What is the difference in the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in nursing?

Both are terminal degrees that offer the highest level of educational preparation in nursing. The PhD program is research focused and the DNP program is practice focused.

The goals and competencies of both programs are different.

- The DNP program at Southern Miss prepares advanced-practice nurses at the highest professional level of nursing practice in order to advance the application of nursing knowledge for the purpose of improving health care to diverse populations.
- The PhD program at Southern Miss prepares scholars with a leadership focus to contribute to the science, practice, and profession of nursing through systematic research inquiry and theory development.

What are some of the required courses in the DNP and PhD programs at Southern Miss?

The DNP program builds on masters degree curriculum and provides advance education in evidence-based practice, quality improvement, systems leadership, population health, epidemiology, statistics, finance, theory, and health policy. The curriculum includes integrative practice experiences and an intense final practice immersion experience.

The PhD program builds on masters degree curriculum and provides advance education in leadership, theory, meta-theory, research methodology, and statistics. The curriculum includes experiences to prepare nursing scholars to be leaders in science, practice, and the nursing profession.

Is a scholarly research project or dissertation required for the DNP and PhD programs?

Yes, both programs prepare nurse scholars and require a scholarly approach, either a dissertation or doctoral capstone project. The DNP program requires a doctoral capstone project and the PhD program requires a dissertation.

- The doctoral capstone project is translation and application of evidence-based practice in an immersion practice experience that is conducted in collaboration with a clinical practice site. The project is the foundation for future advanced practice scholarship and is designed to benefit a group, population and/or a community.
- The dissertation generates knowledge through original research and provides the opportunity for students to begin their programs of scholarship/research. The dissertation is the foundation for future research and is designed to address a gap in the science.

How do students successfully complete the DNP and PhD program?

Students work closely with faculty mentors who guide and supervise their educational program from admission through completion of degree requirements.

The dissertation or doctoral capstone project is developed by the student with guidance and supervision by a faculty advisor and a committee. The student should select a faculty advisor who has an interest and expertise in the proposed area of study.

Who can apply to the DNP or PhD in nursing program?

Nurses and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) or Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree.

- The DNP program is a post-graduate program for nurses and APRNs with a MSN degree.
- The PhD program offers two tracks: Post-Masters and BSN to PhD for nurses with a MSN and BSN degree.

How do students determine their specialty area of doctoral study?

Students in the DNP program will focus on advanced practice or organizational, healthcare policy, and healthcare issues. Students that focus on advanced practice provide direct patient care to individuals, groups, and families and develop expertise and advanced knowledge in a specialty area of practice. Students and graduates that focus on systems and organizational issues are in indirect patient care roles including leadership, healthcare policy, informatics, and population-based specialties.

Students in the PhD program will develop theory and conduct research in a specialty area of nursing and health care. Students will focus their research in nursing leadership that may include systems and organizational issues, healthcare policy, and education.

How long will it take to complete DNP and PhD in nursing program?

The DNP program is a full-time program that is delivered over 2-3 years.

The PhD program offers full-time and part-time options to complete the program and is based on an individualized plan of study. The BSN to PhD track generally takes 3-4 years to complete, and the Post-MSN track generally takes 2-3.5 years to complete.

What are potential opportunities for employment after completing a DNP or PhD program?

Both programs are designed to prepare graduates for scholarly work, academic careers, and leadership positions at universities or in healthcare organizations.