

The Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree: Introduction to the Proposals from UNC Campuses

East Carolina University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, Western Carolina University, and Winston-Salem State University are requesting authorization to plan the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree program. (Five proposals have been submitted, as UNCC and WCU are planning to offer their programs as a consortium and have submitted one combined proposal.) The DNP degree is currently not offered by any UNC institution.

The purpose of this summary introduction, collaboratively developed by the Deans of Nursing from the six institutions above, is to provide common background information and consolidated data in support of the six institutions' requests for authorization to plan DNP degree programs.

Background

In October 2004, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) approved a target date of 2015 for increasing the educational preparation for entry into advanced nursing practice from two to three years; concomitantly the association recommended that the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) replace the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) as the terminal degree for preparation of the following advanced practice registered nurses:

- nurse practitioners (NP)
- clinical nurse specialists (CNS)
- certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA)
- certified nurse midwives (CNM).

Parallel with other health care professions (pharmacy, physical therapy, psychology, medicine, and audiology) the nursing discipline is adopting a practice-focused doctorate as the appropriate graduate education for advanced practice in a highly complex, fast-paced, health care environment. The National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) and multiple specialty certifying bodies have endorsed this shift from the master's to the clinical doctorate (DNP). In fact, beginning in 2025, CRNA nurse anesthetists will be required to have the DNP degree to meet eligibility requirements for taking their national certification examination. The DNP program prepares nurses for direct clinical practice (specifically NPs, CNSs, CRNAs, or CNMs) and for executive roles in areas that support clinical practice such as administration, organizational leadership, and health policy.

Nationally, the DNP degree has taken hold at an extremely fast pace. In 2002, there were 70 students enrolled in DNP programs nationally; in 2011 there were 8,973 students. In 2011, 1,581 nurses earned their DNP.

At this time, DNP programs are already available in 37 states plus the District of Columbia. Currently 182 DNP programs are enrolling students at schools of nursing nationwide, with an additional 131 DNP programs in the planning stages. All states contiguous to North Carolina have institutions which offer the DNP degree. (Of concern is the fact that practicing nurses who leave North Carolina to study are vulnerable to being recruited in their new state.) There are two private universities already offering DNP programs in North Carolina (Duke and Gardner Webb).

The Doctor of Nursing Practice Curriculum

The education provided by the DNP program of study builds on traditional advanced practice programs by providing additional content in key areas, including scientific foundations for advanced practice, quality improvement, population health, systems leadership, health policy, and health economics. The program involves coursework, clinical internships, and a capstone project. The DNP curriculum prepares nurses for higher-level clinical practice (specifically NPs, CNSs, CRNAs, or CNMs) and for executive roles in areas that support clinical practice such as administration, organizational leadership, and health policy. A key feature is that DNP graduates are prepared to assume additional responsibilities in important areas such as patient care, health administration, and health care policy, allowing physicians to focus on responsibilities that only physicians can perform.

The curriculum requirements for the DNP are driven by *The AACN Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice*. Students entering into DNP study with a baccalaureate degree in nursing will require three years of full time study to achieve DNP end-of-program objectives; those entering with a master's degree will require 12 to 18 months of full time study (variability would be based on length of time needed to complete a capstone project in the different specialty areas, prior coursework at the master's level, and clinical readiness).

Because the DNP is replacing the MSN as the educational entry level for advanced practice nurses, this change effectively adds one year of study to the preparation of advanced practice nurses.

Student Demand for the DNP Degree Program in North Carolina

In Spring semester of 2012, using the same measure across all six applicant campuses, the level of program demand was determined by asking currently enrolled baccalaureate and masters students in each institution about their level of interest in doctoral education. Across all six institutions there are currently 2,449 baccalaureate students enrolled. Of these 849 (35%) responded to an online survey that assessed interest in pursuit of doctoral education. Of those 849 responding, 477 (56%) indicated interest in a DNP with more than half hoping to enroll in 2013.

Likewise, data were gathered on currently enrolled Masters students. Across all six programs there are currently 1,553 masters students enrolled, and of these 670 (43%) responded to an online survey that assessed interest in pursuit of doctoral education. Of those 670 responding, 385 (56%) indicated interest in a post-masters DNP with almost 40% hoping to enroll in 2013.

In addition, 4,190 nursing alumni from UNC-Chapel Hill and 2733 from East Carolina were sent an online survey in February 2012 to assess level of interest in pursuing the DNP. There was a 20% response rate (N = 857) from UNC-CH alums and a 25% response rate (N = 675) from ECU alums. Of the 857 UNC-CH respondents, 271 (32%) indicated interest in the DNP. Of the 675 ECU respondents, 345 (51%) indicated interest in the DNP. Across both programs 45% of those interested in DNP studies hoped to begin their studies within the next two years. Western Carolina University also surveyed alumni and 13 of the 23 (68%) who completed the survey indicated interest in the DNP. Lastly, UNC Greensboro randomly selected 759 masters prepared

nurses from a NC Board of Nursing mailing list and surveyed them regarding level of interest in the DNP. They had a 24% response rate (N = 179). 100% of respondents affirmed that if UNC-G offered the DNP within the next five years, they would be interested in enrolling.

Thus, there appears to be strong demand among practicing nurses as well as current students for the initiation of Doctor of Nursing Practice degree programs within UNC.

Societal Need for the DNP Degree Program in North Carolina

Since the DNP is replacing the MSN as the terminal degree for advanced practice nurses, the potential applicant pool and job market for DNP prepared nurses are the same as the current (or predicted) applicant pool and job market for MSN prepared advanced practice nurses.

Each of the six institutions seeking to initiate the DNP examined four years of employment data for graduates of their current advanced practice programs. With employment rates ranging from 82 to 100% at six to 12 months after MSN completion, these data provide documentation that there is now a strong job market for advanced practice nurses. The market for advanced practice nurses will only continue to rise due to: 32 million Americans soon to qualify for health care consequent to the Affordable Care Act, increased restrictions placed on the hours medical residents are allowed to work, and the ever-increasing nursing faculty shortage.

Reports from state and national agencies affirm this predicted need for additional advanced practice nurses. According to the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM), the state is likely to experience a shortage of nurse practitioners and other primary care providers in the next 10-20 years. Further, NCIOM Priority Recommendation 8.1 indicates that the North Carolina General Assembly should direct the University of North Carolina System to explore further expansion of nurse practitioner programs (Expanding Access to Health Care in North Carolina: A Report of the NCIOM Health Access Study Group, 2009). Furthermore, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition “all four advanced practice specialties—clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, nurse-midwives, and nurse anesthetists—will be in high demand, particularly in medically underserved areas such as inner cities and rural areas. Relative to physicians, these RNs [Registered Nurses] increasingly serve as lower-cost primary care providers.”

Evolving Relationship of the DNP and the Master of Science in Nursing Degree

The DNP is an advanced practice degree that prepares nurses for higher-level clinical practice (specifically NPs, CNSs, CRNAs, or CNMs) and for executive roles in areas that support clinical practice such as administration, organizational leadership, and health policy. Over time, the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree programs with concentrations in the NP, CNS, CRNA, or CNM disciplines will be discontinued, as the DNP becomes the preferred/required terminal degree in these fields.

It is important to note that while DNP prepared nurses may teach new RNs, the DNP is not required. The emergence of the DNP as preparation for advanced practice does not change the discipline's and North Carolina Board of Nursing's recommendation that the Master's degree is required to teach undergraduate nursing students. UNC campuses that are currently offering the MSN to prepare nursing faculty for associate and baccalaureate education of RNs will continue to offer MSN preparation for nurse educators. In fact, it is conceivable that having to choose between two years of study to become a nurse educator and three years to become an advanced practice nurse may invite applicants to better discern if their true vocation lies in educating new RNs for entry into practice or seeking the rigorous clinical education necessary to serve in an advanced practice role.

Collaboration Among UNC Institutions

East Carolina University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, Western Carolina University, and Winston-Salem State University are requesting authorization to plan the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree program. If approved, UNC-Chapel Hill, Winston - Salem State University, UNC Charlotte, Western Carolina University, and East Carolina University are prepared to enroll their first students in Fall 2013. UNC Greensboro anticipates a Fall 2015 start date.

UNC Charlotte and Western Carolina have submitted a combined intention to plan document as the two institutions plan to offer the DNP degree program as a consortium. By doing so, the total number of additional full-time faculty needed is less than would be required if separate programs were proposed for each campus. In addition, UNC-Chapel Hill and Winston-Salem State University have committed to collaborate in the offering of their programs. For example, these two institutions will begin by sharing at least one course offered simultaneously via videoconferencing with faculty on both campuses sharing joint responsibility for planning and delivering the content of the course. East Carolina University has reached out to faculty and administrators at UNC Pembroke, UNC Wilmington and Fayetteville State University to discuss collaborative opportunities and ways to enhance access to DNP education for their graduates and faculty. As a consequence of these conversations, ECU and UNC Pembroke have agreed to share qualified preceptors, clinical sites, and a facilitated admission process for faculty and/or students from UNCP who desire to pursue the DNP degree. UNC Greensboro, with a later start date of Fall 2015, continues to examine collaboration possibilities.

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

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