

Background

DNP degree prepares students to lead practice improvement (AACN, 2022)

Healthcare organizations desire DNP graduates who can lead healthcare QI initiatives (Hammersla et al., 2021; Moran et al., 2025).

Research focused DNP projects do not prepare students for QI (Waldrop et al., 2026)

Problem

New DNP program (Post masters + BSN-DNP)

DNP Project – research project

Project done in last 3 courses

Purpose of this project-

Redesign DNP Project for Practice Improvement

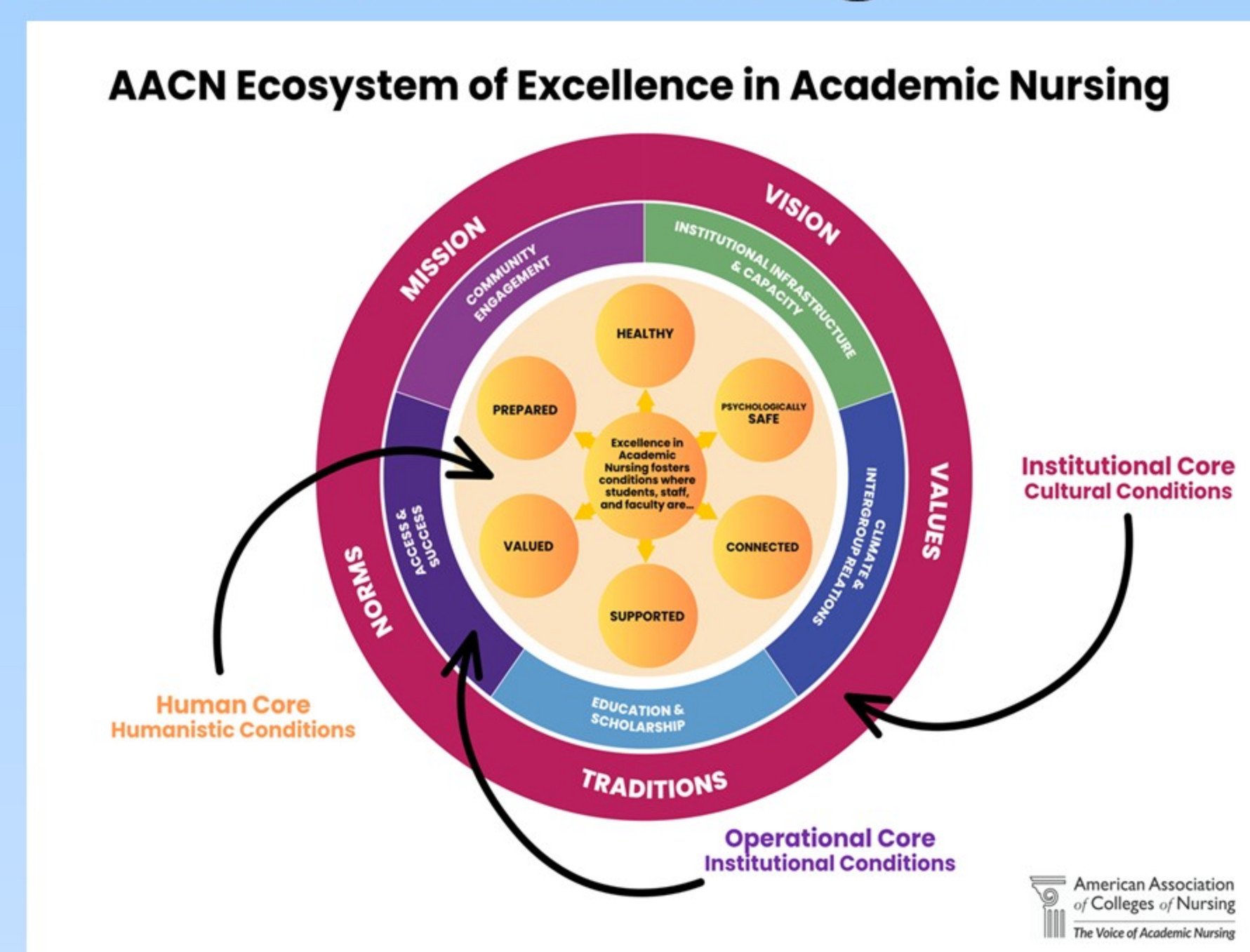
Use model students can replicate after graduation

Use model that supports success of all students

Goal

25% of DNP graduate engaged in practice improvement one year after graduation

AACN Ecosystem of Excellence in Academic Nursing (AACN, 2026)



Institutional Core

- Mission- Christian Leadership to Change the World- develop change agents

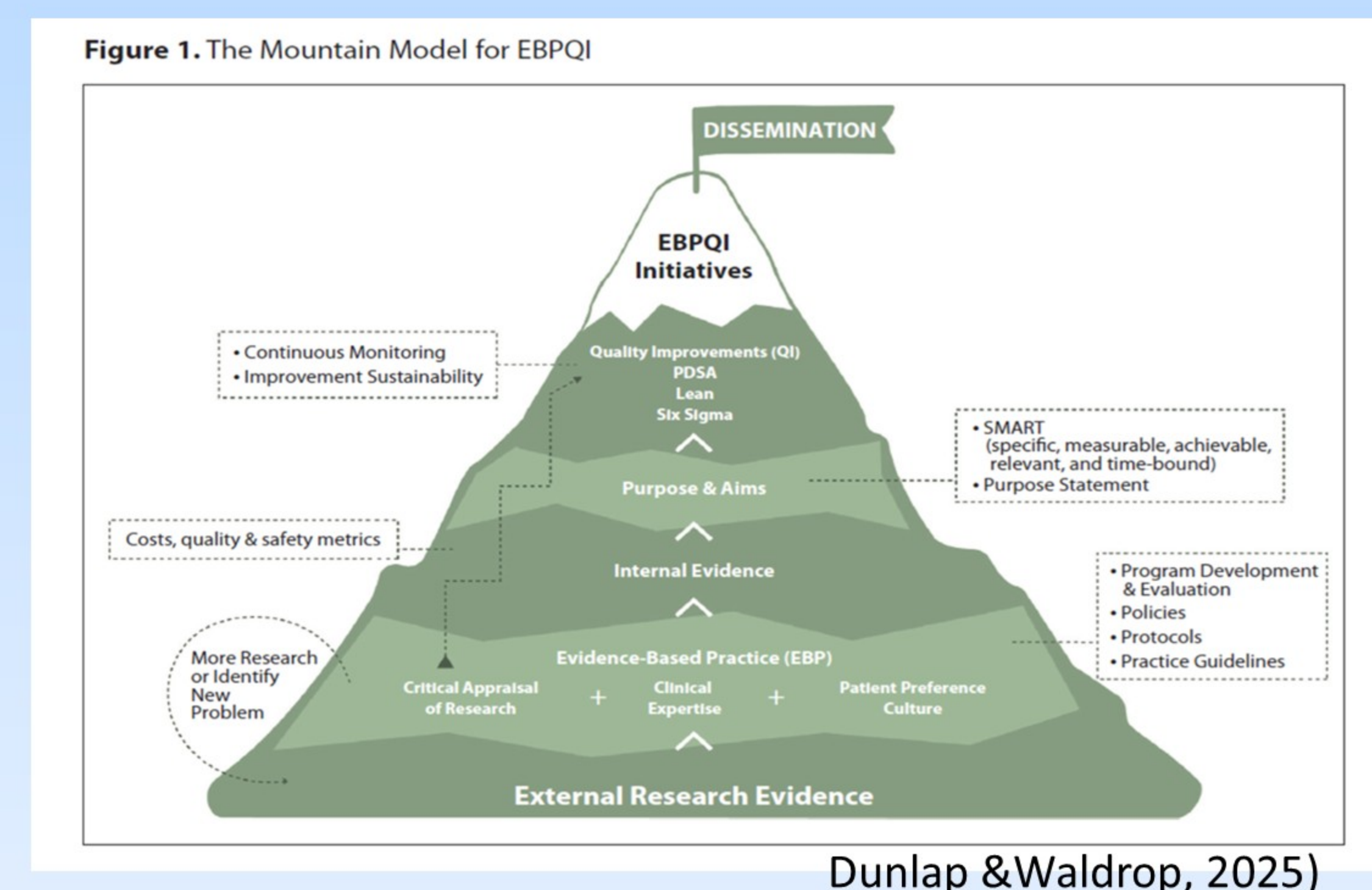
Operational Core

- Success- a project plan students can understand and replicate after graduation
- Community- address real world health system problems

Mountain Model- EBPQI design

EBP- best practices
+
QI- Sustainability

Incorporates all 10 Domains
Competency Based Education
Appropriate for DNP projects
(Waldrop et al., 2026; Wilson & McAllister, 2024)



Curricular Enhancements

- Introduce project in first course
- Roadmap- thread project planning assignment throughout the curriculum
- Worksheets for project planning, not formal papers
- Incorporate clinical hours throughout the curriculum
- Faculty support- Overview PPT. articles, regular communication
- Continuing work- revise worksheets, faculty development with adjuncts

Evaluation

Survey graduates one year after graduation

% engaged in practice improvement since graduation

References

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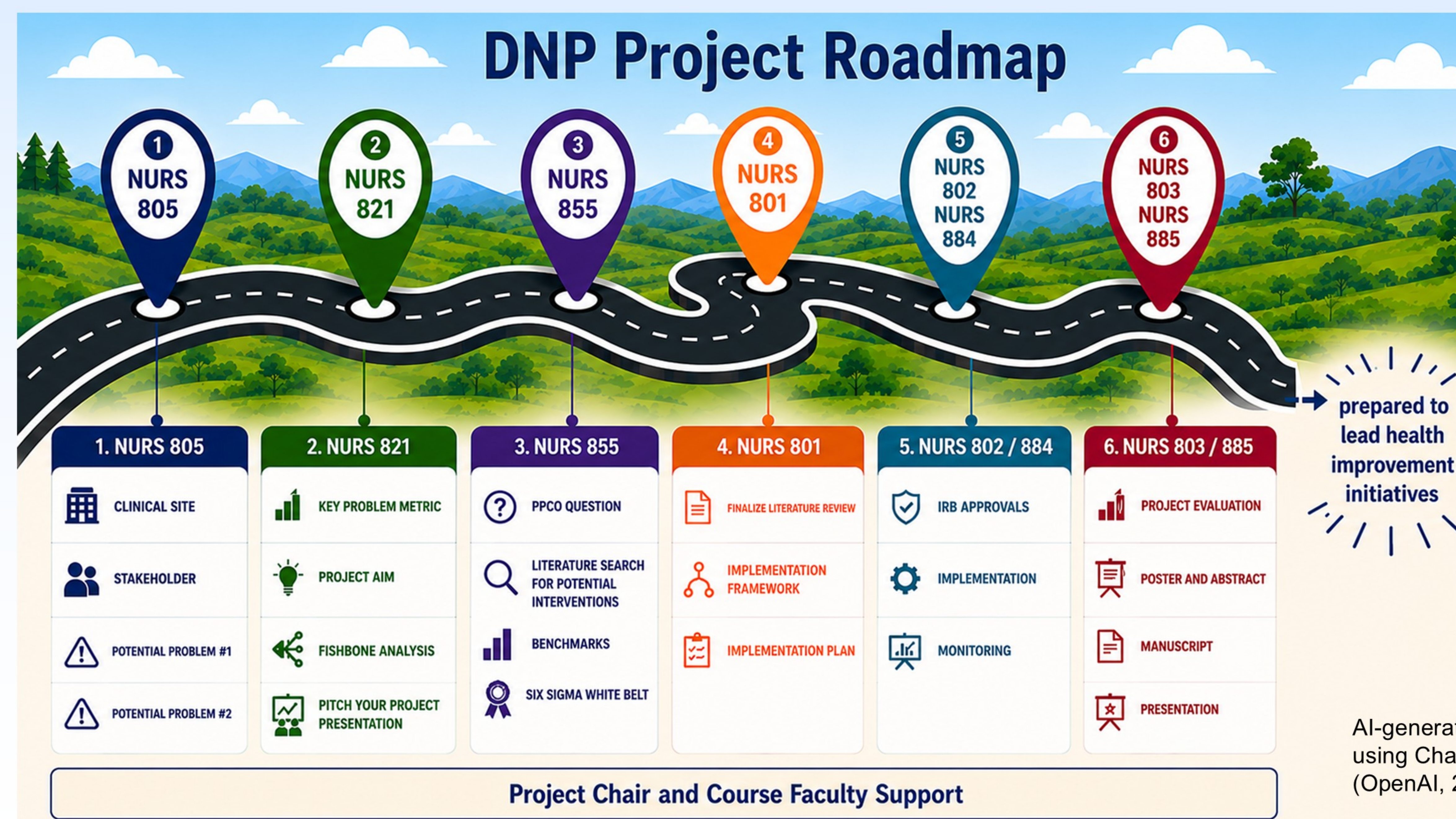
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The Mountain Model: Preparing DNP Students for Practice Improvement

Karen Higgins, DNP, FNP-BC

Biography

Dr. Karen Higgins is Associate Professor at Regent University. As a nurse educator, she has taught undergraduate and graduate students in academic and clinical settings. Her teaching interests include student wellness, innovative teaching strategies, and incorporating the arts in education.

Additionally, Dr Higgins has been a certified family nurse practitioner for over 30 years. As a primary care provider, she uses a patient-centered approach with an emphasis on health promotion, wellness, and empowering patients to manage their health.

Dr. Higgins has been a speaker at state and national conferences and has published articles on innovations in graduate nursing education, self-care, and health and well-being of nursing students. She is a graduate of Bradley University (BSN), Old Dominion University (MSN), and Chatham University (DNP). Additionally, she is a veteran of the US Navy Nurse Corps.

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