

University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Request to Plan a Doctoral Program in Health Services Research

Introduction

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte requests approval to plan a doctoral program in Health Services Research (CIP: 51.2201).

Program Description

Ph.D. program in Health Services Research (HSR) at UNC Charlotte. Considerable strengths in the newly transformed College – through the combined efforts of three academic units and four departments – are available to support the development of a strong interdepartmental Ph.D. program in Health Services Research. Faculty members in the School of Nursing, the Department of Health Behavior and Administration, and the Department of Social Work who are engaged in health services research will serve as doctoral program faculty. The proposed program follows directly from the College's strategic plan submitted to Interim Provost Walcott on October 2, 2002. It connects with existing programs at the institution and in the community, and is consistent with national priorities in health. Designed to meet the rising need for competent health service researchers, the program is thematically guided by its focus on outcomes research. The focus of the proposed Ph.D. program in Health Services Research is the development and dissemination of new knowledge to improve the practice and delivery of health and human services through outcomes research on the effectiveness, quality, and organization of health care delivery systems.

Health Services Research is the field of scientific investigation that studies how finance systems, health technologies, organizational structures and processes, personal behaviors, and social factors affect access to health care, the quality and cost of health care, and ultimately societal health and well-being. Its research domains are individuals, families, organizations, institutions, communities, and populations (Mirvis, 2000). The field addresses the range of factors that influences the health outcomes experienced by individuals and by populations. Health Services Research is an interdisciplinary field that draws on biostatistics, epidemiology, sociology, social work, health economics, medicine, nursing, engineering, and management. Its national importance is recognized by providers, administrators, employers, insurers, and state and national policymakers who are seeking solutions to concerns about the cost of care, the quality of care, and the health status of all Americans (Mirvis, 2000; National Research Council, 1994; Stryer, Tunis, Hubbard, and Clancy, 2000).

Health Services Research has expanded our understanding of organizational and financial factors that affect access to care; the appropriateness of services as well as their quality and cost; and patient outcomes. It has uncovered under-use, overuse, and misuse of health care practices; and geographic and socioeconomic variation in the accessibility, delivery, and utilization of health care services. Outcomes research has altered the culture of clinical practice and health care research by changing how we assess the end results of health care services.

APPENDIX P

Program Review

The review process for requests to plan is designed to determine if the proposal is developed to the stage appropriate for taking to the Graduate Council and if so what are the issues that may need further attention. Proposals to plan doctoral programs are reviewed internally. The concerns from the reviewers were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

One concern expressed was that only one area, nursing, was involved in direct health care, while many of the Health Services Research programs are associated with medical schools or medical centers that would have multiple health care programs. This was related to a concern about developing a critical mass of health services research at UNCC. Obviously, by involving collaborative arrangements with Carolinas Medical Center and Presbyterian Health Care/Novant you are attempting to address this. It is an area that likely will need continuing attention as the proposal is developed.

One reviewer was of the opinion that UNC CH's program is interdisciplinary and that the contrast between the two on this dimension may not be as great as stated in the proposal. If this reviewer is right, then the issue of non-duplication may be met not so much by establishing uniqueness as by showing that a second program in North Carolina can be justified. In any case, this is another area that may require additional attention.

This reviewer also wanted more information about the prospects for faculty positions in this field and perhaps a more detailed account of where the graduates could expect to go.

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to plan the program, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. In addition to the issues raised previously, the following concerns were expressed by Council members: The issue of doing this research apart from a teaching hospital setting was raised as was the issue touched on by the reviewers of the importance of being associated with direct medical services units.

Response

The representative pointed out that the most important data is to be found in very large data sets from a variety of sources that are available in the public domain. While the research is not directly dependent on being associated with direct health care, the program has worked our relationships with the major hospitals in the Charlotte area. UNCC has been tracking applications to Public Health Programs nationally and showed that less than 30% of those seek admission found slots.

Need for the Program

This is a relative new field but with a number of other programs already in existence. As health care move more and more evidence-based practice, large scale analysis of data will become more and more important so positions will be opening both in health care, governmental agencies, health administration agencies, and universities.

APPENDIX P

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

After consideration of the issues raised by previous reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for UNCC to plan a doctoral program in Health Services Research.

Issues to Address in Planning

It will be helpful to provide amplification of the relationships with various hospitals and health care entities and how they will interact with the degree program. Some more targeted discussion of student demand and potential employment for the specific area of the degree program will help as well.

Recommendation

The Office of the President recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to plan a doctoral program in Health Services Research.

Approved to be Recommended for Planning to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs

Senior Vice President Gretchen M. Bataille

May 3, 2004