



Clinical Practicum Guidelines
Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice

Effective Date: 2026	Revisions/Re-Approval:
Section 2: Environmental and Personal Safety	2.2 Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice

Purpose

The Pepperdine University School of Nursing (SON) welcomes students with disabilities and is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for all qualified individuals. Prospective and admitted students are encouraged to contact the Office of Student Accessibility (OSA) early in the admissions or enrollment process to discuss possible accommodations. This policy is consistent with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Policy

The SON requires all students to demonstrate competency across cognitive, physical, sensory, communication, and behavioral domains essential to safe nursing practice. To graduate, students must demonstrate mastery of the curriculum's academic and technical standards throughout enrollment, including during all didactic, simulation, and clinical experiences.

Students with temporary or permanent health adjustments or disabilities will be evaluated on an individual basis. Where a condition cannot be safely accommodated or would fundamentally alter the essential nature of the program, participation in clinical experiences may be prohibited and/or delayed until the student can safely resume participation.

Accommodations are designed to provide equal access; however, they cannot fundamentally alter the essential nature of the clinical curriculum, compromise academic or professional standards, or jeopardize patient or student safety.

Procedure for Health Status Changes

If a student experiences a change in health status (e.g., injury, surgery, pregnancy, acute emotional distress, or infectious disease), they must satisfy the following preconditions before participating in further clinical activities:

1. **Provider Review:** Submit a written statement to the Director of Clinical Academic Practice Partnerships from a qualified healthcare provider confirming they have reviewed Pepperdine's *Essential Functional Abilities Standards*.



2. **Clearance Specification:** The provider must state whether the student is approved to participate in direct patient care with or without specific accommodations.
3. **Formal OSA Registration:** Students seeking accommodations must also register with the Pepperdine Office of Student Accessibility (OSA) to ensure the accommodation is formally documented at the University level.
4. **Clinical Affiliate Authority:** Clinical affiliate facilities retain independent authority over their own environmental safety constraints. The SON, along with the OSA, will use best efforts to work collaboratively with the clinical sites to implement approved accommodations, provided they do not pose an undue hardship or direct threat to patient welfare and do not conflict with the terms of the University's clinical affiliation agreements.
5. **Feasibility Determination:** The SON and OSA will determine whether the University and its clinical site partners can reasonably implement the accommodation without compromising patient safety, violating placement contracts, or fundamentally altering the clinical objectives. The student will be notified in writing of the determination and its basis.
6. **Grievance Rights:** If the student nurse disagrees with the determination, they retain the right to utilize the formal grievance procedures outlined in the University Student Handbook.

Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice Matrix

The following matrix defines the essential baseline domains required for participation in the Pepperdine University School of Nursing program. The clinical examples listed within each domain are illustrative and not exhaustive; additional tasks within the spirit of each domain may also be required.

Sub-Domain	I. Essential Physical & Neurological Functions: Nursing students must possess functional use of the senses to accurately observe close-at-hand and at-a-distance to learn foundational skills and gather clinical data.	Clinical Examples
I-A. Tactile	• Feel differences in sizes, shapes, and surface characteristics. • Detect temperature and sub-surface anatomical changes.	• Palpate pulses, feel vibrations, and identify body landmarks.



		• Safely locate veins for peripheral access. • Assess skin turgor, rashes, and localized deviations in skin temperature.
I-B. Visual	• Visualize objects at a close distance and a far distance. • Maintain adequate depth perception and peripheral vision. • Distinguish colors and color intensities.	• Observe changes in patient skin integrity, breathing patterns, tissue swelling, or IV infiltration. • Identify cyanosis, flushing, paleness, or bleeding/drainage. • Read medication labels, syringe calibrations, IV infusion pumps, and digital LED displays accurately.
I-C. Hearing	• Hear normal speaking level sounds and faint body sounds. • Hear and comprehend in settings where lip-reading is impossible (e.g., masked environments). • Distinguish varied auditory alarms.	• Assess vital signs, including blood pressure, sounds, and auscultate heart, breath, abdominal, and vascular sounds. • Recognize electronic device alarms, fire alarms, overhead pages, and patient call bells immediately.
I-D. Smell	• Detect odors emanating from the patient or clinical environment.	• Detect odors exhibited by body fluids that may be indicative of disease processes or infection. • Identify environmental hazards such as smoke, gases, or noxious chemicals.
Sub-Domain	II. Essential Motor Skills & Physical Capacities- Students must maintain the physical tolerance, mobility, and motor capacity required to execute clinical tasks, fulfill professional roles, and protect patient safety.	Clinical Examples



II-A. Gross Motor Skills	• Move fluidly within confined care environments. • Maintain standing and sitting balance independently. • Reach above the shoulders and below the waist.	• Position and safely move patients to administer care. • Implement immediate physical nursing interventions to stabilize a patient and prevent complications. • Access overhead IV poles and wall-mounted electrical outlets safely.
II-B. Fine Motor Skills	• Pick up, grasp, and manipulate small objects with hands and fingers. • Coordinate eyes and hands/fingers with high accuracy. • Write and utilize electronic keyboards/interfaces.	• Safely prepare and administer precise medications. • Manipulate a syringe, adjust roller clamps on IV tubing, and use eye droppers. • Perform advanced procedural skills such as tracheostomy care, wound dressing, and catheter insertions. • Document data via electronic health records (EHR).
II-C. Physical Endurance	• Sustain repetitive movements over time. • Maintain physical tolerance and alertness for the entirety of an assigned clinical work shift.	• Stand at a patient's bedside during prolonged surgical or therapeutic procedures. • Stand, walk, and remain active to complete a standard 8-to-12-hour clinical rotation shift.
II-D. Physical Strength	• Push, pull, lift, and support up to 50 pounds. • Move light objects up to 10 pounds frequently. • Deploy upper body and grip strength effectively.	• Lift, transfer, and use proper techniques to position patients across varied age groups and weights. • Assist patients with ambulation and operate manual transfer devices. • Perform manual cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) compressions. • Squeeze bulb-type sphygmomanometers and operate fire extinguishers.



II-E. Mobility	• Twist, bend, stoop, squat, and walk continuously. • Move rapidly when responding to unexpected clinical changes.	• Maneuver through crowded patient care areas, hallways, and stairs. • Move independently from room to room to engage in direct patient care. • Respond instantly to clinical emergencies (e.g., Code Blue events).
Sub-Domain	III. Essential Communication Skills-Students must process, comprehend, and transmit written, electronic, and verbal material effectively and efficiently in the English language.	Clinical Examples
III-A. Communication	• Read, speak, and comprehend English clearly. • Convey clinical data via oral, written, or electronic means. • Clarify the meaning of verbal and non-verbal communication elements.	• Explain complex procedures to patients and families and deliver health education. • Provide accurate handoff reports on patient conditions to the interprofessional healthcare team. • Clarify provider orders, communicate via telephone, and document cleanly and legally in the medical record using correct grammar, syntax, and punctuation.
Sub-Domain	IV. Essential Clinical Judgment Skills-Students must exercise strong intellectual reasoning and make prompt, safe choices based on objective scientific data under shifting, high-stress conditions.	Clinical Examples
IV-A. Judgment	• Make clinical decisions rooted in scientific knowledge and objective assessment. • Demonstrate high capacity to make sound, logical choices when under stress.	• Prioritize and organize care pathways for single or multiple patients simultaneously. • Deliver care safely in fast-paced, high-acuity environments (e.g., ICU,



	• Adapt to changing clinical environments, uncertainty, and ambiguity.	Emergency Department, psychiatric units). • Recognize when a clinical scenario shifts into uncertainty and immediately seek appropriate supervision or consultation.
Sub-Domain	V. Essential Intellectual & Cognitive Skills-Students must measure, calculate, reason, analyze, synthesize, integrate, and evaluate information across the basic and applied sciences.	Clinical Examples
V-A. Reading & Interpretation	• Read and master complex documents, protocols, and policies written in English. • Interpret graphic printouts, columns of data, and multi-variable flowsheet charts.	• Review and apply nursing standards of care, institutional protocols, and research data. • Interpret multi-lead graphic printouts (e.g., EKGs) and dynamic vital sign sheets.
V-B. Arithmetic Competence	• Add, subtract, multiply, and divide whole numbers and fractions. • Read digital displays, measure time intervals, and compute metric conversions.	• Accurately calculate weight-based medication dosages within a safe clinical time frame. • Count rates accurately (e.g., IV drops/minute, pulse oximetry, respiratory rates). • Track time intervals (e.g., duration of uterine contractions, timing of emergency medications).
V-C. Analytical & Critical Thinking	• Transfer conceptual knowledge from one educational or clinical setting to another. • Identify cause-and-effect relationships and process vast data streams concurrently. • Leverage short- and long-term memory systems under pressure.	• Analyze assessment data to form valid nursing diagnoses and prioritize immediate tasks. • Handle multiple care problems simultaneously (e.g., tracking complex medication cycles while assessing acute patient pain levels).



		• Assimilate skills learned in the simulation lab and apply them flawlessly at the live clinical bedside.
Sub-Domain	VI. Essential Behavioral, Emotional & Interpersonal Skills-Students must possess the psychological stability required to fully utilize their intellectual capacities, exercise therapeutic objectivity, and build safe, professional relationships	Clinical Examples
VI-A. Interpersonal Competence	• Interact compassionately with individuals, families, and groups from diverse backgrounds. • Establish rapid therapeutic rapport with clients and collaborative relationships with co-workers. • Negotiate interpersonal conflicts constructively.	• Practice in a completely non-judgmental and non-discriminatory manner that respects cultural, social, and emotional differences. • Function as an active, reliable member of the interdisciplinary team. • Engage productively in partnered or group learning experiences in both classroom and clinical settings.
VI-B. Emotional Stability	• Maintain firm, professional therapeutic boundaries. • Adapt to fluid environment stressors and manage personal emotional responses. • Execute multiple competing tasks concurrently without cognitive decompression.	• Assume full personal accountability and legal responsibility for one's own clinical actions. • Provide steady emotional support to grieving or traumatized patients and families. • Maintain focused attention on intricate patient care tasks despite background noise, crisis events, or unexpected clinical ambient tension.
VI-A. Interpersonal Competence	• Interact compassionately with individuals, families, and groups from diverse backgrounds.	• Practice in a completely non-judgmental and non-discriminatory manner that



	• Establish rapid therapeutic rapport with clients and collaborative relationships with co-workers. • Negotiate interpersonal conflicts constructively.	respects cultural, social, and emotional differences. • Function as an active, reliable member of the interdisciplinary team. • Engage productively in partnered or group learning experiences in both classroom and clinical settings.
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Emotional Distress and Behavioral Safety

In full alignment with University and CHS Professionalism Standards, student nurses must maintain the psychological and emotional stability necessary to prioritize patient safety and professional objectivity. Student nurses are exposed to a highly stressful environment across classes, exams, and clinical settings.

- **Instructor Intervention Rights:** If a student nurse's behavior is symptomatic of emotional distress or acute destabilization that impacts safety, the clinical instructor has the immediate right and professional responsibility to remove the student nurse from the patient care area and dismiss them for the day.
- **Return to Clinical Requirements:** Before being permitted to return to the clinical setting, the student nurse must complete the following steps:
 1. **Mandatory Meeting:** Meet with the Clinical Instructor, Lead Faculty, and the Assistant Dean and/or Dean..
 2. **Documentation:** A written incident report will be prepared by the Clinical Instructor; this report may be supplemented with a statement from the student nurse.
 3. **Compliance:** The student nurse is required to comply with all actionable directives issued by Clinical Affiliations.
 4. **Clearance:** The student nurse will not be permitted to participate in clinical practicum courses until they obtain and submit additional clinical clearance signed by a licensed behavioral health provider certifying their readiness to resume direct patient care safely.

(Refer to the Student Incident, Injury or Unexplained Illness policy [Policy 3.1] for additional information)



References and Regulatory Authority

- *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title III, as amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181–12189.*
- *Nondiscrimination based on Disability by Public Accommodations and in Commercial Facilities, 28 C.F.R. Part 36.*
- *Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, as amended, 29 U.S.C. § 794.*
- *California Nursing Practice Act, Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 2700 et seq.*
- *California Board of Registered Nursing, Prelicensure Nursing Program Regulations, Cal. Code Regs. tit. 16, div. 14, art. 3, §§ 1420–1432.*
- *Pepperdine University, Office of Student Accessibility, has applicable policies and procedures regarding disability accommodations and equal access.*
- *Pepperdine University, Student Handbook, applicable nondiscrimination and student grievance policies.*
- *Pepperdine University School of Nursing, Student Incident, Injury or Unexplained Illness Policy (Policy 3.1).*

Student Acknowledgment and Memorandum of Understanding

Following admission and before matriculation into the nursing program, all students are required to review the Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice Policy and sign the School of Nursing Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice Student Acknowledgment and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The MOU acknowledges the student's understanding of the essential functional requirements of the nursing program; reasonable accommodation processes; clinical site requirements; schedule and clinical placement expectations; transportation responsibilities; attendance and required clinical hours; changes in health or functional status; and the student's continuing responsibilities throughout enrollment.

The student's acknowledgment does not waive the right to request reasonable accommodations through the Pepperdine University Office of Student Accessibility or any other rights provided under applicable University policy or law.

Student Acknowledgment and Memorandum of Understanding Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice

The Pepperdine University School of Nursing (SON) is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for all qualified students, including students with disabilities. I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the **Essential Functional Abilities for Nursing Practice Policy (Policy 2.2)** and understand that I am expected to meet the essential academic and functional requirements of the nursing program throughout enrollment, with or without reasonable accommodations.

By signing below, I acknowledge and understand the following:

1. Essential Functional Abilities

I am responsible for meeting the essential physical, sensory, motor, communication, cognitive, clinical judgment, behavioral, emotional, and interpersonal requirements necessary for safe participation in didactic, laboratory, simulation, and clinical learning experiences.

2. Reasonable Accommodations and Clinical Site Requirements

Students seeking reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the **Pepperdine University Office of Student Accessibility (OSA)**. Accommodation requests are considered individually through the University's established process. The SON and OSA will work collaboratively with clinical partners regarding requested accommodations; however, the granting of accommodation requests is not guaranteed. Approved accommodations must be feasible and may not fundamentally alter essential program or clinical requirements, compromise academic or professional standards or patient/student safety, or conflict with applicable clinical affiliation requirements.

3. Schedule and Clinical Placement Flexibility

I understand that required learning experiences may occur on days, evenings, nights, weekends, and during extended clinical shifts, including 8- to 12-hour clinical rotations. The SON cannot guarantee schedule or placement adjustments based on employment, childcare, personal preferences, transportation preferences, or other personal scheduling conflicts.

4. Transportation and Clinical Site Travel

I am responsible for arranging reliable transportation to and from assigned clinical and other required learning experiences, which may occur off Pepperdine campuses and may require travel throughout the region. The SON cannot guarantee placement based on residence, commute distance, transportation preference, or preferred geographic location.

5. Attendance and Clinical Hours

I am responsible for meeting all required attendance, participation, and clinical-hour requirements. Completion of required clinical experiences and hours is necessary for program progression and completion, as well as for meeting eligibility requirements for professional nursing licensure.

6. Continuing Responsibility and Changes in Status

These requirements remain in effect throughout my enrollment. If I experience a temporary or permanent change in health or functional status that may affect safe participation in nursing education or direct patient care, I am responsible for following Policy 2.2 and applicable University procedures and promptly communicating with the appropriate SON and/or University personnel.

Student Acknowledgment

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received, reviewed, and understand **Policy 2.2 and this Student Acknowledgement and Memorandum of Understanding**, and have had the opportunity to seek clarification. I understand that my signature **does not waive my right to request reasonable accommodations** through the Pepperdine University Office of Student Accessibility or any other rights provided under applicable University policy or law.

Student Name: _____

Program/Pathway: _____

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____