

Request to Plan a Doctor of Nursing Practice Program at East Carolina University

Introduction

East Carolina University requests approval to plan a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program (CIP 51.3818).

Program Description

The College of Nursing at ECU proposes to provide the DNP initially as an online post-master's program of study for advanced practice nurses. In view of the national trend for preparation of advanced practice nurses at the doctoral level, the faculty anticipates a large demand for such a program from nurses who have already earned the master's degree and nurse practitioner certification, but who wish to earn the doctoral degree. Entry into the post-master's DNP will require a master's degree in nursing with a focus on an advanced practice role. At the second year after establishment the College will begin moving students currently in the traditional MSN program for Family Nurse Practitioners (FNP) and Adult Nurse Practitioners (ANP) into the post-masters curriculum as soon as they graduate with the master's degree. In addition, it will accept its first cohort into the baccalaureate-to-DNP program. Thus the program will transition from a traditional master's to a baccalaureate-to-DNP program. The post-masters DNP will remain an option, but will have limited enrollment (approximately 20/year) unless additional resources are available.

The entry level degree for the baccalaureate-to-DNP program will be a bachelor of science in nursing. Although initially the program will be focused on FNP and ANP preparation, as other clinical specialties mandate this entry level, the traditional masters program in those concentrations will be phased out as well and the baccalaureate-to-DNP program will enlarge. There will still be students in the concentrations of nursing leadership and nursing education who will need the MSN degree and the master's program will continue to be offered for these specialty areas. Currently there are 140 students in the nursing education concentration and 83 in the nursing leadership option.

The proposed online post-master's DNP degree will be a 34-semester-hour program that builds upon the current College of Nursing master's level curriculum. The DNP curriculum includes advanced study in scientific underpinnings for practice, health care finance, policy, and leadership, as well as patient safety and risk management. The DNP program provides enhanced knowledge to improve nursing practice and patient outcomes as well as enhanced leadership skills to strengthen practice and health care delivery. A scholarly practice project serves as a cumulative outcome measure of the student's overall competence and achievement of the educational objectives. The student will gain greater depth of knowledge regarding policy issues, interdisciplinary models of health care delivery, techniques and models for influencing the health care system, particular problems of rural health populations, clinical scholarship to improve quality and safety, and translational research.

The proposed DNP degree will address the following objectives in delivery of health care to the people of eastern North Carolina:

- Improve patient outcomes through enhanced knowledge of nursing research and practice.
- Strengthen nursing practice and health care delivery through enhanced leadership skills.
- Link research and practice through the process of translating research from “bench to bedside.”
- Improve the health of citizens through the preparation of practitioners who deliver primary care in rural areas of the state.
- Enhance clinical nursing practice and improve patient outcomes through innovation in the clinical arena.

The proposed educational objectives for the DNP degree are to graduate a student who will:

- Assume leadership roles to advance clinical practice and health care delivery.
- Influence policy, care delivery, and systems for current and future health care needs.
- Translate scientific, theoretical, and ethical principles into health care for individuals, families, and populations.
- Implement new technologies and evidence-based practices to optimize health care outcomes, reduce risks, and promote patient safety.
- Develop partnerships with key stakeholders to address the unique health care needs of various groups.

Relevance to Institutional Mission and Strategic Plan

One of the greatest needs of North Carolina is to improve the health and wellness of its citizens, and this is one of the major strategic goals of East Carolina University. Improving health is a particularly important concern in eastern North Carolina where infant mortality and morbidity and mortality from virtually all major diseases are particularly high (NC State Center for Health Statistics, 2010). The DNP degree will directly lead to improved health in the people of North Carolina by preparing practitioners to deliver primary care in rural areas of the state to a culturally diverse population. The degree will equip them to address the primary health concerns within the eastern part of the state, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity, and mother/baby wellness.

Projected Enrollments

Estimated number of students in the program during the first year of operation:

Full-time	6	Part-time	14
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Estimated number of students in the program when it is fully operational:

Full-time	51	Part-time	119
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Graduate Council

The Council heard a presentation introducing the five proposals to plan the six Doctor of Nursing Practice programs under consideration. This presentation addressed the background of the DNP degree, reasons for its currently being offered in 37 states, an overview of the curriculum, student demand for the program in North Carolina, opportunities for employment of DNP graduates in North Carolina, and the relationship of the DNP program to the Master of Science in Nursing degree program.

Graduate Council members asked numerous questions, which were answered by the Deans and faculty members of the six Schools of Nursing in attendance. Questions addressed issues of the evolving relationship of the DNP degree and the MSN degree; which faculty members in what departments may be qualified to teach in the DNP programs; the effect of the DNP on the enrollment in Ph.D. in Nursing programs; student demand for the program in North Carolina; opportunities for employment of DNP graduates in North Carolina; the new role of DNPs in hospitals and other healthcare facilities; the budget implications of initiating these DNP programs; how these six campuses planned to implement, support, and sustain the DNP programs should enrollment growth funding not be available; and other areas. All questions were answered to the satisfaction of the Council members.

East Carolina University made a presentation on the specific details of its proposed DNP program, and answered questions about its program to the satisfaction of Council members.

After discussion, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval of East Carolina University's Request to Plan the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree program.

Collaboration with Other Universities

The College of Nursing at ECU has discussed with UNC Wilmington, Fayetteville State University, and UNC Pembroke various possibilities for developing collaborative relationships. UNCW and ECU have signed a Memorandum of Understanding concerning their intent to work together. UNC Pembroke and the College of Nursing have made definite arrangements to collaborate and a letter describing these arrangements was submitted with the ECU application. One example is the desire to facilitate admission of 10% of ECU's seats in either the post-masters DNP or the BSN-to-DNP program for UNCP students and faculty members. Discussion between ECU and FSU on possible areas of collaboration are continuing.

Resource Implications

The ECU program planners recognize that enrollment increase funds will likely not be available. Because of the high priority of this program, ECU is willing to commit existing resources to its implementation. ECU has recently hired an associate dean for Graduate Programs who has directed a DNP program in her previous position and can assume that role for ECU College of Nursing as well. This reduces the need for additional faculty. One faculty member with the College of Nursing recently resigned and this position will be filled with a nurse practitioner prepared at the DNP level. In addition, two new faculty positions have been committed to the program by the Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences. A tuition differential request will also be considered, if needed. Finally, ECU has revised the

enrollment projections downward and changed its plans to move directly to the BSN-to-DNP program in order to be sure that the campus can accommodate the students without additional resources should enrollment growth dollars not be available.

Should the request to plan be approved, additional detailed budget information on the DNP program will be submitted with the Request to Establish document.

Recommendation

The staff of the General Administration recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from East Carolina University to plan a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree program.

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



Suzann T. Ortega
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

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