

**Request for Authorization to Establish a  
Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health Sciences program at  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

University of North Carolina at Charlotte requests authorization to establish a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health Sciences degree program (CIP 51.2207).

**Program Description**

The interdisciplinary field of public health engages scientists, practitioners, and community partners from a broad spectrum of disciplines and organizations to improve the populations' health. As one of five core areas in public health, the behavioral sciences are focused towards understanding and influencing the social determinants that affect health behavior, prevention, and management of disease and disability within populations, societies and communities. The Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences at UNC Charlotte is designed as an umbrella degree in public health that will initially have a single concentration focused on the core public health area of behavioral sciences. The program will train researchers and professionals with skills essential to address contemporary public health problems at the individual, community and population levels. The 63-credit post-master's program consists of 24 credit hours of core public health courses including methods and professional seminars; 12 credit hours in the behavioral science concentration; 9 credit hours of specialty content based on student interest (e.g. gerontology, women's health, etc.); and 18 credit hours of dissertation research. Professional seminars will provide students with required skills in teaching, writing and research and prepare them for either academic or research careers. The program is designed to fully align with Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accreditation standards.

**Mission Relevance**

The Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences aligns with UNC Charlotte's mission as an urban research university and its particular commitment to address cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health and social needs of the greater Charlotte region. The program also directly addresses Goal 1.1 of the UNC Charlotte Institutional Plan (2011-2016), to develop and prioritize new academic programs with demonstrable need and financial feasibility. The Institutional Plan specifically calls for continued investment in public health education toward the future goal of developing an accredited School of Public Health.

**Student Demand**

Both national and local evidence support the demand for the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences. According to the Association of Schools of Public Health (2010), enrollment in schools of public health have increased 59% in a ten-year period; more than 6,200 students applied to a school of public health doctoral program in 2009. A support letter from UNC Chapel Hill confirms that they receive significantly more doctoral applications from qualified students than the institution is able to admit. UNC Charlotte reports applications to their existing degree programs in public health have doubled since achieving CEPH accreditation in 2009. Among UNC Charlotte public health master's graduates (70 as of Summer 2012), 16% have gone on to health-related doctoral degree programs, one third of those specific to community health and/or behavioral sciences.

In Fall 2012, UNC Charlotte conducted a broad interest survey to determine demand for the program. The survey was sent to current graduate students in public health, nursing, social work, kinesiology, geography, gerontology, communications studies, economics and health services research, as well as current baccalaureate students in public health and alumni from all UNC Charlotte public health

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programs. It is notable that 81% of respondents enrolled in a doctoral program would have considered applying for a Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences at UNC Charlotte if it had been available.

### **Societal Demand and Opportunities for Program Graduates**

The Association of Schools of Public Health (2008) estimates that by 2020 the United States will face a shortage of 250,000 public health workers. Factors contributing to this shortfall include retirement of baby boomer workers, increasing needs of a growing elderly and diverse population, and lack of capacity among current public health education providers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) also indicates that health educators are expected to grow by 37% between 2010 and 2020, much higher than the average for all occupations (14%). Both UNC Charlotte and UNC Chapel Hill report strong track records in placement of Ph.D. public health graduates in post-doctoral fellowships, tenure-track faculty appointments, or as senior scientists in government agencies or contract houses. Of UNC Charlotte's 17 graduates to date from the existing Health Services Research Ph.D. program, thirteen have academic positions or fellowships, one is employed with Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and another is Executive Director of a non-profit organization.

### **Resource Implications**

Additional resources are required to launch the program and will be achieved through a combination of reallocation of present institutional resources, differential tuition, projected campus initiated tuition increases, and external research funding. A differential tuition amount of \$1,800 per academic year per student is requested, which aligns with tuition rates of other similar programs offered in the Southeast while remaining price competitive.

Personnel – UNC Charlotte estimates two new faculty are needed to launch the program; one will serve as Program Director. Both hires will be accomplished through reallocation of present institutional resources. The Program Director search has already been completed, and the new hire will begin Fall 2013. Internal reallocations are also planned to meet the need for a 0.5FTE administrative assistant.

Graduate stipends in Year 1 will be provided through internal reallocations by Academic Affairs. In later years, graduate stipends will be provided from Academic Affairs and other sources, including external research funding, scholarships and teaching assistantships. The program has also received commitment from the Office of the Provost to receive funds from projected campus based tuition increases to be used towards graduate stipends. Should projected funding from campus based tuition increases be unavailable, the Office of the Provost has committed to provide the necessary support through additional internal reallocations.

Library, Facilities, and Technology – Library holdings in Year 4 will be added through internal reallocations and differential tuition. Existing facilities are adequate for the launch of the program.

Other projected expenses include faculty development and travel, supplies, communications, marketing and advertising. Differential tuition will be applied towards these expenses, as well as some reallocation of present institutional resources.

### **Collaborative Opportunities**

Quantitative methods courses currently taught in the existing Ph.D. in Health Services Research (HSR) at UNC Charlotte will form the core quantitative methods courses for the proposed Public Health Sciences program as well. Six existing courses will be cross-listed between the two programs, and other HSR courses will be available as electives for students in the proposed program. Outside of UNC Charlotte,

two other public university programs exist with related themes: the Dr.PH. in Community Health Education at UNC Greensboro, and the Ph.D. in Health Behavior and Health Education at UNC Chapel Hill. Under terms of existing inter-institutional agreements, UNC Charlotte students could enroll in courses from UNC Greensboro and UNC Chapel Hill upon interest and consent of the advisor and Ph.D. program director. UNC Charlotte and UNC Greensboro are in closest proximity and have identified existing courses on each campus with additional student capacity that may be of interest across programs.

### **Outcome of Consultation with Disciplinary Experts**

In February 2012, the program was presented to the UNC Graduate Council. The Council voted, with one abstention, to approve the program pending consideration of and satisfactory response to questions raised by the Council, including:

- need and demand for a PhD in public health oriented towards research and scholarship (versus practice);
- clarity of degree name and its appropriateness relative to the employment opportunities;
- contribution of proposed degree to UNC Charlotte's plans to develop an accredited school of public health; and,
- status of UNC Charlotte's plans to develop a school of public health and the priority of this program without a school of public health.

UNC Charlotte's response referred to CEPH data on the significant growth in programs and schools of public health since 1990 and the need to educate increasingly large numbers of baccalaureate and master's level students in public health. In order to provide this education to increasing numbers, additional doctorally-trained individuals are required. UNC Charlotte noted that the transcript will indicate the major field of study, Public Health Sciences, and the concentration area, Behavioral Sciences, which is consistent with program titles and transcript notations at other institutions with similar degrees. UNC Charlotte confirmed that the proposal for the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences stands on its own as a priority, although it supports the interest of the campus to develop a School of Public Health. The UNC Charlotte Institutional Plan (2011-2016) calls for continued investment in public health education towards developing a School of Public Health. The institution would need to add master's degrees in four other core areas of public health and doctoral degrees in at least two other core areas to meet CEPH accreditation criteria.

The Request to Establish was reviewed by five independent external reviewers. External reviewers favored approval of the program, with several reviewers commenting on the excellence of the proposal and planned curriculum. A common theme was the "moderate" research experience and funding levels of several current faculty and the importance of ensuring that new faculty hires have strong records of research and external funding. Several commented specifically on the importance of the planned Program Director hire. UNC Charlotte has hired a Program Director to begin Fall 2013 who brings broad, interdisciplinary training and experience, a successful research agenda, and experience mentoring doctoral students who have gone on to successful tenure-track academic and research positions. The Department of Public Health Sciences has also added a new faculty member with expertise in epidemiology and biostatistics who will start Fall 2013 and will also contribute to the proposed program.

**Recommendation.** It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve University of North Carolina at Charlotte's request to establish a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health Sciences degree program (CIP 51.2207) effective August 2014.