of resource references, developing a PowerPoint® or Prezi® for presentation, creating a survey to measure satisfaction with activity, attending professional meetings, writing a publishable article, presenting a topic to patients, creating a webinar, delivering a training module to staff nurses, developing software to meet a need, creating a Review of Literature, developing an advocacy agenda, or proposing a change in process or procedure. (180 practicum hours are required for N586).

**Prerequisite:** All core and specialty courses in MSN curriculum.

### **N599 Nursing Capstone**

The purpose of this individualized learning experience is to enable you to develop an original comprehensive nursing capstone project on a topic of professional or personal interest. This project-based course is intended to enable you to research, design and develop a substantial original applied project of your own authorship.

The N599 Capstone Project/Master's Thesis course is designed to encourage students to draw upon knowledge and experience that they have gained over the course of their graduate nursing studies with Aspen University. This project is intended to encourage the demonstration of scholarly thought, incorporation of research findings, application of essential theories, principles, and processes studied in MSN graduate courses to an actual nursing problem or issue of interest and relevance to their professional activities.

An overview of the Capstone process is provided:

#### Enrollment

You may enroll in the N599 Capstone Project after you have completed all courses within the MSN curriculum. This course may be taken concurrently with the final Practicum courses (N552 and N586) with written permission from the Director of Graduate Nursing. Upon enrolling in the Capstone course, you will be assigned a Capstone Instructor who will remain with you throughout the entire course. Your Capstone Instructor will be a select member of the Aspen faculty whose area of expertise has been chosen to most closely align with your Capstone Project interests.

The N599 Capstone Project course is comprised of two phases:  
(Project Proposal).

This phase has been designed to assist you in developing and creating a formal Capstone Project proposal. Your Capstone Instructor will review your Project Proposal and make recommendations before granting approval to proceed with your project. This phase is usually completed in the first two weeks of enrollment and is accomplished by a series of classroom communications between you and your Capstone Instructor.

A detailed overview of activities is provided below.

(Project Implementation and Dissemination).

The second phase has been designed to assist you in implementing your approved formal Capstone Project proposal toward completion of your project. As you progress toward completing your final project submission, your Capstone Instructor will review, analyze, and critique your Capstone Project activities, formal documentations and oral presentation that you have prepared on a section by section basis so that any significant changes or amendments that are suggested can be integrated into your Capstone Project/Master's Thesis manuscript.

The final Capstone Project/Master's Thesis manuscript will be graded by the Capstone Instructor however he or she may select to forward your project to either the Dean of Nursing or Director of Graduate Nursing Programs for a second opinion and evaluation.

#### Project Proposal - Selection of a capstone topic

Capstone projects are intended to be of an applied and pragmatic nature, with the hope that the outcome/findings will be of value to you personally and to the nursing profession. Your topic need not be aligned with traditional functional areas of nursing activity and may assume a variety of formats. Ideas for capstone projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Design or develop a curriculum

- Implement and evaluate an educational activity
- Create a systemic review of the literature to support evidence-based change
- Design and implement a change project (e. g. proposal for a change in process)
- Write a grant
- Develop a policy and work with leaders to implement it.
- Analyze systematically the healthcare system in another geographic region
- Develop or revise an existing business or marketing plan within a nursing or healthcare organization
- Advocate for legislative change for an issue important to nursing
- Write a publishable journal article
- Create a professional conference poster
- Design an informatics solution to a nursing problem

#### Develop a proposal based on the capstone proposal template

When you have chosen a topic, and received approval from your Capstone Instructor, you can proceed to complete the capstone proposal template. The template is designed to guide you through specific steps that will become the blueprint to follow for the rest of your project. The template includes project title, description, rationale, personal/professional expectations, project goals, analysis of the literature, procedure, and evaluation.

Refine your proposal based upon input from your Capstone Instructor.

This step can be accomplished through classroom communication until the Capstone Instructor

is satisfied that all requirements for the proposal have been met. The final proposal can be submitted through the classroom drop box for formal approval and acknowledgement that it is complete in all aspects.

#### Develop a Work plan/Schedule of Deliverables

To progress in a timely manner for the implementation and dissemination of your Capstone project, you will need to develop and submit a timeline estimating the “deadlines” and due dates of work that needs to be completed. This will include a Schedule of Deliverables, and will be developed in consultation with your Capstone Instructor. The Work plan/Schedule of Deliverables will guide you in realistic time management, and will assist your Capstone Instructor and Aspen in tracking your progress through the duration of your enrollment in N599 Capstone Project. All assignments and deliverables should be submitted to the Capstone Instructor via the classroom drop box, until approved by the Capstone Instructor.

#### Submit weekly updates

Although sections of your capstone sections are submitted via the classroom drop box to your Capstone Instructor as you complete them and you must to participate in the classroom and share your reflections and progress with classmates through required activity reports are certain junctures as required in the classroom assignments.

### Project Implementation and Dissemination

The focus of this phase is on the implementation of the project and on the dissemination of findings through an oral presentation and formal paper.

The Oral Presentation of the Capstone Project will be conducted during the N599 Capstone Course. The Oral Presentation marks the culmination of many months of formal study and intensive research on the part of the student. This Oral Presentation affords the student an opportunity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of his/her knowledge in a field of specialization, ability to conduct research and to present the findings before his or her Capstone Instructor and sometimes invited guests. The Oral Presentation, the audience will have the opportunity to question the work, critically.

The Oral Presentation should last about 30 minutes, and will be facilitated via synchronous telecommunication such as video conferencing media. Other faculty and administrative members of Aspen University might also be present. It is recommended that individuals within your community who have an interest in the topic or who may be impacted by the findings be invited to attend. For the first twenty minutes, you will present your Capstone Project, summarizing the aspects of the project that were reported in the formal paper. Visual aids must be included, and may be either a PowerPoint®, Prezi® or poster board. For the final ten minutes, the Capstone Instructor and any Aspen faculty present will have an opportunity to question you about various aspects of the project. At this time the portfolio may also be discussed, and preparation for the comprehensive exam considered. If time allows, other audience members may also ask questions/seek clarification.

If the oral presentation is unsatisfactory, the student will be given one opportunity to improve performance but the Dean of Nursing or her designee will join the Capstone Instructor. If a second "unsatisfactory" presentation is delivered, you will receive a failing grade for this course, which falls under the policies and procedures of Aspen University.

### Submit a final paper of the Capstone project

Your Final Capstone Project/Master's Thesis submission must be professionally prepared and free of typographical, spelling and grammatical errors. The formatting protocol of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.) is the approved format for Aspen University. The specific length of the formal document may vary somewhat depending upon the topic selected, the use of tables, matrices, graphs, or other visual supplements.

The following sections should be included:

- Title page
- Abstract
- Table of Contents
- Introduction (Background, Significance, Justification)
- Purpose
- Literature review
- Method (as appropriate for your project---may include research design, procedures, evaluation methods, etc.)

- Discussion of findings
  - Recommendations
  - Conclusion
  - References
- Appendices, as appropriate

The Final Capstone Project/Master's Thesis submission for dissemination should be prepared using the Microsoft Office suite (Word®, Excel®, and PowerPoint® as appropriate), appropriately paginated using a twelve-point standard style font such as Times New Roman, Century Schoolbook, etc. Although the foregoing project format requirements may suffice for most capstone projects, there may be some appropriate variations approved by your Capstone Instructor. Sample Capstone papers have been provided in the Nursing Student Café.

Throughout the Capstone course, you will need to submit iterations of the chapter sections as you complete them to your Capstone Instructor for feedback. Do not wait until the end of the course to submit one completed paper and expect it to meet the rigorous expectations of this course. At the completion of Phase II, you will submit copies of your final Capstone Project/Master's Thesis to your Capstone Instructor, who might forward it to another faculty member, for a second opinion. The Capstone Instructor will grade the capstone paper/Master's Thesis, issuing the final grade.

## **Policies and Regulations**

MSN students are guided by the policies and regulations as outlined in the Aspen University catalog. In certain situations, policies governing MSN students may differ, and are specified here.

## **Credit Policies**

### **Credit Transfer**

Aspen University accepts academic credits earned from accredited/approved academic institutions when the course content is deemed to be the equivalent to our own. The RN-to-MSN program allows transfer of up to 18 credits. The MSN program allows transfer of up to 12 credits (excluding Practicum courses). A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required for admission and award of any possible transfer credits. Please refer to the Aspen University Catalog for additional details about the Credit Transfer policy.

### **Portfolio Credit**

Prior Experiential Learning (Portfolio Credit) is any learning experience that was not part of a college or university course and does not carry academic degree credit. Portfolio credit is allowed for 400-level nursing courses. Policies and procedures related to portfolio credit are detailed in the student handbook: "**Prior Learning Assessment: Portfolio Guidelines**". Contact your Academic Advisor to request a copy of the guideline document. Portfolio credits are NOT

allowed for 500-level nursing courses in the MSN program.

### **Course Progression and Participation**

Initially, all students must establish their attendance in the course in the first week, following Aspen University's academic participation policy. Throughout the course, students must participate in all academic activities of a course in a regular and substantive manner. Student participation is required and monitored. Assessment of student progress in a course is based on the timeliness of the student's participation in academic or academically-related activities. Academic or academic-related activities include: a) submitting an academic assignment; or b) making a contribution to the online discussion forum.

Students should maintain the following academic participation schedule to avoid the risk of being administratively withdrawn from a class for failure to demonstrate adequate course participation and progress. Assignments are due each week on Monday (7<sup>th</sup> day of the module), with a new module opening on Tuesday. Assignments submitted late may incur a late penalty.

For more information regarding Aspen's academic participation policy, please click on the following link:

<http://catalog.aspen.edu/policies/academic-progress-participation-policy/>

### **Grading Policies**

Individual courses are graded according to the grading rubric provided in the study guide for the course. The grading rubric used for each of the nursing courses is located in Appendix A. Students receiving a "U" (failing grade) will be required to reenroll. If a previously failed course is repeated, the "Unsatisfactory" grade will be replaced with an "R".

Consistent with Aspen University grading policies, all graduate-level program students must earn an overall GPA of 3.0 in order to graduate. Students who fall below the required overall GPA will be placed on academic observation according to the University's Good Academic Standing policy.

### **Grading Policy: Practicum Courses**

The practicum courses N550, N552, and N586 have unique grading policies that deviate from the general Aspen University policies. These courses have a practicum component with a preceptor within the student's home community. The Preceptor Handbook provides additional details on specific requirements for these practicum courses as well

as practicum evaluation criteria and tools.

Evaluation of the student's practicum performance is the responsibility of the faculty with input from the preceptor. These practicum evaluations are comprised of a preceptor evaluation, a self-evaluation, and review by the faculty of practicum experiences with appropriate documentation and satisfaction of the minimum required practicum hours. The practicum performance is graded as "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory." In the practicum setting, students are expected to function with independence and increasing complexity as they progress through the course.

Unsatisfactory practicum performance encompasses an array of behaviors and attitudes. Examples include unprofessional attire, failure to submit required practicum documents, "no-show" at the practicum setting, cross-cultural issues, and functioning at a level inconsistent with expectations. In the event that a preceptor detects performance moving in an unsatisfactory direction, a conference with the student will be "triggered," the result of which will be development of a plan of action to correct the deficiency. This plan of action will be the responsibility of the student working in coordination with their preceptor and the Practicum Coordinator.

Students must pass practicum in order to pass the course. Students who do not satisfactorily pass practicum will not be permitted to progress to the next course in the program sequence.

**Note:** Students receiving a grade of "U" are required to re-enroll in the course, paying all applicable tuition and other fees effective on the date of reenrollment.

### **Grading Policy: Written Assignments**

"Exercises" and "Professional Development" assignments will be graded in three main components. Each component area is independent of the other component areas, and is used to fully evaluate the completeness of your responses. A grading rubric for "Exercises" and "Professional Development" assignments is included in Appendix C.

Demonstrated Understanding of Material (50%): You should strive for succinct answers to questions, but should not neglect important details if you believe those details support your ideas. At all times, instructors will be most interested in the quality of your thinking and your ability to demonstrate an understanding of the material.

Synthesis and Analysis of Core Concepts (40%): Further, instructors will want to view synthesis of the core material, and some presentation of an analysis of the core concepts.

Presentation, Style, and Usage of Resources (10%) Finally, instructors will judge your presentation of the material, look for a clear writing style, and sufficient usage of resources, both your textbook as the primary source and additional

scholarly research as appropriate to support your presented answers and arguments.

### **Grading Policy: Discussion Participation**

Students are expected to actively participate in online discussions if assigned during the module. Students will make a minimum of one original posting to the discussion assignment, AND respond to a fellow learners' posting. If there are no other students in the course, the dialogue interaction will occur with the faculty member. We are attempting to create a learning community in which the perspectives and viewpoints of others with diverse personal and professional experiences enhances the learning environment.

The quality of comments is as important as the quantity, so students are expected to be reflective in their original posts and responses (i.e. not "cut and paste" from a website or reiterate material directly from the textbook!). . Responses to fellow learners need to seek clarification, question and help enhance the student's original thoughts. .

### **Submitting Assignments**

Submit only one module at a time, completing them in sequence. Generally speaking, the modules build on the information presented in previous modules, so it is important to incorporate the feedback and suggestions you receive from the faculty into your subsequent module assignments. Bulk submissions (two modules in a week) are not allowed, unless agreed upon in advance with the instructor.

## **Course Grades**

The letter grade earned at the completion of each course in the MSN program is based on a percentage of total points earned for all assignments (exercises, discussion questions, professional developments, etc.) in the course. The total possible points for each course is: **1000**

Sample Grading Scale for Undergraduate Courses (the 400-level courses in the RN-MSN Bridge Component). Students must receive at least a 70% on each assignment to pass each course:

<b>Numeric Grade Percentage</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>GPA</b>
94% - 100%	A	4.000
90% - 93.9%	A-	3.667
87% - 89.9%	B+	3.333
83% - 86.9%	B	3.000
80% - 82.9%	B-	2.667
77% - 79.9%	C+	2.333
73% - 76.9%	C	2.000
70% - 72.9%	C-	1.667
67% - 69.9%	D+	1.333
63% - 66.9%	D	1.000
60% - 62.9%	D-	0.667
59.9% or Under	U	0.000
Pass / Fail - P / U	*	*

\* Not counted towards the GPA calculation.

Sample Grading Scale for Graduate Courses. Students must receive at least an 80% on each assignment to pass each course:

<b>Numeric Grade Percentage</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>GPA Value</b>
94% - 100%	A	4.000
90% - 93.9%	A-	3.667
87% - 89.9%	B+	3.333
83% - 86.9%	B	3.000
80% - 82.9%	B-	2.667
77% - 79.9%	C+	2.333

<b>Numeric Grade Percentage</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>GPA Value</b>
73% - 76.9%	C	2.000
70% - 72.9%	C-	1.667
69.9% or Under	U	0.000
Pass / Fail - P / U	*	*

\* Not counted towards the GPA calculation.

## **Proctored Examinations**

There is one proctored examination in the MSN program. The **MSN Comprehensive Examination** is administered at the completion of the MSN core courses. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to evaluate a student's ability to synthesize, analyze, and apply core concepts/theories studied in the graduate nursing program (both core and specialty courses). The format is an open-book, broad essay exam, which allows maximum freedom and creativity. Student performance is evaluated on their ability to generate, integrate, and express ideas in a concise manner with appropriate citation. Students will be required to complete three written essays within an eight hour time period. A sample grading rubric for the MSN Comprehensive Examination is provided in Appendix C. The MSN Comprehensive Examination is graded on a S/U (Successful/Unsuccessful) basis. A passing grade on the MSN Comprehensive Exam is an 80%. Students who fail to successfully complete their MSN Comprehensive Exam may have one additional attempt at the exam. Students are highly encouraged to type their exams using a word processing program (e.g. Microsoft Word). If exams are hand written, they must be done legibly and in a dark colored ink.

Students who are admitted into the RN-MSN "Bridge" program are required to take an additional proctored comprehensive examination at the completion of the RN-BSN bridge courses. The purpose of this Bridge Proctored Exam is to evaluate a student's ability to synthesize, analyze, and apply core concepts/theories studied in the undergraduate-level nursing courses. Satisfactory performance on this Bridge Proctored Exam will not only demonstrate mastery of the expected student learning outcomes for the RN-MSN component, but will also demonstrate readiness to transition into graduate-level nursing courses. The Bridge Proctored Exam is offered in two formats: multiple choice or essay. The multiple choice format will require students to complete 60 multiple choice questions within a two hour time period. The essay format will require students to complete 3 essays within an eight hour time period. The Bridge Proctored Exam is graded on a S/U (Successful/Unsuccessful) basis. A passing grade on the Bridge Proctored Exam is a 70%. Students who fail to successfully complete their Bridge Proctored Exam may have one additional attempt at the exam.

## **Student Governance**

### **Students have input into the workings of Aspen University and the MSN program through a variety of mechanisms.**

Input is sought at the completion of each course, through course evaluations. At the end of the RN-MSN bridge courses and at the end of the MSN program, graduates are given a survey to assess how they feel their personal learning objectives were met. As alumni, survey data are collected at 1-, 3-, and 5-years post-graduation to determine how well the nursing program prepared graduates to meet the advanced roles that they fulfill.

Formal committees at Aspen University and within the MSN program provide another avenue for student input. The two MSN committees that have student representation include the Curriculum Committee and the Program Advisory Board. Descriptions of these two committees follow:

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### **Program Advisory Board**

Purpose: The Program Advisory Board acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to promote, assist, and perpetuate the goals and objectives of Aspen University MSN program. This committee meets twice per year.

Functions:

- Identify emerging health care needs that may require programmatic and institutional response
- Provide an opportunity for the exchange of viewpoints between business/professional persons, alumni, and academicians as they relate to nursing education.
- Provide a direct liaison between faculty and the community for the purpose of promoting the activities and mission of the Aspen University MSN program and the nursing profession.
- Advise and inform the Executive Academic Chair on local, state, and national perceptions regarding nursing education and the nursing profession, suggest possible avenues for marketing the program.

Membership: Dean of Nursing, and various members of the community of interest: current student, alumni, nurses, leaders in health care

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## **Curriculum Committee**

Purpose: The Curriculum Committee is responsible for the curriculum, specifically to develop, implement, and evaluate the MSN curricula. This committee is a subcommittee of the MSN Faculty Committee. This committee meets twice a year or as needed.

### Functions:

- Monitor and formulate policies governing the curriculum of the MSN program.
- Lead the evaluation of the curriculum according to the MSN program evaluation plan
- Recommend mechanisms for implementing the MSN program to the parent committee
- Recommend curricular revisions for the MSN program to the parent committee
- Recommend new MSN program options based on input from the community of interest

Membership: Dean of Nursing, at least 2 faculty members as dictated by curricular needs, 1 student from each MSN specialty tract.

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Discussion Board Grading Rubric**

**Appendix B: Grading Rubric for “Exercises” and Professional Development”  
Exercises**

**Appendix C: Evaluation Criteria for the MSN Comprehensive Examination**

### Appendix A: Discussion Board Grading Rubric

Points allotted	4	3	2	1
Category				
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rich in content</li> <li>• full of thought, insight, and analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• substantial information</li> <li>• thought, insight, and analysis has taken place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generally competent</li> <li>• information is thin and commonplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rudimentary and superficial</li> <li>• no analysis or insight is displayed</li> </ul>
<b>Connections</b>	Clear connections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to previous or current experiences</li> <li>• to real-life situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• superficial connections</li> <li>• lack relevance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limited, if any connections</li> <li>• vague generalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no connections are made</li> <li>• off topic</li> </ul>
<b>Uniqueness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new ideas or new connections</li> <li>• made with depth and detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new ideas or connections</li> <li>• lack depth and/or detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• few, if any new ideas or connections</li> <li>• rehash or summarize other postings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no new ideas</li> <li>• "I agree with..." statement</li> </ul>
<b>Stylistics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few grammatical or stylistic errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several grammatical or stylistic errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obvious grammatical or stylistic errors</li> <li>• Errors interfere with content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obvious grammatical or stylistic errors</li> <li>• Makes understanding impossible</li> </ul>
<b>Contribution to the Learning Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware of needs of community</li> <li>• Frequently attempts to motivate the group discussion</li> <li>• Presents creative approaches to topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently attempts to direct the discussion and to present relevant viewpoints for consideration by group</li> <li>• Interacts freely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasionally makes meaningful reflection on group's efforts</li> <li>• Marginal effort to become involved with group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not make effort to participate in learning community as it develops</li> <li>• Seems indifferent</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: Grading Rubric for “Exercises” and “Professional Development” Assignments

Aspen University Rubric	Percentage of grade for each answer	Exceeds	Meets	Approaching	Unsuccessful
		90% - 100%	80% - 89%	70% - 79%	60% - 69%
Relevant course theories and concepts were incorporated	35%	All relevant course theory and concepts were referenced	Most relevant course theory and concepts were referenced	Some course theories and concepts were referenced	No course theories or concepts were referenced
Relevant course theories and concepts were leveraged to deepen analysis	45%	All relevant course theory and concepts were utilized to deepen analytical conclusions and substantiate recommendations	Most relevant course theory and concepts were applied in ways that deepened analysis	Analysis was very superficial, but student attempted to deepen analysis with course theories and concepts	Analysis was significantly flawed and did not leverage course theory or concepts
Appropriate attribution (APA Guidelines)	10%	No errors in APA attribution	Minimal errors in APA style attribution	Major errors in APA style attribution	No scholarly attribution; may be plagiarized
Mechanics (spelling, grammar, composition)	10%	Clear writing with no errors; perfect grammar; engaging written voice	Clear writing with minimal errors; good grammar; some passive voice or other composition aspects that can be improved but do not detract readers	Writing is difficult to understand due to multiple errors in spelling, grammar, and/or composition	Writing cannot be understood due to extensive errors

## Appendix C: Evaluation Criteria for the MSN Comprehensive Examination

Graded Elements	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
<b>Organization</b>	Thoughts are not organized or presented in a logical sequence. Shows intellectual confusion with lack of organization.	Demonstrates necessary knowledge but is not clear or concise. Paper has marginal development of ideas.	Well-organized and developed with good use of supporting examples. Scope of the question is presented in a straight forward manner with few contextual errors.	Exceptional quality of organization and amount of detail used to support or illustrate all points Scope of the issues to be explored is well-described. Essay has logical organization with no errors.
<b>Content</b>	Content does not address the question. Responses show little understanding of the questions.	Responses adequately address the questions. However, thesis is not well-developed and alternatives have not been considered.	Responses demonstrate a clear understanding of the questions. Content is focused and straight forward, if uninspired, with few errors.	Addresses all points in a clear and articulate manner. Content is error free and presented with clarity and purpose with well-developed detail.
<b>Analysis</b>	Analysis does not address topic. Failed to present relevant issues or show evidence of critical thinking. Responses fail to develop an analysis of an issue. There is little or no detail.	Analysis shows adequate development of critical thinking. Uses enough specific information and examples. Identified some implications but failed to point out gaps or contradictions.	Evidence of critical thinking through clear analysis of problems and issues. Implications and contradictions identified but not thoroughly analyzed.	Analysis is clear and well-organized. Synthesis of sources and ideas is insightful and indicates a high level of critical thinking. Implications and contradictions discussed in detail.
<b>Language Use and Style</b>	Numerous spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors. Severe and frequent writing errors. Demonstrates little understanding of the mechanics of writing. No attempt to apply APA style to text or references.	Contain few writing errors but little variety or sophistication in language usage. Several spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors which detract from project. Attempted to use APA style in text and references.	Good use of the English language. Response has been proofread and has few, if any, errors. Uses language effectively, and contains few writing errors. APA style applied to text and references.	Responses demonstrate fluency, language control, and sentence variety. Excellent sentence structure, mechanics, and choice of words. Responses have been proofread. Error-free for spelling, grammar and punctuation. APA style applied to text and references.