FLEX Capstone FAQs

FLEX 445 RN-BS Capstone Clinical Component

GENERAL INFORMATION

Why does NURSING 445 FLEX have a clinical component?

The baccalaureate degree program in nursing at UW-Milwaukee is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (http://www.ccneaccreditation.org). CCNE requires that all students in RN-BSN completion programs have a clinical component to their degree program to enable them to apply and integrate new knowledge in a clinical setting. We use a capstone clinical project to meet the clinical component requirements of our program. The goal of the clinical project experience is to provide an opportunity for RN students to experience, integrate and learn from a nursing role that is different from their current or past roles. Although many of our RN students work in direct patient care, they often choose to plan their Capstone clinical project experience in a non-direct care role. Direct care clinical experiences are also possible if they are completed in a role that is not the student’s current role.

How many clinical hours are required?

60 clinical project hours are currently required in all the UWM College of Nursing RN-BSN programs. Up to 10 hours of the 60 clinical hours can be used off site to complete a required clinical project. The 60 clinical hours should be spent working with your preceptor, attending meetings and gathering information for or implementing your project. The 60 clinical hours cannot be used doing your assessments for the 445X competency – the time it requires to complete your assessments is time in addition to the 60-hour clinical project.

Can I complete my clinical hours in the setting where I currently am employed?

We strongly encourage students to complete their clinical hours in the agency or system where they are currently employed. Past students have found that completing their Capstone clinical project in their own workplace is much more successful than trying to do this in a new setting. Using your current workplace for your Capstone project will make it much more likely that you will be able to meet the goals and outcomes of the Capstone course. This is because you may already know of quality improvement issues on your own (or another) unit and you have access to nurse managers, educators and CNS staff who are very willing to help their own employees with successful educational projects. You will also be able to do your clinical project hours around your own work schedule if you stay in your own setting. You CAN complete your clinical project hours on your own unit or another unit – as long as you are not in your current role (i.e. acute care staff nurse). Our RN students often have connections within their employment setting that facilitate a clinical placement. The clinical hours must be completed in a role other than the student’s current role. An example might be that a student who is employed in an acute care staff nurse role might complete clinical hours as a member of quality improvement team. See suggested clinical settings.
CLINICAL SETTINGS

What types of settings can be used for the clinical experience?

The primary focus is that the student complete clinical hours in a role they are not currently in. Because many of our RN-BSN students work in direct patient care, this often means a clinical experience in non-direct care. Examples of non-direct care clinicals include working with a CNS or nurse educator on a specific project, policy update or quality initiative, working on a Magnet committee, creating an education module or program for staff or patient education. Direct care clinicals include agencies such as schools, health departments, community health centers, clinics, homeless centers, day care centers, home care and hospice agencies and cardiac rehabilitation departments. See The “FLEX Capstone Clinical Component” information sheet for additional clinical practicum examples.

Do I need to find my own clinical placement?

Yes – you will need to find your own clinical placement for Capstone in FLEX. We encourage students to arrange their own clinical placement and hours through their current employer or an agency contact whenever possible. The reason for this is that it allows students to obtain a desired experience, population, specific hours or clinical site. Using your own employer also helps you to meet the goals of the capstone clinical quality improvement project. Many health care systems are very willing to help to place their own RN students in clinical experiences required for educational purposes.

How do I find a preceptor?

The best way to find a preceptor and a project is to start to network through your current employer. Contact your own nurse manager, educator or CNS and tell them you will need to do a 60-hour quality improvement project for your final Capstone course and ask for ideas that may be on their “wish list”. It may also be possible to contact a nursing education department representative at your employer. You will need to find a preceptor prepared at the RN-BSN level or above who is willing to precept you for 60 hours of clinical time. You need to discuss a potential clinical project with your preceptor. Once you send your possible preceptor’s contact details to us, our preceptor coordinator will then contact your potential preceptor and determine if we have an existing contract with the agency. It may require additional time to attempt to pursue a contract if we do not have a current contract with your preferred clinical agency. Contracts are usually facilitated by the education liaison or nursing leadership office in a clinical age.

Does UWM need to have a contract with my clinical setting?

No – we do not require a formal affiliation agreement or contract with your clinical project setting – this is only required if your setting requires it. The UWM College of Nursing will accept either a formal valid affiliation agreement or a letter of agreement with the agency you are completing your clinical project in. UWM has existing educational affiliation agreement contracts with many health care systems, agencies and institutions in the metropolitan Milwaukee area and throughout Wisconsin. If you live outside the Milwaukee area, we will try to help to facilitate a letter of agreement or an affiliation agreement if the agency requires this.
**Do I need to take time off of work? Can I complete my clinical hours on evenings and weekends?**

Most of our RN-BSN students work full time and need to find a way to complete the required 60 clinical project hours. Clinical hours can be completed at whatever time is negotiable between the student and preceptor. Most community health agencies are only open during the daytime on weekdays. Students who use these agencies often use vacation time or days off work to complete their clinical hours. Some home care, hospice, parish nursing and free clinic agencies do offer evening and weekend hours, but this is very site dependent. If you complete your clinical project hours at your employer, you can work around your own schedule. If you can find a clinical site that offers alternate hours, you may be able to complete your clinical hours during the evening or on weekends.

**What should I wear at my clinical site while doing my project?**

There is no Capstone uniform – student should wear whatever is worn in the agency by the staff. Some agencies prefer business casual clothing and others require scrubs or a lab coat. Please ask your preceptor for guidance about what to wear during clinical hours.

**PRECEPTORS**

**Do I need to have a preceptor?**

Yes – a preceptor prepared at the RN, BSN level or above (MSN, CNL or DNP) is required to supervise your clinical project and hours.

**Who is qualified to be my preceptor?**

All preceptors MUST be prepared at the RN, BSN level or above (MSN, CNL, DNP). Nurses prepared at the Associate Degree level only are not eligible to be a preceptor. MD’s are also not eligible to be preceptors.

**How can I verify that my preceptor has agreed to work with me?**

Your preceptor will need to sign a form stating that he/she agrees to be your preceptor. We will also have you ask your preceptor to sign a second form verifying that you have completed your 60 clinical hours. These preceptor forms are both available on the NURSING 445 FLEX site.

**Can I work only with my preceptor?**

You should work primarily with your preceptor, but he/she may wish to facilitate additional clinical experiences with other members of the health care team in the agency. If both you and your preceptor feel that working with additional health care team members will be valuable to your learning, you may do this as a part of your clinical experience.
THE CLINICAL PROJECT

What is the clinical project?
Capstone students in all our programs are required to complete a 60-hour quality improvement clinical project in their clinical practicum site. The Capstone clinical project is meant to be a project that meets the needs of the agency and attempts to improve the outcomes of care in that agency. You will need to work with your preceptor to determine the most appropriate clinical project for your site. Examples of clinical projects include a staff education presentation, an online staff or patient teaching module, development or updating of a clinical guideline, care plan or policy, data collection related to a Joint Commission, Magnet or quality review initiative. See the "Capstone Clinical Project Examples" information sheet for many additional clinical project examples.

How will I know if my clinical project is appropriate for NURSING 445X FLEX?
Each student must submit a Capstone clinical project proposal for approval by the NURSING 445 FLEX faculty. The clinical project proposal form can be found on the FLEX competency set preparation site as well as on the FLEX web page about the NURSING 445 FLEX set. Once your clinical project proposal is returned with approval of the faculty, you can begin to plan your clinical project.

Is there a FLEX assessment related to the clinical project?
Yes – the entire 445X competency set is related to your clinical project. Each assessment is designed to focus on the clinical project topic area. Assessment #4 in the NURSING 445 FLEX competency set is a written description of your clinical project. This assessment is worth 30% of your final grade in this competency set. See the learning path for Assessment #4 in the NURSING 445 FLEX competency set for more information about this assessment.

PREPARING FOR NURSING 445 RN-BSN CAPSTONE

When do I need to begin the process of preparing to take Nursing 445 in FLEX??
We suggest that students begin preparing for Capstone at least 3 to 6 calendar months ahead of the date they wish to begin the NURSING 445 FLEX competency set. You will need to find a preceptor and have them agree to precept your clinical time. You will also need to discuss a potential clinical project with your preceptor and complete a clinical project proposal. It may require additional time if we do not have an existing formal agreement with your preferred clinical agency and they require one. Affiliation agreements are usually facilitated by the education liaison or nursing leadership office in a clinical agency. We do not require a formal affiliation agreement with your setting and are willing to use a letter of agreement, but some settings will require a formal affiliation agreement. Please work closely with your ASC to determine when to start the NURSING 445 FLEX competency set as we do not want you to begin the competency set until your preceptor and your clinical site is secured.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
Please direct your questions to your ASC. If they are unable to answer your questions, they will seek guidance from the appropriate program director or faculty member.