DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY Undergraduate Program Competency Attainment Support Policy	**Policy Sponsor:** School Council	**Approval Date:** June 2, 2023
	Responsible Unit: School of Nursing	**Amendments:**

Index (where appropriate)

A. Background & Purpose:

Competency is a dynamic concept putting emphasis on an individual's *actual* performance in real-life settings and is relative to the specific standards of performance and/or practice in that particular setting (Grif Alspach, 1996; Lackie & Tomblin Murphy, 2016). Competence can only be guaranteed when there is evidence that the **knowledge**, **skills**, and **abilities/attitudes** required to deliver care are consistently demonstrated (i.e., **performance**) in real-life situations (Grif Alspach, 1996). The School of Nursing has a social and moral responsibility to ensure that graduates possess the entry-level competencies to provide high-quality, safe care. Theoretical and experiential learning are formed by the educational experience. As future health care team members, nursing students will be expected to accept responsibility, be accountable for their practice, recognize personal limitations, identify learning gaps, and determine resources to address these gaps (NSCN, 2020). This process of supporting students to attain the requisite entry-level competencies requires time, expertise, resources, and commitment from both faculty and students (Chou et al., 2019; Custer, 2018).

The purpose of this policy is to address competency attainment requirements through a compassionate lens that considers life events interfering with a student's trajectory, as well as equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility when addressing the areas of **knowledge**, **skills**, and **abilities/attitudes** related to performance.

B. Application:

Competency attainment support is required for students in the nursing program who experience identified challenges meeting the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities/attitudes associated with each competency and/or who experience circumstances (e.g., temporary break

from clinical courses) that may interfere with attaining the competencies required to perform safely and that may prohibit progression in their program of study. Students will be offered or may seek program competency attainment support if they face challenges in meeting the expected outcome criteria for a course or are challenged to show progression in learning, including but not limited to:

- exhibiting difficulties with clinical skill competencies (i.e., psychomotor performance, communication [verbal, written])

- difficulties with demonstrating critical thinking, clinical judgment, and/or failure to uphold to the Student Code of Conduct or Nursing Code of Ethics

It is essential that competency attainment support practices include measures that normalize the need for support, as well as self-help seeking behaviours. Information about ongoing competency appraisal and support provided throughout the program within a course syllabus and encouraging students to self-refer normalizes the process. As such, students, faculty, simulation/lab instructors, tutorial leaders and/or clinical instructors may request help in the face of competency attainment challenges.

C. Definitions:

1. *Competence:* The student's individual ability (knowledge, skills, and abilities/attitudes) required to practice safely and ethically in a student role and practice setting to achieve successful progression through the nursing program.

2. *Competency:* The individual student's actual performance of specific knowledge, skills and abilities/attitudes required by the nursing student to be considered competent in a designated role (semester) and practice setting.

3. *Competency Assessment:* The process by which competency is assessed utilizing various methods and tools as appropriate for the level of competence expected in any given semester and clinical course.

4. C*ompetency Attainment Plan:* The individualized process, specific to the student's identified learning needs, developed collaboratively with the student, Course Professor, and Tutorial Lead/Simulation Lab Instructor/Clinical as appropriate. The plan will include specific goals and learning objectives, Instructor instruction/supportive strategies, assessment strategies, completion dates, learning resources, and measurable outcomes of successful completion. Please see appendix A for template.

5. *Reflection*: The students written account of their reasoning process utilized to make meaning of the competency attainment challenge. The reflection should be written using the FRAME Method (NSCN, 2018).

6. *Support Faculty*: The TA's, Simulation Lab Instructors and Clinical instructors assigned to an individual course.

D. Policy:

All faculty within the School of Nursing are committed to student success, and therefore have a strong desire for all students to obtain the required knowledge, skills and abilities/attitudes required of a graduate nurse. The policy addresses competency attainment requirements through a compassionate lens that considers equity, diversity, inclusion and life events that may interfere with a students' progression. This policy is intended to promote transparency and clarify procedures to address the support of students in attaining competency for graduation.

E.   Administrative Structure:

1. Authority: This policy falls under the authority of the Undergraduate Studies Committee

2. Student Affairs committee is responsible for:
    a. Tracking of students requiring *competency attainment plans* when reviewing student progression.

3. The Course Professor is responsible for:
    a. Place the link to the Competency Attainment Support Policy on the course syllabus and notify students about its availability during the course orientation.
    b. Identifying (in collaboration with support faculty) individual students who could benefit from a *competency attainment plan*.
    c. Development of the individual *competency attainment plan* in collaboration with the student and identified support persons.
    d. Ensures resources are in place for successful completion of the plan.
    e. Arranges for reassessment of the identified competency(s).
    f. Place a copy of the *competency attainment plan*, including outcomes on the student's file.

4. School of Nursing Support Faculty are responsible for:
    a. Identifying individual students who could benefit from a *competency attainment plan*.
    b. Notifying the Course Professor of the students need for support.
    c. Supporting the student as identified in the *competency attainment plan*.
    d. Reassessment of clinical competency(s) as directed by the Course Professor and/or the *competency attainment plan*.

5. The Coordinator of Simulation Based Education is responsible for:
    a. Arranging resources required for simulation/lab competency assessment.
    b. Reassessment of clinical competency(s) carried out in the simulation lab environment.

6. The Associate Director of Student Affairs is responsible for:
    a. Introduce the Competency Attainment Policy in the student orientation.

b. Identifying individual students who could benefit from a *competency attainment plan*.

c. Refer all students returning from a leave of absence to participate in the *competency attainment plan* process.

d. Recommend to identified students that they participate in the *competency attainment plan* process.

e. Support students to access competency attainment supports.

7. The Student Advisors are responsible for:

    a. Identifying individual students who could benefit from a *competency attainment plan*.

    b. Recommend to identified students that they participate in the *competency attainment plan* process.

    c. Support students to access competency attainment supports.

8. The Student is responsible for:

    a. Self identifying (when possible) the need for support.

    b. Identifying the need to participate in the *competency attainment plan* process when they return from a leave of absence.

    c. Participating in development of the *competency attainment plan*.

    d. Completing (as part of their *competency attainment plan),* a written reflection pertaining to the area/event requiring support.

    e. Completion of all components of the *competency attainment plan*.

F. <u>Procedures</u>:

1. Identification

    a. Students self-identify (when possible) as requiring support for competency attainment and contacts clinical instructor, simulation instructor, or tutorial leader as appropriate. The student can also reach out directly to their course professor and are encouraged to do so as soon as they realize that they could benefit by the support of a *competency attainment plan*.

    b. Course Professor or Tutorial Leader identify student competency attainment challenges related to performance in class, tutorial, and/or assigned work. Identification should occur no later than mid-way through the theory portion of the course.

    c. Simulation Lab Instructor identifies student competency attainment challenges related to simulation and/or clinical skills. Identification should occur no later than mid-way through the simulation lab portion of the course.

    d. Clinical instructor identifies student competency attainment challenges related to clinical performance through clinical skills assessments that identify concrete examples of assessment indicators. Identification should occur no later than mid-way through the clinical placement.

     e.   Associate Director of Student Affairs identifies the benefits of a *competency attainment plan* for individual students to whom they are providing guidance.

     f.   Academic Advisors identifies the benefits of a *competency attainment plan* for individual students to whom they are providing guidance.

2. Once areas of competency attainment challenges are identified, the Student, Tutorial Leader, Clinical Instructor, and/or Simulation Instructor as appropriate notifies the Course Professor.

3. Once the Associate Director of Student Affairs and/or Academic Advisors identify the benefits of a *competency attainment plan*, they recommend to the students that they participate in the *competency attainment plan* process and support the student in accessing competency attainment supports.

4. The Course Professor contacts the student and arranges a meeting with the student to identify the competency attainment challenges, including provision of rationale for support, and shares expectations for satisfactory performance. The student will be asked to reflect upon the situation, including academic and non-academic mitigating factors, that may have impacted their learning and performance. Because student experience differs significantly and resources are in place for all students, including those from DEDGs, students may wish to seek additional support as they deem necessary at any stage of the process. Suggested supports include but are not limited to the following: a) African Nova Scotian Nursing Student Advisor; b) L'nu Nurse and/or Indigenous Nursing Student Advisor, c) Dalhousie University Accessibility Centre; d) Bissett Centre; e) Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services (DSAS); f) Nursing Student Equity Coalition; g) 2LGBTQ+ Student Advisor; h) Dalhousie Writing Centre; i) Associate Director Student Affairs.

5. A *competency attainment plan,* specific to the student's identified learning needs, will be collaboratively developed with the student, Course Professor, identified special supports (where applicable), and Tutorial Lead/Simulation Lab Instructor/Clinical Instructor as appropriate. The plan will include specific goals and learning objectives, instruction/supportive strategies, assessment strategies, completion dates, learning resources, and measurable outcomes of successful completion.

6. The student and faculty involved will monitor progress through completion of the *competency attainment plan* for each specified learning outcome. This may include guided clinical practice (e.g., sterile procedure, medication administration, communication, etc.), observation of competencies [e.g., practice/simulation in the Clinical Learning and Simulation Centre (CLSC)], additional assignments (e.g., care plans, reflective analysis, medication quiz, etc.) and/or Mock OSCE's. Mock OSCE's are a strategy that provides students the opportunity to integrate theory (the why) with practice (the doing) to provide a realistic learning environment to practice for the OSCE. This process can be carried out in pairs, where students test each other using the grading rubric and then provide feedback to each other. Students benefit from both roles as they must integrate theory in order to assess and provide feedback.

7. Once all steps of the *competency attainment plan* are fulfilled, and the student identifies they are ready, they will participate in the reassessment originally identified in their *competency attainment plan*. This reassessment will be appropriate to the knowledge, skills, and performance competencies originally identified. This reassessment may include another OSCE, written exam, medication quiz, or bedside assessment in the clinical setting by the clinical instructor or faculty. Success is defined by the student retaking and passing an OSCE or other evaluation method (e.g., instructor/faculty-observed patient encounter, exam, written assignment, etc.).

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Appendix A

Competency Attainment Plan

Critical Reflection: Utilizing the FRAME Method, the student will critically reflect on the situation and identify the factors that negatively and positively impacted their knowledge/skill/performance. Students will explore the importance of this knowledge/skill/performance issue to their future nursing practice. In this reflection, students will strategize how they will overcome the negative impacts on knowledge/skill/performance while optimizing the positive impacts on knowledge/skill/performance.

Due date: (Day/Month/Year):

Learning Objectives: Working in collaboration with the course professor and/or clinical/sim-lab/tutorial instructor the student will identify 3 learning objectives related to each procedure/skill/knowledge to which the student experienced difficulty.

Due date: (Day/Month/Year):

Learning Objectives Identified:

1._____

2._____

3._____

SMART Goals: Working in collaboration with the course professor and/or clinical/sim-lab/tutorial instructor the student will identify SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant & Timeframe) goals to achieve success of their learning objectives.

Due date: (Day/Month/Year):

SMART Goals:

1._____

2._____

3._____

Expected Outcomes: Working in collaboration with the course professor and/or clinical/sim-lab/tutorial instructor the student will identify the expected measurable outcomes for successful competency attainment:

1._____

2._____

3._____

Required Supports: The student will identify the support needed from an advocate/resource person, preceptor, tutorial lead, clinical/lab instructor, and/or course professor to ensure success in achieving their SMART goals.

Advocate/Resource person:

_____
_____

Preceptor:

_____
_____

Clinical/Lab Instructor/Tutorial Lead:

_____
_____

Course Professor:

_____
_____

Theory Appraisal and Support: If required, students will complete the following recommended identified activities (e.g., repeat course work, seek assistance from the Writing Centre/ Studying for Success/Student Accessibility/ANS Student Advisor/L'nu Nurse/and/or other EDIA supports, repeat instruction and or facilitation by faculty, etc.):

1._____

2._____

3._____

Simulation Lab & Clinical Competency Attainment: If required, students will work with the CLSC team and/or Clinical Instructor to practice the following skills:

1._____

2._____

3._____

Due date: (Day/Month/Year):

Re-evaluation: Retesting and/or re-evaluation will include the following knowledge/skill(s)/performance:

1._____
_

2._____
_

3._____
_

Due date: (Day/Month/Year):

Attestations:

I understand that this contract will be shared with the CLSC Coordinator, Associate Director Undergraduate Student Affairs, and Associate Director Undergraduate Academic Programs, in the School of Nursing _____(Student Initial)

I am aware that this learning contract becomes part of my Academic and Practice Experience Record _____(Student Initial)

I have read all the above and understand the expectations for achieving success. _____(Student initial)

Signatures:

Student Name: _____Signature_____

Student Initial:_____Date: _____

Faculty Name: _____Signature_____

Date: _____