

4. UNC Degree Program Proposal Courtney Thornton

Situation: Appalachian State University requests authorization to establish a Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.) degree program (CIP 51.3801).

Background: Per UNC 400.1, UNC General Administration, in consultation with the campuses, brings recommendations to the UNC Board of Governors for new degree programs that meet identified academic program needs.

Assessment: Establishment of the programs is recommended.

Action: This item requires a vote.

**Request for Authorization to Establish a
Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N., CIP 51.3801) at
Appalachian State University**

I. Program Highlights

- 39 credit hours
- Concentration in nursing education
- Thesis or research project requirement
- Guided by *The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing* (AACN)
- Online program delivery with hybrid course in instructional technologies
- 60 full-time students projected at steady state
- Start-up costs include salary and benefits for four faculty and 0.15 FTE of existing SPA support staff time by Year 4, supplies and materials, some travel, and furniture and equipment upgrades for the simulation lab largely in Years 1-2. All funds needed have been identified through internal reallocations.

II. BOG Academic Program Planning Criteria (UNC Policy 400.1)

1. **Existing Programs (Number, Location, Mode of Delivery).** Eight UNC institutions offer MSN degree programs; six of those offer their programs via online or hybrid delivery: ECU, UNC-CH (hybrid), UNCC, UNCG, UNCW and WCU. Four private universities offer MSN programs; two of those offer their programs via online delivery: Duke University and Gardner-Webb University.
2. **Relation to Campus Distinctiveness and Mission.** ASU is a regional university committed to providing educational leadership and service to the state and region. The proposed program extends the mission of ASU to “create healthy, just and sustainable societies” by preparing MSN graduates to educate, inform and lead nursing students and other nursing professionals in improving health in their organizations and communities. The 2010 reorganization of six different health disciplines and departments into the College of Health Sciences has resulted in more effective and efficient achievement of this mission. The proposed program also aligns with elements of ASU’s strategic plan, *The Appalachian Experience: Envisioning a Just and Sustainable Future (2014-2019)*, including creation of transformational educational experiences through challenging academic programs, expanding e-learning opportunities, and increasing access to innovative learning technologies. Other related strategic priorities include applying the resources of the university to promote and improve quality of life for the communities served by ASU.
3. **Demand (Local, regional, state).** The primary audience of the proposed program is baccalaureate-prepared registered nurses whose career objective is to work as a nurse educator in an academic, clinical or staff development position. Similar to ASU’s online RN-BSN program, the majority of applicants are expected to be from northwest North Carolina and east Tennessee. Practicums and clinical experiences will most likely be conducted in communities where the students reside, giving MSN students more exposure to nursing education for rural populations. Seniors in the online RN-BSN program were recently surveyed regarding their interest in graduate education in nursing, with 53% expressing interest in the degree program

being proposed; that percentage alone indicates potential for approximately 50 applicants per year. In both 2011 and 2013, ASU surveyed RNs about likelihood of pursuing the MSN, desired mode of study, and desired concentrations. Of the 296 respondents in 2013, 83% indicated likelihood to pursue the MSN within the next five years; 78% of those responding were from nearby counties of Catawba, Burke, Forsyth, Caldwell, Rowan and McDowell. Ninety-six (96) individuals indicated interest in the nursing education specialization (second highest to nurse practitioner) totaling 40% of all responses received; 105 indicated interest in a mostly online mode of delivery with occasional face-to-face meetings followed by 70 indicating interest in fully online delivery.

- 4. Potential for Unnecessary Duplication.** The majority of applicants are expected to be from northwest North Carolina and east Tennessee. While several other online MSN degree programs exist within the system, prior research conducted at UNC General Administration has shown that online degree-seeking students tend to enroll in institutions close to their residence. ASU's experience with their successful online RN-BSN program confirms this as well. Over 85% of students in their online RN-BSN program are from western NC and very few (10 of 200) are from counties or regions primarily served by other UNC programs.
- 5. Employment Opportunities for Graduates.** The 2013 National Nursing Workforce Survey of Registered Nurses reported that 87% of MSN-RNs were employed in nursing, 47% of those in nursing education. In 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected a 35.4% increase (24,000 positions) in nursing faculty nationally from 2012-2022. Faculty shortages at nursing schools across the country have been well documented by AACN and others. In April 2013, the NC Board of Nursing reported 115 full-time and 125 part-time faculty positions were vacant in North Carolina. The Community Advisory Board for the ASU Department of Nursing expressed considerable interest in the proposed program at their December 2013 meeting with many indicating strong interest in hiring program graduates. Several members of the advisory board, as well as other partners of Department of Nursing, provided letters in support of the proposed program, including High Country Community Health, Appalachian District Health Department, Catawba Valley Community College, Western Piedmont Community College, Appalachian Regional Healthcare System, and Caldwell County Health Department.
- 6. Faculty Quality and Number.** Upon establishment, the proposed program will be immediately served by ten doctoral-prepared faculty with graduate faculty status as well as three full-time clinical faculty. The Department also employs an EPA non-faculty Director of Compliance and Academic Support who assists with clinical placements and regulatory compliance. By Year 4 of the program, ASU estimates that four additional faculty will be needed.
- 7. Availability of Campus Resources (library, space, etc.).** No new library resources, facilities, or information technology infrastructure and services are needed to launch the program. The proposed program budget does include improvements to the simulation laboratory and equipment.
- 8. Relevant Lower-level and Cognate Programs.** Depending upon their interests, students in the proposed program may collaborate across ASU's colleges for the thesis or research project. For example, students may work with faculty in ASU's award-winning Instructional Technology program, the Department of Health and Exercise Science, or the Health Care Management program.

9. **Impact on Access and Affordability.** The program would be a particularly desirable addition for baccalaureate-prepared nurses in northwest North Carolina.
10. **Expected Quality.** The conversion of ASU's RN-BSN degree program to an online format in 2012 has been highly successful and resulted in dramatic increases in enrollment. The institution is positioned to deliver desirable and quality online education in this area.
11. **Feasibility of Collaborative Program.** ASU and UNCW have signed a memorandum of understanding that demonstrates their intent to collaborate in provision of the MSN degree programs. Each university serves a defined rural region of North Carolina, and the partnership specifically targets collaborative opportunities that will provide a "mountains to sea" perspective of rural health delivery in North Carolina. Potential areas of collaboration include, but are not limited to, shared instruction and practicum sites that provide wider exposure to learning environments and regional cultures impacting nursing education.
12. **Other Considerations.** The program will launch with a single nurse educator concentration, but clinical nurse leader or other concentrations may be added in the future to meet anticipated demand in the region.

III. Summary of Review Processes

Campus Review Process and Feedback. The proposed program was reviewed and unanimously approved by faculty and administrative committees at the department, college, ASU Graduate Council and ASU Academic Policy and Programs Committee levels. No substantive issues, concerns or opposition were raised through the campus approval processes that required revision of the proposal prior to its submission.

UNC General Administration Review Process and Feedback. Prior to UNC Graduate Council review, ASU responded to questions from UNC General Administration staff on demand evidence, specialization areas, collaborative opportunities, graduate faculty, and resource needs. The proposal was then reviewed by twenty-three faculty and graduate program administrators from seven UNC campuses. Reviews consistently noted the well-known shortage of nursing faculty across the state and nation but questioned whether this program, as planned with a single concentration, would be fully positioned to meet the full spectrum of advanced practice nursing needs in the ASU region. Reviewers asked for clarification regarding the nurse educator focus, versus advanced practice preparation for registered nurses. ASU clarified their intent to offer the single concentration at first and others later if sufficient demand exists. Reviewers questioned whether ASU would meet projected enrollment targets if the program does not offer a pathway for part-time students. ASU responded with a plan that demonstrates how part-time student cohorts, if sufficient numbers are attracted to the program, could complete the MSN over seven consecutive semesters (instead of five). Reviewers generally acknowledged that the program content is not unique, although this is somewhat a function of accreditation requirements, and will likely compete to some degree with other existing programs. Reviewers also recognized, however, the contribution that the program can make for individuals in the immediate vicinity of ASU. ASU reconfirmed this stating that over 85% of the students in their online RN-BSN program are from western NC and very few (10 of 200) from

counties or regions served by other UNC programs. Some reviewers questioned whether the program could launch immediately without additional faculty support. The budget submitted by ASU shows clearly that four additional faculty will be needed by Year 4 of implementation, with 1.5 FTE new faculty budgeted for Year 1. ASU has committed to reallocate existing positions within the College of Health Sciences or broader university to accommodate the new hires needed for the MSN.

Benefits of program approval include new capacity to meet regional student and employer demand. For these reasons, we do not recommend any alternatives to implementing the degree program. The single nurse educator concentration is a measured approach to launching the program. As already noted, ASU may be well served to explore additional concentrations in the future that address critical advanced practice nursing needs in the region.

IV. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve Appalachian State University's request to establish a Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.) degree program (CIP 51.3801) effective January 2015 for fall 2015 admissions.