



**AGENDA ITEM**

A-2. UNC Degree Program Establishment.....Courtney Thornton

**Situation:** UNC Charlotte requests authorization to establish the following program:

- Master of Science (M.S.) in Respiratory Care (CIP 51.0908)

**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 above-listed program is recommended.

**Action:** This item requires a vote by the Committee, with full Board vote through the consent agenda.

**Request for Authorization to Establish a  
Master of Science in Respiratory Care  
(M.S., CIP 51.0908) at  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

**I. Program Highlights**

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- Designed to meet the needs of working Respiratory Therapists who seek the education required for expanding responsibilities in education, research, management, and specialized advanced practice.
- Entry level requirement for respiratory therapy is shifting to baccalaureate degree, so the number of educators with advanced preparation must grow.
- Entire program curriculum available online
- 40 credit hours
- 30 full-time, 24 part-time students projected at steady state
- Resources needed to launch the program include two faculty, one as Program Director and another Clinical Assistant Professor, as well as teaching assistantship stipends, supplies, travel, communications and advertising, and accreditation costs. Differential tuition of \$2500 per FTE per year will be requested, upon program approval, in the next tuition and fee cycle. The program cannot be offered as described without the projected differential tuition and enrollment increase funds.

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

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1. **Existing Programs (Number, Location, Mode of Delivery).** No other institution in North Carolina offers an advanced degree program in respiratory therapy, and UNC Charlotte is the only NC institution to offer the baccalaureate degree in respiratory therapy. Nine advanced degree programs in respiratory care exist across the country, and three of those are offered via distance education. These three are Casinius College, Loma Linda University, and Youngstown State University.
2. **Relation to Campus Distinctiveness and Mission.** Through connections with local and regional healthcare practitioners, the proposed program advances UNC Charlotte's mission as an urban research university. Additionally, the proposed program meets UNC Charlotte's strategic goals to increase access to graduate study in health fields and to enhance accessibility through the use of online programs.
3. **Demand (Local, regional, state).** UNC Charlotte surveyed 320 of their own B.S. in Respiratory Therapy (BSRT) students and graduates in 2014. Of the 232 responding, 81% indicated interest or strong interest in enrolling in a master's program in respiratory care at UNC Charlotte. The majority preferred an online delivery format. UNC Charlotte also conducted a comprehensive survey of outgoing BSRT graduates in 2015 regarding their professional advancement goals. The proposal included several qualitative statements regarding the desire and need for an in-state master's program in respiratory care. Using data from program graduates, UNC Charlotte estimates that approximately 17%, or 15-20, of their BSRT graduates enroll in graduate programs each year. Enrollment in UNC Charlotte's BSRT program, a feeder for the proposed program, has increased in each of the past six years and currently exceeds 200 students.

4. **Potential for Unnecessary Duplication.** No other UNC or NC institution offers advanced degree programming in respiratory care.
5. **Employment Opportunities for Graduates.** In 2015, a task force of the American Association for Respiratory Care recommended that the profession advance to the B.S. level for new entry-level practitioners and existing educational programs develop ways to meet this need. While a 2009 AARC survey showed that only 1.5% of respiratory therapists enter the workforce with a master's, 13.5% achieve a master's degree during the course of their careers. AARC conducted another human resource survey of educational programs in 2014, and over one-third report difficulties when trying to recruit faculty who met the academic preparation requirements.

The development of the program was informed by the UNC Charlotte Respiratory Therapy Program Advisory Committee, which includes representative organizations such as NC Respiratory Care Board, Carolinas Medical Center, Duke University Medical Center, UNC Hospitals, Central Piedmont Community College, and others. In August 2014, UNC Charlotte surveyed managers of large respiratory care departments in North Carolina. Twelve of the 29 surveyed responded, and 83% of respondents supported the launch of a master's program by UNC Charlotte. UNC Charlotte estimates that, with one manager needed for every 40 clinical therapists, approximately 100 managers will need to obtain a master's degree to accommodate the 4,500 licensed respiratory therapists in the state. Of the 46 respiratory therapy educators in North Carolina at the time of the proposal, only 10 held a master's degree or higher. The proposal noted that master's level respiratory care professionals at Duke University Hospital can achieve salaries of \$80,000-\$120,000, and national data indicates median salary of master's prepared individuals at \$75,430.

6. **Faculty Quality and Number.** Two new faculty hires are needed, and UNC Charlotte will seek to hire additional registered respiratory therapists for future clinical faculty hires. UNC Charlotte's existing clinical professor, lecturer, and clinical assistant professors who deliver the baccalaureate program in respiratory therapy can also contribute to the program.
7. **Availability of Campus Resources (library, space, etc.).** Library and information technology resources and facilities are all adequate to launch the program.
8. **Relevant Lower-level and Cognate Programs.** UNC Charlotte's accredited baccalaureate program in respiratory care is unique in the state.
9. **Impact on Access and Affordability.** This would be the only advanced degree program in respiratory therapy in the state and one of only ten in the country. The program would be accessible throughout North Carolina and the country via online delivery.
10. **Expected Quality.** The Commission on Accreditation of Respiratory Care (CoARC) is the accrediting body for respiratory therapy education. UNC Charlotte's baccalaureate program was the first degree advancement program to be accredited by CoARC. Upon approval of the proposed program, UNC Charlotte would request its accreditation as an add-on to the BSRT Advancement Program designation.

Graduates of the program will not require additional licenses to practice; however, UNC Charlotte does plan to require each student to sit for one advanced credential offered by the National Board of Respiratory Care to serve as an objective outcome measure of student learning.

**11. Feasibility of Collaborative Program.** The number of programs in the country is relatively few, and no potential collaborative programs exist in the state.

**12. Other Considerations.** None.

### **III. Summary of Review Processes**

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**Campus Review Process and Feedback.** The proposal was reviewed by the Chair of the Graduate Committee of the Department of Kinesiology, Chair of the Department of Kinesiology, and Associate Dean of the College of Health and Human Services. The proposal was reviewed and unanimously approved by the Graduate Committee of the Department of Kinesiology and the Advisory Committee of the UNC Charlotte B.S. in Respiratory Therapy. The proposal was also reviewed and approved by the Provost and Chancellor. Feedback during the campus review strengthened the proposal and resulted in the elimination of specific tracks that would have increased the need for additional human resources and diluted the number of students in each course. Internship and thesis requirements were added to allow for specialization without the need for additional courses and faculty.

**UNC General Administration Review Process and Feedback.** Throughout the review process, UNC Charlotte responded to questions from UNC General Administration regarding educational objectives, budget, faculty, and impact on the baccalaureate offering. Reviewers from three UNC system institutions evaluated the proposal. Reviewers affirmed that the program is unique in the state and applauded the plans for online delivery, which should bolster enrollments and student access. UNC Charlotte responded to their few questions regarding program administration, graduate assistantships, and curriculum and evaluation. Some reviewers asked about the use of graduate assistants. UNC Charlotte clarified their intention to allow select students who are interested in education to develop pedagogical competencies and experience in an online environment under the direct supervision of faculty. UNC Charlotte also responded to questions regarding faculty expectations and clarified that the new faculty hires will fill tenure-track positions with research expectations. Finally, UNC Charlotte provided additional details regarding simulations and equipment that allow students to work through clinical challenges synchronously online.

Benefits of program approval include accessible availability of advanced professional training previously unavailable in the state and responsive to a growing national need. For these reasons, we do not recommend any alternatives to implementing the degree program.

### **IV. Recommendation**

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It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve UNC-Charlotte's request to establish a Master of Science (M.S.) in Respiratory Care degree program (CIP 51.0908) to enroll students starting Fall 2017.