

Request for Authorization to Establish a Master's in Molecular Diagnostic Science Degree at UNC-Chapel Hill

UNC-Chapel Hill requests authorization to establish a Master's in Molecular Diagnostic Science (MMDS) degree (CIP 51.1005) effective May 2009.

Program Description

The MMDS program will prepare health care professionals for current practice in clinical laboratories providing molecular-based information and services. Graduates will be competent in performing and interpreting molecular-based laboratory tests, validating new molecular assays in a clinical laboratory, and explaining the appropriate use and meaning of molecular-based tests to other health care professionals. Upon completion of the MMDS program, graduates will be qualified for national certification examinations from the National Credentialing Agency for Laboratory Personnel and from the American Society for Clinical Pathology. The MMDS will build on the current post-baccalaureate certificate program, adding six new courses that will strengthen students' preparation for roles as practitioners, educators, researchers, and leaders in the molecular diagnostics industry.

UNC Tomorrow Relevance

The program primarily responds to UNC Tomorrow findings relating to the need to utilize health information to improve health and wellness in North Carolina and to educate more health professionals. Access to higher education is also addressed because a major part of the program will be online in order to meet the needs of working adults. Molecular diagnostic tests are used in many areas of medicine including genetic disorders, infectious diseases, cancer, pharmacogenetics, and identity testing. The need for molecular based laboratory tests has increased rapidly over the last decade because of the improved accuracy and sensitivity these tests provide. The need for more laboratory practitioners in molecular diagnostic testing comes at a time when the clinical laboratory profession is experiencing a nation-wide personnel shortage. National and state reports indicate there is a need for more laboratory practitioners at all levels.

Resource Implications

One new faculty member will be hired with enrollment increase funding. New facilities and equipment are not required. Grants from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the NC Biotechnology Center supported the development of online courses and the purchase of equipment. The MDS Corporate Partners program is securing private support, and UNC General Administration has provided a distance education grant to assist in development of additional online courses.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve the UNC-Chapel Hill request to establish a Master's in Molecular Diagnostic Science (MMDS) degree (CIP 51.1005) effective May 2009.