NURSING

BSN-DNP PROGRAM
(FNP & PMHNP)
STUDENT HANDBOOK
2026-2027

Robert Morris University
School of Health Professions Department of Nursing

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I. Welcome

Congratulations on being accepted into the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) or Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) certificate program at Robert Morris University (RMU). Your success depends on many factors, including a commitment to academics, communication with faculty, as well as an ability to utilize and understand the resources available to you at Robert Morris University. This handbook will serve as a guide to assist you throughout your years in the program. Please refer to the many web links provided in this handbook.

The School of Health Professions website is rich with information to assist you in achieving success in the program. Please visit the School of Health Professions website for more information. School of Health Professions

II. About Robert Morris University

Robert Morris University, a private nonprofit institution, was founded in 1921 as the Pittsburgh School of Accountancy. In 1935 the school was named The Robert Morris School in honor of a famous Pennsylvanian financier of the American Revolution. In 1962, the Pennsylvania Department of Education approved its status as Robert Morris Junior College. With authorization to grant the Bachelor of Science in business administration degree in 1969, the State approved status as Robert Morris College. The State approved the granting of the MBA degree in 1988.

Over the years, most notably since 1990, the College expanded and diversified its curriculum beyond the original specialty of business with its addition of graduate programs in communication, information systems, and education. In recognition of these changes, the Carnegie Foundation reclassified Robert Morris as a Master's (Comprehensive) I institution in 2000. Following a comprehensive self-study and site visit, the State granted university status in May 2001. The institution formally changed its name to Robert Morris University in January 2002.

Robert Morris University is organized into two colleges: College of Business & STEM, where Degrees are offered in the Rockwell School of Business; School of Data Intelligence and Technology: School of Engineering and Science; and the College of Health and Human Sciences where Degrees are offered in the School of Health Professions; School of Education and Social Sciences; and the School of Communication and Media. Deans of the two schools report to the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. Robert Morris University offers baccalaureate and graduate degrees.

III. RMU's Vision, Mission, and Values

a. **Vision** - RMU Changes lives by empowering students to achieve their potential.
b. **Mission** - Through professionally focused educational programs, extraordinary experiences, and a supportive community, RMU students are challenged, inspired and transformed into career-ready individuals.
c. **Values** - We believe every RMU student has the potential to be unstoppable. We work relentlessly to empower our students to achieve their goals.

IV. Department of Nursing Mission Statement

a. The Department of Nursing develops engaged, productive and successful healthcare professionals through experiential learning, inspiring faculty, and worldwide opportunities.

V. Department of Nursing Vision Statement

a. As a student-centered school of excellence, we aspire to lead, co-create, and transform healthcare education through innovative programs that build relationships, knowledge, and skills.

VI. History of RMU's DNP Program

Robert Morris University launched Pennsylvania's first BSN-to-DNP program in 2007 through its School of Nursing, which was founded in 2003 to address nursing shortages in southwestern Pennsylvania. The DNP program emphasized clinical leadership, patient centered care, and evidence-based practice to prepare nurses for advanced roles, particularly as Family Nurse Practitioners (FNP) and Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (PMHNP). The DNP program was developed to provide specialized doctoral-level training for registered nurses in preparation for these roles. The DNP program is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

VII. DNP Program Outcomes

a. Apply nursing science and clinical reasoning at the highest level of practice to plan and implement care.
b. Utilize expert communication and leadership skills with interdisciplinary teams to create improvements in health care and complex health care delivery systems.
c. Apply theory, research, clinical inquiry, information technology, and evidence based practice for clinical decision-making and the provision of patient care.
d. Lead health care provider teams to systematically evaluate outcomes and implement quality improvements based on evidence-based practice.
e. Generate a culturally competent practice environment.
f. Influence health policy to improve health care delivery and outcomes for all stakeholders.
g. Partner with other health care providers to form an inter-professional team to advance high-quality, safe, patient-centered care
h. Lead initiatives to promote disease prevention and population health

VIII. The educational objectives of the **PMHNP Certification program are to prepare advanced practice providers in the psych-mental health specialty.**

a. Utilize expert communication and leadership skills with interdisciplinary teams to ensure quality of care of patients experiencing mental illness;
b. Employ clinical reasoning to aid in the differential diagnosis of both medical and psychiatric disorders across the lifespan;
c. Utilize pharmacologic, non-pharmacologic and complementary interventions using an evidence-based practice approach in the provision of treatment to individuals across the lifespan experiencing acute and chronic psychiatric disorder;
d. Function as team leaders to facilitate collaborative, interprofessional teamwork to ensure safe, patient-centered care;
e. Demonstrate culturally competent care in the provision of treatment to individuals across the lifespan experiencing acute and chronic psychiatric disorders

IX. Academic Calendar

The academic calendar has important dates, including dates for registration, tuition payment, course withdrawal, and semester start and end. Click on the following link to view the RMU Academic Calendar: Academic Calendar

X. Course Catalog

The course catalog contains information regarding courses, dates, and times which are helpful when scheduling. The following link provides access to the RMU course catalog: Course Catalog

XI. Department of Nursing Faculty

a. The Department of Nursing faculty is committed to teaching, scholarship and service. Faculty members are encouraged to maintain active clinical practice in their area of expertise and direct patient care. As such, they are excellent role models for students transitioning from clinicians to clinical scholars and educators. Students will form scholarly relationships with faculty and will be assigned an academic advisor during the first semester and a DNP Project Advisor when beginning work on the scholarly DNP.

b. **DNP Program Contact Information**

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XII. Accreditation and Approval

The baccalaureate degree in nursing, master's degree in nursing, post-graduate/post-APRN PMHNP certification, and the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) at Robert Morris University are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education

XIII. Registration

All DNP and PMHNP certificate students must have their course selections approved by their academic advisors prior to registration for the fall, spring, and summer terms. Academic advisors will be assigned to you upon admission to the program. Students must schedule an appointment with their academic advisor prior to registration.

XIV. Curriculum

The RMU Department of Nursing offers several areas of focus for the DNP program, including BSN-to-DNP, Master's-to-DNP, and certificate options. DNP Program Information

XV. Transfer of Credits

Graduate level courses may be accepted. Transfer students requesting admission to the Graduate Nursing programs will be evaluated on an individual basis.

XVI. Academic Progression and Graduation

All students who have concerns about their academic standing should discuss academic progression with their academic advisor. DNP and PMHNP certificate students should be aware of the policy for academic standing: **Acceptable Academic Status-DNP Program**

XVII. Policies and Procedures

a. Nursing

The Department of Nursing has specific graduate policies that guide our academic practices. The following link provides access to the Department of Nursing graduate policies and procedures. Students are required to review and be familiar with all graduate, nursing and DNP policies.

CHHS Graduate Policies and Procedures

b. Robert Morris University

The following link provides access to the graduate academic policies and procedures of RMU:

University Graduate Policies

c. DNP Project Policies

Students should be familiar with and adhere to the guidelines and policies related to the DNP project. Policies for the DNP project for BSN-DNP and DNP Completion program students are available at:
DNP Project Policy

d. Formal Complaints

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the department head (DH) of nursing. The DH will attempt to resolve the issue with appropriate University personnel (where applicable). Any formal complaint regarding a faculty member follows the faculty-student dispute policy.
Graduate Student-Faculty Dispute

e. Grade Change Policy

If a student disputes a grade and an acceptable solution is not reached by discussion with the faculty member, the student should put the issue regarding the grade or grading procedure in writing and deliver a copy to the faculty member and department head. The faculty member will cooperate with the department head for review and assessment, including, but not limited to: instructional materials, grade books, exams and syllabi. This process is not intended to replace informal conferences between a student and a faculty member concerning the issuance of a grade. **Graduate Grade Change Policy**

f. Student Advisory Board

Comments and concerns from students are shared with the Dean and Chief Nursing Officer/Associate Dean. In turn, the info is shared with faculty and administrative team during Council meetings. A suggestion box is located next to the Scaife lobby elevators.

XVIII. Practicum Information for BSN-DNP and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Certification

a. Preceptors

Identifying clinical placement sites at Robert Morris University is a partnership between the university and the student. The faculty at RMU makes every attempt to establish relationships with preceptors and to ensure clinical placements, however, this becomes more challenging each semester. Therefore, to provide clinical placements, the student is expected to take an active part in identifying preceptors for courses containing a clinical component. If you know a provider who has agreed to be your preceptor, you need to inform the course instructor and the Clinical Placement Coordinator & Compliance Specialist (Feather Bacher). If you are assigned a preceptor and decline to go with them, you are responsible for finding your own preceptor. In addition, students MUST comply with all mandatory clinical agency requirements. Failure to do so, will result in removal from the clinical site and will necessitate that the student find his/her own preceptor.

If the clinical organization and/or preceptor has a circumstance outside of the control RMU, the DNP program faculty will do its best to support the student in finding a preceptor as a partnership between the student and faculty. If a preceptor cannot be found by RMU or the student, clinical hours may need to be extended into future terms.

b. Clinical Clearances

RMU BSN-DNP and PMHNP Post-Master's certification programs students must follow the clinical organization/preceptor's requirements in addition to RMU policies. Below is information regarding UPMC and RMU clinical guidelines.

1. **UPMC and AHN do not permit students or faculty members to cold call any providers**. Cold calling is defined as calling or reaching out to providers or office managers who you do not know. You are permitted to ask a friend, colleague, or relative to precept you, and after you receive approval, please notify your clinical instructor. Cold calling clinical providers will result in disciplinary actions for the student and the university. **Cold calling preceptors may also result in a complete loss of all clinical placements at UPMC for all students at RMU.** As a result, all students must abide by UPMC and AHN rules to ensure future arrangements at the numerous UPMC/AHN clinical sites.
2. The next step in the preceptor acquisition process requires the student to obtain the information requested by the new preceptor form. This form is used for all new preceptors and can be completed by the student by compiling information from the clinical site, the preceptor, or the office manager. It is important to establish the **preceptor's name, address, email address, practice name if applicable, and office manager name if applicable.** Also, students are asked to obtain a copy of the new preceptor's CV or resume for accreditation purposes. The preceptor information form and preceptor CV should be completed and returned to the course instructor who will communicate with the Placement Coordinator. You may not attend clinical with a new preceptor until the completed form is submitted and you have received confirmation that a clinical contract with the new site has been established. The new preceptor information form aids with the establishment of a clinical contract, which validates the RMU's student liability insurance and allows the professors to send thank you emails, letters, and preceptor packets.
3. After establishing an agreement with a new preceptor, it is imperative that you inquire about any special clinical requirements that the office needs before your rotation. The Placement Coordinator may have information on clinical requirements regarding facilities such as UPMC, AHN, St. Clair Hospital, Sewickley Valley Health System, Genesis Medical or Independence Health, etc., so please check with them to see if RMU has

knowledge of your particular site's placement requirements. If the new site is a private practice or the Placement Coordinator does not have information on the site, then this is your responsibility to determine what is required and provide the information to the site manager.

4. You must be in compliance with all RMU requirements and documentation must be up to date in CastleBranch (CB) system before you can begin all clinical rotations. Requirements must be updated, and new documentation must be uploaded to CB when each requirement expires. Below is a list of RMU clinical requirements that must be updated during the entire program at RMU, **until you graduate**. Also, students are responsible for providing copies of clinical requirements to each clinical site before your rotation. If you do not comply with RMU clinical requirements or the site's clinical requirements, you are not permitted to attend clinical for that semester and you may be required to drop the course. Therefore, it is of vital importance that you comply with **all** clinical requirements.
    a. The Initial Health Evaluation- includes immunization & titers- annual health appraisal renewal requires:
        i. Two-step PPD test (two sticks) – annual one-step PPD renewal required
        ii. PA Child Abuse Clearance (Act 33) – annual renewal required
        iii. PA Criminal Record Clearance (Act 34) – annual renewal required
        iv. FBI Fingerprint Clearance (Act 73) – annual renewal required
        v. Copy of valid CPR card – required renewal when expired
        vi. American Heart Association Healthcare Provider CPR certification is required
        vii. Copy of Covid vaccination record
        viii. Copy of valid nursing license – required renewal when expired
        ix. 10 panel urine drug screen
        x. Flu Vaccine (Seasonal) – annual renewal required (Student maintains documentation of annual flu vaccine, not CB)
        xi. Act 31 Mandatory Child Abuse Training – documentation required (Student maintains documentation of Act 31 completion, not CB)
5. If you are attempting to find your preceptor, it is imperative to communicate this early on to the course instructor. Some students have identified a new preceptor AFTER already being assigned a preceptor. This is not the correct process at RMU. When you have been assigned a preceptor, you are required to complete most of your hours with the preceptor assigned by RMU. Due to the limited number of preceptors, it is important to use the preceptors who have agreed to precept our students.

XIX. Health Insurance

All students in the DNP and PMHNP certificate program are required to carry health insurance while enrolled in the program. If you need health insurance, this can be obtained through Robert Morris University. If you have your own coverage, you must enter your health insurance information on the RMU website each academic year or you will be automatically invoiced for the health insurance offered through RMU. The following link has information for students regarding student health insurance coverage: **Robert Morris University - Student Health Insurance**

d. **Clinical Clearances**

Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance Form (CY113), Pennsylvania Criminal Record Check

Clearances (SPA-164) and FBI Criminal History Background Check are due prior to starting practicum experiences. SNEHS has contracted with Castle Branch (CB) to facilitate the process of clinical clearances and health information. You will receive detailed information regarding access to CB. Students need to read all materials carefully and adhere to all CB requirements. Failure to adhere to mandated clearances and other documentation may result in delays and/or exclusion from clinical sites. Costs for the use of CB are the responsibility of the student. **Students need to have all clearances submitted and APPROVED by the required due date**. Failure to comply may result in an automatic withdrawal from the course. Please allow up to six weeks for completion of clearances. CastleBranch

NOTE: A charge or a conviction of a felonious act may prevent students from attending clinical experiences. Inability to fulfill clinical objectives may result in failure of the course and/or dismissal from the program.

All clinical agencies where a student is scheduled to have a clinical practicum experience must be informed if a student has a positive criminal background check. The agency will decide if they are willing to provide the student with a practicum experience based on the review of the background check. If a student is not accepted for a clinical practicum experience, this may jeopardize progress in clinical courses. If this is the case, the student will be responsible for securing his/her own clinical site/preceptor who must be approved by the practicum course faculty.

e. **Health Evaluation**

An initial health evaluation is required prior to the start of the first course with clinical agency activities. In order to comply with the National Council of State Board of Nursing regulations and contractual agreements with the clinical agencies, the Department of Nursing requires a separate health evaluation. The form is available on the CastleBranch website.

Students are responsible for downloading the form and having it completed by the healthcare provider. Completed forms need to be uploaded to the Castle Branch

website by the given due date. All clearances must be submitted and approved by the required due date. Please allow up to six weeks for completion of clearances. Always keep a copy of any important documents that are submitted. A health exam is required yearly after the initial health evaluation for as long as the student is enrolled in any clinical courses. The annual health evaluation form is also available on the CastleBranch website. **All costs associated with the health screening are the responsibility of the student.**

f. **CPR Certification**

Current CPR certification is required prior to the first practicum course and must be maintained throughout the DNP or PMHNP certificate Program. The certification required is the American Heart Association "Healthcare Provider" Level. Students are responsible for the cost of certification. A copy of the CPR card is to be uploaded to the Castle Branch site. The student will keep the original.

g. **Drug Screening**

An initial negative drug screen is required of all students prior to beginning clinical practicum activities. Information about the drug screening process is available through CastleBranch. The cost of initial drug screening is the responsibility of the student and must be completed according to the process described on the CB website. Some agencies and circumstances may require an additional random drug screening process and details will be provided at the time of the random drug screening request.

h. **Appropriate Attire for Clinical Practicum Experiences**

It is expected that DNP and PMHNP certificate students dress professionally and wear RMU issued lab coats during clinical practicum experiences. However, clinical agency requirements will supersede school requirements for appropriate attire.

i. **International Experiences**

Nursing students are given the opportunity to travel internationally. The following link provides helpful information regarding this innovative program:
Robert Morris University - SON - International Activities

j. **Simulation Lab**

The Department of Nursing incorporates the use of high-fidelity human patient simulators and standardized patients in the educational process. This innovative technology allows students the ability to practice and demonstrate the advanced practice nursing role in a safe, controlled environment. The following link provides information regarding this innovative instructional technique. Robert Morris University - Simulation

k. **Professional Liability**

Students are covered by a group policy through the Department of Nursing. A copy of this policy is available from the Department of Nursing. A face sheet will be sent to you in December of each year.

l. **Academic Integrity**

The Academic Integrity Policy for the SNEHS is consistent with the University Academic Integrity Policy and can be found at: **Academic Integrity Policy.** It is expected that all written work is original and all documentation of clinical hours is accurate. Group work should be collaborative and final group projects should reflect "team effort." **Violation of academic integrity may result in course failure or dismissal from the program.**

XX. Student Resources a. Student Advising Students are assigned an academic advisor as they begin the DNP or PMHNP certificate program. DNP students will be assigned a DNP project advisor in addition to their academic advisor following the overview of their DNP project topics.

b. Scholarship and Financial Aid Information

Scholarship Information Financial Aid www.pheaa.org.

c. Student Email

Email is used by academic advisors and by faculty to contact students with important information. Students should read their RMU student email daily. NOTE: Students may have the RMU student email forwarded to different email addresses. Please contact the RMU IT Help Desk for assistance at 412- 397- 2211 or help@rmu.edu.

d. RMU Library

The RMU library is staffed by qualified librarians to assist you in your scholarly projects. There are also many nursing and medical professional journals with digital subscriptions. In addition, the RMU Electronic Library is a helpful service to search databases while off campus. An overview of the library system at RMU can be found at: Robert Morris University - Library

XXI. Graduation Information

Commencement

RMU hosts a formal graduate commencement ceremony each May that includes both the December and May graduates. The dates are included in the academic calendar. This formal academic ceremony is rich with tradition and includes the academic procession of administrators, faculty, and students, a pertinent message delivered by a guest speaker, and the presentation of each graduate candidate. Academic regalia must be worn.

Family and friends are encouraged to attend. Students must apply for graduation in the first two weeks of the semester in which they will graduate. Please see the website for details at: Commencement**.**

XXII. Extracurricular Activities

a. RMU Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI)

Sigma Theta Tau International, the Honor Society of Nursing, promotes scholarship in the profession of nursing. There are specific criteria for selection and it is an honor to be selected. Upsilon Phi is our chapter of Sigma Theta Tau. Students who become eligible are invited to join and are strongly encouraged to do so. More information about STTI is available at: Sigma Nursing.

b. RMU Committees

DNP and PMHNP certificate students are welcomed and encouraged to serve on university or school committees and provide valuable information. Please contact the DNP Program Director for more information about participation.

XXIII. Covid-19 Information

All DNP and PMHNP certification students across all programs are expected to fully engage and participate in assigned clinical experiences. In order to remain enrolled in the clinical courses, students MUST comply with all mandatory clinical agency requirements. Please refer to the Clinical Requirements Policy for your respective program. All nursing program policies can be accessed using the following link: Nursing and Health Sciences Policies

Clinical agencies may have a different set of requirements for employees and students. If a student's clinical placement happens to also be his/her place of employment, the student is responsible for adhering to all student policies and requirements when completing course related clinical hours. Specific to COVID-19, ALL students must adhere to the university requirements in addition to Clinical Agency requirements and Nursing Program policies. For University-level updates, please refer to the COVID-19 Information page on the RMU website. Agencies reserve the right to limit clinical placements and experiences for nonvaccinated individuals. Some of our clinical partners require ongoing tracking of students' vaccination status, including the COVID-19 vaccine and the annual flu shot. For this reason, all students must report, and update, their vaccination status in CastleBranch.