What is Senior Practicum?

NUR 480, Practicum/Care Management, is a three credit clinical course taken the final 7 weeks of the undergraduate nursing program. Commonly called “Practicum”, NUR 480 has both a required weekly seminar of two hours and clinical time of approximately 22 hours per week in a location of student interest or need. Practicum provides a culminating intensive clinical experience that gives the opportunity to refine your clinical practice. Emphasis is placed on integrating the multiple roles of professional nursing and serves as a vehicle for you to enhance your critical thinking and communication skills.

The primary purpose of this course is to develop your competency in nursing care, including organizational, prioritizing and decision-making skills. Your identified goals are key to your success in Practicum, as this course is meant to help you with the transition into professional nursing. Regardless of your practicum location, this transition occurs.

The seminar meets weekly for two hours with faculty. Attendance at seminar is MANDATORY with assigned readings and assignments for each class. Topics explored during the course include delegation, end-of-life and professional ethics as applied to a wide range of health care settings. All students will develop and present a capstone project which requires application of competent technical skills and best practice concepts. Student presentations are scheduled during seminar.

Guide to Choosing a Practicum Site

Some students feel that choosing a practicum site is difficult because of misconceptions about what it is all about. If you are having trouble deciding what to request you are not alone. Here are some tips to think about as you get ready to make a request.

1. We recommend that you choose a medical surgical nursing unit experience to achieve the best background in organization and prioritization as well as nursing skills. You should select a unit related to what you need to learn rather than what you are “curious” about. Specialty units have a focused patient population and advanced skills which may not allow you to reach the independence you seek. We encourage those with low GPA or struggling with basic skills to choose a med/surg setting rather than a specialty location. You can indicate clinical units at the agencies/hospitals, if you have a preference. There is a list of possible health care organizations to choose from on the practicum web page and when you enter the Google Doc request form.

2. If you have completed a student internship, and/or your G.P.A. is 3.4 or above, and you receive a recommendation from a clinical faculty (FACULTY FEEDBACK FORM), you may submit a request for a specialty unit placement which are defined as ER, any Critical Care Units, PACU, Maternity, Pediatrics. Placement in a specialty area is at the discretion of the Practicum faculty. Faculty will consult your previous clinical instructors to determine appropriateness of a specialty unit placement for you.
3. If location is an issue due to commuting, please consider this factor and indicate your special needs when completing the request form. Be sure to explain your facility location preference as a strong factor in your interest statement. Just like clinical placements, we expect that you will have transportation to facilities outside of Portland.

4. If you do not know a specific area of interest, it is best to indicate “any med surg”. If you do indicate an interest and you will not change this between request submission and the course start, you should list that area as your first choice and provide choices of hospitals/agencies that provide that experience. Your request MUST include two different FACILITIES and two different UNITs within those facilities. Your first choices may not be available.


6. **We will not place you in a unit in which you are currently or recently employed.** You must include information about employment on your request form.

7. We will do all we can to place you in your first choices. Realize, though, that there is no guarantee that your requests will be accommodated. There are several reasons:

   - We are dependent on the availability of clinical slots in various hospitals/agencies and do not have control over the decision of an agency to take a Practicum student.
   - Slots available are dependent upon what is happening on the requested unit. The unit may have newly hired nurses, activities planned or no availability of seasoned preceptors and cannot accommodate a student at this time.
   - Nursing Directors or Head Nurses have the final say. They know the capabilities of the unit to offer a successful learning experience. It would be unfair to place a student with an inexperienced preceptor or on a unit in the midst of change.
   - Student progression through the program, especially in adult health clinical, is also a consideration. If you want a placement in a specialty area and have struggled clinically in the program, it may be a disservice to you and the unit to place you where expectations require a clinically strong student from the start of the experience. As a result, faculty has the final decision with regard to placement.
   - Finally, we compete with other schools of nursing for the same clinical units. The numbers of placement requests have increased greatly in the past few years.
   - So, the bottom line is to carefully identify all your choices. We will do the best we can to secure your preferred placement within reason and availability of resources.
   - You may not hear about your placement until very close to the start of Practicum.

8. **You must not** approach individual nurses, nurse managers, directors or placement coordinators in the facilities to request or arrange your own practicum. Most hospitals have a specifically proscribed ways of ascertaining availability of preceptors for students and get very upset if we, or a student, go directly to a staff member, preceptor or manager. If you have...
someone in mind to be your preceptor, you may include a name, telephone, and work location in your request. But again, DO NOT APPROACH ANYONE to arrange your own placement. It is the faculty’s responsibility to coordinate this Practicum with the health care facility. We want to avoid any conflicting communication. For example, a nurse you know who would be a good preceptor might already be assigned to precept a new graduate or a student from another school. Give us the information and let us use the organization's process.

9. Students who request New Hampshire facilities WILL have extra hoops to go through such as additional background checks, drug testing, sending resume and cover letter. The VA system requires drug testing. CMMC requires resumes and cover letters. Don’t be discouraged about these, it just requires a longer acceptance process and may have a few additional costs required by the health care organization.

What else you should know about Practicum?

1. BIGGEST MYTH TO DISPEL: “You can work full time while you do practicum.” ABSOLUTELY NOT TRUE! The number of hours for Practicum (154), seminar requirements (2 hours in class per week), and the leadership course (4 hrs in class plus online (12-14hrs per week) make it nearly impossible to work during the last 7 weeks of the program. Your practicum schedule MUST be the preceptor's schedule and cannot be made around your outside work schedule. You need to have a conversation right now with your employer about your decreased flexibility and availability during those last seven weeks. There really is no "wiggle-room" here so be aware and plan accordingly.

2. Please note. The requests you make give the USM faculty coordinators your permission to seek placements in the facilities and the units you select. It also gives us permission to give your contact information to the facilities when your placement is confirmed.

3. If you have any changes to your requests after submission, these adjustments are likely not possible due to the facilities placing large number of student placements from many schools. Specialty units cannot be expected. Be thoughtful and measured in making your requests and we'll do what we can to get it for you. If you do need to have an adjustment to your request due to circumstances beyond your control, please notify faculty as soon as you are aware of them.

4. It is highly probable that you will be offered a night shift placement. If you limit your shift availability to day shift, you may not be offered the facility or unit you request. The facility will see this constraint on the request and move to your second choice or deny the request, or, faculty will move to your second facility choice. More shift flexibility will assure you of the facility and type of unit you are requesting. Remember, this experience is approximately two shifts per week, or 13 twelve-hour shifts in the seven weeks.

4. Please consult your advisor or course faculty for further assistance. We understand how exciting and challenging this process is and we have a lot of experience in helping students achieve the best possible transition into practice clinical experience. Thank you!