



Canadian Association
of Schools of Nursing

Association canadienne des
écoles de sciences infirmières

Position Statement

Doctoral Education in Nursing in Canada

Background

CASN establishes and promotes national standards of excellence as reflected in the *CASN National Nursing Education Framework (2015)* for nursing education.

- The CASN annual student and faculty survey (2016) indicates an urgent need to continue developing doctoral education in Canada in order to prepare the next generation of nursing faculty across practice domains.
- We need to increase the number of doctorally prepared nurses in order to continue generating nursing knowledge that supports practice and high quality health care. As the cohort of doctorally prepared nurses grows, so too will our national capacity for advancing research to meet the evolving demands of the health care system.
- Since 1991, Canadian universities have produced excellent PhD graduates from nursing doctoral programs characterized by research-intensiveness, core disciplinary knowledge, and expertise within a substantive field.
- In the Canadian context, the number of nurses graduating with PhD's is insufficient to fill existing vacancies, and an aging academic workforce is further perpetuating a faculty shortage. Sixty percent of Canadian nursing professors reported that they are over the age of 55. Unoccupied faculty positions are projected to increase (Vandyk et al., 2017). Until the numbers of graduates from Canadian programs build to meet the requirements of the professoriate, there will be a shortfall in supervisory capacity for doctoral education in the country. Given the limited human resources available nationally, it is important to prioritize doctoral education for the next 5 years to continue to build the faculty base of a PhD prepared professoriate across the country.

CASN's Position on Doctoral Education

The final section of the *National Nursing Education Framework* targets doctoral programs in nursing which are relatively new in Canada. Doctoral programs must build on what has been achieved at the master's level while fostering research and scholarship at a higher level. The assumption underlying the doctoral section of the framework is that the student has already integrated the core expectations at the baccalaureate and master's levels. The expectations articulated for this level are specifically for PhD programs in nursing rather than a professional doctorate.

The focus at the doctoral level is to prepare scholars who will lead the nursing profession, through innovative research and system development, and by educating the next generation of nurses.

The framework is organized into six domains. The domains represent a sphere of degree level outcomes and provide a heuristic organizing structure. In reality, they do not exist in silos, but are interwoven and interdependent.

The domains and a guiding principle for the doctoral level are listed below:

Knowledge:

- Programs provide an in-depth understanding of the philosophical, theoretical, and scientific foundations of the nursing discipline, as well as its sociopolitical and historical context.

Research, methodologies, critical inquiry & evidence:

- Programs foster the ability to independently conduct rigorous and original nursing research that creates new knowledge for dissemination and/or mobilization.

Nursing Practice:

- Programs provide practice learning experiences to foster engagement in inquiry and build skills in developing and mobilizing new knowledge that informs and improves the discipline of nursing.

Communication & collaboration:

- Programs prepare students to collaborate with intra and interdisciplinary teams in creating new knowledge, and to communicate complex knowledge to diverse audiences.

Professionalism:

- Programs prepare graduates to be nursing scholars and experts in one or more focal areas who ethically and responsibly advance the discipline and profession of nursing and are responsive to the needs of society.

Leadership:

- Programs prepare graduates to be leaders in advancing the discipline of nursing.

Doctoral programs prepare students to demonstrate a critical understanding of the philosophical and empirical foundations of the discipline, a breadth of knowledge related to research methodology and methods, and advanced and in-depth knowledge in a given substantive area. Knowledge expectations for graduates also include the ability to make connections between disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, and sociopolitical and organizational understandings related to nursing education, practice, and research.

Graduates are able to conduct rigorous, independent, and original research that advances the discipline and profession of nursing. They have the ability to innovate as well as apply sound existing approaches to knowledge generation. Graduates of doctoral programs are able to provide constructive peer evaluation of scholarship.

Doctoral programs provide practical opportunities for students to develop sound research skills and abilities including conducting systematic reviews of current research and developing persuasive research proposals.

Graduates demonstrate the ability to engage with a community of scholars, develop research teams, and create research partnerships across institutions and regions. They are able to articulate and debate critical perspectives related to nursing knowledge, and clearly disseminate research findings to a variety of audiences.

The program prepares graduates to be engaged in scholarly productivity on an ongoing basis, to conduct research ethically, and to mentor and support the professional growth of others. Including, the capacity to teach students at all levels of nursing education. Graduates demonstrate a growing capacity for leadership in the profession through scholarship and policy development, and by influencing organizational and system change.

Quality Standards for Canadian Doctoral Education in Nursing

In all fields of scholarship, quality doctoral education relies on a critical mass of active researchers and appropriate infrastructure to support research and education. Diversity among programs is important to capture the breadth of Canadian approaches to education and research and to respond to the needs and career aspirations of students. This diversity, however, must be underpinned by quality standards. The criteria required for excellence in PhD programs in nursing are the following:

- Academic nursing units, housed within universities with well-established graduate program infrastructure and access to high quality interdisciplinary interactions.
- A critical mass of active faculty researchers capable of supporting the mentorship, research training and socialization required to engage in the full complement of roles associated with success in the competitive Canadian health research context.
- The ability to provide students with diverse intellectual perspectives (e.g., analytical and leadership strategies for engaging with social, ethical, cultural, economic and political issues related to nursing, health care and research).
- Learning experiences related to at least the following five core components: 1) research training; 2) core disciplinary knowledge related to the history, practice context, philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of nursing; 3) knowledge of the current state of the science and scholarship within a substantive field within the discipline; 4) opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative learning and research; and 5) developing teaching and mentoring skills
- A combination of a modest amount of coursework and completion of a dissertation. It is expected that doctoral programs will reflect the diverse institutional cultures with a wide range of emphases in coursework and research foci consistent with the philosophy and mission of the parent institution and nursing program. For instance, research intensive universities may have a strong emphasis on didactic research training, community engagement, or practice partnerships.
- Opportunities for active engagement by students in a scholarly learning environment and recognition of the contribution of doctoral students to the creation of new knowledge.
- Supervision arrangements and examination procedures are based upon an articulated framework of accountability, shared responsibility and transparent governance.

- Evidence of a rigorous external evaluation benchmarking research effectiveness and productivity, infrastructure and resources, and outcomes.

The critical attributes of graduates of Canadian programs include the capacity for

- conducting research that is both rigorous and original to address a problem of concern to the discipline;
- obtaining competitive research funding;
- articulating and establishing a program of research that builds the discipline and furthers practice;
- communicating effectively through respected peer-reviewed journal publications, presentations at scholarly meetings, and in professional and scientific interactions;
- mentoring and teaching others including students at all levels of nursing education; and
- effective engagement with practice community for knowledge translation and exchange, and dissemination of findings.

CASN expects that established university quality assurance/improvement mechanisms will reference these criteria in their considerations of individual programs.

Professional or Practice Doctorates

CASN recognizes that future consideration of profession- or practice-based doctoral programs for the Canadian context will require thoughtful and strategic national consultation with relevant stakeholder groups, including governments and employers.

Going Forward

The critical priority for Doctoral Education in Nursing in Canada remains to build the numbers of PhD graduates to

- provide the faculty base to allow expansion of nursing education across the country to meet national human health resource needs;
- provide faculty to replace the retiring professoriate;
- build research capacity that serves the diverse needs of communities and practice domains;
- advance knowledge in the discipline through high quality research training, discipline-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge and substantive content expertise;
- build the discipline to improve nursing practice and to improve health care delivery and the health of Canadians;
- provide senior leadership in the health care system in terms of research, knowledge translation, and administration; and
- ensure PhD prepared nurse practitioners are teaching in nurse practitioner programs.

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Approved November 2017

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