

# WSU's largest-ever DNP class improves healthcare in myriad ways

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*Latoyia Butler presented her DNP final project at the recent Western Institute of Nursing conference in Spokane. Photo by Cori Kogan.*

The WSU College of Nursing will graduate 33 Doctor of Nursing Practice students this spring, its largest-ever DNP class.

Most of those 33 students will become family nurse

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practitioners, psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioners, or will take on leadership roles in public health, public policy, or health care administration.

Before they graduate, however, they all had to complete a final project. They were tasked with investigating an area of nursing practice, a health care delivery system, or a policy issue, and using scientific evidence to improve practice or patient outcomes.

Thanks to the work of the latest class of WSU DNPs, a psychiatric practice in Spokane has more information on the effectiveness of group medical visits.

Medical personnel in a Western Washington prison have new information on standardizing wound care to help prevent MRSA.

New moms who had gestational diabetes during pregnancy are more reliably receiving postpartum follow-up at a large health clinic in the Seattle area.

And working nurse practitioners who want to set up an independent practice have new resources for doing that.

Such projects demonstrate that an advance-practice nurse can assess a population or organization “and understand how to be a change agent or implement change in very complex settings,” said Anne Mason, director of the DNP program at the WSU College of Nursing and clinical associate professor.

Projects aren’t intended to be basic research, noted Clinical Professor Anita Hunter, who served as faculty mentor for some of the DNP student projects. Instead, “It’s about taking information that’s already in evidence, applying it to a particular setting and saying, ‘Does it work, or does it need further evolution?’”

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*Nick Goodwin and Latoya Butler presented their DNP final projects at the Western Institute of Nursing conference in Spokane recently. Photo by Cori Kogan.*

Many DNP students undertake projects in their workplaces, but others connect with an organization outside of their professional setting. Projects often change during the course of the systematic investigation.

David Colvin, for example, developed a framework for a project to improve patient “handoffs” from provider to provider within a small rural hospital. He quickly discovered that there was no baseline – “they didn’t know what people were already doing,” he said. His primary objective shifted to creating that baseline on current practices and attitudes, with recommendations for future work on standardization and training.

Projects can result in improved patient care or organizational efficiency, lower costs, or greater knowledge – or a combination of those benefits.

DNP students presented the projects this week, and will graduate in ceremonies next week.

*–Story by Addy Hatch*

**About the DNP:** The Doctor of Nursing Practice is a clinically focused doctoral program, as opposed to the research-focused PhD. Many DNPs go on to careers as Family Nurse Practitioners or Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners, or work in education or health care leadership.

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