FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Nursing

Graduate Student Handbook

2026 – 2027

September 2026

Department of Nursing - Graduate Student Handbook, 2026-2027

Accreditation and Approval Status

The baccalaureate degree in nursing and master's degree in nursing at Fitchburg State University are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) (http://www.ccneaccreditation.org).

Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
655 K Street NW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20001
Telephone: (202) 887-6791

The Department of Nursing has full approval status from the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Nursing.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Board of Registration in Nursing
239 Causeway Street, Suite 500, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02114
Telephone: (617) 973-0900 or (800)-414-0168

In addition, the Department of Nursing is a member of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the Massachusetts Association of Colleges of Nursing (MACN).

Fitchburg State University is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE).

Letter from Graduate Program Chairperson

September 2026

Dear Graduate Nursing Students,

Welcome to the Master of Science and Graduate Certificate programs in Forensic Nursing at Fitchburg State University. This Handbook provides essential information about the department, curriculum, and academic policies.

Please review this Handbook thoroughly and refer to it throughout your program. Your faculty advisor is available to discuss or clarify any contents, ensuring a smooth experience. Additionally, the department chairperson is accessible for addressing any concerns that may arise.

The Fitchburg State University Catalog policies apply to all students, with a few exceptions outlined in this Handbook. Both resources will serve as references during your enrollment in the nursing program. Please note that policies and practices are subject to annual review and revision.

The faculty and administration are excited about the opportunities offered by our unique program. Our alumni, located throughout the United States and Canada, have successful careers in various settings, including death investigation, education, and more. We are committed to your academic success and the program's excellence. We hope your experience at Fitchburg State University is rewarding.

Best regards,



Deborah A. Stone, Ph.D., RN

Chairperson, Graduate Program in Forensic Nursing



Debbie Benes, Ph.D., RN, PNP-R

Chairperson, Department of Nursing

October 2026

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Disclaimer Statement - *Fall 2026*

Please Note:

The rules, regulations, policies, courses of study, and academic requirements that appear in the Fitchburg State University catalog and this DON Graduate Student Handbook were in effect at the time of their publication. Just as with all content within the catalog or handbook, they are published for informational purposes only, and they do not constitute a contract between the University or the Department of Nursing and any student, applicant for admission, or other person.

Whether noted elsewhere in the catalog or the handbook or not, the University and the Department of Nursing reserve the right to change, eliminate and /or add to any existing (and introduce additional) rules, regulations, policies, courses of study and/or academic requirements.

Whenever it does so, the University or the Department of Nursing will give as much advance notice as it considers feasible or appropriate, but it reserves the right in all cases to do so without notice.

Deborah Benes, PhD, RN, PNP-R
Chairperson
Department of Nursing

Philosophy of the Nursing Faculty

1. Professional nursing is an applied science and art based on concepts from the natural and behavioral sciences, and humanities, which are integrated into a unique configuration both in theory and practice. The delivery of professional nursing care requires critical thinking. It involves a systematic approach to meeting clients' health needs, the application of skilled practice activities in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, relationships characterized by the therapeutic use of self, and accountability for nursing actions and decisions. Professional nursing is dynamic in its approach to practice and has a responsibility to identify society's evolving health needs; influence society's concept of health while remaining sensitive to different approaches to health and health care; initiate and participate in the planning and delivery of health services; and, improve nursing practice through scholarly pursuits. The environment for the practice of professional nursing extends to any setting where the health needs of society must be met.

2. Undergraduate nursing education prepares a nurse generalist and leads to the first professional degree. It prepares the practitioner to provide direct and indirect care to individuals, families, and groups, and to assume beginning leadership roles. Graduate nursing education builds upon the knowledge and competencies acquired in baccalaureate nursing education using a curriculum specific to the area of nursing specialization. It prepares the practitioner to assume advanced leadership in the community and the health care system, and to contribute to the development of nursing science and the improvement of health care.

3. Education is a process of teaching and learning in which growth occurs. The goal of education is to assist humankind as learners towards self-actualization and to enhance their ability to be responsible members of society. Teaching involves determining learning objectives, creating an environment that offers a multiplicity of experiences, guiding the development of the learner's potential according to individual needs, and evaluating and affirming the achievement of learning objectives. Opportunities for advanced placement in the curriculum are provided through validation of previously

acquired academic and clinical competencies. Learning is an active ongoing process requiring motivation. Individuals learn throughout life that which has meaning and value to them. Learners have the right and responsibility to participate in the planning and evaluation of their educational program.

4. The role of the faculty member at the undergraduate level is guidance of the learner's personal growth and their attainment of competencies commensurate with the role expectations of entry-level professional nursing practice. This is accomplished by developing and implementing a curriculum that promotes integration of knowledge from a broad range of disciplines with professional study. The role of the faculty member at the graduate level is to facilitate creative inquiry and achievement of specialized role competencies. This is accomplished through application of principles of adult education: self-direction, commitment to lifelong learning, and participation in and evaluation of learning activities.

Vision and Mission

Vision Statement

As a center of excellence in baccalaureate nursing education, the Fitchburg State University Department of Nursing prepares students to assume healthcare leadership roles in the global society of the 21st century. The Department uses continuous program evaluation and innovation to maintain an educational culture that fosters social responsibility, service commitment, client advocacy, and lifelong learning. Graduates are nurse generalists who use critical thinking and current evidence to solve problems using integrative care to meet the evolving healthcare needs of populations and environments.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Fitchburg State University Department of Nursing is to prepare professional nurses capable of meeting societal healthcare needs in a variety of settings. In their teaching, the faculty nurtures respect for diversity, social responsibility, and a commitment to excellence. Collaborative and interactive teaching methods foster the use of critical thinking to build a strong foundation for the practice of holistic nursing. Legal, ethical and professional standards guide the faculty in teaching the art and science of nursing.

Purpose of the Graduate Program

The purpose of the graduate program is to prepare professional nurses who wish to pursue advanced education in forensic nursing. In addition, the graduate is prepared to assume leadership positions and to pursue doctoral study.

Graduate Terminal Outcomes

Graduates will:

1. Translate and integrate knowledge from the liberal arts, natural and social sciences, and nursing as a foundation into the provision of advanced nursing Specialty Care to diverse populations.
2. Design and deliver evidence-based person-centered care that is holistic, equitable, respectful, compassionate, and coordinated to diverse populations.
3. Lead initiatives to promote health and prevent and manage disease throughout the healthcare delivery continuum, collaborating in partnership with communities, public health agencies, practice partners, and local and regional government entities to achieve equitable population health outcomes.
4. Analyze, evaluate, apply, and disseminate research and evidence-based practice in the nursing care of clients across a variety of populations to improve practice and associated health outcomes.
5. Lead process improvements to advance and support safe practice environments that minimize the risk of physical or psychological harm to clients and providers and optimize client safety and positive health outcomes.
6. Facilitate the work of multidisciplinary teams through collaboration, effective communication, and the promotion of policies to optimize health across the continuum and advance the nursing profession.
7. Analyze the coordination of resources across complex systems and advocate for equitable distribution of cost-effective, safe, high-quality, client-centered services to diverse populations.
8. Appraise and use information, communication technologies, and informatics processes to gather and interpret data that drives decision making for the management and

improvement of safe, high-quality, and efficient healthcare services in accordance with best practice, professional and regulatory standards.

9. Model and sustain a professional identity that exemplifies accountability, empathy, integrity, collaborative disposition, moral courage, and other behaviors reflective of nursing's characteristics and values.
10. Participate, foster, and advance activities and self-reflection that promote and sustain personal health, resilience, well-being, and lifelong learning to support the acquisition of nursing expertise and the assertion of transformational leadership.

Master of Science – Nursing

Forensic Nurse and Forensic Nursing Certificate Program

Program Objectives

The Master of Science in nursing program is designed for registered nurses who wish to pursue advanced practice in Forensic Nursing. Fitchburg State University offers both a master's degree (39 credits) for nurses who have bachelor's degrees in nursing, and a post master's certificate program (21 credits) for nurses who already hold an MSN degree(s). Graduate nursing education builds upon the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in baccalaureate nursing education and professional practice. Graduates are prepared to contribute to the development of nursing science and the improvement of health care.

Forensic nurses apply the forensic aspects of healthcare in providing direct services to individual clients, as well as consultation services to nursing, medical, and law-related agencies. They are called upon to provide expert court testimony in cases dealing with forensic trauma and/or questioned death investigative processes, adequacy of services delivered, and specialized diagnoses of specific conditions as related to nursing.

The graduate nursing program has a strong emphasis on the development of forensic nurses who are sensitive to the health needs and concerns of diverse populations.

Program Description

The Master of Science in Nursing Degree Program is offered completely online. Upon successful completion of all program requirements, the student receives a Master of Science Degree in Forensic Nursing. The FSU program does not prepare clinical nurse specialists.

Forensic Nursing Certificate Program

The Forensic Nursing Certificate Program provides an opportunity for advanced practice nurses who hold master's degrees in nursing from accredited institutions to acquire forensic nursing

specialization. Forensic nursing is the application of nursing science to public or legal proceedings, and the integration of the forensic aspects of healthcare with the bio-psycho-social education of the professional nurse. Students are prepared to deal with the prevention, scientific investigation and treatment of victims of trauma and/or death, as well as the investigation and treatment of perpetrators of abuse, violence, criminal activity and traumatic accidents.

Fitchburg State University

Department of Nursing

Graduate Student Program Worksheet

Course	Clinical Practice Experience Hours	Credits
Core Nursing Courses (12 Credits)	**-**	**-**
NURS 7200 Nursing Theory	-	3
NURS 7300 Advanced Clinical Concepts	60 hours *	3
NURS 7400 Contexts and Role for Advanced Practice	-	3
NURS 8600 Advanced Pathopharmacology and Epigenetics in Forensic Nursing	-	3
Scholarly Inquiry Course Work (6 Credits)	-	-
NURS 7700 Nursing Research		3
NURS 9600 Forensic Nursing Capstone	-	3
Specialty Track Course Work: Forensic Nursing (21 Credits)	**-**	**-**
NURS 8000 Introduction to Forensic Nursing	-	3
NURS 8130 Sci. Found. for Forensic Nursing Interventions	60 hours	3
NURS 8200 Forensic Nursing: Victims	60 hours	3
NURS 8300 Forensic Nursing: Perpetrators	60 hours	3
NURS 8410 Criminal Law: Substantive and Procedural	-	3
NURS 8500 Forensic Science and Technology	-	3
NURS 9500 Practicum in Forensic Nursing	180 hours	3
-	-	-
Total Credits	-	39 Credits
Total Clinical Practice Experience Hours	420 hours	-

***** NURS 7300 Clinical Practice Experience hours are completed virtually using Shadow Health

Fitchburg State University

Department of Nursing

Graduate Academic Policies

The Fitchburg State University Department of Nursing Graduate Program adheres to all graduate academic policies of Fitchburg State University. These policies are published in the Fitchburg State University Catalog, Open Fitchburg State University Catalog in a new window

Additional departmental policies are delineated below.

Admission to the Graduate Program

An applicant for enrollment in the Master of Science Degree Program is required to submit:

- an application, available at FSU Admissions or Graduate and Continuing Education Office or online at: School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education
- an official transcript from a baccalaureate nursing program accredited by the National League for Nursing or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), at the time of matriculation (minimum GPA of 2.8)
- successful completion of an undergraduate statistics course is strongly recommended but not required
- three letters of recommendation, at least one of which provides evidence of a minimum of one year of recent successful nursing practice or its part time equivalent
- evidence of unencumbered licensure as a registered nurse in the United States or the equivalent in other countries
- a two-part essay to include:

  Part I (no more than 300 words) - your reasons for wishing to attend graduate school or your reason for pursuing a post-master's certificate in a specialty area.

Part II (at least 1200 words) - your specific interests, the type of work you would like to pursue in this field, and how you intend to pursue employment or volunteer work in this area.

Academic and professional integrity

Nursing has a strong moral basis. Fitchburg State University Department of Nursing subscribes to the American Nurses Association's (ANA) *Code of Ethics for Nurses* (2015*)* and the ANA *Forensic Nursing: Scope and Standards of Nursing Practice, 2nd Ed.* (2019). The *Code* (See Appendix B.) is based on the fundamental principle of respect for persons. Other ethical principles underlying the *Code* are autonomy, beneficence, non-malfeasance, veracity, confidentiality, fidelity, and justice. One of Fitchburg State University's nursing program's main objectives is that nursing students and graduates demonstrate responsibility and accountability for nursing judgments and actions consistent with the profession's ethical code. Nursing faculty and students must maintain high standards of integrity and respect for one another in the academic and professional settings.

Faculty and students have a responsibility to take appropriate action when they detect any form of academic or professional dishonesty. Students should bring concerns (professional, academic, or ethical) to the attention of the faculty responsible.

Current University Academic Integrity Policy is in effect – see Appendix A.

A student may be barred from class, clinical practice experience, laboratories, and examinations for unethical, unprofessional behavior, or persistent unsatisfactory behavior that includes, but is not limited to nonattendance, dishonesty, plagiarism, and/or failure to produce assignments to the satisfaction of the instructor. Students so barred will fail the course and may be dismissed from the nursing program and/or University.

Equal Opportunity, Diversity and Affirmative Action/Title IX

Fitchburg State University is committed to a policy of non-discrimination, equal opportunity, diversity, affirmative action and a campus free from all forms of sexually harassing and violent behavior. The university is dedicated to providing an educational, working, and living environment for students, employees, and other members of the campus community-more information is available at: Equal Opportunity and Title IX

Policies Related to Eligibility for Course Registration

Registration

Graduate nursing course registration is contingent upon application to the graduate nursing program, or permission of the graduate chairperson in consultation with the Graduate committee of the Department of Nursing. Applicants are limited to six (6) semester hours of program course work (exclusive of any course with a clinical practice experience component) prior to program matriculation.

Professional Requirements/Viewpoint

Prior to the first day of any course with a clinical practice experience component, each student is required to have on file various professional and health requirements as detailed below.

In order to facilitate compliance with these requirements FSU has engaged an outside company, Viewpoint. At least four weeks before beginning the clinical practice experience component of a course students must create an account with Viewpoint and complete all required components. There is a required first-time fee of $65.00 for the Background Check and Health Portal Package. Each subsequent year, there is a required yearly fee of $25.00 for the Annual Background Check. (Optional/Not required Drug Screening Testing is available if a specific clinical agency requires it. The Optional/Not required Drug Screening Testing fee is $38.00.) Create an account at Viewpoint - Health Portal. See Appendix C for instructions and details.

Graduate Professional Requirements

Prior to the first day of any course with a clinical practice experience component (NURS 8130, 8200, 8300 & 9500), each student is required to have on file with Viewpoint:

- Required Personal Information - In addition to entering your full name and date of birth, you will be asked for your Social Security Number, current address, phone number and email address.
- Immunizations - Document trackers provide secure online storage for all of your important documents.
- Drug Test - Drug testing options are available with both Viewpoint Screening service and will be used with regard to clinical policy at each healthcare entity students attend and only when required. Cost for this service is $38.00. Students also have the option of using their primary care to initiate a 10-12 panel drug test if needed. *Students should refer to the nursing coordinator for guidance if a drug test is required.*

Health, Professional and Additional Requirements for FSU Nursing Students

Each student is required to have an account with Viewpoint. See directions in Appendix C.

Immunization Requirements

- Annual Physical Exam
- Tuberculosis (TB)
    - The requirement will be met by having an FDA approved TB blood test (T-spot) followed by an annual TB test.
    - If a TB test is positive, students must provide proof of a negative Chest X-ray to complete this requirement. A negative Chest X-ray will remain valid for 2 years.
- Tetanus (TD/Tdap)
    - Tetanus is typically valid for 10 years. If this vaccination expires you are required to update your documentation through Viewpoint.

- Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)
    - Two doses of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine ≥ 28 days apart OR serologic proof of immunity to measles and mumps and rubella series of 2 immunizations OR Titer resulting in immunity
- Varicella (Chicken Pox)
    - Series of 2 immunizations OR Titer resulting in immunity
- Hepatitis B (Hep B)
    - Series of 3 immunizations AND Titer resulting in immunity (positive titer).
    - If Titer is negative, students are required to provide proof of having started (and continue) repeating the series. (A second titer is not required). At this point the requirement will have been met as you will either be positive or a non-responder. Both are allowed in a clinical setting.
- Influenza
    - Students must provide documentation of receiving the current Influenza vaccine before October 30th. Documentation must be uploaded by students to their Viewpoint account.
- Covid
    - The Department of Nursing follows the University and our affiliated Healthcare Organizations requirements for receiving the initial series and booster for the Covid vaccine.

***Failure to comply with the above requirements and deadlines can jeopardize student participation in clinical practical experience components of nursing courses**

<u>RN Licensure</u>

Students must have and maintain RN licensure.

Professional Liability Insurance

Students must have professional malpractice coverage if enrolled in any clinical course. Currently, the University provides this professional liability coverage for all nursing students. If this University coverage should change, students will be responsible for purchasing their own professional liability insurance.

Current CPR Certification

This certification is through the American Heart Association (AHA) and students are required to take BLS for Healthcare Professional. Certification by AHA prior to September 1 of sophomore and senior years will prevent delays in the student starting clinical experience on time. Students without current AHA CPR certification will not be allowed to start clinical experiences. Delaying clinical experience will jeopardize a student's ability to complete courses and can result in course failure.

Criminal Offender Record Information CORI checks

CORI checks are completed for all students upon matriculation into the nursing program and yearly thereafter. Agencies often require students to update the CORI check prior to participation in an educational experience. An agency can refuse to accept a student as a result of a CORI check, and Fitchburg State University assumes no obligation to locate an alternative site and cannot guarantee the completion of degree requirements. Students are required to notify the Department Chair immediately of any changes in their CORI status.

Drug Testing

The Department of Nursing supports a drug free environment with a no-tolerance policy regarding substance abuse. Clinical agencies may require students to undergo drug screening as a clinical requirement for placement, at random, or when there is cause for concern regarding the use of such substances. A clinical agency can refuse a placement for a student with a positive drug test and the University is under no obligation to find an alternate clinical placement. A positive drug test will require a meeting with the Department Chairperson and can result in dismissal from the nursing program.

Prerequisites to Courses

- NURS 7300 *Advanced Clinical Concepts* is a prerequisite to courses with a clinical practice experience.
- NURS 8000 *Introduction to Forensic Nursing* is a prerequisite to all further nursing courses in the specialty area.
- NURS 8300 *Forensic Nursing: Caring for Perpetrators* has two additional prerequisites: NURS 7400 *Contexts and Role for Advanced Practice* and NURS 7200 *Nursing Theory*
- Registration for courses may require documentation of prerequisites as stated in the University Catalog. Each student is responsible for ascertaining his/her eligibility for such courses in a timely manner.
- Successful completion of course prerequisites as noted above requires documentation of a numerical or letter grade, i.e. no incompletes or in-progress grade status.

Program Progression

- Any student on probation is ineligible to register for a nursing course with a clinical practice experience component without prior approval of faculty and administration.
- Progression in the final nursing Practicum and Research Project courses requires successful completion of all other nursing core and specialty courses and required cognates/electives as stated in the FSU Catalog for the matriculation track.
- Retention in the graduate nursing program is contingent upon adherence to the academic policies of the Graduate Degree Program's policy as stated in the Fitchburg State University Catalog.
- Graduation is contingent upon successful completion of program-specific requirements and a minimum GPA of 3.0 or greater. The degree must be completed within six (6) years of the student's program matriculation date.
- Retention Policy. To maintain enrollment in the graduate forensic nursing program students must earn at least a 3.0 in each course.

Transfer Credits

- Transfer credit for graduate coursework is accepted according to the Graduate Degree Program's policy. Nursing transfer credits are accepted only from accredited graduate programs. Nursing transfer credits are not accepted for required courses with a forensic clinical practice experience component. Transfer courses must have been completed no more than six (6) years prior to the date of intended graduation. (Note: By FSU Graduate Program policy, courses which were part of a completed graduate degree program cannot be counted toward the total number of credits required for an FSU degree).

Additional Student Responsibilities

- Students are responsible for adherence to all additional FSU graduate policies. They can be retrieved at: Fitchburg State University Catalog.

Policies Related to Course Performance

A. Class participation is an integral part of graduate study and most grading criteria. Instructors have the prerogative to place value on attendance and state the same in their course syllabi.

B. Suggestions for Clinical Practice Experience Agency/Preceptor (NURS 8130, NURS 8200, NURS 8300 & NURS 9500):
   i. Students may contact Angelina DiPietrantonio, Clinical Placement Coordinator (adipiet2@fitchburgstate.edu) to discuss suggestions.
   ii. Agency Suggestion Sheets are available upon request from Angelina DiPietrantonio or Deborah Gifford, Administrative Assistant, (dgiffor1@fitchburgstate.edu).

C. Clinical Practice Experience
   i. In nursing courses with a clinical practice experience component, students are required to document at a minimum the stated number of hours of clinical practice experience practice.

ii. Clinical practice experience sites must be approved in writing by the course faculty in advance of any student being present for practice in the clinical practice experience area.

iii. Students must file a timely projected schedule of clinical practice experience attendance with course faculty.

iv. Current Clinical Practice Experience and Preceptor procedures:

1. Student submits the following via email to course instructor for approval (cc Deborah Gifford):
    a. Preceptor's resume/CV (including preceptor's title, email address & phone number)
    b. Preceptor's job description
    c. Clinical practice experience site/agency description

2. After the course instructor has approved the Preceptor and Clinical Practice Experience Agency, the student will identify a contact person to assist with initiating the Clinical Contract/MOU. The following information must be emailed to Deborah Gifford:
    a. contact person's name, title, email address, and phone number

3. The following must be completed before Deborah Gifford notifies student and course instructor of completion of ***On-boarding process***
    a. Clinical Contract/MOU (signed by Agency & FSU administration),
    b. Health/Professional/CORI documents (cleared through CastleBranch)
    c. Student registered for the course
    d. Preceptor Contract signed by student & preceptor (obtained from Blackboard & emailed to D. Gifford)
    e. Acknowledgement Signature Page – last page of Preceptor & Student Orientation Packet (obtained from Blackboard & emailed to D. Gifford)

Deborah Gifford will send an email to the student and course instructor stating that "The above five (5) items have been completed."

4. The following must be submitted to the course instructor:
    a. Clinical Objectives: student will work with course instructor to develop

The course instructor will send an email to student (cc Deborah Gifford) stating that "Student has permission to start clinical practice experience hours."

5. The course instructor contacts the preceptor to ensure their understanding of this information. The Preceptor Contract also summarizes the roles of students, preceptor and faculty member.
6. During the semester, course instructors communicate with preceptors to ensure the student is meeting course outcomes. Faculty conducts outreach to the preceptor three times (beginning, mid-way & end of clinical) or as needed.

7. At the completion of the clinical practice experience: Instructor will forward these five documents to Deborah Gifford for program evaluation records.
    a. Clinical Objectives: Developed by students and approved by instructors.
    b. Preceptor Evaluation: The preceptor evaluates the performance of the student. The preceptor emails the Preceptor Evaluation to the course instructor. (Obtained from Blackboard)
    c. Preceptor & Learning Experience Evaluation: The student evaluates the preceptor & agency and emails completed evaluation to the instructor. (Obtained from Blackboard)
    d. Clinical Hours Log: The student will email the completed clinical hours log (obtained from Blackboard), signed by the preceptor, to the instructor.
    e. Clinical Site Evaluation: The course instructor provides evaluation of the student and clinical practice experience. (Course instructor will complete and send to student for student signature)

D. Term papers
    i. The American Psychological Association Publication Manual (7th edition) is the required style manual for written assignments.

ii. Plagiarism is stealing another person's work by taking words, ideas, or other material and presenting them as one's own. Plagiarism is committed when a person uses another person's exact words or ideas with some changes without appropriately acknowledging the source of this work and giving credit to the author. Refer to the current *American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual* and to the *University's Academic Integrity Policy* (see Appendix A) for further information on plagiarism.

E. Evaluative Process

i. Students are required to complete any evaluative processes in a timely fashion. Should an emergency arise whereby a student is unable to complete a process at the scheduled time, permission for an extension must be obtained prior to the due date of the evaluative process. It is the student's responsibility to negotiate with the faculty member for a due date extension.

F. Course Completion – Each student must:

i. Complete theoretical requirements, including evaluation processes and papers

ii. Satisfactory complete requirements for all clinical practice experiences before registering for another course with a required clinical practice experience component.

iii. A student who begins a clinical practice experience placement without a signed Clinical Contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place will receive a grade of 0.0 for that course.

Policies Related to Evaluation

- Content Grade

Fitchburg State University - Graduate Grading System

Effective September 2008

Fitchburg State Grade	Letter Grade Equivalency	100% Point Equivalency
4.0	95 – 100	A
3.7	92 – 94	A-
3.5	89 – 91	A-/B+
3.3	86 – 88	B+
3.0	83 –85	B
2.7	80 – 82	B-
2.5	77 – 79	B-/C+
2.3	74 – 76	C+
2.0	71 –73	C
0.0	0 –70	F
W	Withdrawn	-
IN	Incomplete	-
IP	In Progress	-

An incomplete (IN) may be awarded with the recommendation of the instructor when the student has completed 80% of the coursework but cannot complete the rest due to illness or some other serious reason. The student must file a petition for an incomplete with the instructor prior to the last day of class. A student who has received an Incomplete in lieu of a course grade must make up the missing part or his/her coursework during the first four weeks of the following semester. Failure to do so will result in an automatic 0.0 for the course.

- Clinical Practice Experience Grade
    i. The clinical practice experience performance component of each course will be graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. A student who does not satisfactorily

complete a given clinical practice experience in any nursing course will receive a 0.0 for the course.

ii. Any student who withdraws due to difficulties in the clinical practice experience component of any nursing course may apply for registration in that or another nursing course only by submitting a letter of request stating the reason for withdrawal and providing a rationale for readmission or further registration. Requests must be approved by the Department of Nursing Graduate Committee and the Graduate Program Chair. Only one readmission after withdrawal due to clinical practice experience difficulty is permitted within the program.

iii. A grade of IP (In-Progress) may be awarded for thesis, practicum, internships, and clinical practice experience at the end of a given semester. IP grades in the practicum and internships need to be completed within two semesters. The time limit for thesis is the six years allowed for the completion of a degree. If the thesis, internship and/or practicum are not completed within the allotted time then the IP grade will be changed to either an incomplete (IN) or a grade of 0.0.

Additional graduate student policies and procedures

A. All client information is confidential, regardless of form (e.g., verbal, hard copy, film, or electronic), and its unauthorized access, use or disclosure is illegal. Further, it is the ethical responsibility of each faculty and student to maintain client confidentiality and abide by laws relative to privacy including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) guidelines. This policy includes materials discussed in both the classroom and clinical practice experience settings. Information pertinent to patients may be relayed only to those individuals who have authority to have that information.

B. Each matriculated graduate student is assigned an academic advisor. Office, online, and telephone advising information may be obtained from the advisor.

C. Students are required to obtain their clinical practice experience placements. Faculty may be able to facilitate clinical practice experience placements; however, students must initiate contact and negotiate placement hours. Faculty are available

to assist with the development of student specific clinical practice experience outcomes.

D. Students must adhere to all University technology policies. This information may be found at: Technology Policies and Planning
E. Support for distance education courses may be found at: 100% Online
F. Support for information technology questions, configurations, etc. may be found at Technology
G. Students should obtain a Fitchburg State University One Card upon the start of their first semester. Information is available at: OneCard Office . Benefits of obtaining a One Card include the ability to purchase software at a reduced price.
H. Distance Education course work in the Forensic Nursing Graduate Program is delivered currently via the Blackboard platform class site available at: Blackboard.
I. Distributed Learning Library Services information is available at University Credentials . Included are instructions on how to obtain your library username and password for off-site use.

Professional Activities and Organizations

Graduate forensic nursing students are encouraged to engage in professional organizations that support scholarship, leadership development, ethical practice, and advancement of the discipline. Key organizations and resources include:

Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma)
Sigma is an international nursing honor society that recognizes academic excellence and leadership. Membership provides opportunities for scholarship, professional networking, and engagement in regional and national activities.

American Nurses Association
The ANA advances the nursing profession through standards of practice, advocacy, and policy development. Students are encouraged to review the Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements. ANA link

Codes of Ethics and Professional Guidance
The following resources support ethical and professional nursing practice:

International Council of Nurses (ICN) – Code of Ethics for Nurses
ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses Link

Code of Ethics for Forensic Nurses
AIHCP Code of Ethics for Forensic Nurses Link

Forensic Nursing Organizations and Resources
The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN), founded in 1992, was the first international organization dedicated exclusively to advancing forensic nursing practice, education, and certification. In April 2026, IAFN formally dissolved, with key functions transitioned to support continuity within the field. Membership infrastructure and professional engagement are now supported by the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA). Forensic nursing certification programs are transitioning to the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), ensuring ongoing recognition and portability of credentials. The Journal of Forensic Nursing continues publication under Wolters Kluwer.

Forensic nurses also contribute to the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS).
Forensic Nursing-Science Section Link
The discipline achieved formal recognition with the establishment of the Forensic Nursing Science Section at the 2022 AAFS Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington.

Canadian Forensic Nurses Association
The Canadian Forensic Nurses Association (CFNA) advances forensic nursing in Canada, focusing on national standards and issues such as Violence, Trauma, Death Investigation, Human Trafficking, Corrections, Sexual Assault, Inter-Personal Violence and Domestic Violence. Considered a specialty with the Canadian Nurses Association, a

generalist forensic nurse examiner certification is now available. CFNA Link

Academy of Forensic Nursing (AFN)
The Academy of Forensic Nursing supports education, certification, and interdisciplinary collaboration in forensic nursing. Certification options (introduced in 2022) include Generalist and Advanced Forensic Nurse designations. Academy of Forensic Nurses Link

Resources of the Department of Nursing

Department Office: Thompson Hall 3rd Floor, Room 324

Department of Nursing Chairperson

Dr. Debbie Benes, Ph.D. RN, PNP-R (dbenes@fitchburgstate.edu) 978-665-3325

Graduate Program Chairperson

Dr. Deborah Stone, Ph.D., M.S., RN (dstone1@fitchburgstate.edu) 978-665-3426

Department Resource Staff

Deborah Gifford, Admin. Assist. (dgiffor1@fitchburgstate.edu) 978-665-3023

Angelina DiPietrantonio, Clinical Placement Coordinator (adipiet2@fitchburgstate.edu)

The Resource persons available in the office are Ms. Deborah Gifford and Ms. Kim Clarke, department administrative assistants. If they do not know the answer to your question, they can find someone who does. They can provide you with most departmental forms and know most departmental regulations. They can often track down a faculty member and provide you with needed telephone numbers and schedules.

Websites for Support

The Department of Nursing website can be found at the Department of Nursing, Fitchburg State University. The site features Faculty and Nursing Students Association information, links to other websites and is constantly updated with current departmental and University news.

Library

Information on the library can be obtained at the Library website at: Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library.

Academic Success Center

The University maintains a number of academic and personal support services for all students. Most of these services are co-located on the third floor of Hammond. Information can also be found at the Fitchburg State University Website or at the Tutor Center, where a link to the Writing Center is also provided: Academic Coaching and Tutoring Center .

The following is a list of these support service programs:

The ACCESS Program and Minority Affairs Programs: a state funded program to assist talented, low income, and educationally disadvantaged undergraduate students;

Counseling Services: for short term, confidential counseling services to all students.

Career Services: for assisting students and alumni in planning for career decisions during and after enrollment at the University.

Disability Services: for support services for undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities enrolled in the day or evening division.

International Education Office: for study abroad opportunities, and to support undergraduate and graduate international students, and to provide cultural awareness programs.

Writing Center: for professional and peer tutors who work with students to improve their writing skills.

Avenues for Addressing Concerns

Graduate nursing students who have concerns about the program or personal experiences have a number of avenues by which to address their concerns. Please refer to the University catalog for the guidance process: Fitchburg State University Catalog

Concerns about the curriculum

Students have access to the department Departmental Graduate Curriculum Committee either through direct student representation or by written communication or petition. Evaluation of the students' perceptions of courses, agencies, and curriculum objectives is conducted by the faculty on a routine basis, and students should take advantage of the opportunity offered by this process to contribute their ideas, concerns, and criticisms. The faculty encourages dialogue regarding the need for change in the program.

Concerns about faculty

The University mandates a procedure for student evaluation of faculty in every class for which the student is registered. Even though the effects of their anonymous ratings may not always be immediately evident to students, they may be assured that student evaluations are considered a vital part of any faculty member's personnel action process. If students have major concerns or issues about a faculty member's performance, they may also bring it to the attention of the chairperson of that department.

Addressing issues with faculty

In all cases of disagreement between faculty and student as, for example grading, clinical practice experience evaluation etc., the student must attempt to resolve the situation through direct communication with the faculty member involved. If still unresolved, the student may seek recourse from the Graduate Program Chair and then the Department Chairperson. If resolution is still not achieved the graduate student should refer to the graduate student's complaint policy available at: Fitchburg State University Catalog

Petition for waiver of policies

University: petition of waiver

If the policy is a university-wide one, students should consult with the graduate program chairperson regarding the feasibility of requesting a petition of waiver. Waivers require the comment and signature of the faculty instructor or advisor and the Department Chairperson before being submitted to the Dean of Graduate and Continuing Education for a decision. Forms are available: Fitchburg State University Registrar

Department: petition of waiver

If the policy is a departmental one, Waiver Forms are available in the nursing office. Comment and signature from the instructor or advisor are required before being submitted to the Department Chairperson for a decision. The student should note that reasons for waiver must be substantial and waivers are not automatically granted. Students are encouraged to attach a letter to the petition waiver which clearly and fully describes his or her situation and the rationale to grant a waiver.

Formal Complaint Policy

The FSU Nursing Department defines a formal complaint as a signed letter that specifically expresses concern from a member(s) of the programs' community of interest about issues related to a student(s) experience in the nursing program(s). A formal complaint does not replace the processes for "Addressing Issues with Faculty" and "Petition for Waiver of Policies" (pg. 29 and 30).

The formal complaint should include:

1. The basis of the complaint
2. The steps taken to resolve the complaint
3. The intention of the formal complaint

Once a signed formal complaint letter is received in the Department of Nursing, the Department Chairperson forwards the formal complaint documentation to the appropriate committee or person(s) for review. The person(s) or review committee's comments/recommendations are forwarded to the Department Chairperson who then provides a response to the originator of the written formal complaint.

Formal Complaints are tracked via a Formal Complaint Log that includes:

- Tracking number designated by year & complaint # for that year (i.e. 2013-1)
- Date the letter was received by department
- Reviewing committee or person(s) conducting review
- Date formal complaint was 'closed'

Source documentation for each formal complaint is kept on file in the Department of Nursing Administrative Office.

Appendix A: Academic Integrity Policy

Initiated September 2010 available at
Academic Integrity Policy

Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student's own effort. A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic integrity in a course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. A student's lack of understanding of the academic integrity policy is not a valid defense to a charge of academic dishonesty.

A student's name on any written or creative exercise (e.g., examination, report, thesis, theme, laboratory report, computer program, artistic production, etc.), or in association with an oral presentation, declares that the work is the result of that student's own thought and study. Any work that the student declares as his or her own shall be stated in the student's own words and produced without the assistance of others. Students must make clear through accurate citations when they make use of other sources. Talking during an examination, or possession or use of unauthorized materials or equipment during an examination constitutes an infringement of the academic integrity policy. Aiding and abetting academic dishonesty also constitutes a violation of the academic integrity policy.

Unless permission is received in advance from the faculty member in charge of the course involved, a student may not submit, in identical or similar form, work for one course that has been used to fulfill any academic requirement in another course at Fitchburg State University or any other institution. A student who perceives the possibility of overlapping assignments in courses should consult with the appropriate faculty members before presuming that a single effort will fulfill requirements of both courses. Students should consult course syllabi for additional guidance on matters of academic integrity.

When an alleged offense of the Academic Integrity Policy has occurred, the following process will apply:

1. *If the accuser is a faculty member*, and s/he decides to make a formal accusation of a violation of the academic integrity policy, the faculty member will provide the student with a letter describing the case for academic dishonesty within **fourteen days** of discovering the alleged infringement. This letter may be presented to the student in person or delivered to the student's home, local or campus address or mailbox, or Fitchburg State University email account. The student will either **a)** agree with the accusation of academic dishonesty and the sanction as imposed by the faculty member or **b)** disagree with the accusation of academic dishonesty. (A student cannot agree with the accusation of academic dishonesty but disagree with the sanction. Disagreement with a sanction, in other words, is not grounds for an appeal.)
   If the student has agreed with the accusation and signed the letter accordingly, the sanction identified by the faculty member will be imposed, and the matter will be considered closed. If the student disagrees with the accusation and again signs the letter accordingly, the student may appeal the matter to the University Conduct Board. With all formal accusations of a violation of the academic integrity policy, the faculty member will forward the letter with the student's signature and other relevant information to the Director of Student Conduct. (Proceed to No. 3 below.)
2. *If the accuser is not a faculty member*, and s/he decides to initiate the formal process, the accuser must submit a report and/or relevant information to the Office of Student Conduct within **fourteen days** of discovering the alleged infringement of the academic integrity policy.
3. Once a case is forwarded by a student or as an appeal (in the form of a report, signed letter and/or other relevant information), the Director of Student Conduct, or designee, will review all relevant information and either **a)** dismiss the incident due to lack of merit or timeliness or **b)** contact the accused student to schedule a conduct board hearing.
4. If the case goes to the conduct board, the board will determine whether the student is responsible or not responsible for violating the academic integrity policy. If the student is found responsible, the board will recommend sanctions to the Dean of Student and Academic Life, or designee, or, in the case of graduate students, the Dean of Graduate

Studies. These sanctions will include those identified by the faculty member and, in the event a student has a prior disciplinary record, may also include the additional sanctions of:

- a grade of zero on the assignment;
- a failing grade in the course;
- suspension from Fitchburg State University;
- dismissal from Fitchburg State University;
- or other sanctions.

5. In cases of undergraduate student violations of the academic integrity policy, the Dean of Student and Academic Life (or designee) will either impose the sanction recommended by the conduct board or determine that the sanction is excessive or inadequate and alter it accordingly. In cases of graduate student violations of the academic integrity policy, the Dean of Graduate Studies (or designee) will take the above action.
6. The student may make a final appeal to the president of the University only for a sanction of suspension or dismissal.

Note:

If the student agrees with the academic dishonesty finding by the faculty member, the case will not go before the conduct board; however, if s/he has a prior disciplinary record, the Director of Student Conduct may pursue other charges and sanctions once the academic integrity issue has been resolved.

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Appendix B: Code of Ethics for Nurses

1. The nurse, in all professional relationships, practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth and uniqueness of every individual, unrestricted by considerations of social or economic status, personal attributes, or the nature of health problems.
2. The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, or community.
3. The nurse promotes, advocates for and strives to protect the health, safety and rights of the patient.
4. The nurse is responsible and accountable for individual nursing practice and determines the appropriate delegation of tasks consistent with the nurse's obligation to provide optimum patient care.
5. The nurse owes the same duties to self as others, including the responsibility to preserve integrity and safety, to maintain competence and to continue personal and professional growth.
6. The nurse participates in establishing, maintaining and improving healthcare environments and conditions of employment conducive to the provision of quality healthcare and consistent with the values of the profession through individual and collective action.
7. The nurse participates in the advancement of the profession through contributions to practice, education, administration and knowledge development.
8. The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public in promoting community, national, and international efforts to meet health needs.
9. The profession of nursing, as represented by associations and their members, is responsible for articulating nursing values, for maintaining the integrity of the profession and its practice and for shaping social policy.

American Nurses Association (2025). Code of Ethics for Nurses. Retrieved from American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses

Students: To read the interpretive statements for the provisions listed above, you can access the ANA Web site. However, because all nurses are held to this Code, owning a copy is prudent.

October 2026

Appendix C: Viewpoint Student Instructions (Health Portal)

At least four weeks before beginning the clinical practice experience component of a course students must create an account with Viewpoint and complete all required components. There is a required first-time fee of $65.00 for the Background Check and Health Portal Package. Each subsequent year, there is a required yearly fee of $25.00 for the Annual Background Check. (Optional/Not required Drug Screening Testing is available if a specific clinical agency requires it. The Optional/Not required Drug Screening Testing fee is $38.00.)

Instructions:

- Create an account at Viewpoint - Health Portal.
- A "Viewpoint - Student Instructions" sheet is available upon request from Deborah Gifford, dgiffor1@fitchburgstate.edu or 978-665-3023.
- You must remain in compliance with health & professional requirements throughout the Nursing Program and many employers have similar requirements so feel free to continue the use of Viewpoint well past graduation at no additional cost.

The following will be asked of you once your Viewpoint account is established:

- Personal Details: student email, first & last name, last 6 of SSN, date of birth
- CPR Certification only accepted from the *American Heart Association BLS Healthcare Professional/Provider*
- Professional License – Copy of valid RN License
- Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) - Annually
- Physical Exam (update form annually +10 days. Example: May 10th, 2018 expires May 20th 2019)
- Flu Shot (Annually by Oct. 30)
- Immunizations (use Immunization Form if needed)
    - FDA approved Tb blood test (T-spot) OR Two Negative PPD/TB results within 365 days: followed by an annual TB test.
      If a TB test is positive, students must provide proof of a negative Chest X-ray to complete this requirement.

A negative Chest X-ray will remain valid for 2 years.

- T-dap (Tetanus, Valid 10 years)
- MMR (2 doses or lab report of serological proof of immunity titer).
- Varicella (2 doses or lab report of serological proof of immunity titer).
- Hep-B (Series of 3 AND serological proof of immunity titer). If Negative

  Titer please provide proof of having restarted the series with #1 ASAP, #2 4 weeks after #1, and #3 6 months after #1, followed by a 2nd titer to confirm either a positive result or a second negative titer resulting in a non-responder).

Fitchburg State University

Department of Nursing

Appendix D: Acknowledgement of Receipt, Review, and Understanding of the Graduate Student Handbook Content

My signature below indicates that I, _____,

(Please Print)

have received, reviewed, and understand the content within this Fitchburg State University Department of Nursing *Graduate Student Handbook*.

_____ _____

Student Signature *Date*

Directions:
Please complete the form.
Scan and email to dgiffor1@fitchburgstate.edu.
Or mail to:
Deborah Gifford
Dept. of Nursing
Fitchburg State University
160 Pearl Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420

October 2026