

## Preparing Nurses for Practice: AACN Competencies in the Perioperative Environment

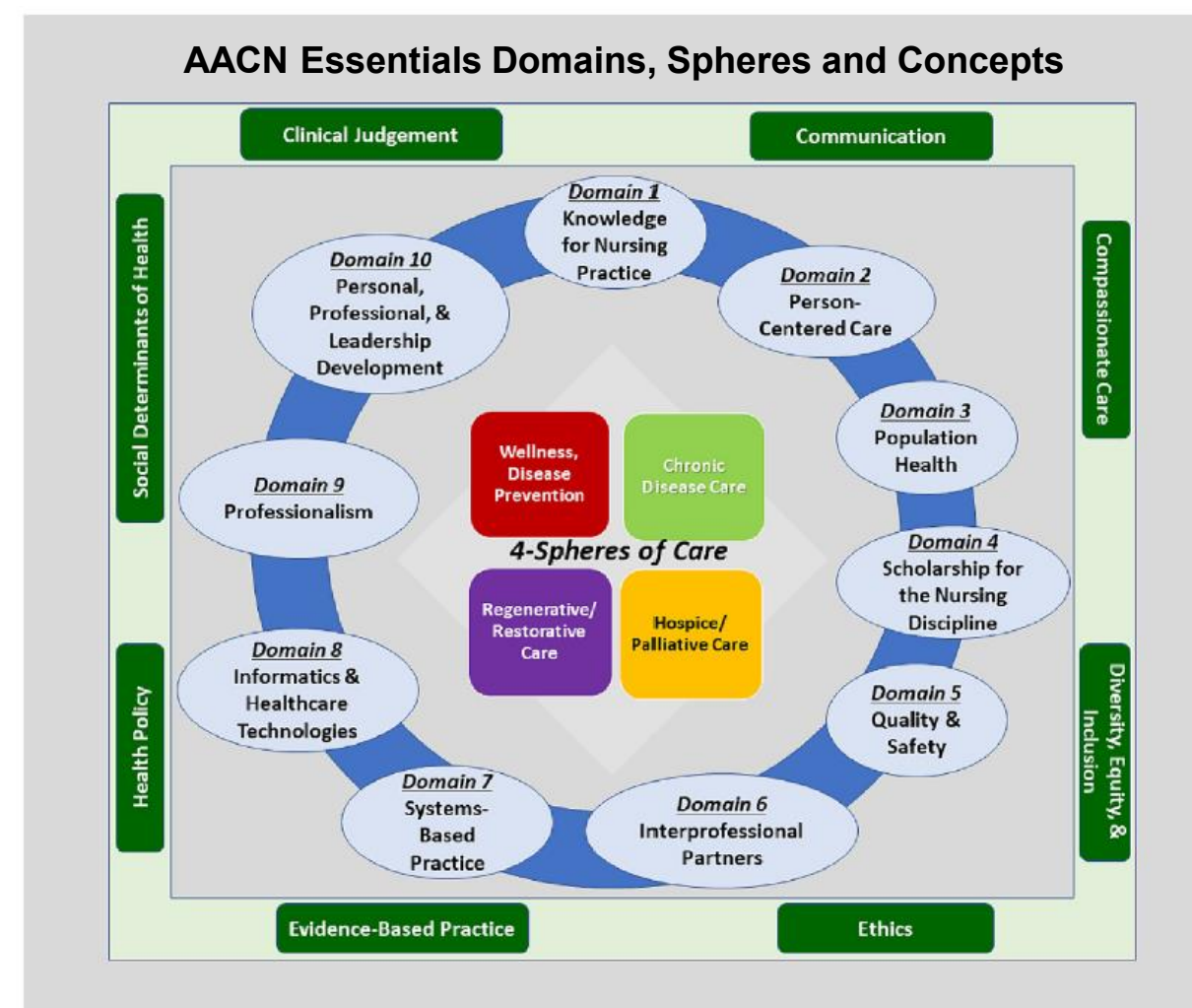
**Purpose:** This poster highlights how the Experiential Learning in Perioperative Nursing Course (NURS 4952) aligns with multiple AACN Essentials by providing undergraduate nursing students with direct perioperative nursing exposure, while advocating for the integration of perioperative content across nursing curricula to support the development of well-rounded, practice-ready graduates.

### Introduction and Background

BSN programs prepare practice-ready nurses through competency-based education that integrates knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes, as emphasized by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing Essentials (AACN; 2021). Although experiential learning across diverse care environments is central to these competencies, perioperative nursing remains limited in many undergraduate curricula. This elective course at Texas Woman's University addresses this gap by utilizing the operating room as an immersive learning environment where students develop core competencies in patient safety, clinical judgment, communication, teamwork, ethical and legal practice, and professionalism through clinical, simulation, and reflective experiences.



### Mapping of AACN Essentials to Course



(Vortman et al., 2024)

Guided by the AACN Essentials and evidence-based perioperative education frameworks (Vortman et al., 2024), the course was designed to support measurable growth across multiple AACN Essential domains:

- Domain 2: Person-Centered Care – students practiced empathy, situational awareness, and patient advocacy.
- Domain 5: Quality and Safety – hands-on application of aseptic technique and counting protocols to prevent retained surgical items.
- Domain 9: Professionalism – reflections demonstrated evolving professional identity and accountability.
- Domain 10: Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development – students developed clinical confidence, ethical awareness, and communication skills.

### Methodology

Students engaged in structured clinical, classroom, and simulation-based experiences focused on sterile technique, interprofessional collaboration, surgical safety, and ethical decision-making. Learning outcomes and reflective assignments were analyzed using the AACN Essentials to evaluate competency development and curricular alignment. Course activities included:



Formative and summative reflective activities were integrated throughout the course to promote critical thinking, self-awareness, and professional growth including:

- Daily guided reflections focused on clinical judgment, observed practices, and professional growth.
- Perioperative case logs documenting patient care, safety principles, and team dynamics.
- Preceptor evaluations provided formative feedback on clinical performance, professionalism, and skill development in the perioperative setting.

### Conclusions and Implications

Students demonstrated improved understanding of the perioperative nurse's role, increased confidence in infection control practices, and heightened awareness of surgical conscience (Quintana, 2022). This course provides a scalable model for integrating perioperative education into undergraduate nursing curricula, supporting workforce readiness, patient advocacy and safety, and recruitment into the perioperative nursing specialty. Limitations include reduced clinical placement availability, limited specialty exposure, and minimal research on the impact of perioperative experiences on clinical competence.



### References

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2021). The essentials: Core competencies for professional nursing education. <https://www.aacnursing.org/Essentials>

Quintana D. (2022). Surgical conscience: A concept analysis for perioperative nurses. *AORN Journal*, 116(6), 533–546. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aorn.13827>

Vortman, R., Quintana, D., Oliver-Coleman, J., Baker, J. D., & Wagner, D. (2024). Roadmap for integrating the AACN Essentials with perioperative nursing. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 53, 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2024.04.007>