

## **Request to Establish a Doctoral Program in Physical Therapy at Western Carolina University**

### **Introduction**

Following a recommendation from the Graduate Council and from the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs approved the request from Western Carolina University on November 12, 2009 to plan a doctoral program in the Physical Therapy (DPT). Western Carolina University now seeks approval to establish a doctoral program in Physical Therapy (CIP: 51.2308).

### **Special Note**

WCU currently has a Master's in Physical Therapy degree program. That is the current entry level for practicing physical therapy in the U.S. The profession is poised to make the doctorate in physical therapy the entry level degree for the profession. In 2000 the House of Delegates of the American Physical Therapy Association approved a vision statement that included the following: "By 2020, physical therapy will be provided by physical therapists who are doctors of physical therapy...." With unprecedented speed, universities across the country have been moving their programs to the doctoral level, so that now only a handful of the more than 200 programs in the country remain at the master's level. The accrediting entity for physical therapy is now planning to make doctoral level preparation an accreditation requirement for entry into the profession.

This means WCU's master's of physical therapy cannot continue as currently constituted. It will have to be elevated to the doctoral level or it will have to be discontinued.

UNC has doctoral programs in physical therapy at ECU and UNCCH, and master's programs at WCU and WSSU.

### **Program Description**

The proposed DPT program at WCU will be 33 months long with a total of 104 credit hours and 34 weeks of fulltime clinical education. All of the courses for the DPT degree will require that students have been accepted into the program. As currently conceptualized, all of the courses will be taught by core faculty in the Department of Physical Therapy at WCU or clinical specialists employed part-time to teach special topics. This is typical of accredited entry-level physical therapy programs and is true for the current MPT program. The curriculum will be fulltime, lockstep with a cohort of students starting each August and progressing together towards graduation. This is in accordance with trends in physical therapy education and revised evaluative criteria by CAPTE, the accrediting body.

The proposed DPT program will emphasize content that will best prepare graduates for autonomous practice in a primary care model. This will occur with both the addition of new courses and enhancement of existing courses. Areas of increased emphasis will include knowledge and clinical skills for differential diagnosis and prognosis in relation to a variety of conditions. Students will receive more in-depth education on medical screening, the interpretation of radiographic imaging and the effects of pharmacologic agents. In accordance with the increased national focus on wellness, students will have additional content on health promotion and illness prevention. They will receive the information and develop skills to analyze human movement using modern technology and they will also have additional content on a variety of professional issues. More emphasis will be given throughout the curriculum on

evidence-based practice and research methodology, providing graduates with additional skills to critically appraise scientific literature and conduct clinical research to enhance the evidence supporting physical therapy interventions.

After having completed all requirements of the curriculum, including successful performance in didactic and clinical portions, graduates will be able to:

1. Practice autonomously as competent and ethical physical therapist clinician generalist;
2. Communicate effectively with multiple audiences using appropriate strategies and technologies;
3. Respect individual and cultural differences;
4. Demonstrate professional behaviors during interactions with others;
5. Make sound professional judgments consistent with the best available evidence and moderated by patient circumstances and preferences;
6. Employ effective educational strategies and technologies when teaching audiences with varied needs;
7. Accept responsibility for continual critical assessment of one's practice, personal growth, and professional development;
8. Address the physical therapy related health and wellness needs of individuals, groups, and communities;
9. Collaborate in the management and administration of systems for patient care and community health;
10. Manage resources to achieve goals of the practice setting and facilitate cost-effective health care;
11. Advocate for the health and welfare of clients, the profession, and the public.

### **UNC Tomorrow Relevance**

This request fits with the recommendation in 4.5.2 that UNC should educate more health professionals to meet the health needs in North Carolina. Physical Therapy is an area that will experience more demand for services particularly as the population ages. Nationally the US Labor department expects employment of physical therapist to grow by 27% between 2006 and 2016. In the state WCU has played an important role in providing physical therapist for the state, especially the western area of the state. With the current level of production, physical therapy has the most vacancies of any allied health area and the second highest percentage of vacancies in North Carolina. To discontinue a program would reduce the pool to meet the established need in NC.

### **Program Review**

The review process is designed to surface strengths and weaknesses in proposed new degree programs. Proposals to establish new doctoral programs are reviewed internally and externally. The concerns from the two review processes were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

*The reviewer comments that the proposed curriculum is of good quality and consistent with the professional norms of the discipline. On the core issue of students available for the program and opportunities available for graduates, the reviewer confirms that there is more than an adequate supply of each.*

*An issue is raised about whether any adjustment needs to be made to the recruiting plan if the program moves to the doctoral level. Part of the rationale for the program is services to the region, so it will be important to continue to recruit cohorts of students who see returning to or serving the region as their goal.*

*The reviewer raised the issue of electives in the program and assessed prior advice the program received not to emphasize electives. The point is that, apparently, there are a number of views on this in the profession and the curriculum for WCU needs to reflect its understanding of its mission.*

*The reviewer has a number of issues related to faculty. The reviewer states that the faculty is probably above average for a program in this discipline, but also comments that the faculty needs to be expanded and that, while there is some excellent scholarship among the faculty, scholarship needs to be expanded in the program. The proposal indicates it is part of their planning to expand the faculty. It might be helpful to have a reiteration of administrative support of the program's plan.*

*The reviewer judges that the proposal presents a sound rationale for preserving this program in western North Carolina and concludes with a summary of strengths and weaknesses for the proposed program with the strengths far outweighing the weaknesses.*

### **Graduate Council**

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to plan the program, a copy of the outside review of 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:

Whether the commitment for additional faculty has been confirmed by the administration; whether the graduate schools was organized to support additional doctoral level work, whether there would be a track for current MPT students to have an opportunity to get a doctorate in physical therapy, and the accreditation status of the proposed doctorate with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges.

### **Response**

The representatives of the campus provide a thorough overview of the proposed doctoral program and addressed all the issues addressed by the reviewer or the Graduate Council. Regarding the elective, the program indicated it wished to begin with a solid basic preparation for the profession. While some specialization opportunities would be built into the program, they expect the graduates to pursue specialization post-degree. The campus is solidly committed to this program and additional positions will be added in parallel with the growth of the program. The program does not intend to offer a transitional doctoral program at the current time, but it was pointed out that UNC-CH has such a program and previous MPT graduates from WCU have taken advantage of it. The campus has completed the reporting to the Commission on Colleges and is waiting to document UNC approval of the program to complete the process for including this program under its general accreditation. Specialized accreditation will remain in effect since masters and doctoral programs are currently accredited on the same standards.

### **Recommendation by the Graduate Council**

After consideration of the issues raised by reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for Western Carolina University to establish a doctoral program in Physical Therapy.

### **Need for the Program**

While a case can be made for the growing need for physical therapist, the case here is that in order to keep this program WCU must move to the doctoral level. The US Labor Department indicates that the field will grow “much faster than the average for all occupations.” WCU is currently operating a program that meets the accreditation standards in the field, and this action is needed in order to continue the operation of the program.

### **Resources**

Since the program has been in existence for many years at the master’s level and since the need to transform to the doctoral level has been known for several years there has been a gradual transformation of the program toward the doctoral level. Library and equipment needs are adequate and WCU will complete its new Health and Gerontology building in the fall of 2011 which was designed to accommodate the increased enrollment and curricular demands of the proposed DPT program. Western has collaborative relationships with a wide range of health care facilities in the region so clinical experiences for doctoral students can build on what is currently available. They will expect to add two to three more faculty members over time as the doctoral program ramps up.

Since the doctoral program will replace the master’s program all the resources currently committed to the master’s program can be shifted to the proposed doctoral program. The addition of one year to the program and the move to doctoral status will increase state funding for the program.

State funding is based on the change of enrollment by discipline, by level (undergraduate, masters, doctoral) and by resident status. By moving to the doctoral level a year will be added to the program and for courses at the doctoral level the funding will be based on doctoral level funding rather than masters level funding. Based on a projected annual enrollment of 96 (32 in each of three classes) students when the program is fully ramped up, this proposed program would generate an estimated \$800,000 in new state support for the change in enrollment tied to the additional 32 students in the program when fully ramped up. This is above the current level of state support for the masters program. This is calculated at the largest enrollment the program expects to achieve and based on all the course work being at the doctoral level. If enrollment does not reach that level or students continue to take some master’s level courses then the state funding generated would be lower.

### **Recommendation**

The staff of the General Administration recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from Western Carolina University to establish a doctoral program in Physical Therapy subject to the availability of funding.

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

  
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Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

March 29, 2010

## **General Information Template for Academic Program Review**

### ***Degree Area and Level:***

D.P.T in Physical Therapy (CIP 51.2308) at Western Carolina University and Winston-Salem State University

### ***Addressing UNC Tomorrow:***

A D.P.T in Physical Therapy directly applies to UNC Tomorrow Recommendation 4.5.2 that states, “UNC should educate more health professionals.”

### ***Role of Program in Relation to State and Regional Needs:***

In the Report of the Technical Panel on the Physical Therapy workforce titled, *Maintaining Balance: The Physical Therapy Workforce in North Carolina in the Year 2000*, the panel “concludes that supply and requirements in the physical therapy professions are in approximate balance at this time and recommends the following courses of action to educational institutions in North Carolina preparing physical therapy personnel:

- Maintain the status quo with respect to the number of programs and the number of enrollments in physical therapy and physical therapist assistants in North Carolina’s PT and PTA programs. Follow the APTA suggested moratorium on any new programs through 2003.
- Address the issue of under-representation of minorities in physical therapist and physical therapist assistant programs in North Carolina.
- Educational policy makers should avoid downsizing or closing programs in response to a single year’s decline in the applicant pool or graduates’ employment opportunities. Doing so might waste resources if demand resurfaces while the capacity to produce new personnel is eroded. Hence, the panel recommends that those few programs experiencing declining enrollments should receive continued support for a minimum of 3 to 5 years as local, state and national trends can be observed and interpreted.

According to 2004 data produced by The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, there were 3,594 licensed, active, in-state physical therapists in North Carolina. The workforce is 74% female and 26% male. In 2004, there were 4.2 physical therapists per 10,000 population in North Carolina. There were 4.8 per 10,000 population in metropolitan areas and 2.9 per 10,000 population in non-metropolitan areas. Nationally, there were 5.9 physical therapists per 10,000 population.

### ***US Labor Department Analysis:***

- *Summary* – Employment of physical therapists is expected to grow 27 percent from 2006 to 2016, much faster than the average for all occupations. The impact of proposed Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the short-term job outlook for physical therapists. However, the long-run demand for physical therapists should continue to rise as new treatments and techniques expand the scope of physical therapy practices. Moreover, demand will be spurred by the increasing numbers of individuals with disabilities or limited function.

**Availability of Program Statewide (Enrollment and Degrees Awarded in Last 3 Years):**

- *Public universities*

Enrollment			Academic Year						
			Fall 05	Spr 06	Fall 06	Spr 07	Fall 07	Spr 08	Fall 08
ECU	Physical Therapy/Therapist	DPT	32	32	63	63	83	87	90
UNC-CH	Physical Therapy/Therapist	DPT	40	37	41	40	82	79	109

Number of Degrees Awarded			Academic Year		
			2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
ECU	Physical Therapy/Therapist	DPT	9	9	26
UNC-CH	Physical Therapy/Therapist	DPT	6	34	20

- *Private universities – Source: Occupational Supply Demand System and the College Navigator for the National Center for Educational Statistics*

Number of Degrees Awarded			Academic Year		
			2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Duke	Physical Therapy/Therapist	D	32	38	42
Elon	Physical Therapy/Therapist	D	52	37	33

**Available in Online or Distance Format from UNC institutions:**

Not available.

**Available or not from Academic Common Market:**

Not available.

**WCU and WSSU Campus enrollment and degrees awarded in similar programs at the Doctoral level:**

(Based on two CIP digits – 51 CIP is the summary group for Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences under which Physical Therapy is listed as a program)

Neither campus offers Doctoral level programs in the 51 CIP categories.

**Campus Average of enrollment and degrees awarded in this degree area at the Doctoral level:**

(Based on two CIP digits – 51 CIP is the summary group for Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences under which Physical Therapy is listed as a program - over the last 3 Academic Years, Fall 2005-Fall 2008)

Campus Average			
	Number of Active Programs	Enrollment per Semester	Degrees Awarded per Year
ECU	6	21	4
NCSU	1	42	9
UNC-C	1	13	N/A
UNC-CH	11	38	8
UNC-G	3	14	1
Campus Average		26	6

***WCU Campus Degree Programs added in the past three years:***

- *Bachelor*
  - BS Entrepreneurship (09/07/2007)
- *Master*
  - N/A
- *Doctoral*
  - N/A

***WCU Degree Programs discontinued in past three years:***

- *Bachelor*
  - BSEd French, Secondary Education (03/20/2009)
  - BSEd German, Secondary Education (03/20/2009)
  - BS Electronics Engineering Technology (03/20/2009)
  - BS Telecommunications Engineering Technology (03/20/2009)
  - BS Industrial Distribution (03/20/2009)
  - BS Engineering Technologies Manufacturing (03/20/2009)
  - BS Industrial Chemistry (03/20/2009)
  - BS Social Sciences (03/20/2009)
  - BS International Business (03/20/2009)
  - BA in Social Sciences (03/20/2009)
- *Masters*
  - MAEd English, 2-Yr College Teaching (03/20/2009)
  - MAEd Mathematics, 2-Yr College Teaching (03/20/2009)
  - MAEd Physical Education, 2-Yr College Teaching (03/20/2009)
  - MAEd Biology, 2-Yr College Teaching (03/20/2009)
- *Doctoral*
  - N/A

***WSSU Campus Degree Programs added in the past three years:***

- *Bachelor*
  - BA African and African-American Studies (10/13/2006)
  - BS Motorsport Management (05/11/2007)
  - BS Health Care Management (01/11/2008)
  - BS Management (01/12/2007)
  - BS Finance (01/12/2007)
  - BS Marketing (01/12/2007)
- *Master*
  - MHA Healthcare Administration (09/07/2007)
  - MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) (08/11/2006)
- *Doctoral*
  - N/A

***WSSU Degree Programs discontinued in past three years:***

- *Bachelor*
  - BA Art Education (03/20/2009)
  - BA Social Studies Education (03/20/2009)
  - BA Spanish Teacher Education (03/20/2009)
  - BS Molecular Biology (03/20/2009)
  - BSOT Occupational Therapy (10/12/2007)
- *Masters*
  - N/A
- *Doctoral*
  - N/A