

**Preceptor Handbook  
For  
Master of Nursing Science (MNSc)  
and  
Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)  
Programs**

**UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS  
FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES**



**COLLEGE OF NURSING**

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**PRECEPTOR HANDBOOK**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In advanced practice professions, the attainment of certain skills, whether of a cognitive, affective or psychomotor nature, is mandated for the development of advanced clinical expertise. One method used to enhance graduate student development of such advanced clinical skills is the use of preceptors within the clinical setting. The relationship between clinical preceptors and students provides for the requisite supervision for advanced practice skill development and the mentorship for role acquisition.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide a mechanism for orienting designated individuals to the role of preceptor as delineated by the faculty of the UAMS College of Nursing. Secondly, it provides students with an overview of the preceptor role and their own responsibilities within the student-preceptor relationship. Lastly, this handbook is designed to reflect how faculty, preceptor, and students are expected to interact in order to facilitate graduate student achievement of course objectives to the mutual satisfaction of all involved.

### **MASTER OF NURSING SCIENCE AND DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE PROGRAMS**

The Master of Nursing Science program is designed to provide the structure and the opportunities for the development of advanced nursing practice expertise in a chosen specialty.

The graduates of the Doctor of Nursing Practice program are expert clinicians who use research to create, implement, and evaluate practice. The graduates play vital roles in developing, implementing, and testing national practice guidelines as well as collaborating in clinical trials. Further, graduates are equipped to redesign and improve the quality of patient-centered care and provide cost effective health care delivery services as well as propose solutions.

## **REQUIRED COURSES**

There are numerous courses within the Master of Nursing Science and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs that require preceptorships. The course objectives will be provided to the preceptor by the faculty member for each particular course. The student will discuss these with the preceptor, in addition to personal goals that are developed by the student.

## **ROLE OF THE PRECEPTOR**

### **Criteria for Selection of a Preceptor**

Preceptors are selected for their ability to contribute to the learning experiences necessary for graduate nursing students.

A preceptor is defined as a Physician or a Registered Nurse, with a minimum of a Master's degree, or other individual who is a highly qualified professional with specific clinical, teaching or administrative expertise and knowledge of the teaching/learning process. The preceptor is not paid as an employee of the College of Nursing. The preceptor agrees to serve as a role model, resource person, and to provide support for a master's nursing student while supervising the student's clinical, administrative, or teaching experiences. The preceptor-student relationship ideally is a one-to-one experience. The preceptor's ability to create and maintain an atmosphere that allows and encourages independent self-directed learning is crucial to the success of the master's student.

### **Preceptor Orientation**

The faculty member will confirm placement with the student and the preceptor on an individual or group basis, as is appropriate to the situation. The following topics will be part of the orientation:

1. Overview of the preceptor relationship including the respective roles and responsibilities of preceptor, faculty and student.
2. Goals and objectives for the practicum experience.
3. Methods of evaluation/feedback regarding student activities.

### **Functions of the Preceptor**

The functions of the preceptor include evaluation, teaching, and feedback to faculty regarding student performance. The preceptor serves as a resource person, consultant, role model and facilitator. The preceptor also provides the student with exposure to clients and clinical, administrative or teaching experiences that will assist the student in meeting course and personal objectives.

## Preceptor/Student Relationship

The preceptor/student relationship progresses through phases, much as any helping relationship. In the first stage, the preceptor is more directive and the student takes a more passive role. As the student becomes more competent and confident, the preceptor shifts from directing student activities to assisting the student as needed. By the end of the clinical, administrative, or educational practicum, the student assumes an active role in patient care, administration, teaching or other areas identified by the student. The practicum is a mutually beneficial experience for both preceptor and student where the student gains in knowledge and experience while sharing enthusiasm and new ideas with the preceptor. There may be sharing of articles, research, etc., by preceptor and student as is appropriate in the situation.

## Communication and Feedback to Student and Faculty

In the preceptor's role, it is important to provide the student with both formal and informal feedback. Faculty also will meet or call preceptors to discuss student progress.

**Beginning needs.** Student, preceptor and faculty need to discuss the objectives and schedule for the experience. It is helpful for the preceptor to inform the student of expectations and give frequent feedback about the student's performance. The faculty will have regular conferences with the student and preceptor to assess progress. If significant problems are noted it is expected that the preceptor will discuss these with the faculty member.

**Mid-point needs.** As the rapport between student and preceptor develops and the student becomes more confident, the student should give the preceptor feedback as to which learning experiences are the most helpful and then request other experiences as appropriate. It is helpful for the preceptor to assist the student in problem solving and decision making, progressively allowing more autonomy and encouraging increasing responsibility for client care, administration or teaching. Faculty will continue with regular conferences with student for progression assessment. The faculty is available throughout the practicum by telephone if any questions or problems arise. Faculty can be contacted through the UAMS College of Nursing switchboard (686-5374).

**Termination needs.** At the end of the practicum experience, preceptors are expected to have a final conference with the student and faculty. The preceptor, student and faculty can share views on what experiences were beneficial, as well as the student's progress towards personal learning objectives. The preceptor can give feedback to the faculty on student performance and on peer and client relationships. Either the preceptor or the student may have suggestions for changes in future student experiences.

It is extremely important for faculty to receive feedback on the student's knowledge and skills, as well as professional traits. A conference is held between preceptor, student and faculty member at the completion of the student's experience to discuss the practicum activities relative to the completion of the student's course and personal objectives.

## ROLE OF THE FACULTY

The role of the faculty is to provide direction and support to assist students in meeting objectives, to support and assist the preceptor as needed, to evaluate the student's progress towards meeting course objectives, and finally to assign a grade to the student.

The faculty facilitates the preparation of the graduate student for advanced nursing practice by:

1. Visiting the practicum site for review of facilities and conference with the preceptor.
2. Orienting the preceptor to the requirements of the practicum.
3. Reviewing with the preceptor:
  - a. Course objectives
  - b. Student performance expectations
  - c. Practicum evaluation/feedback format
4. Collaborating with preceptor in planning the student learning activities.
5. Assisting the preceptor and student in identifying problems and/or projects, and providing additional instruction when indicated.
6. Being available for consultation and/or collaboration.
7. Conferring with preceptor and student to determine student progress.
8. Evaluating student practicum performance and determining if the student is meeting goals and objectives.

At the conclusion of the practicum, the faculty member evaluates the student's performance based on data provided by the student and the preceptor and/or faculty on site and through the use of journals or logs. The faculty member is responsible for securing preceptor input on the student's progress, as well as student-input on the practicum experience. Faculty then evaluates the student's achievement of course objectives based on the data collected and assigns a grade.

In addition to those noted above, faculty responsibilities include:

1. Ultimate responsibility for the course grade with input from the preceptor.
2. Evaluation of clinical sites and preceptors.

## **ROLE OF THE STUDENT**

The student comes with a unique combination of education and experiences in nursing. The student, in conjunction with the faculty member, is responsible for planning and negotiating his/her own learning experiences to meet course and personal objectives and carrying out what he/she has agreed to do.

Both faculty and preceptor are committed to assisting the student in meeting these objectives. However, the ultimate responsibility for learning rests with the student.

Qualities which are important for the graduate student to succeed include initiative, assertiveness, good communication skills, critical thinking skills, and the ability to analyze personal strengths and weaknesses. The student's role is that of a learner, but increasingly, the student takes a more active role in providing and/or managing client care through clinical, administrative, or educational activities, and directing his/her own learning. The student must assume responsibility for asking faculty and preceptor for direction when help is needed. The student also assumes responsibility for negotiating for more autonomy or different learning experiences as appropriate.

## **EVALUATION OF STUDENTS**

The graduate student is evaluated on the achievement of the course objectives. These objectives serve as the evaluation tool. Each faculty member will determine his/her appropriate evaluation activities related to completion of the course objectives.

Although the faculty member is responsible for assigning the student's grade, preceptors are asked for feedback relative to the student's practicum performance. Anecdotal information that might be pertinent would be appreciated.

## **SERVICES AT UAMS FOR PRECEPTORS**

Preceptors may apply for a two-year volunteer (adjunct) faculty appointment in the College of Nursing. Benefits include access to the UAMS library, including resources that can be accessed remotely such Up-to-Date and online book and journals, and one free continuing education program conducted by the College of Nursing every year.

If you have questions about these services, please call the Associate Dean for Practice at the College of Nursing, 501-686-5452.

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