

APPENDIX J

University of North Carolina at Greensboro Request to Plan a Doctoral Program in Special Education

Introduction

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro requests approval to plan a doctoral program in Special Education (CIP: 13.1001).

Program Description

The proposed PhD in Special Education at the University of North Carolina Greensboro will be an innovative, research-based doctoral program designed to address the critical national (Smith, 2001; Smith & Salzberg, 1994), regional, and local needs for specially trained professionals in special education leadership roles. The doctoral program will prepare leaders for (a) higher education and (b) public/private agencies and organizations (i.e., mental health programs, professional organizations, advocacy agencies, state departments of public instruction, exceptional children's services/public schools, early intervention programs, diagnostic testing agencies).

Currently, most doctoral programs in special education have as a primary emphasis developing a content knowledge base in a disability-related area of specialization (e.g., learning disabilities, education of deaf/hard of hearing children, behavior disorders). That is, students learn the history, current knowledge about, and issues and trends pertaining to a single area, and their research emphasizes generation of knowledge about that area. This program will depart somewhat from that approach by emphasizing understanding a particular dimension of special education within the context of collaboration, research, and technology. Thus, students not only grow in their understanding of a particular area of specialization but also learn to conduct research related to it. Student understanding is developed from a contemporary perspective of special education that places collaboration and technology in the forefront. Thus, the focus of the program shifts from content analysis, as in more traditional PhD programs, to process analysis and evaluation.

Within the special education major coursework, students will be able to focus in one of two areas: (a) preparation of professionals in higher education or (b) leadership in community programs. In addition, the doctoral program will emphasize interdisciplinary experiences between the two focus areas, thereby providing for collaboration opportunities. The distinction between these two areas of focus will be made within the special education seminars in the types of assignments students complete and the nature of their research and portfolio products. This dual emphasis is reflective of the fact that nearly 50 percent of all individuals who complete the PhD in special education take positions in the community and that the other half of completers seek positions in higher education. Thus, the pattern of providing options creates a rigorous yet flexible program designed to meet the diverse needs of enrolling students.

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:

One concern was that a program preparing students both for academic and non-academic employment must be careful to adequately serve each group. The kind of preparation in the use of research for non-academic employment may not always fit with the need for becoming proficient at cutting-edge research for those preparing for an academic direction. It simply would aid the proposal to have a thorough discussion of this issue. A related issue is the request for more justification for separating this program from its current home, especially in light of the small size planned for the new degree program. The reader was looking for more discussion of the range of disabilities that would be part of the curriculum, and proposed that there were reasons to keep special education connected directly with curriculum and teaching to parallel the effort to introduce those with mild disabilities into the regular classrooms. Again, more direct discussion of these issues would be very helpful.

Both readers had questions about the demand level for this program, each expressing that this part could have been more thorough.

The budgetary requirements and the sources of funding need to be clarified. Given the size of the program and the fact that the program has been operating embedded in another program it is not clear that all that much new enrollment funding will be generated. University commitments to meet the budgetary needs should be made clear in the proposal.

There was a suggestion that the planning might involve someone from DPI since they might have a good handle on what was needed in the area of non-academic employment.

One reader was concerned that there was very little discussion or explanation of the proposed shift from “content analysis” to “process analysis and evaluation.” Without more discussion it is difficult for the reader to judge just how large a shift this is and what the consequences of it are.

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, UNCG’s proposal to establish the program in Special Education, 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 the Council members: whether they had considered an EdD rather than a PhD, what kind of research would be done in each track, and that there be a clear explanation of the relation of master’s specialty focus to the more general doctoral focus.

Response

The representatives elaborated the case for moving the program to stand-alone status. In 1998 UNCG established a separate department of Special Education Services. Doctoral work in this area continued to be done through the program in Curriculum and Instruction, which was unsatisfactory in many ways. The programs lacked depth since there was not a special track, and graduates would often have difficulty establishing that their credentials were in Special Education. The proposed option will allow the development of a full special education curriculum and concentrate on preparing students for academic and non-academic positions in special education.

The program plans to offer a core of research courses to all students but differentiate some course work with program evaluation for the non-academic track and research methods for the academic track.

The representative explained the “process analysis/evaluation” focus as requiring that students come to the program with a master’s in a specific special education area, so that in their graduate work they could deepen that but have an overall focus on the full range of issues arising from the requirements for special education.

Need for the Program

With the growing number of children who qualify for special education, the production of faculty for special education programs has not kept pace. While approximately 250 Special Education doctorates are awarded annually, there are approximately that many openings in college and university teaching positions, but up to a third of those positions go unfilled because many of the doctoral recipients choose other types of employment. This program proposes to address that need. At the same time they seek to prepare doctoral graduates who can work in K-12. It would appear that the program would meet a current need for more doctoral trained special educators.

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 UNCG to plan a doctoral program in Special Education.

Issues to Address in Planning

All the issues identified above would need attention in the planning process, and the sources of students for the program, the new costs for the program, as well as sources of funding will need to be addressed.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve the request from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to plan a doctoral program in Special Education.