

APPENDIX F

Executive Summary **Request to Establish a Degree Program in Health and Wellness Promotion at** **The University of North Carolina at Asheville**

Consider these startling statistics: only 18 percent of all adults, and only 10 percent of adults over age 50, are free of preventable risk factors for heart disease. These risk factors are high blood cholesterol, smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and sedentary lifestyle. They cause 500,000 deaths each year; 45 percent involve people under age 45 and 55 percent are over age 65. The tragedy is that most of these deaths could have been prevented or postponed through multi-level preventive strategies.

The aging of the American population adds another dimension to the exigency for increasing the emphasis on health promotion/disease prevention. Early in this century, “baby boomers” will enter the prime age for premature death and disability from heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, and other lifestyle-related disorders. The number of Americans over the age of sixty-five has increased eleven fold since 1900, whereas the non-elderly population has increased only three fold. In Western North Carolina alone, there will be an additional sixty thousand residents over the age of sixty-five by 2030 and by that same year, half of the country’s population will be over the age of thirty-nine.

Two out of three adults in North Carolina are overweight or obese. By 2005, medical and lost productivity costs due to excess body weight will meet or exceed those caused by tobacco use. As a result of this epidemic, incidence and prevalence of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, and some cancers is expected to rise dramatically over the next several decades. For example, from 1995 to 2001, the prevalence of diagnosed diabetes increased by 48 percent. As reported by the North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System, 1 in 5 children ages 5-11, and 1 in 4 children ages 12-18 are overweight. Thus, a large percentage of children are suffering from and/or are at risk for Type II Diabetes early in life.

Almost always, minority populations disproportionately suffer more from chronic lifestyle-related diseases than white populations. The “Healthy People 2010 Objectives for the Nation” has set as the nation’s public health goals for the next decade to increase quality and years of healthy life and to eliminate health disparities that are associated with race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Implicit in these goals is the necessity for health and wellness promotion for all populations.

Elizabeth Whelan, Sc.D., M.P.H., is co-founder and president of the American Council on Science and Health and recipient of the 1996 Ethics Award from the American Institute of Chemists. She maintains that the primary aim for professionals in public health and epidemiology should be to teach and assist people in the avoidance of premature disease and death. A national conference, Community-Campus Partnerships in Health, was held in San Antonio in May 2001 with the purpose of engaging higher education in the collective commitment to Health for All in 2010.

Recognizing the significant bearing this initiative will have on our degree program, UNCA was represented at this conference.

Dr. Whelan's view and the focus of the conference in Texas are consistent with the intended thrust of the Health and Wellness Promotion degree program at UNCA: the prevention of premature disease and death, with a concurrent increase in quality of life for all of humanity. Strong consideration will be given in the UNCA degree program to understanding and eliminating race, ethnic, and class health disparities; providing effective health and wellness promotion/disease prevention services; and addressing the needs of children, employers, and the aging population.

The educational objectives we have established for the degree program are designed to provide our students with the knowledge and specific skills they will need to make a positive impact in 21st Century health care. Briefly, they include preparing students to think critically from a broad perspective and to function effectively on a personal and professional level; to understand the health promotion/disease prevention needs of an intergenerational and diverse population; to understand the multidimensional nature of human health, and to assess disease prevention needs in diverse populations and to create and deliver programs to address these needs. We further intend to provide students with the knowledge and skills to develop multi-level interventions and educational materials and delivery systems focused on public health promotion/disease prevention; and, most importantly to ensure that our students have the necessary educational, research, and service-learning experiences to pursue post-graduate study and/or public health-related careers.

These objectives will be achieved by offering a curriculum, which nurtures a broad and liberating view of human health and prevention through the study of biology, sociology, psychology, statistics, and public health. The UNCA curriculum will seek to broaden the Health and Wellness Promotion student's perspective with which to pursue the truth.

Progressive study in Health and Wellness Promotion incorporates the tradition of the liberal arts, which pursues the broadest possible education, involving interdisciplinary studies and "hands-on" collaborative learning experiences, and a thorough attempt to integrate specific skills and knowledge into the single overarching Humanities matrix. The humanities serve as a strong core from which to critically think about human behavior. Effective application of this knowledge and theoretical awareness is achieved through course work and service-learning in Health Promotion/Disease Prevention.

Over the past several years, the chair of UNCA's Department of Health and Fitness and the director of the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement (NCCCR) have explored the potential of collaboratively establishing The Western North Carolina Senior Wellness Institute on the UNCA campus. NCCCR is a nationally renowned program for lifelong learning with considerable emphasis on physical and mental wellness and is housed at UNCA. The WNC Senior Wellness Institute would serve as a unique service-learning and undergraduate research vehicle for Health and Wellness Promotion students. More specifically, UNCA students would play a vital role in the health promotion of the Institute's target population.

In addition, UNCA intends to establish and operate The North Carolina Center for Health and Wellness Promotion; an extensive outreach and partnership initiative meant to promote health and wellness throughout Western North Carolina, and serve as a national model for community/campus partnerships for health. Initially, outreach and partnership efforts will focus on prevention of childhood obesity, worksite wellness, and senior wellness. These programs will

provide students numerous opportunities to engage in service-learning, internships, and outcomes-based research.

Health and Wellness Promotion at UNCA has the potential to be a dynamic force in undergraduate education, greatly affecting the lives of Western North Carolina students and residents. The chairs of Health Promotion Departments at East Carolina and Appalachian State Universities say that student demand is strong and growing and that the market for health promotion graduates far exceeds the supply. Referring to health promotion as a discovery degree, Dr. David White at ECU says some students will enter UNCA undecided and later declare a major in health promotion after discovering the nature of the program. Since health and wellness courses are required for all students, the opportunity for discovery clearly exists.

If approved, we propose to have the Health and Wellness Promotion degree program in place and accepting students as early as January, 2005.