

**Request for Authorization to Establish a
Doctor of Psychology in Health Service Psychology: Combined Clinical/School
(Psy.D., CIP 42.2899) at
Western Carolina University**

I. Program Highlights

- Western Carolina University (WCU) has successfully offered high-quality graduate programs in psychology, including the Master's in Clinical Psychology (MA) and the Specialist in School Psychology (SSP), for more than 40 years. In response to WCU's 20/20 Strategic Plan, an increase in student demand and societal need, and demonstrable employability potential for Psy.D. graduates throughout the region and state, WCU is proposing to establish a practitioner-focused doctoral degree program in Clinical-School Psychology. In applied psychology specialties, the Psy.D. indicates practitioner-oriented training and is distinct from the research-intensive Ph.D. which seeks to prepare researchers and academicians.
- The proposed Psy.D. program is being developed in ongoing consultation and collaboration with Appalachian State University. These campuses share a mission in serving the broad, rural western region of North Carolina. Their respective doctoral degree proposals and current master's level programs share common elements as well as clear distinctions. The Appalachian State proposal for a Psy.D. focuses on rural health psychology and offers applied training elements that will not be duplicated at WCU. In turn, the WCU emphasis on school-aged individuals will include many child-oriented and school-oriented components that will not be duplicated in the ASU training programs. However, the inter-institutional collaboration established by the WCU-ASU Memorandum of Understanding will include joint coursework, field placements, research supervision, and other scholarly activities.
- WCU is located in a region of the state which is underserved by mental health service providers. This shortage is especially evident when one considers the unmet needs of specific populations, such as children and adolescents. The need for mental health services is expected to increase in the foreseeable future, and WCU is well positioned to address this need and to directly serve the region.

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

1. **Existing Programs (Number, Location, Mode of Delivery).** There are currently no Psy.D. Programs in the state and no doctoral programs of any kind in the state for combined Clinical/School Psychology. There is one private institution in the state (Duke University) with a Clinical Ph.D. program. In addition, four universities in the state system have a Clinical (or Health/Clinical Health) Ph.D. program. Among the universities in the state system, American Psychological Association (APA)-Accredited programs include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Clinical), the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Clinical), East Carolina University (Health), and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (Health). The Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington will seek accreditation in 2019. Further, UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University have School Psychology Ph.D. programs, while East Carolina has a pediatric school psychology track. Finally, as noted above, Appalachian State is seeking permission to establish a

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Psy.D. in Rural Clinical Psychology. Letters of support were received from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, East Carolina, UNC Charlotte, and NC State.

2. **Relation to Campus Distinctiveness and Mission.** The proposed program continues the strong alignment that the psychology master's degree programs have with WCU's academic mission as a regional comprehensive university. WCU's 2020 Strategic Plan includes in its Mission Statement a goal *"to improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in our region, state, and nation through engaged learning opportunities in our academic programs..."* The 2020 Vision Statement also stresses service to the region: *"To be a national model for student learning and engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a regionally engaged university."*

Faculty and graduate students in the current program provide needed services to the region through practicum work in various settings, including the Psychological Services Clinic (The McKee Clinic), a first-class facility for public-facing clinic services. This training clinic is already operating at full capacity and having doctoral students on campus for an additional two years will allow the clinic to increase service capacity in terms of both numbers of clients as well as types of services provided. The program will also be in a position to significantly enhance its regional engagement through expanded professional associations with existing partners, including public schools, charter schools, private schools, and the Asheville VA Hospital, as well as new and evolving partnerships with Cherokee Hospital, Mission Hospital, and the North Carolina Department of Corrections.

3. **Demand (local, regional, state).** The NC Department of Commerce projects a 12% employment growth rate for psychologists from 2012 to 2022 and states that job prospects will be "best for those who have a doctoral degree in an applied specialty" (NCworks.gov, 2016). Clinical Psychology is generally characterized as a "growing" occupation, with demand outweighing supply. The NCworks.gov database indicates that there are 156 annual openings for Clinical Psychologists in NC. On the specific day of August 18, 2016, 51 job openings were listed at this website, with only 18 potential Clinical Psychologist candidates identified as looking for work; of those seeking employment, only 5 resided in rural NC (as designated by The Rural Center, 2016). However, nearly a third ($n = 15$) of the job listings at this snapshot were listed across 10 rural counties.
4. **Potential for Unnecessary Duplication.** Please see #1 above for information about existing programs. As has been noted, the existing programs are highly competitive, with demand far exceeding the number of students accepted. However, the total number of graduates is far short of the number of practitioners that are needed now, with increasing needs in coming years. Appalachian State and WCU are developing doctoral-level programs with different goals, aims, and identities, but are proposing a collaborative use of resources. Specifically, administrators and faculty members from both institutions first met at WCU's Biltmore Park campus in Fall 2012, and have continued to have ongoing discussions since. These discussions have included ways to eliminate duplication and pool resources by sharing thesis/dissertation supervision, practicum sites, and possibly single course instruction for students at

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both institutions using virtual conference technology. This innovative approach will be the first of its kind involving psychology graduate programs in North Carolina.

5. **Employment Opportunities for Graduates.** As noted in #3 above, demand is high in North Carolina. According to the 2010-2011 Occupational Outlook Handbook from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, employment opportunities for psychologists is expected to grow 22% from 2010-2020 (compared to 14% for all occupations). Although this rate of growth is faster than average, job prospects are best for those with doctoral degrees in applied specialty areas.
6. **Faculty Quality and Number.** The 19 full-time faculty and 506 adjunct and affiliated faculty in the department represent depth and breadth of the field. The size of the core clinical (n=4) and school (n=4) faculty is consistent with national data on faculty members in similar programs. The department also has a nationally recognized professor of developmental psychology, two Educational psychologists, and two Social psychologists, all of whom will contribute significantly to the program. Although the focus historically has been on teaching, the graduate faculty in psychology at WCU are prolific researchers and have a strong publication record and track record of disseminating findings at state, regional, and national conferences. The graduate faculty members generally meet or exceed the national mean for peer-reviewed publications by faculty members at clinical Ph.D. programs.
7. **Availability of Campus Resources (library, space, etc.).** Library resources and services are fully equipped to provide high quality information for students who enroll in the proposed program. Existing facilities are adequate. The Department of Psychology occupies space in two academic buildings on the campus that provide ample space for faculty offices, graduate student work spaces, research laboratories of varying sizes, and specialized equipment. The McKee Clinic provides numerous flexible spaces and resources for research, particularly applied projects. In addition to Cullowhee-based facilities, the department also has access to a variety of spaces and resources at WCU's Biltmore Park Instructional Site in Asheville, NC. This will include periodic classroom space and space for meetings with colleagues from Appalachian State, impromptu supervision meetings, and meetings with Asheville area agency directors and staff. This site also provides conference and workshop venues for professional groups.
8. **Relevant Lower-level and Cognate Programs.** As noted above, the Master's in Clinical Psychology and the Specialist in School Psychology programs have been in existence for 40 years at WCU. Undergraduate degrees in psychology, social work, and other related disciplines in the social sciences are offered as well.
9. **Impact on Access and Affordability.** As noted above, the establishment of the doctoral program will ensure greater access to mental health services for the citizens of western North Carolina through the increased number of qualified practitioners being trained through the Psy.D. program and also through increased capacity for the McKee Clinic both in terms of number of clients served and in terms of available services. Given the highly selectivity of doctoral programs in North Carolina (about

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2% of applicants actually matriculate), this will provide much needed seats for qualified applicants.

10. Expected Quality. A doctoral graduate program committee will be established and given the responsibility of overseeing the collection and analysis of all program evaluation data. This committee will meet at least twice per semester and collaborate with the WCU Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE) in setting and evaluating annual program goals and student learning outcomes. A doctoral graduate program advisory board will also be established. The members of this board will include a representation of professionals from community agencies and school systems within the region as well as program alumni. The doctoral graduate program committee will meet with this advisory board at least twice a year (once per semester), providing information from the data collected on the program and engaging in discussions about program improvements as needed. During the first four years, the following evaluation activities are anticipated:

- i. Year 1: Evaluation of recruitment success including number of applications, number of acceptances, and GRE & GPA data on applicants and acceptances.
- ii. Year 2: Recruitment strategies will continue to be evaluated. Initial data will be collected and analyzed regarding student performance in course work and practicum work. An initial review of graduate faculty and graduate student research productivity will be conducted to determine need for any additional support. An additional evaluation will be made regarding internship placements. In addition, the APA self-study will be initiated at this point.
- iii. Year 3: Evaluations will continue regarding recruitment; student success in coursework, practicum, and internship; and faculty and graduate student research productivity. APA accreditation site visit should take place, leading to accreditation.
- iv. Year 4: Evaluations will continue regarding recruitment; student success in coursework, practicum, and internship; and faculty and graduate student research productivity. This is the earliest point at which students may begin to graduate from the program. At this point the committee can start to collect and analyze alumni data regarding program feedback, licensing success, and job placements.
- v. Year 5: All assessments will be in place for a 5-year program review.

11. Feasibility of Collaborative Program. As noted above, discussions with Appalachian State about possibilities of collaboration have been ongoing since the inception of each respective degree proposal.

12. Other Considerations. None.

III. Summary of Review Processes

Campus Review Process and Feedback. The proposal originated in the Department of Psychology and was actively discussed for an extended period (of approximately two years), with multiple votes during that time. The proposal was then presented to and discussed by the Leadership Council of the College of Education and Allied Professions, with a unanimously positive endorsement. The proposal was presented for comment to the Council of Deans early in its development (Spring of 2012) and then for a second and more formal response in the Fall of 2013. This group provided a positive endorsement on both occasions. The Dean of the Graduate School has played an active role throughout the development of this proposal. The proposal has been reviewed, with positive response, by the current provost, two previous provosts, and Chancellor Belcher. Finally, this document has passed through the formal curriculum review sequence and received unanimous support from Department of Psychology, the College of Education and Allied Professions, the Graduate Council Curriculum Committee, the Academic Policy and Review Committee, and the Faculty Senate.

Feedback:

Adequacy of library resources for a doctoral program. “We are assured by the Dean of the Library that the resources available will remain at least at the current levels, with enhancement in online research capabilities likely. As our program will be practitioner oriented, we have stipulated that both the thesis and dissertation projects will be directed toward scholarship of application, and the journal article format will be preferred over the traditional dissertation model with an exhaustive literature review.”

Adequacy of Graduate Assistantship support. “A modest increase in institutional support will be required as we implement the doctoral level of training. The Dean of the Graduate School is aware of this fact and has agreed to support the doctoral program by continuing to provide an adequate number of assistantships for graduate students in psychology.”

UNC General Administration Review Process and Feedback. The Request to Plan was thoroughly reviewed and discussed by the 17-member UNC Graduate Council at its April 2017 meeting. Following a presentation by WCU faculty and questions, the Council voted to recommend that it be authorized to submit a Request to Establish. Subsequent to the submission of the Request to Establish, the proposal was sent to three external reviewers, all of whom are faculty and/or administrators of nationally ranked programs in professional psychology with expertise in relevant areas. The three reviewers concurred on the quality of the proposal, the high demand for doctoral-prepared psychologists in the areas of focus, and on the qualifications of the faculty. Excerpts from the reviews:

“In sum, I was very impressed with the program. It is clear that a lot of thought and planning has gone into it, and I believe it is going to be a quality program.”

“The proposed PsyD program is a priority for WCU and is aligned with the university’s mission and 2020 strategic plan. The program will offer the first PsyD in the state, bringing a unique practitioner-scholar perspective to help meet unmet psychological service and highest quality provider needs in the western region of the state. The scholar focus will help bring relevant applied research to enhance psychological health service provision, societal well-being external funding to the university and surrounding community.”

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“There are a number of strengths for the Doctor of Psychology in Health Psychology program. The program is being developed at an institution that appears to care about graduate study. There is strong support—both financially and administratively—for the program. The faculty have appropriate training and also provide a diverse experience from which the students can gain experience. There are a number of appropriate practical/applied experiences and there is the opportunity to conduct meaningful research. I like the number and breadth of practicum experiences students have, and I believe the curriculum is strong for a doctoral program.”

“This is a review of the Doctor of Psychology in Health Service Psychology: Combined Clinical/School program at Western Carolina University. This proposal describes the planned doctoral-level program providing training in clinical psychology and school psychology. I believe that the program is needed, as there is a dearth of doctoral-level psychology practitioners in rural America. Doctoral-level practitioners provide a number of benefits to the region in which they are located. Not only can doctoral-level practitioners provide services themselves, they can also supervise master’s-level practitioners in states that allow master’s-level practice. They can also supervise students in graduate programs that are training the next generation of practitioners. I found the program proposal from Western Carolina University to be interesting, unique, and ambitious. I believe it is well-designed, has appropriate resources, and has both appropriate current staff and staffing plan.”

“The department can boast of having a strong and productive faculty. Additionally, there is an existing high quality Master’s program, so the doctoral program will not be starting from scratch. Further, there appears to be the possibility of significant collaboration with Appalachian State University... Most importantly, there needs to be an increase in the number of licensed Clinical Psychologists on the faculty and the addition of at least one senior clinical faculty member, which should occur as soon as possible.”

WCU responded to all questions and concerns raised by the external reviewers.

IV. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors should approve Western Carolina University’s request to establish a Doctor of Psychology in Health Service Psychology: Combined Clinical/School (Psy.D) degree program (CIP 42.2899) to enroll students starting August 2019.