

# **University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

## **Request to Establish a Doctoral Program in Special Education**

### **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 on November 8, 2002 the request from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to plan a doctoral program in Special Education. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro now seeks approval to establish a doctoral program in Special Education (CIP: 13.1001) effective August 2004.

### **Program Description**

The institution describes the new program as follows:

The Ph.D. in Specialized Education in the Department of Specialized Education Services at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro will have as its mission the preparation of transdisciplinary leaders for special education and related fields (e.g., deaf education) whose efforts enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. The program will accomplish this mission by addressing four themes:

*1. Generating knowledge to help shape the future of the field.*

Leaders in the field of special education must have as a core of their expertise the ability to generate knowledge. They do this through rigorous research, whether quantitative or qualitative; conceptual design and development; and production using technology.

*2. Sharing knowledge with others so that they can understand it and use it to improve their practice.*

In addition to generating knowledge, leaders are able to share that knowledge in a way that enables it to influence the practices of others. This sharing may occur through traditional university teaching, staff development, publication, presentation at professional conferences, and the development of training materials using print or other media, or consultation.

*3. Facilitating strong professional relationships through collaboration.*

It is increasingly clear that leaders working on behalf of persons with disabilities can only be as effective as they are skilled at bringing together individuals with many types of expertise and enabling those individuals to create options and opportunities beyond those any single person could envision. These individuals may include teachers, interpreters, specialists, psychologists, medical personnel, and others, and a high degree of skill for collaboration is essential.

*4. Creating, interpreting, and implementing special education policy and procedures.*

The field of special education is characterized by legislation and litigation. Federal special education law is reauthorized every three or four years, and it is interpreted through Department of Education memos in the interim. In addition, precedent setting court cases pertaining to individuals with disabilities occur each year. Leaders in the field must recognize the evolution of special education policy and procedure and be equipped to stay current in their understanding of it.

These four themes are representative of Department of Specialized Education Services decisions about how to address an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving field characterized by a critical shortage of leadership personnel (Smith, 2001; Smith & Salzberg, 1994) while being responsive to a diverse group of potential program students. These elements had to be taken into account:

- Special education leadership personnel must be prepared to guide others in an era of increased accountability, complex service delivery, and conflicting philosophy. For example, they need to understand how children and young adults with disabilities or other special needs participate in high-stakes testing, they need to contribute to the increasing national trend toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education programs, they have to stay abreast of special education policy that is changed frequently through federal legislation and ongoing litigation, and they need to help others reconcile the apparent conflict between traditional approaches emphasizing small-group, separate instruction and newer, more inclusive approaches.
- Special education leadership personnel are needed for institutions of higher education, but also for other settings, including public and private schools, state and regional education and social service agencies, and private practice. For example, individuals inquiring about doctoral studies at UNCG and completing the current program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction that permits an emphasis in special education have expressed interest in working as university professors, public school special education coordinators, specialists for the Department of Public Instruction, advocates for individuals with disabilities, early intervention specialists, assessment specialists, and consultants to public and private schools working to improve their special education programs

When the above factors were juxtaposed, it became clear that another quandary for the development of this program was addressing the wide range of critical topics while simultaneously preparing professionals for a variety of settings. It seemed too restrictive to make a decision to emphasize only the preparation of university professors with the great need in so many additional areas. At the same time, concern was raised about creating “tracks” in the program because of finite resources and the potential result of professionals with too narrow training. In this program, resolution will be accomplished by ensuring that all candidates receive strong preparation that encompasses all four of the program’s themes, but within courses and through internships and dissertation, students will select assignments and experiences tailored to their intended career path. The design of this proposed Ph.D. program in special education reflects the consideration of all of the factors just described. Unlike the traditional pattern of many special education doctoral programs begun in the 1960s and early 1970s in which students selected a category of disability in which to specialize (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, mental retardation, early childhood special education, deaf education) (Pierce & Smith, 1995), this program will be based on the premise that entering students already possess a strong grasp of particular

disabilities, obtained through their undergraduate and master's degree work, and that doctoral preparation should emphasize the themes as outlined.

### **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:

*While the external reviewers were supportive of the proposal, they did express some concerns. At the top of the list would appear to be the faculty of the program and a sense from both reviewers that more senior faculty with research profiles are needed for the program, as well as a program for providing development opportunities for some current faculty to raise their research profile. One reviewer thought the two new faculty identified in the proposal should both be at the senior level, and the other thought at least one new senior faculty member with a high profile research program should be on board before the program is initiated.*

*I think both external reviewers thought that the core research and methodology courses would give the students a good foundation, but one reviewer advised consideration of providing the opportunity for more in-depth development of research skills.*

*One reviewer thought the case for the library needed further elaboration, either to make the case for more resources for library development or provide a fuller account of the library collections currently available.*

*Since there is one other doctoral program in special education in the State, the newly established one at UNCC, one reviewer wanted more attention to whether they would compete or whether there was a sufficient pool of students beyond what one program could serve.*

*Finally one reviewer thought the account of space for the program, when new faculty are added, had not been fully resolved.*

### **Graduate Council**

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to establish the program, copies of the outside reviews of the program, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. No issues not previously identified were raised. Assurance was sought that the new faculty would be in place and that assurance was given.

**Response**

The Department of Specialized Education is currently authorized for two searches for faculty for this program. One priority is to fill the open rank position with someone at the senior level. Two additional faculty members will satisfy the concern about faculty. More details were provided to demonstrate that library holdings were adequate to support doctoral work in the program and that the College of Education at UNCG has an annual budget of \$20,000 to purchase new volumes. The shortage of doctoral-trained graduates in special education both in the academy and in the administration and delivery of educational services suggests that a program of this size will find placement for all its graduates. The representatives made clear that the research requirement were minimums every student would need to meet but that many other opportunities would be available for students to do more intensive research.

**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 to establish this doctoral program in Special Education.

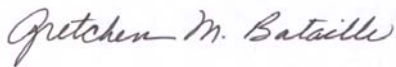
**Resources**

Students are already pursuing doctoral study in this field as a specialization within another program at UNCG. Internal reallocation (particularly of two faculty positions) and enrollment growth appear to be adequate to support this program.

**Recommendations**

The Office of the President recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to establish a doctoral program in Special Education effective August 2004.

**Approved to be Recommended to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies,  
and Programs of the Board of Governors**



**Senior Vice President Gretchen M. Bataille**

**November 3, 2003**