

APPENDIX I

East Carolina University Request to Plan a Doctoral Program in Medical Family Therapy

Introduction

East Carolina University requests approval to plan a doctoral program in Medical Family Therapy (CIP: 19.0703).

Program Description

The purpose of the proposed PhD in medical family therapy is to prepare marriage and family therapists to discover, create, expand and advance the scientific and research bases of marriage and family therapy practice and education. Innovations and advancements in medical family therapy practice and education will emerge from the research, theory development, and clinical practice that the proposed program will foster. Students will be prepared to conduct research in the interdisciplinary domains of human development (i.e., the biological-psychological-social) and collaborate with other professionals on interdisciplinary projects.

The curriculum will be enriched through interdisciplinary cognate study in the health, behavioral, social, and biological sciences; interdisciplinary research practica; and integration of technologies in the delivery of the program. Dissertation research will prepare graduates to contribute their discoveries to the body of marriage and family therapy and health care knowledge. Upon graduation, students will be prepared to assume positions as researchers; university faculty; administrators in public and private mental health, human services, and health care organizations; and therapists in public or private practice.

The proposed doctoral program will focus on issues related to healthcare and will build on the university's strength as an innovative and collaborative academic research and outreach institution. The medical and mental health programs and the health sciences division offer considerable support for the success of this program.

Program Review

The review process for requests to plan is designed to determine if the proposal is developed to the stage appropriate for taking to the Graduate Council and if so what are the issues that may need further attention. Proposals to plan doctoral programs are reviewed internally. The concerns from the reviewers were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

Budgetary issues will need to be addressed carefully. Given the proposed size of the program, it appears enrollment growth funding will fall short of the projected cost of the new program. The willingness of the institution to make reallocations to support this program will need to be addressed.

A primary concern has to do with including the term “medical” in the name of the program. Questions about the name are not meant to challenge the substantive discussion of the importance of having many perspectives and a variety of knowledge bases involved in the training of family therapists. It is the simple point that people trained in this program will not qualify for a “medical” degree. A doctorate with “medical” in its name could certainly lead to confusion. This is said to be the first program of its sort in the nation so it may be the most appropriate point to have a discussion about the name of the degree program and set the right precedent. Marriage and family therapy has a clear tradition and a recognized set of accreditation standards, which you plan to satisfy. Certainly those standards do not require this term in the name of the program. In addition, the actual plan of coursework appears to have little or no coursework from the medical school in the model curriculum provided. There are many ways to communicate the content of a degree program, and the very fact of its setting will be one of those ways. It might be possible to have an associated certificate program that might convey some special work done by the students in the medical school.

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, ECU’s proposal to establish the program in Medical and Family Therapy, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. In addition to the issues raised previously, the following concerns were expressed by Council members: the extent that medical programs would participate in the program and the extent students would have access to courses in the medical school. The appropriateness of the use of “medical” in the name of the degree was discussed as well. There was also discussion of the size of the faculty for the new program.

Response

The representatives characterized the kind of work now being done looking at the role illness plays in family systems and how family therapists can work with families in such circumstances. They have a strong master’s program in family therapy on which to build doctoral study and they have begun developing working relations with medical departments in the Brody School of Medicine. Their view is that the field is moving to recognize medical family therapy as a specialization within family therapy. While their faculty is small, they are highly active researchers in the field and they expect to add an additional faculty member.

Need for the Program

There is one other doctoral level program in the area of family development in the state, Human Development and Family Studies at UNCG, but such programs differ from family therapy programs. The proposed program at ECU is characterized as having quite a different focus and specialization, which addresses family therapy in the context of illness or medical debility. The field of family therapy has an accrediting body and the intent is to seek accreditation for the proposed program. The proposed program, then, would offer the only opportunity for NC students to have in-state access to training to become family therapists. The faculty see themselves pioneering a medical family therapy model.

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

After consideration of the issues raised by previous reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for ECU to plan a doctoral program in Medical Family Therapy.

Issues to Address in Planning

Among the issues that will need careful attention in the planning stage are size of the faculty, financial needs for the program and the sources of the funding for the program, the issue of the naming of the program, and how multiple departments will participate in the program. The curriculum needs careful attention in light of the proposed focus of the program.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve the request from East Carolina University to plan a doctoral program in Medical Family Therapy.