Advising Top 20 FAQ’s

1. How do I find out who my advisor is? Your acceptance letter will indicate which faculty member has been assigned as your advisor. You should contact your advisor by email as soon as possible to set up your Plan of Study (POS) and receive further advising assistance. You should contact your advisor a minimum of once per semester throughout your program and every time you need to make a change in your POS. Email is usually the best way to communicate with your advisor, but you may also call during your advisor’s posted office hours or set up an appointment for a face to face visit if you are close to campus. Be sure to use your MU email account for all electronic communication with your advisor.

2. How do I enroll in my first class? The Graduate School will process your admission to MU and assign you a student number and user ID. This usually takes about two weeks after you are accepted. You will need to enroll through MU Direct for all distance education courses. Your plan of study (POS) must be approved by your advisor before you can enroll.

3. Why are all nursing courses “closed” when I try to enroll through myZou? Distance students must enroll through MU Direct, myZou is for enrolling in campus courses only. All graduate nursing courses are capped at “0” to ensure that online students are taking the proper sequence of course work. “Closed” courses may still have seats available but you will not be allowed in the class unless you have an approved Plan of Study on file in the School of Nursing. MU Direct is given a list of students who are approved to enroll in specific courses each semester.

4. Do I need to come to campus at any point in the program? Some areas of study require on-campus visits at the beginning of your program for orientation or at the beginning of each semester for special classes. The MHNP area is the only program that does not require students to come to campus. There may be a few courses that require campus visits (see FAQ #11 regarding summer versus fall offerings of N7140 Advanced Health Assessment and Promotion).

5. Where does one find out if the classes have an on-campus requirement or if live chats are required? Information regarding on-campus visits and scheduled live chats can be found on the MU Direct course enrollment site when you sign up for a course. Live chats (if required) are usually scheduled during evening hours depending on when most students are available and what time zones students live in.

6. How are arrangements for clinical sites and preceptors made? The student initiates a clinical arrangement by contacting the faculty responsible for teaching that specific course. You should send a copy of your proposed preceptor’s resume or curriculum vita (CV) to the course faculty to obtain approval. Once the faculty has approved your preceptor you must fill out a Request for Practicum Agreement form (complete with email and postal address) to the administrative assistant listed on the form. A standard contract is then sent to the agency for signatures.
7. How long does it take to get a contract in place so I can start clinical? The entire process can take about 6 weeks to set up a contract, if a standard MU contract is used. However, if clinical agencies require their own contract to be used, it sometimes takes several months. You should start the clinical contract process at least 6 weeks before the semester starts. Students are responsible for following up with their clinical agencies to help move the process along. A signed clinical contract must be in effect before you can begin your clinical practicum. Once you have a contract in place, it may be possible to use the same agency in future semesters, if approved by the course faculty. Contracts can be short-term (one calendar year) or long-term (to cover your entire program). Please see the Clinical Site Tips and the Clinical Preceptor Policy on the MS(N) home page for more specific instructions and information.

8. Is it possible to take two classes during the summer? It is possible but not advisable. The summer session is only 8 weeks long with the same course requirements as a 15 week fall or spring semester. You should consult with your advisor before deciding to enroll in 2 summer courses. Some courses, such as N8910 Advanced Evidence Based Practice are writing intensive and require the student to complete several papers. If you do take 2 summer classes, the faculty recommends that you not work full-time or take a vacation during any part of the summer session.

9. Are we allowed to get any Cs in the program and still graduate? No, you must earn a "B" or higher in all required nursing courses in your Plan of Study (POS). Since graduate statistics is a pre-requisite to the program you do not have to repeat it if you earn a “C” after entering the program. Students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average to continue in the program. Please see the Master’s in Nursing Handbook for more information regarding progression through the program.

10. What should I do if I need to take a semester off from course work? Contact your advisor and request a Leave of Absence (LOA) form to reserve your space in the program. An LOA can be granted for 2 semesters with a possible one year extension. The decision to grant a student’s LOA request is made by the advisor in consultation with the Associate Dean and forwarded to the Graduate School. You must complete your master’s degree requirements within 5 years or you will need to request an extension from the Graduate School. If you do not request an LOA, you must reapply to the program if you wish to return.

11. What are the differences between summer and fall offerings of N7140 Advanced Health Assessment? The summer course has two mandatory on-campus visits for all students taking the course and the fall course has an optional on-campus requirement for students who live at a great distance. Campus visits in the fall are mid- and end-of-semester, and are structured differently so that students (particularly MHNP students) who do not live within easy travel distance to campus have off-campus options for the material/activities covered. Summer students are not exempt from on-campus visits because: 1) the course and campus visits are structured differently with needed didactic material offered during those visits and 2) because the summer
session is much shorter, it is difficult to get all the clinical hours in so the students are required to do part of their clinical hours in the nursing lab. It was decided that special adjustments for students were better accomplished in the fall course where there are 16 weeks. MHNP students should probably take the fall N7140 course.

12. Does my preceptor have to be an NP, if I am in the NP program, or a CNS, if I am in the CNS program? An APN with similar credentials is preferred, but if there are no NPs or CNS’s in your area then the course instructor may approve an MD or CNS (if you are an NP) or an NP (if you are a CNS). In the mental health area a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or licensed professional counselor may be used - approval is up to the course instructor. The minimum educational requirement for a preceptor is a master’s degree. When you find a preceptor, you need to send the resume to your clinical course instructor and get approval before the contract is initiated.

13. What is the difference between an “M1” and a “POS”? The M1 Program of Study for Master's Degree form is the official form for the MU Graduate School. The M1 notifies the registrar of the courses you need to take to be awarded a Master's degree. You must have this on file in order to graduate. This form should be filled out after you complete 12 credit hours and sent to your advisor for her signature. The courses listed on your M1 must match your transcript - so if you don't take a course for some reason (or take another course instead) you must file a Course Substitution form with the Graduate School. The POS or Plan of Study is an internal form within the MU Sinclair School of Nursing (MUSSON) that is filled out by you and your advisor. The POS outlines the sequence in which to take your required courses and helps you take prerequisite courses in the proper sequence (so you aren't delayed in graduating). This form should be filled out before you register for your first semester and should be reviewed and updated as you continue in the program - especially if you need to take a course during a different semester than was originally planned.

14. What is the Master’s Exam? The Master’s Exam (ME) is the final capstone of the master’s degree program. The ME is a qualifying exam that incorporates the theoretical concepts and clinical knowledge gained throughout your course work. To fulfill this requirement the School of Nursing requires each student to write a scholarly paper. For further information, please see the Master’s Exam Orientation presentation (either online or on campus during the first week of the fall or spring semester).

15. Does everyone have to do a Master’s Exam (ME)? Only students obtaining a master’s degree in nursing (MSN) are required to write the ME. This requirement takes the place of a research practicum or thesis. Students may opt to complete a thesis, however, most students choose the ME over the thesis option. A thesis requires the student to enlist the help of a faculty research advisor and thesis committee to mentor the student through an individual research project. If you are a post-master’s student, the ME requirement is waived.
16. When should I start working on my Master’s Exam (ME)? You should identify the topic of your ME, in consultation with your advisor, during your first or second semester in the master’s program. Several core courses are designed to help you develop your topic and hone your writing skills to successfully complete this requirement. The faculty recommend that you focus on your ME topic in each of the core and clinical specialty courses, so that upon completion of the program you have developed an extensive knowledge base to draw upon when writing your paper.

17. What is the difference between the School of Nursing Convocation and the Graduate School Commencement Ceremony? Does a graduate have to attend both? The School of Nursing Convocation is a ceremony on campus just for nursing graduates. The Graduate School has a separate ceremony on campus (following the SON Convocation) for all MU graduate students. Students can choose to attend one or both, or not at all. If you can only attend one ceremony, the SON Convocation ceremony is attended by most of the nursing faculty (in full academic regalia) and you would have an opportunity to be congratulated or perhaps meet the faculty for the first time! Recently, MU Direct has offered an online graduation ceremony for all distance education students. This is a virtual ceremony complete with speeches and a list of all students graduating from the online programs. Family, friends, and faculty can even send congratulatory messages to the graduate at this site.

18. Do you know if most employers will hire APNs before they have taken the certification exams, or do they require that you be board certified first? Hiring requirements are really up to the agency who hires you - so you need to check with them during your hiring interview. Some agencies require you to have certification before working for them - others (particularly if you were their employee prior to graduation) will hire you before you have certification. You should also contact your State Board of Nursing for specific certification requirements for licensure as an advanced practice nurse.

19. What is Mizzou's pass rate for the NP certification exams? Annual reports from various certifying bodies are sent to the School of Nursing indicating the University of Missouri (Mizzou) pass rates for the preceding academic year. In 2007, the PNP and FNP pass rates were 100% and the MHNP pass rate was 97%. The MU Sinclair School of Nursing Master’s program is ranked 47th out of 448 Master’s of Nursing program’s in the nation in the recent 2008 edition of the U.S. News & World Report-2008 Edition “America’s Best Graduate Schools” and is ranked 18th nationally in NIH research grant awards among all 102 schools of nursing that offer PhD degrees.

20. Are there any preparation courses the faculty recommends before taking the NP certification exam? The MU SSON faculty does not recommend a specific preparation course; however, you can contact your advisor for previous student recommendations regarding the need for additional preparation to take the certification exam.