

GRADUATE COUNCIL CURRICULUM REPORT #4, December 2014

Additional Curricular Matters

URI College of Nursing

Request to use 42 credits of MS program at URI for DNP program credits

The issue:

Our understanding in the College of Nursing is that we have a BS to DNP Program where students begin by selecting one of our three advanced practice options and take the initial 42 - 45 credits of the doctoral core and Nurse Practitioner (NP) concentration courses. They may then elect to get their MS degree at this point by taking the one credit 520 course, comprehensive exams and completing their major paper AND then continue on seamlessly to take the 27 - 30 credits remaining for them to complete their DNP. (The rationale explaining the importance of this option is below in the background section.) A second option is that they may choose NOT to get their MS degree and just progress continuously through the doctoral core courses, the advanced practice courses, and the remaining DNP courses. This is how the program was proposed, was described in our HRSA grant funding this program, and in the notification of program change to CCNE, our accrediting agency. See the Faculty Senate approved bill also attached to this email, especially top two paragraphs on the last page where the MS along the way and credit savings of this program is described. It is our position that this legislation supports this opting for a MS degree along the way and allowing 42 credits to be used toward a 72 credit DNP degree.

The Graduate Manual (see following paragraph) states that up to 30 credits may be transferred in from another accredited institution. Because of this statement, the Graduate School has only allowed 30 credits taken at URI for the MS degree in nursing to be carried forward into the DNP degree, causing major issues for 2 of our students who graduated with their MS in May and several students who plan to graduate this year.

From Graduate Manual: 7.54 *Minimum Credit Requirements.* The number of credits required will depend on the program in which the student is enrolled, the preparation of the individual student, and the Program of Study. Each student shall complete an approved Program of Study with a minimum of 72 credit hours beyond the baccalaureate degree, and at least 42 of these credits shall be taken at the University of Rhode Island. For students with a master's degree in the same or closely related area, up to 30 credits may be transferred from another accredited institution. Students who have graduate level credits from another institution but who did not have a master's degree may be allowed to transfer 20% of the required courses if they are pertinent to the field and discipline in which the degree is to be taken. Courses taken more than seven years prior to the date of first registration in the student's current doctoral program at the University of Rhode Island cannot be transferred.

We had 2 BS to DNP students - our first - who graduated in May 2014 with their MS on route to their DNP. Because of this issue, one student chose to graduate with her MS so she could work and unhappily left our graduate program without continuing on for her DNP. The second student had taken several DNP courses concurrently with her MS courses so at the time when she graduated last May, actually had taken three additional courses toward her DNP. She has since taken one additional one last summer and one credit of the 686 practicum. To finish her DNP, she only needs one more theory course and 12 credits of her practicum courses. She is waiting to hear whether this request will be approved and she will be allowed to complete her DNP degree with these additional 15 credits. If she is required to take an additional 12 elective credits, she will also leave our university very dissatisfied.

We have 18 students currently taking classes in this program who, because they have heard of this problem from others, are very unsettled. Many other universities nationally also have this "MS along the way" to the DPN option. Our closest competitor is Salve Regina University which has opened a new 78 credit DNP program also offering a MS degree en route to the DNP. Requiring our BS to DNP students who wish to get their MS degree along the way to take an additional four elective courses to complete their DNP degree will essentially close our growing BS to DNP program due to a lack of enrollment. Alternatively, eliminating the opportunity for our students to get their MS and work as NPs while completing their DNP will also force us to close the program for lack of students.

Background:

Our post MS DNP program was approved in June 2009. In July 2010, we received a HRSA grant for this program that also funded development of a post-BS DNP program. We developed this post BS DNP program with an option to obtain a MS degree along the way to the DNP. It was approved by faculty senate in January 2013 and was sent on to the then Board of Higher Ed. This was during the transition time when the BOHE was dissolved and the new Board of Education was formed. Our proposal for the post BS – DNP program was held in their office until May 2013, when it was finally approved. In the interim, we had several students already admitted into our MS programs waiting to be admitted into this post-BS DNP program and whom we were anxious to admit in order to meet our grant objectives.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has recommended that all advanced practice nurses (nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists with MS degrees) be prepared with the DNP degree by 2015. The DNP is a professional degree focused on advanced practice and transforming healthcare, not a research degree such as the PhD. Our post BS – DNP program was designed to respond to this call by combining our doctoral core courses with existing MS advanced practice requirements and with additional DNP course work. In many of the larger nursing programs across the country, the MS degree has been eliminated, however in RI, there is still a strong market for MS degrees and NPs must have at least a MS degree in order to practice. Additionally, since the Institute of Medicine Report *The Future of Nursing* and the Affordable Care Act, the need and market for primary care nurse practitioners has accelerated. To respond to this need, we developed a post-BS program with an option for students to obtain a MS degree along the way to the DNP. It is also possible for students to

stop, graduate with their MS and not continue on for their DNP. This has always been the way this program has been proposed, explained to others, and implemented in the College of Nursing. Applications and admissions into this program have continued to grow every semester.

New codes for each of these three post BS DNP tracks were developed by Jack Humphrey last year. These codes clearly define the 2 options of stopping with the MS and then continuing on for the DNP or going continuously for the DNP without getting a MS along the way. These codes have recently been implemented by the Graduate School and are currently in use.

We look forward to finding a resolution to this issue that will work for our students and allow our BS DNP program to continue to grow.