NURS 6033 Curriculum Critique

This paper is an objective critique of the course NURS 6033 Ethical Dimensions of Nursing. This paper is divided into three sections: (a) requirements suggested for a doctoral-level ethics course, (b) comparison of ethics curriculum offered in other Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs, and (c) critique of NURS 6033 course contents.

DNP Requirements

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). The AACN Essentials of the Doctoral Education for Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) provide general guidance and foundational standards necessary to achieve practice-focused excellence within the DNP curriculum (AACN, 2006). A component that is woven throughout these eight Essentials requires that the DNP acquire in-depth knowledge and skill to competently manage ethical decision-making in practice. Moreover, this education should add to the ethical education previously acquired during the student’s undergraduate and masters’ programs (Peirce & Smith, 2008).

Recommended ethics curriculum for DNP programs. Peirce and Smith (2008) have proposed a framework for the ethics curriculum necessary to adequately prepare the DNP. Where the master’s preparation focuses on “ethical decision making, patient care, and conflict of interest,” the authors deemed that doctoral preparation should include a broader and deeper understanding of these ethical principles (p. 272). The authors noted that most advanced practice nurses are not comfortable with their basic understanding of ethics, and they do not feel that their baccalaureate or master’s education provided an adequate foundation. This unfortunate gap must be bridged in order for the DNP to fully participate in ethical decision-making.
Peirce and Smith (2008) noted four main components for the DNP ethics curriculum: (a) research, (b) clinical, (c) business, and (d) legal ethics. Research ethics is the vast subset of information necessary to participate in the research process and includes the selection of human subjects, data management, privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Clinical ethics should incorporate the content necessary to understand bioethical, nursing, and other ethical frameworks involving patient care. Although most DNPs have a basic understanding of research and clinical ethics, their exposure to the other two components noted by Peirce and Smith are either weak or non-existent. Expanding the ethics curriculum to include business ethics prepares the DNP to balance competing business interests with patient care conflicts. The curriculum should integrate basic business ethics with accounting, marketing, organizational, and corporate principles. Knowledge of risk management, compliance issues, and diagnostic code reimbursements (especially the fine lines of under-coding and over-coding) are areas that the DNP must be very familiar.

According to the authors, the fourth component that must be included in the DNP ethics curriculum is the legal influences on DNP professional ethics. Although many APNs are familiar with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), they are unaware of other regulations, such as the Starks Act and the False Claims Act. The DNP must comprehend the laws surrounding malpractice, professional courtesy, kickbacks, prescriptive privileges, and non-compete agreements. Failure to understand how these laws influence practice “is an indefensible argument” (Peirce & Smith, 2008, p. 273).
Comparison of Ethics Courses Offered in National DNP Programs

The AACN does not mandate that the DNP curriculum contain a separate ethics course. If the institution determines that the curriculum should not include this specific course, then the components necessary for competent ethical decision-making should be addressed in other courses, such as policy, informatics, and research outcomes.

The AACN (2010) has current links to nationally recognized DNP programs. This website is frequently updated, with March 2010 noted as the latest update. Although there are over 100 DNP programs represented on the website, the author randomly chose to review 30 national DNP programs. The emphasis of the search was (a) to determine if an ethics course was offered, and if so, (b) to determine the focus of each course offered. A listing of the reviewed programs can be found in Appendices A and B.

Of the 30 programs, 13 required a specific ethics course as a part of their DNP curriculum. Four institutions offered a general ethics course. Two of the programs combined ethics and legal and three combined ethics and health policy. One program designated the course as ethics and social justice and another program combined ethics and genetics. The two remaining programs combined social, legal, and ethics together. All 13 courses were designated for 3 credit hours (see Appendix B).

Critique of TWU NURS 6033 Ethical Dimensions of Nursing

**Course Overview.** The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of traditional and contemporary ethical issues encountered by the DNP. The required texts reinforce and supplement the students learning. Beauchamp & Childress (2009) provides the student with the necessary theoretical foundation, especially for those
students who need to “fill in the gaps” from their master’s education. Lo (2009) provides a practical application of these ethical principles for the clinician. The course objectives are separated for the TWU College of Nursing and for the DNP program. Finally, the overarching Essentials (AACN, 2006) address the necessary components for this ethical course.

DNP Course Objectives. Course objectives provide the students with course expectations and provide the faculty with expected, measurable student outcomes. There are five DNP objectives listed in this syllabus. Specific ways that faculty can measure each students achievement of each objective are written in italics.

1. Recognize ethical dilemmas when presented in a clinical setting including acknowledgement of ethical complexity, ethical terms, legal implications, and relationships among biological, nursing, medical, moral-ethical, and psychological aspects of care. Measurable by student responses online, in the final assigned paper, genetics power point presentation, and in their class discussions.

2. Exhibit skills to analyze ethics cases, avoiding imposition of personal values and moral beliefs on patients and families, yet without compromise of personal and professional moral integrity. Measurable by student responses online, in the final assigned paper, and in their presentation/class discussions.

3. Exhibit humility when facing diverse, complex practice-oriented ethics. This third objective is a little more difficult for faculty to measure. Perhaps if one applies the definition of this virtuous characteristic, humility, as “…reflecting, expressing, or offered in a spirit of deference or submission,” it becomes a little
clearer how this objective can be evaluated and measured by the faculty (“Humility”, 2010). When humility is considered in this manner, the faculty could expect the student to broaden narrowly-minded viewpoints and consider the different ethical and moral viewpoints of each of the involved parties, not just their own. The faculty should seek student statements that consider other ethical and moral viewpoints.

4. **Achieve collaborative resolution of ethical dilemmas through demonstration of respect to patients and peers and skilled interaction as a team player.**

Measurable by the student’s written and verbal responses provided in the various activities assigned in each of the four modules.

5. **Engage in a dialogue around ethical issues using collaborative leadership, demonstration of acceptance of ambiguity, and assumption of responsibility and accountability to others.** Measurable by the student’s written and verbal responses provided in the various activities assigned in each of the four modules.

**The Four Modules.** The content and assignments for this course are divided into 4 modules:

**Module 1.** An overview of Blackboard usage, a review of library search techniques, and course overview comprise the majority of this module. Several views of healthcare ethics and nursing ethics are provided. A basic study module written by Hook and White reinforce foundational nursing ethics.

**Module 2.** This module covers basic medical ethics. End-of-life and other general ethical dilemmas, such as organ donation, family involvement, and patient
decision-making are covered. The articles written by Atule Gawande appropriately augment the required readings in Beauchamp & Childress (2009) and Lo (2009).

**Module 3.** This module provides a smattering of business, legal, and research ethics. The assignments, however, focus only on research ethics: (a) self-study IRB training and (b) discussion board posting regarding a research dilemma. Additional resources include HIPAA information. The article by Peirce and Smith (2008) is embedded in this module.

**Module 4.** This module focuses on biotechnical ethics. The assignment for this module overlaps with content from the required BIOL 6903 Health Care Genetics course.

**Course Strengths.** The layout and the format for this course are straightforward and it is easy for the student to navigate through each modules. The ethics information that is provided in Module 1 provides the student with basic foundational ethics. The required readings are applicable to objectives and assignments. The final paper assignment is an appropriate integration of the five objectives, especially with the inclusion the legal aspects. The Powerpoint presentation integrates components from genetics and ethics and forces the student to determine potential solutions for real life scenarios. Sharing these different case studies exposes the DNP student to a variety of APN scope of practices.

**Course Limitations.** This course is heavily focused on research and clinical ethics. The TWU IRB module should be included only as an additional assignment for students who transfer from another university, and have not yet taken the Library Science course (which is where this 3-hour study module is also embedded). The
author did not find any articles of reference material that would help the DNP decipher business and legal ethics. The DNP needs to know how to navigate through coding issues, day-to-day business dilemmas, and have a solid understanding of how certain laws, such as the Stark Act and the False Claims Act, impact their business practices. Although not mentioned in Peirce and Smith (2008), a brief discussion about theological ethics should be provided so that the DNP student can separate religious beliefs with ethical decision-making. Considering the strong religious influences prevalent in this “Bible Belt” region of the country, adding this small component would better equip the DNP student to interact respectfully with patients from different faiths.

**Suggestions for NURS 6033 Curriculum.** A suggestion for the format of this course is as follows:

- Course Description and Overview (in syllabus) should read, “… as they apply to common ethical and moral problems encountered by the advanced practice nurse.”
- Consider basic ethics readings (Hook & White, Peirce & Smith, and initial chapters of Beauchamp & Childress) to be completed before the first class session so that all students have access to a fundamental ethics foundation. This is important, especially for those students, who have limited past experience with an ethics course.
- Give a basic on-line ethics quiz the first week of class to assure that all students have a basic understanding of the material. This quiz could be repeated multiple times, however, only for the first two weeks of the semester.
• Modules would be assigned by components as described by Peirce and Smith. Suggestions for, but not limited to, components of modules are in parenthesis:
  o Module 1: Overview and Ethical Frameworks (nursing, utilitarian, rights, fairness, common good, virtue, theological)
  o Module 2: Research Ethics (Subjects, IRB, informed consent, data management)
  o Module 3: Clinical Ethics
    ▪ General Medical Ethics (end-of-life, organ donation, steroid use, bioterrorism, pandemics, culturally competent care)
    ▪ Biotechnical Ethics (genetics, cloning)
  o Module 4: Business & Legal Ethics
    ▪ Business Ethics (gifts, conflicts of interest, professional courtesy, kickbacks, prescriptive privileges, and non-compete agreements).
    ▪ Legal Ethics (HIPAA, coding discrepancies, malpractice, healthcare reform, and laws that influence medical and nursing decision making).

• Assignments would be constructed based on the content of each module and reflect outcomes for each course objective. Assignments would include scholarly discussion board postings, quizzes, a Powerpoint presentation in class, and a final paper.

• Remove the overview of Blackboard and review of library search skills from Module 1. This could be included in another section of NURS 6033 Blackboard,
such as *Course Information* or *Start Here* section and reference access to this information within the course syllabus.
References


Appendix A

DNP Programs Without a Designated Ethics Course

Arizona State
Ball State University
Carlow University
Drexel University (hybrid program)
Duke University
Johns Hopkins University
Loyola University Chicago
Old Dominion University
Pennsylvania State University (no DNP program, but on this website)
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Texas Tech University HSC
Texas Christian University
University of Arizona
University of Massachusetts Boston
University of Tennessee HSC
University of West Virginia
University of Texas at Arlington
Appendix B

DNP Programs With Designated Ethics Course

Barry University: *Bioethics (3)*

Columbia University: *Legal and Ethical Issues (3)*

Farleigh Dickinson University: *Health Disparities: Social, Ethical & Legal Issues (3)*

Frontier School of Midwifery and Family Nursing: *Ethics and Health Care Policy (3)*

Loyola University New Orleans: *Ethics & Social Justice (3)*

University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey: *Healthcare Ethics for the Nurse Leader (3)*

University of Texas HSC at Houston: *Ethics and Health Policy (3)*

University of Virginia: *Nursing Ethics for Advanced Practice (3)*

Valparaiso University: *Ethical Issues in Advanced Practice Nursing (3)*

Vanderbilt University: *Legal and Ethical Environment (3)*

Wayne State University: *Conceptual Methodologies in Health Policy Leadership and Ethics (3)*

Western University: *Social Justice, Health Care Advocacy & Policy (3)*

Widener University: *Ethics & Genetics in Advanced Practice (3)*