Comprehensive
Examination
Handbook
(Revised 9/2018)
Overview

The graduate nursing program requires students to complete a comprehensive examination to evaluate student attainment of program outcomes. This handbook provides information to guide the degree seeking graduate nursing student through the comprehensive exam process.

As per the ASU Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog [http://www.angelo.edu/catalogs/](http://www.angelo.edu/catalogs/) MSN students must successfully complete a written comprehensive examination as part of the eligibility requirements for graduation.

Comprehensives exams are offered fall and spring (typically November and April). Dates for testing are posted in advance on the ASU Nursing webpage at the Comp Exam tab. [http://www.angelo.edu/dept/nursing/msn.php](http://www.angelo.edu/dept/nursing/msn.php)

Purpose

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is two-fold:

**Part 1.** To determine *MSN core curriculum competency* in areas of leadership, theory, ethics, advocacy, and research for advanced nursing. (Part 1 is a four-hour written exam proctored and administered at the HHS Testing Center, in the Health and Human Services Building, 2341 Vanderventer Ave., San Angelo, Texas. 76909 (No reference materials or notes are permitted.)

**Part 2.** To determine competency in the area of specialization (Nurse Educator or Family Nurse Practitioner). (Part 2 is completed independently according to program track requirements. Students typically have one week to complete.)

Planning for Success

Successful completion of the graduate nursing program is based upon synthesis and application of master’s level advanced nursing knowledge taught throughout the program. The comprehensive exam validates that the MSN Graduate Program Student Learning Outcomes have been met and knowledge synthesis has occurred.
**MSN Graduate Program Student Learning Outcomes**

*Upon program completion, the graduate will be prepared to:*

1. Integrate nursing and related sciences into the delivery of advanced nursing care to diverse populations.
2. Apply organizational and systems leadership skills.
3. Design and implement quality improvement initiatives.
4. Integrate best research evidence to improve health outcomes.
5. Utilize informatics, healthcare technology and information systems.
6. Advocate through system level policy development.
7. Employ effective communication in inter-professional teams.
8. Synthesize the impact of health determinants for provision of culturally relevant health promotion/disease prevention strategies.
9. Practice at the level of a Master’s prepared nurse.

Each course in the curriculum builds upon foundational knowledge needed for the advanced nursing role. Planning with the end in mind for successful exam completion, faculty recommends that students:

- Reflect on knowledge gained from major assignments and readings as courses are completed.
- Review competencies as outlined in the AACN’s *The Essentials of Master’s Education in Nursing* and identify examples of coursework that demonstrate achievement.
- Save resources such as syllabi, textbooks, major projects and references for review.
- Schedule ample time to complete a comprehensive review and synthesis of major concepts, theories, and evidence used during course work.

**Eligibility**

To sit for the comprehensive exam, graduate students must meet eligibility. The following outlines eligibility requirements for exam completion.

**Part 1.** Students typically complete all core curriculum courses prior to taking Part 1, but they are eligible to sit for examination during the semester of their final core course work as identified by the graduate degree plan.

**Part 2.** Students are eligible to take Part 2 during the last semester of enrollment in their final specialty track course.

Early in the semester in which they qualify, students will be notified of eligibility by email. Students should contact the graduate nursing office if there is any question about eligibility or if they have not received notification.
Students with Disabilities

If you are registered with the Office of Student Life and require special accommodations for documented disabilities please contact the MSN Program Coordinator as soon as you are notified of eligibility.

Application

After students receive notification of eligibility from the graduate nursing department, they must make application to guarantee a testing appointment. Based upon the number of eligible students, more than one testing session may be offered. To obtain a preferred testing time slot, students should submit their application promptly. Once application is received, confirmation of a testing reservation date and time will be sent from the graduate nursing office via email.

https://www.angelo.edu/content/forms/215-application-for-permission-to-take-comprehensive

Travel/Lodging

Students are responsible for travel and lodging expenses. Students traveling a significant distance to San Angelo will need to consider traveling the day before taking Part 1 of the comprehensive exam. For hotel accommodations, students may check the Chamber of Commerce website to review local hotel information (www.sanangelo.org).

Make hotel reservations well in advance.

Preparing for Comprehensive Examination

Students who have completed core courses have passed course requirements, indicating satisfactory competency at the course level. The purpose of the exam is for the graduate student to demonstrate synthesis of knowledge, therefore students will draw from multiple assignments and readings from completed course work to answer exam questions.

To study for comprehensive exams, a thorough review of all major core courses as well as courses specific to program specialty tracks (FNP or NE) is required. The first study segment should be devoted to reviewing core courses and major assignments. Part 1 of the exam tests concepts involving leadership, research, theory, ethics and policy. Pull out your syllabi, papers, presentations, references and textbooks. Be prepared to give summary statements and examples of your work to demonstrate competency at an advanced nursing level.
Included below are study guides for key components:

- Research
- Theory
- Policy/Ethics
- Leadership and Roles
- Informatics

**Research Component Study Guide:**

Students completing the Master of Science in Nursing degree at Angelo State University should be able to:

1. Identify a researchable/search-able problem and explain the process and purpose of a review of literature.
2. Generate research questions from theory and practice.
3. Develop a researchable/search-able problem statement (PICO/PICOT) or research question and justify that problem selection.
4. Relate research design to objectives, questions and hypotheses in nursing research and discuss application of findings based upon evidence strength.
5. Discuss the validity and reliability of data collection measurements/instruments.
6. Identify and define various sampling techniques and strategies as these apply to the research process.
7. Differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and be able to state why one or the other might be used for a research project.
8. Identify independent and dependent variables in a variety of research problem statements.
9. Differentiate between selected sampling techniques and identify the research implications.
10. Interpret statistical methods employed to answer research objective, questions and/or hypotheses testing.
11. Be able to derive meaning and interpret statistical findings. Examples include p value, confidence interval, effect size, and power.
12. Differentiate between statistical and clinical significance.
13. Describe an evidence-based approach (systematic plan) for applying research findings in practice setting, including evaluation of outcomes.
14. Describe the purpose and objectives for evidence-based practice as contributing to the development of nursing science.
15. Appraise research studies for quality and level of evidence. Be able to discuss the following: a) type of research, b) need for the study, c) theoretical framework, d) sampling technique, e) study design, f) strengths and limitations of the findings, g) interpretation of outcomes, and h) recommendations for practice or future research.
Primary Research Resources

(Research textbooks may vary depending upon on course, instructor, and year. General research and statistics textbooks written for the graduate level nurse will suffice.)


Theory Component Study Guide

The purpose of theory is to guide nursing research and practice, so the theory should reflect a reality that is important and significant. In other words, it must possess clinical or practical value. Students must understand the underlying premise of a theory in order to appropriately apply that theory to the research process.

Choose a theory from your master’s education (nursing or another field) that you feel might guide you professionally and review the following information about that theory so you can discuss how best to incorporate use of theory into a research problem.

1. How do you know the theory is clear and consistent?
2. How are the major concepts defined?
3. Are relationships described for these concepts?
4. What assumptions, values, and/or beliefs underlie the development of the theory?
5. Is the theory understandable? Does it make sense?
6. Does the theory address a problem that is important to nursing research? Practice?
7. How does the theory address the concepts included in the nursing paradigm?

Applying Theory to a Professional Practice Question

1. How might the selected theory serve as a framework for a research question?
2. What element(s) of the theory would clearly support use of this theory as a framework for a research question?
3. How does the theory help identify meaningful and relevant areas for study?
4. Does the theory provide a plausible approach to health problems?
5. How does the theory help to interpret research findings?
6. How does the theory help develop practice protocols?
7. Does the theory help generate nursing diagnosis?

Your theory textbooks are your best source of information. You might also find this website useful: [http://currentnursing.com/nursing_theory/research_and_nursing_theories.html](http://currentnursing.com/nursing_theory/research_and_nursing_theories.html)

Primary Theory Resources:

Policy / Ethics Component Study Guide

Advanced Practice Nurses act to influence health care policy in order to: improve health, improve access, improve safety and quality of care, remove disparities and reduce the cost of health care.

There are many strategies used by nurses to influence policy which include— but are not limited to—political analysis, letters to editors, contact with policymakers, running for office, publishing articles, serving on boards, volunteering on campaigns, preparing issue briefs, conducting research or participating in community action.

For preparation of the comprehensive exam on the leadership role of Master’s prepared nurses in health policy issues be able to answer the following questions:

1. What process would you use to initiate a health related policy change? Be prepared to give at least two specific examples of how you would approach resolving a health related issue through policy change.
2. Define key ethical terminology and be prepared to provide examples of ethical dilemmas from clinical practice that would require advanced nursing advocacy.
3. What theoretical and ethical framework(s) will you employ to guide your actions related to policy development and change?
4. What are the skills that advanced practice nurses use to help shape the health delivery system?
5. What spheres of influence (community, workforce/workplace, government, interest groups) could you employ in policy development and/or change for an identified problem?
6. What potential barriers to policy development and change for a specific health related issue could prevent successful change?
7. How would you address barriers to change?
8. How would you identify potential facilitators of change?
9. What steps would you take to successfully advocate change through collaboration with facilitators?
10. How do current and emerging technologies influence or hinder your ability to implement policy change?
11. What ethical ramifications would you need to consider when utilizing technology to promote change?
12. What are the major health care and education policy initiatives currently influencing healthcare?

Utilizing the information from answers to the above questions, you should be able to demonstrate your ability to apply the information to a health problem / diagnosis needing policy assessment, formulation or change.

Primary Ethics and Policy Resources


Leadership and Roles in Advanced Nursing Study Guide

Purpose:
Application of leadership and practice principles at both the patient and system levels is used to promote high quality and safe patient care, reduce overall health care delivery costs, improve access to care, and influence political factors that affect interdisciplinary care.

Task:
Utilize organizational data to identify a potential or actual problem in your workplace setting/other health care setting and use the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Process to address the problem.

Questions:
1. What challenges do health care organizations and leadership teams face as a result of the identified problem?
2. How does the identified problem effect the organization, staff, and/or consumer?
3. According to current evidence-based practice guidelines, what strategies can be developed or utilized to best address the identified problem within the specific organization?
4. How can Kurt Lewin’s Change Theory be used to implement a proposed solution to the identified problem?
5. What ethical challenges must be considered when implementing a proposed solution?
6. What budgetary constraints must be considered when implementing a proposed solution?
7. How will overall project success be measured and evaluated?

Leadership and Roles in Advanced Nursing Resources:


Informatics Component Study Guide

1. What current and emerging technologies support safe practice environments along with optimizing patient safety, cost-effectiveness, and health outcomes.

2. How does the use of outcome data using current communication technologies and information systems reduce risks and improve health outcomes.

3. Be able to appraise policies that incorporate ethical principles and standards for the use of health and information technologies as they impact care environments.

4. Demonstrate the ability to provide oversight and guidance in the integration of technologies to document patient care and improve patient outcomes.

5. Be aware of information and communication technologies, resources, and principles of learning to teach patients and others.

6. Be cognizant of current and emerging technologies in the care environment to support lifelong learning for self and others.

The above provides an overview regarding informatics and technology as it currently stands. It should provide you a platform to help utilize informatics as you navigate exam questions.

Primary Informatics Resources:


Helpful Link
American Nurses Informatics Association [https://www.ania.org/](https://www.ania.org/)
On the Day of the Written Examination (Part 1)—at Angelo State University

Directions to the ASU Testing Center and parking arrangements will be sent via email at least one week in advance. Parking permits are required on campus. Print out parking pass and put it on the vehicle dashboard as instructed. The HHS Testing Center is in the Health and Human Services Building, 2341 Vanderventer Ave., San Angelo. Campus maps are provided to you with your parking permit.

Students will arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the appointed testing time. All personal belongings including electronic equipment will be collected upon entry. No food or drinks are permitted in the testing center.

Each student will have a designated cubicle and computer with the exam file loaded onto the computer desktop. Students will be instructed to open the exam file and to review exam questions. Blank paper for notes will be provided. The exam is timed and will be stopped at four hours.

Students will type directly into the document file on their computer. It will be important to save the exam file often while writing responses to prevent loss should there be a problem with technology or power outage.

Bathroom breaks are permitted during the exam, however no additional time will be given. During the exam, should a bathroom break be needed, the student will notify the proctor.

Before leaving the testing center, students should double check to be sure the exam file has been saved and the desktop file is closed properly. Note paper will be collected.

Specialty Track Exams (Part 2)

Nurse educator specialty track take-home exam is designed to evaluate nurse educator core competencies. Nurse Educator students graduating in the same semester will receive Part 2 via email immediately following the on-campus exam Part 1 to be returned within a week. Nurse Educator specialty track students graduating in a subsequent semester will receive Part 2 during their final semester.

Family nurse practitioner specialty track exam is designed to evaluate family nurse practitioner competencies. Family Nurse Practitioner students will receive Part 2 instructions during their final semester. The FNP specialty track exam, designed to mirror the national certification exam, is centered on NONPF competencies.

Evaluation Part 1 (On-campus Written Exam)

Student performance on Part 1 will be evaluated by at least 2 graduate faculty members, with at least one faculty having expertise in the degree program. Students will receive a
Pass/ Fail grade for their performance on the comprehensive examination based upon the grading rubric (See attached). **Satisfactory performance/Passing** is judged as the demonstration of the students’ ability to synthesize, integrate, and apply principles of leadership, theory, research, and policy in the role of the advanced nurse.

Specifically, students should discuss the development and application of theory, research methodology, and policy as it applies to a specific problem selected at the time of the exam. A clear comprehensive understanding of the *Essentials of Master’s Education in Nursing* is expected. Failure to convince the graduate faculty that the student has sufficient comprehensive knowledge for entry level performance in the role of a master’s prepared nurse will result in **unsatisfactory performance** and a failed exam.

**Evaluation Part 2 (Track Specific Take-home Exam)**

The MSN faculty members with specialty track expertise review the take home exam Part 2 and assign a Pass/Fail grade. Satisfactory/Passing grade is based upon the student’s ability to demonstrate competency in their specialty.

**Results**

Students will be notified of Part 1 written examination and Part 2 specialty track examination results usually within one week via ASU email. In order to be recommended for graduation to the College of Graduate Studies, students are required to pass both portions of the comprehensive exam.

If a student fails to demonstrate in writing synthesis and comprehension of graduate program core curricula at a satisfactory level, it is at the discretion of the graduate nursing faculty to give a follow-up oral examination. Faculty will contact the student as soon as it is determined that the written comprehensive exam Part 1 did not meet minimum passing standards.

For the oral exam, the student will come to San Angelo to be examined by two or more graduate nursing faculty members and one ASU faculty member from outside the department. Typically this is a 1 hour question and answer session designed to allow faculty members to further evaluate the student’s ability to synthesize, integrate, and apply principles of leadership, theory, research, and policy in the role of the advanced nurse.

*A candidate who fails Part 1 written and oral comprehensive exams may petition the nursing graduate faculty for permission to repeat the written examination. If approved by faculty, the student will be allowed to take another written examination no sooner than the next semester or summer session.* Any student who fails the second comprehensive examination will be dismissed from the graduate program.

(See ASU Catalog, Graduate Studies, Academic Status, III. Dismissal  https://www.angelo.edu/content/files/25772-2018-2019-university-catalog-archive)
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<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
<th>ACCEPTABLE</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>RATING Q 1</th>
<th>RATING Q 2</th>
<th>RATING Q 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>(15 pts) All required information is clearly and completely provided.</td>
<td>(0-10 pts) Required information not provided and/or information provided is not clearly related to question posed.</td>
<td>(10.5-11 pts) Two or more elements of required information are omitted. Most of provided response is clearly related to question posed.</td>
<td>(12-13 pts) One or more elements of required information are omitted. Response clearly related to question posed.</td>
<td>(13.5-15 pts) All required information is addressed. Substantive response with logical framework.</td>
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<td>(10 pts) Responses are supported by examples, details and illustrations</td>
<td>(0-6.5 pts) No examples/illustrations are provided or are inaccurate.</td>
<td>(7-7.5 pts) Examples, details or illustrations are simplistic and demonstrate some evidence to support assertions, however may lack appropriate application.</td>
<td>(8-8.5 pts) Examples, details or illustrations demonstrate evidence of basic level of understanding of topic explored</td>
<td>(9-10 pts) Examples, details or illustrations demonstrate comprehensive and in depth understanding of topic explored.</td>
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<td>(40 pts) Critical thinking is evident</td>
<td>(0-27.5 pts) Fails to demonstrate ability to evaluate and interpret information. Analysis is simplistic and fails to demonstrate ability to solve problems systematically.</td>
<td>(28-31.5 pts) Demonstrates adequate ability to evaluate and interpret information at basic level. Analysis lacks full development. Illustrates limited ability to solve problems systematically.</td>
<td>(32-35.5 pts) Demonstrates high level ability to evaluate and interpret information. Fairly comprehensive analysis. Illustrates clear ability to solve problems systematically.</td>
<td>(36-40 pts) Demonstrates exemplary ability to evaluate and interpret information. Comprehensive analysis. Illustrates outstanding ability to solve problems systematically.</td>
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<td>(30 pts) Ability to synthesize component ideas into a viable solution is evident</td>
<td>(0-20.5 pts) Does not demonstrate ability to assemble evidence for solution creation. Does not relate supporting evidence to topic.</td>
<td>(21 pts) Multiple errors in assembling evidence for solution creation. Conclusions have some logic but contain multiple errors of reasoning.</td>
<td>(24-26.5 pts) Minor errors in assembling evidence for solution creation. Conclusions generally logical, with minor errors of reasoning.</td>
<td>(27-30 pts) Outstanding ability to assemble evidence for solution creation. Conclusions are logical and reflect an informed evaluation of evidence.</td>
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<td>(5 pts) Punctuation, grammar, sentence structure reflect graduate level writing skills</td>
<td>(0-3 pts) Abundance of errors in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, ideas.</td>
<td>(3.5 pts) Noticeable errors in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, usage.</td>
<td>(4 pts) One or two errors in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, usage.</td>
<td>(4.5-5 pts) No errors in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, usage.</td>
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**TOTAL SCORE** 0 0 0

**NOTE:** Maximum number of points per item in left hand column.
Total maximum Score equals 100.

**Pass** = 70 points or above on each question; **Fail** = less than 70 points on any question.