**FAQ: Practicum Requirements for MSN**

**Adult-Gerontology, Adult-Gerontology Acute Care, and Family Nurse Practitioner Specializations**

One of the most important elements of the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program is the practicum. This might be a new experience for some students, so we have compiled the answers to some frequently asked questions to help you gain a clear understanding of what is required. More detailed information will be provided once you enroll, but if you have additional questions not addressed in this document, please feel free to contact your enrollment advisor.

**What is a practicum?**
A practicum is a graduate-level course designed to give students supervised clinical practice to apply the theory, knowledge, and skills learned in both previous and concurrent coursework. For the Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner (AGNP), Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner (AGA-CNP), and Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) specializations, this is referred to as a clinical practicum or simply a clinical. A clinical is a distinctly defined supervised on-site experience in which students develop applied skills and integrate professional knowledge in the provision of “hands-on” primary care.

**What is a preceptor?**
Preceptors are qualified nurse practitioners within a clinical field site who are responsible for guiding students’ practicum experiences. For the nurse practitioner specializations, physicians may also serve as preceptors but must be credentialed and licensed to practice in their population-focused and/or specialty area of practice. Acceptable preceptors (depending on the specific course focus) include family nurse practitioners, adult-gerontology nurse practitioners, adult women’s health nurse practitioners, pediatric nurse practitioners, physicians (MD or DO), and certified nurse midwives. Preceptors are master’s- or doctorate-prepared and licensed and credentialed in their state to practice in their area of specialization.

**What are the site requirements?**
Appropriate field sites for the nurse practitioner specializations can include physicians’ offices (family practice, pediatric practice, women’s health, or internal medicine) and clinics that provide primary care, such as health departments and hospital-based primary care clinics. In addition, AGNP students may spend time in long-term care facilities to gain experience caring for seniors. Clinical field sites enter into a field site affiliation agreement with Walden, stating they will provide appropriate support and supervision for students during the practicum experience. Students initiate the field site affiliation agreement during the application process, usually with the help of preceptors or other personnel at the clinical field sites.

**Does Walden provide assistance with finding a clinical site?**
Although Walden does not place students into clinical sites, our team of field education coordinators will offer assistance (when requested) by providing suggestions. Students may complete the practicum where they work if the facility meets the requirements for the practicum course. However, students’ practicum experience must be in a different setting than their usual assigned work, completed outside of their normal working hours, and under the direction of a preceptor who is not their immediate supervisor. The American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) provides a student resource center that may be helpful in finding a preceptor and field site: (www.aanp.org/education/student-resource-center/connecting-with-nps).

**What is the application process?**
Students must choose a clinical field site and initiate contact with a potential preceptor who meets the qualifications and may be interested in working with them. Students should keep in mind that they are taking four courses that focus on different populations and may need three to four different preceptors and sites over the course of their program. Most students should have their first preceptor nominee and a practicum field site identified by the middle of their second term. Clinical application materials must be submitted at least 12 weeks prior to starting their first clinical course (NURS 6531). However, because of state board requirements and approvals, students who will be doing their clinical in Alabama or Wyoming must submit their applications at least 24 weeks prior to starting their first clinical course. During the admission process, students are required to provide names of potential clinical sites in their area that they can use in their search.
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When can I begin my clinical practicum?
You will automatically be registered for your practicum course just as you would for the other courses in the MSN program. Registration does not mean your practicum has been approved. You may begin your practicum once the course has started and you have successfully completed all prerequisite coursework, submitted your practicum application documents and, received notification of approval of your application and preceptor nominee. You must be in good academic standing to begin the practicum experience.

How long is my practicum?
MSN students in the AGNP, AG-ACNP, and FNP specializations must complete four 12-week courses that will include both didactic and practicum requirements and complete a minimum of 576 hours of supervised practicum experience (144 hours per course). The number of practicum hours completed per week can be flexible, as long as the 144 hours is completed by the end of the course. The practicum courses must be taken in order.

Can I take the two practicum courses concurrently?
We recommend completing one course at a time due to the number of clinical hours that would need to be completed during one 12-week quarter. You would be responsible for the 288 hours (144 hours per course), in addition to the coursework. If you feel strongly that you can complete two courses per quarter, you may petition the program director for approval.

Do I have to finish all the practicum hours during the practicum course?
Yes, the number of practicum hours completed per week can be somewhat flexible as long as 144 clinical practicum hours are completed per course. You will not be able to progress to the next course if all hours are not completed during the 12-week course.

Can I get credit for practicum activities completed before I start the practicum course?
No. You must wait until the first day of the practicum course to begin your practicum activities, and your practicum plan must be created and approved by your course instructor. Any hours accumulated prior to the first week of the practicum course will not be accepted.

Can I use the same preceptor and site for each of my four practicum courses?
Yes, but only if your preceptor and site meet all the requirements necessary for each course. You will most likely need to use a different preceptor and site for each of the four courses of practicum.

Examples of who would qualify as a preceptor and possible site choices:

**Advanced Practice Care of Adults Across the Lifespan**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, AGNP, GNP, ANP, MD, DO, PA
- Possible site choices: primary care clinic, family practice, internal medicine, urgent care center, specialty practice

**Primary Care of Adolescents and Children (FNP specialization only)**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, pediatric nurse practitioner, family practice physician, pediatrician
- Possible site choices: family practice, primary care clinic (with significant child and adolescent practice), pediatrician’s office, health department

**Primary Care of Women (AGNP and FNP specializations)**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, AWHPN, CNW obstetrician/gynecologist, family practice physician. AGNP students may also choose an internal medicine physician.
- Possible site choices: obstetrics/gynecological practice, family practice, primary care clinic, health department, internal medicine (for the AGNP student). FNP students must complete 40 hours of OB.

**Direct Care Roles in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Across the Lifespan (AGNP and FNP specializations)**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, AGNP, family practice physician, internal medicine physician
- Possible site choices: family practice, primary care clinic, health department. AGNP students may also choose cardiology, pulmonology, neurology, dermatology, or GI/GU clinics.

**Advanced Practice Care of Frail Elders (AGNP and AG-ACNP specializations)**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, AGNP, GNP, ANP, MD, DO, PA
- Possible site choices: specialty practice, rehabilitation center, sub-acute care facility, internal medicine, hospice

**Advanced Practice Care of Adults in Acute Care Settings (AG-ACNP specialization only)**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, AGNP, GNP, ANP, MD, DO, PA
- Possible site choices: acute care facility

**Advanced Practice Care of Adults in Acute Care Settings II (AG-ACNP specialization only)**
- Possible preceptor choices: FNP, AGNP, GNP, ANP, MD, DO, PA
- Possible site choices: acute care facility

Examples of sites that would NOT qualify as acceptable choices:
- Hospitals (acute care facilities for FNP and AGNP students)
- Surgery centers
- Emergency departments

Do I need to purchase liability insurance?
Yes, all Walden students beginning a practicum are required to purchase professional liability insurance, even if there is no patient-client contact. The policy must be for at least $1 million per incident, $3 million aggregate. Walden can provide suggestions on where to purchase this insurance.

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