



**National League  
for Nursing**

The Voice for Nursing Education

# NLN Program Outcomes and Competencies for Graduate Academic Nurse Educator Preparation

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## INTRODUCTION

Consistent with the NLN's commitment to excellence in nursing education and its belief that nursing education is a specialized area of practice, these outcomes and competencies will: 1) identify essential concepts in graduate nursing education programs; 2) articulate the unique aspects of each type of graduate academic nurse educator preparation; and 3) clearly define the scope and depth of expected outcomes for educators prepared in master's and doctoral nursing education programs.

The program outcomes and competencies are grounded in the core values of the NLN – caring, integrity, diversity, and excellence. The concepts of evidence-based teaching, the science of learning, research in nursing education, and personal and professional development are reflective of these values assuming different dimensions across program type.

The concepts are embedded in four broad program outcomes (NLN, 2010):

### A. Human Flourishing

Nurse educators use learning and teaching skills to enhance human flourishing for students, colleagues, patients, and communities.

### B. Sound Nursing Judgment

Nurse educators demonstrate sound nursing judgment in decisions and actions related to quality nursing education and patient care.

### C. Professional Identity

Growth in professional identity is integral to the development of the nurse educator as a leader who pursues and values professional and personal advancement.

### D. The Spirit of Inquiry.

Nursing, a vital profession in the reforming health care system, functions with a spirit of inquiry to continuously inform education and practice.

These graduate academic nurse educator program outcomes and competencies are in addition to those outcomes and competencies required of students to meet the requirements of their general graduate program of study. They provide guidance for graduate programs whose focus is the preparation of academic nurse educators and scholars. While clinical practice competency is not a direct outcome of nurse educator preparation, it is the foundation of teaching practice for all nurse educators.

## A. HUMAN FLOURISHING

Human flourishing is defined as “an effort to achieve self-actualization and fulfillment within the context of a larger community of individuals, each with the right to pursue his or her own such efforts. It encompasses the uniqueness, dignity, diversity, freedom, happiness, and holistic well-being of the individual within the larger family, community, and population. Achieving human flourishing is a life-long existential journey of hopes, achievements, regrets, losses, illness, suffering, and coping. The nurse helps the individual to reclaim or develop

new pathways toward human flourishing” (NLN, 2010, p.33). Foundational concepts include health and illness, human dignity, compassion, vulnerability, and cultural and ethnic diversity (NLN, 2016). Sumner (2013) adds that “Flourishing means thriving, having vigor, being successful and growing vigorously” (p. 25).

## *1. Context*

One aspect of human flourishing for the academic nurse educator to appreciate and support is a healthy work environment. The major areas of consideration identified in the NLN Healthful Work Environment Tool Kit (NLN, 2006) are salaries, benefits, workload, collegial environment, role preparation and professional development, scholarship, institutional support, marketing and recognition, and leadership.

The toolkit focuses on role preparation and professional development, scholarship, and leadership. These attributes are reflected in the academic nurse educator’s valuing of a collegial environment. i Brett, Branstetter, and Wagner (2014) found that nurse educators highly value caring attributes, which provide a useful framework to enhance a healthy work environment in which educators (and students and staff) “feel known, cared about, and values through simple actions (e.g. active listening, open dialogue, understanding situations)” (p. 365).

According to the NLN (2016), “Diversity signifies that each individual is unique and recognizes individual differences - race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs political beliefs or other attributes. It encourages self-awareness and respect for all persons” (p. 2). In terms of the implications of this definition of diversity, the NLN Board of Governors’ call to action stated that “creating inclusive academic environments that foster the recruitment, retention, and graduation of diverse students, is the role and responsibility of nursing education leadership” (p. 8). In order to support human flourishing, nurse educators must embrace this definition of diversity and reflect it in every aspect of their role.

Cultural safety is viewed as a “viable and appropriate framework for engaging in ‘upstream approaches to addressing diversity in nursing education and practice” (Kellett & Fitton, 2017). It can be used to facilitate safe educational and practice spaces for everyone who is “othered” by dominant perspectives in society. According to Arieli, Mashiach, Hirschfeld, and Friedman (2012), nurse educators must be aware of the “hidden but significant, effects of cultural safety on their students...see themselves as inquirers who seek to explore how their students perceive certain situations...and work to develop skills that enable them and their students to ‘negotiate reality’ so as to bring perceptions into closer alignment” (pp. 367-368). Nurse educators need to acknowledge the diversity of their students, colleagues, and patients in order to provide a safe space for them in nursing education and practice.

## *2. End-of-Program Competencies*

**Graduates who assume academic nurse educator roles are prepared to:**

### **a. Master’s or Foundational Graduates**

- ▶ Function as leaders and change agents in teaching practice to create systems that promote human flourishing. Engage in holistic teaching practice that respects, without conditions or

limitations, the dignity, diversity, and self-determination of students.

- › Take a collaborative role with the intra/interprofessional team that enhances the flourishing of self as nurse educator.
- › Contribute to the flourishing of others in the local, regional, and national community of nurse educators.

### **b. Doctoral-Practice (DNP) Graduates**

Systematically synthesize pedagogical evidence from nursing and other disciplines and translate this knowledge to promote human flourishing of the student, educator, nurse, nursing profession, patients, families, communities, populations, and systems:

- › Translate evidence for a holistic teaching practice that respects, without conditions or limitations, the dignity, diversity, and self-determination of students.
- › Function as a practice scholar that enhances the flourishing of self as nurse educator
- › Contribute to the flourishing of others in the regional, national, and global communities of nurse educators

### **c. Doctoral-Research Graduates**

Design, implement, and evaluate pedagogical research that promotes human flourishing of the student, educator, nurse, nursing profession, patients, families, communities, populations, and systems:

- › Conduct research that contributes to holistic teaching practice that respects, without conditions or limitations, the dignity, diversity, and self-determination of students.
- › Function as a research scholar that enhances the flourishing of self as nurse educator scientist.
- › Help others in the regional, national, and global communities of nurse educators to flourish.

## **B. NURSING JUDGMENT**

Nursing judgment encompasses three processes: “critical thinking, clinical judgment, and integration of best evidence into practice. Nurses must employ these processes as they make decisions about clinical care, the development and application of research and the broader dissemination of insights and research findings to the community and management and resource allocation” (NLN, 2010, p. 34).

The use of sound professional judgment in nursing education involves the processing of information, thinking critically about it, evaluating the evidence, applying relevant knowledge, using problem-solving skills, reflecting and using clinical judgment to select the best course of action with regard to educational issues and strategies. Papp et al. (2014) described sound professional judgment as “the ability to apply higher-order cognitive skills (conceptualization, analysis, evaluation) and the disposition to be deliberate about thinking (being open-minded or intellectually honest) that lead to action that is logical and appropriate (p. 715).

## *1. Context*

The nurse educator, using sound professional judgment, identifies educational issues in collaboration with other members of the interprofessional team, and then proceeds with the appraisal, selection, and integration of evidence and the evaluation of learning outcomes. The educator should integrate reliable evidence from multiple ways of knowing to improve educational practices and nursing judgments. The educator also identifies gaps in the evidence and formulates research questions to address those gaps (Gordon, 2016).

Nurse educators need to be prepared to contend with emergent health care issues to create a strong, diverse competent nursing workforce (NLN, 2017). Development of public policy advocacy skills and an evidentiary base will help educators prepare practitioners in the delivery of excellent health care (NLN, 2016a). Additionally, educators need to create closer linkages among how they teach students, how students learn, and patient care outcomes (Patterson & Krouse, 2017). These connections are crucial in the delivery of quality health care.

## *2. End-of-Program Competencies*

**Graduates who assume academic nurse educator roles are prepared to:**

### **a. Master's or Foundational Graduates**

Make judgments in teaching practice that reflect a scholarly critique of current evidence from nursing and other disciplines with the capacity to identify gaps in knowledge and formulate research questions.

- Demonstrate accountability for decisions and actions in the implementation of evidence-based teaching.
- Collaborate with the intra/interprofessional team to ensure quality nursing education.
- Apply components of the science of learning in teaching practice to identify linkages between learning and improved patient care.
- Analyze institutional educational resource allocation to support best teaching practices.
- Identify innovative approaches to learning that improve clinical reasoning and judgment.

### **b. Doctoral-Practice (DNP) Graduates**

Systematically synthesize evidence from nursing and other disciplines and translate this knowledge to enhance nursing education and the ability of educators to make judgments in teaching practice.

- Demonstrate accountability for decisions and actions in the translation of evidence into teaching practice.
- Implement quality improvement processes in the assessment and evaluation of teaching practice.
- Integrate components of the science of learning into the application of best teaching practices to link learning with improved patient care.

- › Apply complexity science to inform educational systems and public policy formation.
- › Apply innovative approaches to learning that improve clinical reasoning and judgment.

### **c. Doctoral-Research Graduates**

Provide leadership in designing and implementing pedagogical research that expands the evidence underlying the practice of nursing education and strengthens nurse educators' ability to make judgments in teaching practice.

- › Demonstrate accountability for decisions and actions in the generation of evidence for teaching practice.
- › Contribute to quality assurance in nursing education with advancements in assessment and evaluation in teaching practice through rigorous research.
- › Evaluate components of the science of learning for best teaching practices and curricular impact to link learning with improved patient care.
- › Assume a leadership role in educational and public policy and resource allocation in educational settings.
- › Examine through rigorous research methodologies innovative approaches to learning that improve clinical reasoning and judgment.

## **C. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

Professional identity including both personal and professional development, involves “the internalization of core values and perspectives recognized as integral to the art and science of nursing” (NLN, 2010, p. 68) and is socially constructed (Mazhindu, Griffiths, Pook, Erskine, Ellis, & Smith, 2016). These core values become self-evident as the nurse learns, gains experience, reflects, and grows in the profession. The nurse must internalize these fundamental values in every aspect of practice while working to improve patient outcomes and promote the ideals of the nursing profession. Integral to this outcome is the nurse’s commitment to advocacy for improved health care access and service delivery for vulnerable populations and to the growth and sustainability of the nursing profession.

### ***1. Context***

Content addressed during a person’s educational experience, as well as the teachers and mentors with whom a person interacts influence the development of professional identity (Johnson et al., 2012). Thus academic nurse educators assume ownership in the development of their own professional identity as well as that of their students, irrespective of level of student. Incorporating appropriate ethical standards derived from existing national and international codes of ethics reflects such ownership.

Not only must academic nurse educators embrace essential attributes of the nursing profession, they must also be familiar with the values and perspectives of the discipline of education, including those of nursing education. Critical to professional identity is awareness of changing health care vistas, including the occurrence of conflicting values. Refinement of professional identity may be enhanced through interactions with colleagues in communities

of interest. (Woods, Cashin, & Stockhausen, 2016).

## ***2. End-of-Program Competencies***

**Graduates who assume academic nurse educator roles are prepared to:**

### **a. Master's or Foundational Graduates**

Implement the educator role in ways that foster best pedagogical practices, work toward personal and professional growth and encourage it in others, demonstrate leadership, and advance the profession.

- › Embrace the core values of nursing education and the profession.
- › Assume accountability for the quality of nursing education for a diverse student population in a variety of settings.
- › Participate in professional development opportunities that enhance effectiveness in the nurse educator role.
- › Function as a professional role model for students.
- › Apply ethical/legal principles to issues in nursing education.

### **b. Doctoral-Practice (DNP) Graduates**

Translate pedagogical research findings into teaching practice and help design, implement, evaluate, and advocate for changes in teaching and in educational policy that will best serve a diverse student population and nursing workforce.

- › Advocate for change in teaching practice reflective of the core values of nursing education.
- › Design, implement, and evaluate changes in teaching practice for a diverse student population.
- › Collaborate on intra/interprofessional development activities to enhance the effectiveness of nursing education.
- › Assume leadership role for initiatives focused on system changes in educational settings at all levels.
- › Apply ethical/legal principles to issues in nursing education.

### **c. Doctoral-Research Graduates**

Exhibit a commitment to a spirit of inquiry, the systematic investigation of nursing education-related problems, and the dissemination of research findings, in order to shape a preferred future for nursing education.

- › Design the science of nursing education to address the core values of nursing and nursing education.
- › Design, implement, and evaluate changes in teaching practice for a diverse student population.
- › Collaborate on intra/interprofessional development activities to enhance the effectiveness of nursing education.

- › Assume leadership role for initiatives in nursing education to reform the national and global perspectives.
- › Develop the science addressing the ethical/legal issues in nursing education.

## D. SPIRIT OF INQUIRY

Spirit of inquiry is “a persistent sense of curiosity that informs both learning and practice. A nurse infused by a spirit of inquiry will raise questions, challenge traditional and existing practices, and seek creative approaches to problem-solving. A spirit of inquiry in nursing engenders innovative thinking and extends possibilities for discovering novel solutions in both predictable and unpredictable situations” (NLN, 2010, p. 36). Cultivating the capacity for a spirit of inquiry among all graduate nursing students is an outcome worth pursuing since knowledge development and the science of nursing education is all about discovering, exploring, experimenting, and learning. Being an intellectual role model and mentor with a questioning mind is a necessary component for creation of a scholarly environment that welcomes innovative and imaginative approaches thinking. This has to be driven by an educator’s curiosity.

### *1. Context*

Academic nurse educators need to question and challenge how they were taught and how they teach. They need to seek the acquisition of “new knowledge or seek clarity in understanding” (Russell, 2013, p. 100) and be able to ignite a spirit of inquiry in their students. Intellectual curiosity includes a heightened or enhanced dimension of cognitive stimulation, motivational state, and desirable cognitive process (Russell, 2013, p. 100). Academic educators must provide a learning climate for nursing students to challenge the status quo.

There is a natural progression in the spirit of inquiry from the master’s or foundational preparation of an academic nurse educator to the practice and research doctorate. Stimulating, fostering, and sustaining a spirit of inquiry begins at the master’s or foundational level with an analysis and evaluation of knowledge and evidence (Dobratz, Primomo, & Delo, 2012). Preparation of the academic nurse educator for the clinical doctorate includes the translation of pedagogical evidence to generate new knowledge that is transferable to other practice settings at a system’s level. Cultivating a spirit of scholarly inquiry for research doctorate students (Armstrong, McCurry & Dluhy, 2017) requires engaging them in the science of discovery through the design and implementation of pedagogical research to generate new knowledge to improve and reform nursing education.

### *2. End-of-Program Competencies*

Graduates who assume academic nurse educator roles are prepared to:

#### **a. Master’s or Foundational Graduates**

Contribute to the science of nursing education by analyzing and evaluating the underlying disparities in knowledge or evidence.

- › Analyze traditional and existing teaching practices to enhance student learning.
- › Apply current best evidence in teaching practice in various educational settings.



- › Collaborate with the intra/ interprofessional efforts in scholarly inquiry for best practices in nursing education.
- › Collaborate with colleagues in the design, implementation, and evaluation of teaching strategies to best serve a diverse student population.
- › Evaluate the impact of evidence-based teaching strategies with student populations.

### **b. Doctoral-Practice (DNP) Graduates**

Translate, implement, and evaluate pedagogical evidence to generate new knowledge that is transferable to other practice settings at a system level.

- › Generate innovative teaching/learning ideas based on a critique and synthesis of the current pedagogical evidence.
- › Translate research evidence on salient nursing education phenomena.
- › Lead intra/ interprofessional efforts in knowledge translation for best practices in nursing education.
- › Integrate the components of complexity science in the translation of evidence for teaching practice.
- › Assume the role of practice scholar in the translation of knowledge for nursing education.
- › Disseminate translational evidence to establish best practices in nursing education.

### **c. Doctoral-Research Graduates**

Engage in the science of discovery by designing, implementing, and evaluating pedagogical research to generate new knowledge to improve and reform nursing education.

- › Apply creative and analytic thinking in the exploration of pedagogical evidence for teaching practice.
- › Generate the research evidence on salient nursing education phenomena.
- › Lead intra/ interprofessional efforts in knowledge generation for best practices in nursing education.
- › Integrate the science of learning in the conduct of pedagogical research.
- › Assume the role of scientist scholar in the generation of knowledge for nursing education.
- › Disseminate empirical evidence to establish best practices in nursing education.

## GLOSSARY

The following terms have been defined for the purpose of understanding them within the context on nursing education and the *Outcomes and Competencies for Graduate Academic Nurse Educator Preparation*.

*Academic Nurse Educator* is a specialty practice role requiring advanced knowledge in teaching, learning, and evaluation; knowledge and skill in curriculum development; assessment of program outcomes; and the ability and dedication to be contributing members of an academic community.

*Competency* is “a principle of professional practice that identifies the expectations required for safe and effective performance of a task or implementation of a role” (NLN, 2009, p. 182).

*Complexity Science* or the science of complex adaptive systems is characterized by “a number of elements interacting locally in a dynamic, non-linear manner. Interactions in the system are intricate; system activities are a function of what has previously occurred and are open to energy and information from the environment” (Chaffee & McNeill, 2007, p. 232).

*Core values* for nursing education are caring, integrity, diversity, and excellence; advocacy and civility.

*Educational Practice* is the professional work of a nurse whose focus is the teaching-learning of students.

*Evidence-based teaching practice (EBTP)* is using systematically developed and appropriately-integrated research as the foundation for curriculum design, selection of teaching/learning strategies, selection of evaluation methods, advisement practices, and other elements of the educational enterprise (NLN, 2009, p. 192).

*Foundational* refers to the basis or groundwork for academic nurse educator preparation prior to a doctoral degree such as certificate programs or master’s education.

*Global Perspective* is knowledge about and critical understanding of global issues that enable an individual to a) effectively address those issues; b) acquire values that give priority to ecological sustainability, global interdependence, social justice for all the world’s people, peace, human rights, and mutually-beneficial processes of economic, social, and cultural development; c) develop the will and ability to act as mature, responsible citizens of the world; and d) develop a commitment to creating acceptable futures for themselves, their communities, and the world. Such a perspective is critical in light of the increasing connectivity and interdependence of the world’s social, economic, educational, and other systems (NLN, 2004, Glossary).

*Pedagogical Research* is systematic inquiry into all aspects of the teaching/learning process, including how students learn, effective teaching strategies, effective assessment or evaluation methods, curriculum design and implementation, program outcomes, learner outcomes, environments that enhance learning, and other components of the educational enterprise (NLN, 2004, Glossary).

*Program Outcomes* are “results achieved in response to goals set by a program” (CNEA, 2016, p. 35).

*Quality Assurance* is a process to ensure the quality of nursing education based on standards and guidelines. It incorporates systematic measurement, comparison with a standard, and monitoring of processes with feedback mechanisms.

*Continuous Quality Improvement* is a comprehensive, sustained, and integrative approach to system assessment and evaluation that aims for continual improvement and renewal of the total system (NLN, 2009, p. 182).

*Practice Scholar* refers to a nurse with a doctor of nursing practice degree.

*Research Scholar* refers to a nurse with a research doctoral degree.

*Science of Learning* is “a systematic and empirical approach to understanding how people learn” (Benassi, Overson, & Hakala, 2014, p. 4).

*Science of Nursing Education* is an integrated, systematically developed body of knowledge that “address[es] questions related to student learning, new pedagogies, graduate competencies, program outcomes, innovative clinical teaching models, effective student advisement strategies, recruitment and retention strategies, and other elements of quality nursing education.” (Tanner, 2003, p. 3)

*Structured Preparation for the Faculty Role* “requires specialized preparation.... There is a core of knowledge and skills that is essential if one is to be effective and achieve excellence in the role. That core of knowledge and skills entails the ability to facilitate learning, advance the total development and professional socialization of the learner, design appropriate learning experiences, and evaluate learning outcomes. ... It is critical that all nurse educators know about teaching, learning and evaluation; and nurse educators who practice in academic settings also must have knowledge and skill in curriculum development, assessment of program outcomes, and being an effective member of an academic community, among other things. ... Competence as an educator can be established, recognized, and expanded through master’s and/or doctoral education, post-master’s certificate programs, continuing professional development, mentoring activities, and professional certification as a faculty member.” (NLN, 2002)

*System* is “a group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a

complex whole” (thefreedictionary.com, system).

*Translation of Research* is the process of moving research findings into practice to positively influence nursing education and policy outcomes.

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# Curricular Elements for Preparation of Academic Nurse Educators

The following core content is guided by the Nurse Educator Competencies\* and is recommended as a basis for the design of graduate programs that prepare academic nurse educators.

Core Content ***	MSN or Foundational	PRACTICE DOCTORATE (Practice Scholar)	RESEARCH DOCTORATE (Research Scholar)
<b>Substantive content in the scholarship of teaching</b> (Boyer)	<b>Scholarship of teaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role – educator competencies (curricular design &amp; implementation, teaching methodologies, needs assessment, evaluation strategies)</li> </ul>	<b>Scholarship of teaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role – nurse educator competencies</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Teaching and learning theories</li> </ul>	<b>Scholarship of teaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role – nurse educator competencies</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Teaching and learning theories</li> <li>• Design/evaluation</li> <li>• Educational Policy in nursing and in higher education</li> </ul>
<b>Research/inquiry/ Methods</b>	<b>Research utilization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarship of application (Boyer)</li> <li>• Evidence-based Teaching Practice (EBTP)</li> <li>• Dissemination of research</li> </ul>	<b>Translation of evidence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarship of integration &amp; application (Boyer)</li> <li>• Generation of internal evidence** (QI, outcomes management and EBP projects)</li> <li>• Critical appraisal of the literature and research synthesis</li> <li>• Implementation/ Evaluation/Integration</li> <li>• Dissemination of evidence</li> </ul>	<b>Generation of new knowledge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarship of application, integration, &amp; discovery (Boyer)</li> <li>• Critical appraisal and synthesis of the theoretical and research literature</li> <li>• Generation of external evidence** (Conducts educational research)</li> <li>• Use of secondary data analysis</li> <li>• Employment of large data sets</li> <li>• Development of measurement tools and instruments</li> <li>• Dissemination of knowledge</li> </ul>

Nursing Knowledge/ Theory/Science	Nursing science	Nursing science	Nursing science
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise in nursing practice</li> <li>• Introduction to concepts &amp; theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise in advanced nursing practice</li> <li>• Translation theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept development</li> <li>• Theory development/testing</li> <li>• Meta theory</li> </ul>

\*Halstead, J. A. (Ed.). (2007). *Nurse educator competencies: Creating an evidence-based practice for nurse educators*. New York, NY: National League for Nursing.

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