

9. UNC Degree Program Proposals Courtney Thornton

Situation: Appalachian State University requests authorization to establish the Master of Health Administration degree program (M.H.A., CIP 51.0701).

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 Health Administration
(M.H.A., CIP 51.0701) at
Appalachian State University**

I. Program Highlights

- Prepares working adults with healthcare experience in advanced healthcare management principles and applications
- 46 credit hours
- Students will pursue one of two tracks: health care leadership and health information systems
- Rural healthcare management focus embedded throughout much of the curriculum
- Hybrid courses taught primarily in an online format
- Developed to meet Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) standards
- 30 full-time and 45 part-time students projected at steady state
- Resource needs to launch the program include four full-time and two part-time faculty by Year 4, funded almost entirely through internal reallocations, as well as one administrative staff, graduate assistantships, supplies and materials, travel, communications and equipment funded through differential tuition. ASU will request a differential tuition of \$3000 per student per year.

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

1. **Existing Programs (Number, Location, Mode of Delivery).** UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, and Winston-Salem State University offer M.H.A. programs. UNC-Chapel Hill offers a residential and a hybrid executive program. UNC Charlotte's program is residential, and Winston-Salem State's program is hybrid instruction. East Carolina University offers the M.S. in Health Informatics and Information Management, both online and residential, and Western Carolina University offers the Master of Health Science online. These are related degrees with some similarities in management or information technology concentration areas.
2. **Relation to Campus Distinctiveness and Mission.** The proposed program, and its embedded focus on rural healthcare management, align with ASU's mission to serve unique needs of rural communities in western North Carolina and to create "healthy, just and sustainable societies." ASU's existing undergraduate degree program has been recognized for its commitment to engagement with local health provider organizations; their partnership with AccessCare of the Blue Ridge won the 2014 Innovations in Rural Health Award, a national competition sponsored by the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.
3. **Demand (Local, regional, state).** Other UNC institutions with similar programs see robust applicant pools and enrollments. ASU reports in the proposal that UNC Charlotte enrolls 25-30 individuals each year out of approximately 110 applicants, and UNC-Chapel Hill enrolls 95 students per year out of 245 applicants. Between 2013 and 2015, ASU surveyed undergraduate Health Care Management (HCM) students, graduating seniors, and recent graduates on several occasions. An August 2015 survey of 228 current HCM students and recent graduates yielded 99 responses; 92% indicated intention to enroll in a M.H.A degree program, and 88% expressed

interest in such a degree at ASU. NC Tower indicates that 82% of 2011-2012 graduates from ASU's baccalaureate HCM program were employed in North Carolina within a year after graduation. The proposal included several survey comments from graduates of ASU's baccalaureate HCM program indicating they prefer an online option that allows them to maintain employment while seeking the master's degree. In addition to student surveys, ASU also surveyed its HCM Advisory Board, internship preceptors, and alumni as to the need for the M.H.A. Internship preceptors were surveyed each year from 2013 to 2015, with a range of 80-90% of the respondents agreeing there was need for this proposed program.

- 4. Potential for Unnecessary Duplication.** Existing hybrid M.H.A. programs in UNC require that students attend on campus for some portion of one or more courses. It is reasonable to deduce that students currently willing to drive to UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, or Winston-Salem State University may find a hybrid option at ASU to be feasible as well.
- 5. Employment Opportunities for Graduates.** The proposal referenced numerous national and state reports indicating significant growth in national and state-level health care employment, both historical and projected. In 2009, administrative positions accounted for 12% of all employees in North Carolina hospitals; a similar level of administrative personnel and expense exists among medical device makers, biopharmaceutical, and other health care firms. According to the 2010 North Carolina Hospital Workforce Report, between 2000 and 2010, health care employment in North Carolina grew 54%. The U.S. Department of Labor projects employment of medical and health services managers to grow 12.5% in North Carolina from 2010 to 2020, compared to 2.3% for all managers during the same period. In February 2015 alone, NCWorks reported 508 job openings for medical and health services managers. The same site reported that the median salary for a North Carolina health service manager exceeds \$90,600 a year. Several support letters from potential employers were included in the proposal, such as Caldwell Memorial Hospital, WellSpring, LeadingAge, Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital, Caldwell Hospice, and Appalachian Regional Healthcare Center.
- 6. Faculty Quality and Number.** Five full-time and two part-time faculty deliver the current Health Care Management undergraduate program and will also deliver this master's program. The proposal budget notes that additional faculty are needed within the first four years of the program offering; ASU will fund those positions through internal reallocations. ASU is currently advertising for an additional full-time faculty member using internally identified resources. Discussions are underway with two health care executives to serve as "executive-in-residence" part-time faculty. Plans also exist to apply part of a recent gift to the university towards establishing an endowed professorship in the health care management faculty.
- 7. Availability of Campus Resources (library, space, etc.).** Existing library and information technology resources are sufficient to launch the program. ASU has received planning funds for a new academic and research building to house the Beaver College of Health Sciences. Should the structure be built, it would house the faculty for this proposed M.H.A. and related undergraduate program.
- 8. Relevant Lower-level and Cognate Programs.** Successful candidates to the program will have baccalaureate degrees in disciplines related to health care administration. As stated, ASU's own undergraduate program, which enjoys a strong reputation for quality, would be a likely feeder into the proposed M.H.A.

9. **Impact on Access and Affordability.** The majority of the curriculum will be delivered online, offering flexibility to working adults who are likely to be interested in the program.
10. **Expected Quality.** The undergraduate Health Care Management program, delivered by the same faculty who will deliver the proposed M.H.A., recently received its re-certification from the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA). Feedback from AUPHA's Board of Directors was that ASU's undergraduate program is an "absolutely stellar program."
11. **Feasibility of Collaborative Program.** The proposal included a Memorandum of Understanding between ASU and East Carolina University to collaborate in the provision of graduate education in areas of health administration and health informatics/information management. Areas of potential collaboration include shared delivery of online instruction and exposing graduate students to wider regional cultures that impact healthcare administration.
12. **Other Considerations.** None.

III. Summary of Review Processes

Campus Review Process and Feedback. The proposal was reviewed and unanimously approved by each of the following: Curriculum Committee of the Department of Nutrition and Health Care Management; faculty of the Department of Nutrition and Health Care Management; Leadership Council of the Beaver College of Health Sciences; ASU Graduate Council; Academic Policies and Procedures Committee. No substantive issues, concerns or opposition were raised that required revision to the proposal.

UNC General Administration Review Process and Feedback. Throughout the review process, ASU responded to questions from UNC General Administration regarding student demand, societal demand, faculty capacity, budget, curriculum requirements, and collaborative opportunities. The program was reviewed by faculty and graduate program administrators from nine UNC institutions. Reviewers consistently recognized and agreed that the health management field is growing in North Carolina and beyond and that a nearly completely online degree with a focus on rural health is an attractive niche. With only two exceptions, reviewers found the proposal either "acceptable" or "acceptable with some considerations" in all of the categories they considered and ranked. Several reviewers questioned why work experience was only a "preferred" qualification and how, without requiring an internship or professional field experience, the program would assist students in developing relevant prerequisite skills. There was a question as to whether such experience is a requirement for CAHME accreditation. ASU clarified that their admissions committee will require either 1) current employment in a health care organization at time of application, or 2) minimum two years prior work experience in health care. ASU also provided CAHME documentation which states that integrative experiences are required but field experiences themselves are not a required component of the curriculum. Examples of integrative experiences include supervised field experiences, internships, a thesis or major paper, oral or written comprehensive exams, simulations, group activities and more.

Several reviewers agreed that the additional faculty needed are essential for program success but are dependent upon internal reallocations and the approval of differential tuition. ASU reiterated leadership commitment to support this program, as stated in a letter from the Provost. Reviewers also asked for clarification on the number and use of graduate student assistantships, since the program is intended to serve an online population. ASU clarified that the graduate assistantships would support students in other degree programs within the Beaver College of Health Sciences to provide administrative and other support for the M.H.A. program. ASU also responded to reviewer questions and comments on target audience, rural health administration focus, and the potential for collaboration with ECU.

Benefits of program approval include flexible delivery in response to an identified and growing need. For these reasons, we do not recommend any alternatives to implementing the degree program.

IV. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve Appalachian State University's request to establish a Master of Health Administration (M.H.A.) degree program (CIP 51.0701) to enroll students starting Fall 2016.