The central purpose of the University of Virginia is to enrich the mind by stimulating and sustaining the spirit of free inquiry directed to understanding the nature of the universe and human existence. The philosophy of the School of Nursing is consistent with that of the University as it prepares leaders in health care.

Nursing is both a profession and a discipline that is responsive to changing health needs. It is concerned with human experiences and responses to birth, health, illness, and death within the context of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Nurses, often in collaboration with other health care professionals, promote the optimal health care and comfort of individuals and groups through the systematic application of knowledge from nursing and related disciplines.

The faculty believes that education is based on humanistic approaches that foster critical thinking and promote awareness of social and cultural diversity among individuals. The faculty views each student as a unique person with special talents, abilities, needs, and goals. Cultural diversity, varying life experiences, and changing socioeconomic factors affect each student differently. To this end, faculty endeavor to provide an environment that assists students to realize their full potential. The acquisition of professional knowledge and the development of clinical competence occur through active involvement of the student in the learning process. Students assume primary responsibility for learning, while faculty provide educational opportunities for knowledge acquisition and professional role development. We believe that an atmosphere of shared growth and inquiry offers the maximum potential for development.

Baccalaureate education in nursing is the basic preparation necessary for the practice of professional nursing. This education provides the foundation for the development of professional knowledge, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, leadership skills, and the independent and interdisciplinary pursuit of high standards of health care. Master’s education prepares the nurse with strong critical thinking and decision-making skills for generalist practice as a clinical nurse leader, or advanced practice in acute and primary care and specialty practice in the areas of health systems management and public health leadership. A primary aim of master’s nursing education is to ensure that every student acquires the ability to analyze, synthesize, and utilize knowledge in a respective area of nursing practice. Doctoral education prepares the nurse scholar to influence health care through leadership in education, policy, practice, research, and knowledge development.

Implicit in the practice of professional nursing is accountability for professional growth and practice, demonstration of leadership, and commitment to the development and application of nursing theory and research. Life-long learning leads to the optimal development of both the individual practitioner and the discipline of nursing.

Characteristics of Graduates
The disciplinary and professional domains of nursing give direction to current and evolving nursing practice. The clinical nurse leader is prepared through graduate nursing education as a nurse generalist who provides and manages care at the point of care to individuals and groups or populations in all settings in which health care is delivered. The clinical nurse leader designs, implements, and evaluates client care by coordinating, delegating and supervising care provided by the health care team. Nurses implementing these roles are prepared to provide leadership and assume accountability for client care outcomes through assimilation and application of evidence-based information to design, implement, and evaluate client plans of care.

Advanced practice nurses demonstrate in-depth knowledge and skills in nursing and health care systems with diverse populations. Components of their roles are expert clinical practice, assessment of outcomes, research, teaching, collaboration, and consultation within health care systems. Nurses prepared through graduate nursing programs with advanced practice knowledge, critical thinking, and decision-making skills can function in a variety of nursing roles. Examples of such roles include clinical nurse specialist, nurse practitioner, nurse educator, and nurse administrator. Nurses implementing these roles demonstrate specialized knowledge and skills. For example, nurses engaged in advanced clinical practice conduct in-depth assessments and demonstrate expertise in judgment and decision-making for purposes of health promotion/disease prevention, intervention, and follow-up in specified populations. Implementation of a particular role may emphasize some role attributes more than others and reflect the advanced practice nurse’s area of expertise.

Graduates of the M.S.N. program are expected to:

1. integrate theoretical and research based knowledge as a generalist leader or in an advanced nursing practice specialty;
2. provide care and comfort to individuals, families and groups experiencing complex health care needs;
3. provide care that reflects sensitivity to differences among culturally and ethnically diverse populations;
4. assume a leadership role in establishing and monitoring standards of practice to improve patient care in collaboration with other nursing experts;
5. use ethical principles to guide decision-making in nursing practice;
6. evaluate clinical practice in relation to professional practice standards and relevant statutes and regulations;
7. apply the research process to improve evidence based clinical practice and contribute to knowledge development;
8. engage in self-directed and purposeful activities in seeking necessary knowledge and skills to enhance career goals;
9. examine economic, political, and social forces affecting nursing care delivery in complex health care systems;
10. promote multidisciplinary collaboration to ensure quality, cost effective care;
11. contribute to the development of peers, colleagues, and others to improve patient care and foster the growth of professional nursing;
12. act as change agents to create environments that promote effective nursing practice and patient outcomes.

These core characteristics are in accordance with national guidelines for the Clinical Nurse Leader and professional standards of advanced practice nursing specialties.