University of California  
Commentary regarding the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree  
Developed by the UC Nursing Leadership in collaboration with the UC Office of the President, Division of Health Sciences and Services (April 2009)

1. As presently envisioned, the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) is intended for nurses seeking a terminal degree in clinical practice, preparing specialists at the highest level of advanced nursing practice - currently defined as Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Nurse Midwives and Nurse Anesthetists. The DNP offers an alternative to research-focused doctoral (i.e., PhD) programs, but is not specifically designed to prepare nursing faculty for programs/schools of nursing.

2. Currently, advanced practice nurses (APNs) are generally trained in master’s degree programs; the DNP degree has been proposed by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing to replace the master’s as the required degree for APNs. The association also agreed that nurses in administration, organizational management/leadership, and policy could benefit from the additional doctoral education.

3. There is ongoing debate within the nursing profession about the relative role and value of the DNP degree. Among the issues raised are concerns related to the lengthening of the APN program of study, increasing debt and ramifications for access and diversity, potential to decrease the number of nursing PhD graduates and their years of productivity, as well as likelihood of disenfranchising active APNs and increasing the costs of health care.

4. Given the lack of consensus among nurses concerning the DNP degree, it is likely that confusion exists among patients, as well as other health care professionals, about the role of a DNP-prepared nurse vis-à-vis other nurses or health care professionals.

5. Significant variability exists in the curriculum and requirements of existing DNP programs offered across the country. There is concern expressed that this inconsistency might undermine public understanding of the degree title, the quality of the graduates and their productivity.

6. At present, the DNP degree is not required for California licensure or entry-to-practice in any of the advanced practice roles, nor is offering a DNP program a requirement for state or national nursing accreditation.

7. The University of California currently does not offer a DNP degree program at any of its four nursing education campuses (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Irvine, Davis); each program, however, will continue to closely monitor and assess state and national accreditation changes and trends.

8. UC remains committed to its role in training new nursing faculty for the state/nation and helping to rebuild the pool of baccalaureate-prepared students who can continue on for graduate study in nursing. Its resources and efforts are focused on educational nursing programs at the BS, MSN, and PhD levels as the recommended degrees for various levels of practice, teaching and research. At the graduate level and with an emphasis on preparing future nursing faculty, these degrees have achieved 1) consistency between the educational and regulatory worlds and 2) parity with other disciplines in the scientific and academic communities.

9. Collectively, the UC nursing programs are dedicated to ensuring that nursing students receive a quality UC education, that its programs address the health care needs of Californians, meet all regulatory and accreditation requirements, as well as align with strategic plans for meeting future health care and workforce needs.