



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
School of Nursing  
Faculty of Applied Science

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## NURS 595 Guidelines

Scholarly Practice Advancement Research Project (SPAR)

Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)



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## Overview & Context

Students in the MSN program may complete the program requirements by completing a MSN 3-credit research project, called the Scholarly Practice Advancement Research [SPAR] project. Typically, students register for this option from the first term of enrolment in the program and work on the SPAR alongside the completion of their required and optional course work. The SPAR project must be completed under the supervision of a faculty member, and a proposal for the project has to be prepared and approved by the supervisor and one additional supervisory committee member. The initial steps towards proposal development can be undertaken under the guidance of the provisional advisor, assigned to each student from the start of the program.

The SPAR represents an original piece of scholarship that builds on knowledge and skills acquired from coursework. The SPAR project may take a variety of forms and will draw on accepted research and synthesis methodologies to address topics relevant to the discipline of nursing. The SPAR project will typically focus on an issue of immediate relevance to an area of nursing practice, which might be inclusive of clinical, educational, leadership, health policy, or health administrative domains. The overall aim of a SPAR project, which is narrower in scope and focus than a conventional thesis, is to provide a critical analysis of an issue that will inform decision-making within the nursing profession, and advance practice and health care. Such critical analyses are evidence-based and theoretically informed.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the 3-credit SPAR project the student will be able to:

- Identify a topic or question of significance and relevance to the discipline of nursing
- Explicate the significance of the project for advancing nursing practice, education or leadership
- Synthesize the literature and theory relevant to the analysis of the question or problem (an analysis of the literature may be the main focus)
- Conduct a systematic exploration of the topic using accepted methodologies
- Provide an organized report of the project's findings
- Articulate the contribution and applicability of the findings for nursing
- Address knowledge translation and implications of the findings.

A SPAR project could include:

- A synthesis project of existing theories, research, practice guidelines, education and/or health policies to inform the development of new practice standards, education programs and/or policies
- A theoretical paper that explores the conceptual and/or ethical perspectives on a specific nursing issue and will generate a useful analysis and critique that will inform practice and health care decision-making
- A small-scale project that explores the feasibility, appropriateness, applicability, and utility of a new practice/intervention, practice guidelines, policy, education program, administrative tool, or knowledge dissemination tool, and does not involve primary data collection
- A scoping review or small-scale rapid evidence review.

The scope of the SPAR needs to fit within the expectations of a 3-credit project and should be guided by the following principles:

- Supports advanced nursing practice, education or leadership
- Acknowledges the 'real world' (pragmatic) application to the nursing profession and discipline
- Recognizes nursing as an evidence-based and theoretically-informed discipline
- Addresses knowledge translation and exchange approaches
- Demonstrates awareness of the leadership role of nurses in health care
- Able to be completed in one academic term upon proposal approval.

## Preparation for the SPAR Project

The SPAR project is an original scholarly product that applies skills developed within the core, focus and elective courses of the Master's program. Normally, students are encouraged to have completed the core MSN courses and have elective course requirements in progress when completing the proposal for the SPAR project.

Once the proposal has been approved, the active work on the SPAR project begins and is normally completed within one term following the approval of the proposal. Typically, the end product is a written report of the process, findings and recommendations of the SPAR project, and typically takes the form of a written research report or essay.

The decision to pursue a SPAR project should be made in consultation with the student's provisional advisor or supervisor. Students are encouraged to discuss this decision within the first year of the Master's program in order to inform course planning.

## Role of the Provisional Advisor

The Provisional Advisor, assigned upon admission to the program, serves to provide guidance to MSN students who have not yet identified a supervisor for their SPAR or thesis, but who do need initial guidance to get started on NURS 595.

## School of Nursing Policies on MSN Completion Projects

*(Common to NURS 595 & NURS 599)*

1. The topic for the completion project must be of significance and relevance to nursing and health care.
2. Once registered for NURS 595 (or NURS 599), students must maintain that registration, and progress continually towards completion. Up until the time the proposal is approved, switching between NURS 595 (SPAR) and NURS 599 (Thesis) is possible; the supervisor needs to consult with the MSN Program Coordinator to seek approval and make the switch. Students are not normally permitted to switch between the SPAR project and thesis after the proposal for the SPAR project or the thesis has been approved.
3. Students must remain continuously registered until the degree is completed, except for periods of time for which the student is away on an approved leave of absence. Students are reminded that they must complete the program within 5 years (whether they pay tuition fees according to Schedules A or B) and are advised to know their required completion date.
4. The student must keep in regular contact with their supervisor(s), at least every month, and notify them of the status of their progress. Progress on the project is also documented within the Term Progress Reports that students submit every month.
5. Lack of regular contact with supervisor and unsatisfactory progress towards completion of the SPAR or thesis

could result in:

- A request to meet with MSN Program Coordinator regarding unsatisfactory progress
- A requirement for the supervisor and student to submit a detailed learning contract to the Student Services
- Other consequences such as voluntary withdrawal or withdrawal for academic non-progress, etc., may apply as specified by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
- Web Reference: [Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Policy on Academic Progress](#)
- Web Reference: [Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Policy on Withdrawal](#)

## Committee Membership for SPAR Project

- The minimum number of committee members is two.
- SPAR supervisor qualifications:
  - ◆ Those eligible to be a SPAR supervisor must be a faculty member at professorial ranks (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor) or Senior instructor.
  - ◆ To see a list of eligible faculty, visit School of Nursing Website MSN Supervisors
  - ◆ Students should connect with faculty to inquire about their availability for supervision.
  - ◆ In cases where students wish to clarify eligibility of faculty for supervision, they should consult with the MSN Program Coordinator prior to finalizing their supervisor.
- Qualifications of the second committee member:
  - ◆ The second member may be drawn from the full list of faculty members, adjunct professors, and faculty emeriti or, in special circumstances, may be an individual holding an appointment in another department or university.
  - ◆ To access a full list of School of Nursing faculty, please visit the [Faculty Contact Page](#) on the School of Nursing Website.
  - ◆ Committee membership is determined in consultation with the supervisor.
- Changes in the makeup of the supervisory committee need to be made in consultation with the current supervisor and the MSN Program Coordinator. These are handled on a case by case basis.

## Student Responsibilities

- Develops initial aims and objectives for the project for discussion with supervisor and the potential committee member.
- It is essential to select the supervisor first; the supervisor's guidance will be useful in determining other committee members. Formalize your supervisor request by emailing the request to [academic.support@nursing.ubc.ca](mailto:academic.support@nursing.ubc.ca).
- Meets with the committee members to verify the SPAR topic and agree upon the following elements of the process, which will be outlined in the proposal:
  - ◆ Approach to the SPAR topic
  - ◆ Tentative timetable
  - ◆ Frequency of contact with committee supervisor and member(s).
- Develops a written project proposal that must be approved by all committee members.



- Develops the SPAR project as planned and consult with the supervisor and committee member(s) as needed, and particularly if any modifications are required or difficulties are encountered.
- Writes up the results in a written report or essay under the guidance of the supervisor.
- Follows the School policies for written assignments and preparation of graduate theses
  - ◆ Web Reference: [School of Nursing Policy: Submission of Graduate Student Assignments](#)
  - ◆ Web Reference: [Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Handbook of Supervision: Graduate Student Responsibilities](#)
- Works with their supervisor to create and agree to a Memorandum of Understanding regarding Scholarly Integrity.
  - ◆ Web Reference: [UBC Board of Governors – Policy 85: Scholarly Integrity \(University Council\)](#)
  - ◆ Web reference: [School of Nursing Template for Scholarly Integrity Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- To expedite the process, depending on the work-plan established by the committee, the student normally will work most closely with the supervisor until drafts of the work are ready for review by the other committee member(s).
- Submit materials for review allowing for a two-week response time.
- Present drafts of the SPAR project for feedback to the supervisor and the committee member(s), and for final approval.
- Once your SPAR Project is complete, follow the checklist for NURS 595 requirements to ensure your SPAR report or essay is submitted correctly and on time to the School of Nursing.
  - ◆ Web Reference: [Checklist for Submitting SPAR](#)

## Supervisor Responsibilities

- Works with the student to identify an appropriate committee member(s) who has the required substantive expertise.
- Oversees all aspects of the SPAR planning (proposal development), project completion, writing and submission process.
- **Meets with the student at the beginning of each term to review the student's Term Progress Report.**
  - ◆ Web Reference: [School of Nursing: Term Progress Report Instructions](#)
- Works with their student to create and agree to a Memorandum of Understanding regarding Scholarly Integrity.
  - ◆ Web Reference: [UBC Board of Governors – Policy 85: Scholarly Integrity \(University Council\)](#)
  - ◆ Web Reference: [School of Nursing Template for Scholarly Integrity Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- Initially meets with the student and committee member(s) to clarify the topic and approach.
- Provides feedback on proposal, and subsequently submitted materials (i.e. drafts of the project report or essay), within a two-week period unless otherwise negotiated.
- Guides the student through the process, seeking input from the committee member(s) as appropriate, and particularly when modifications are required or difficulties are encountered.
- Determines, in consultation with the committee member(s), when the SPAR project is approved.
- When the SPAR project is approved, follows the guidelines for program completion as outlined on the SON website and in accordance with the guidelines from the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral studies.

◆ Web Reference: [Checklist for Submitting SPAR](#)

- Consults with the committee member(s) to determine a grade and submits according to guidelines in the checklist above.
- Identifies opportunities and provides guidance for appropriate dissemination of the SPAR project (e.g., publication, presentation). In many instances, SPAR projects can be transformed into publishable manuscripts.

## Committee Member(s) Responsibilities

- Consults with the student and supervisor as required.
- Provides feedback on submitted materials within a two-week period unless otherwise negotiated.
- Approves the proposal and final SPAR project in consultation with the supervisor.
- Consults with the supervisor to determine an appropriate grade.

## Expectations for the SPAR Project Proposal

The SPAR project begins with the development of a project proposal that summarizes the significance of the issue, the focus of analysis or gap in knowledge that will be addressed, the rationale for interest in the area, the anticipated scope and range of ideas that will be included in the SPAR project, the project objectives, the methodology that will be utilized including the theoretical perspectives informing the analysis, the approach to knowledge exchange that will be implemented and the ways in which the SPAR project will advance nursing and health care. The proposal must include a timeline of project completion.

The proposal must be submitted in writing and accepted by the committee members before beginning the SPAR project. In most cases, the proposal can be described in 6-8 double-spaced pages, 1500 to 2000 words (excluding references). The proposal will be evaluated on the basis of its articulation of an original idea or application of ideas, and a coherent work plan.

Once the proposal is approved, the supervisor and committee member(s) must be given a complete copy of the proposal.

## Assessment Strategies and Criteria *for Evaluation of the SPAR Project Outcome*

The SPAR project results in an essay or project report that is typically between 35 and 40 double-spaced pages, between 8,750 to 10,000 words (excluding references and appendices) and should demonstrate the student's ability to organize, analyze and synthesize a body of knowledge as well as critically apply research and synthesis methodology to address a focused practice issue. The SPAR should integrate theory, research findings and insights from practice.

The following evaluation criteria will be used to appraise the SPAR project. The SPAR project:

- Involves an in-depth exploration of a topic using a critical and rigorous approach
- Draws on relevant theoretical perspectives to inform the analysis
- Articulates the significant and relevance to the knowledge and theory regarding clinical nursing practice, nursing leadership or administration, nursing education, or health policy (emphasis on either one of these areas may vary depending on the focus of the project)
- Is sufficiently focused to permit clear and comprehensive coverage of the topic

- Includes a concise review and analysis of literature pertaining to the topic. If the paper is solely focused on an analysis of existing literature the analysis of the literature will be the main focus of the report, which forms the basis for recommendations.
- Articulates the contribution and applicability of the project to advancing nursing practice and health care.
- Includes discussion of a knowledge translation phase that is in keeping with the objectives of the project.
- Is clearly written, logically developed, and adheres to the current APA publication manual (or other acceptable publication manual).
- All SPAR projects are submitted to the publicly available UBC Library digital repository.

## Grade Assignment

Upon completion of the project a grade will be assigned by the supervisory committee according to the UBC grading scale and guided by the grade assignment guidelines of the School of Nursing:

<http://www.nursing.ubc.ca/CurrentStudents/policies/GradeAssignmentGuidelines.aspx>

## SPAR Project Formats

### *Standard Format*

- The standard format for a SPAR project, as noted above, is a comprehensive scholarly paper of approximately 35 - 40 pages in length (equivalent to 8,750 to 10,000 words excluding references and appendices), permitting an in-depth, rigorous examination of a topic relevant to the discipline or profession. This may be written in a section or chapter format, or as a single essay with section headings. In all instances, it must represent a logical and coherent piece of academic writing, with appropriate introduction and conclusion, and with sufficient grounding within the existing scholarly literature such that an informed reader could recognize the contribution that it makes.

### *Alternative Formats*

- Students planning an alternative format for their SPAR project must have the proposed format vetted by the Graduate Program Committee (consult with MSN Program Advisor) to ensure that their intentions are consistent with a product that will satisfy the evaluation criteria. Faculty members are welcome to consult with the Graduate Program Committee in their advisement of students proposing alternative formats. Examples of alternatives formats might include: A practice guideline (in consultation with a practice setting), or a practice innovation (theoretically and evidence informed)
- Although the alternative format might constitute the outcome of the project, it is unlikely, in itself, to meet all of the criteria articulated above. Thus, if an alternative format is chosen as the final product, it must be contextualized within a sufficiently comprehensive essay that a reader can understand its contribution and include a thorough and critical literature review supporting the final product. If a guideline is the preferred format, for example, a detailed report on all steps of the SPAR project should accompany the drafted guideline, including a more elaborate discussion of the relevant literature.