March 31, 2014

Youngho Seo, PhD
Chair, Graduate Council
Office of the Academic Senate
500 Parnassus Avenue, MUE 230
San Francisco, CA 93143

Dear Dr. Seo:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional feedback to support approval of a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree program at the University of California. This collaborative effort will leverage the strengths of the four Schools of Nursing in the University of California (UC) system: UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Los Angeles and UC San Francisco to develop and implement a novel degree program.

Please find attached the response from the DNP workgroup, which represents the input of me and my nursing colleagues at the other UC Schools of Nursing. The feedback from the Graduate Council is valued as we strive to develop this innovative program.

Feel free to contact me with any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Annette Carley NNP PNP
Clinical Professor
DNP Workgroup Chair
UC San Francisco School of Nursing
annette.carley@nursing.ucsf.edu
Point #1: Degree Duration. Four years has been a remarkably durable minimum for doctoral degrees. The JD is awarded in three years, and while nominally a doctorate does not confer the title of Dr. All of the clinical practice degrees that the DNP is seeking to join – MD, PharmD, DDS, and Doctor of Optometry – are full-time four year degrees. The DPT degree here at UCSF/SFSU itself is a full-time, 36 month (12 or 13 Quarter), in-residence program consisting of 184 units -- and a fourth year would not be harmful towards the subject mastery that a doctorate is meant to imply. The proposal before us is less than 2 years (7 quarters), part-time, mostly online, and consists of 51 units – of which 24 are academic (online) and 17 for the capstone project. This is similar in duration to Berkeley's MPH (another practice degree, which at most schools has prerequisites of a doctoral degree, or, in some circumstances, a Master's), and was the norm for Master's degrees at the School of Nursing here before the MS-HAIL degree went part-time and jettisoned the second year's requirements – for the convenience of students, more than for any academic rationale.

Response: The proposed DNP degree program is designed as a post-Master’s program for nurses interested in obtaining additional practice and knowledge to add to their advanced practice expertise. Admitted students will already possess a Master’s degree, which typically requires two years of post-Baccalaureate coursework, and most students will already possess Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) certification. This certification typically requires a minimum of 500-600 direct practice clinical residency hours. The additional coursework and residency experiences planned for the DNP program will build upon this foundational work. Thirty-four didactic units, including eight core courses, four project series courses and three immersion courses will support the additional knowledge necessary to plan, develop, implement and evaluate a clinically focused DNP Project. In addition, 17 mentored practice residency units (510 hours) will complement the didactic coursework and support the leadership and practice expertise expected of the DNP graduate. The proposed curriculum of 51 total units, offered continuously over seven academic quarters, satisfies the DNP Essentials framework established by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) while flexibly allowing students to remain employed in parallel advanced practice nursing positions that are complemented by this additional training.

Point #2: Degree Prerequisites. The argument is that degree prerequisites – however distantly obtained -- will add up to the equivalent of a doctoral degree, but prerequisites are more often used as criteria for admissions and perhaps to allow substitutions of a limited number of required classes with electives. It is rarely, if ever, the case that degree pre-requisites alter the residence requirements or shorten the time to completion of any other doctoral degrees. The M.D./PharmD/DDS/OD degrees require four years whether the student has an advanced practice nursing degree and years of clinical work-experience, a Ph.D., is enrolled in an M.D.-Ph.D. program, or has multiple M.Sc.’s in relevant areas. This would be a very significant change to our understanding of prerequisites.
If after 2015 a DNP is the only nursing practice degree that will be recognized (while grandfathering Master’s level practitioners with degrees before 2015), and since Cal State already offers a DNP for Master’s level practitioners, it would be a great opportunity for UCSF to develop California’s preeminent four year, free-standing, DNP program for bachelor’s (and Master’s) level applicants. In fact, this would seem to be an urgent priority if newly conferred Master’s practitioner degrees are to be obsolete after the next academic year.

**Response:** The proposed DNP program is a post-Master’s degree program. The typical advanced practice nursing Master’s program requires two years of study, and clinical specialty programs leading to APRN certification typically require a minimum of 500-600 hours of mentored clinical practice. Therefore our typical DNP student would already possess this level of preparation at initiation of his/her studies. While other practice doctorates may require three or more years of work, they do not universally require a Baccalaureate degree as an admission prerequisite which makes comparisons with this proposed post-Master’s degree program difficult. The proposed DNP program has sufficient rigor to satisfy the AACN DNP Essentials requirements through didactic and residency practice hours. It also supports evaluation and dissemination of scholarly work through formal defense, presentations and development of a final written product such as a manuscript.

AACN expects the DNP to become the required degree for APRN certification in 2015. There is an urgent need to capitalize on the strengths of the four UC Schools of Nursing that are poised to collaborate effectively to deliver a quality DNP program. The Schools of Nursing are known for their collective expertise in teaching, clinical practice and research and this proposed program will add to each campus’s and the UC system’s position as a leader in nursing knowledge, translational research and practice. The collaborating UC Schools of Nursing are capable of supporting the development and implementation of this innovative degree program.

**Point #3: Capstone Project:** There was also concern that the capstone projects do not require greater, or primary, oversight by UCSF faculty. How will the mentoring faculty (of a student s/he may barely have met) ensure that the clinical site that s/he has probably never seen, run by people s/he probably doesn’t know, and which may be very distant from San Francisco, provides the required educational benefit? This would seem to sub-contract too much of the university’s core educational work, and certainly increases the risk that a student will be severely short-changed in the quality of their experience. Moreover, since, for many students, the 500 capstone hours will occur while continuing the job they were already in; how will it be ensured that they receive greater educational benefit than they would have anyway? Some diversity of experience outside their normal setting would seem to be a necessity.

Finally, we are genuinely concerned about the predominantly online nature of the degree (with limited face-to-face required credit hours), particularly when it is for an entirely new degree that has never been offered on our campus. It would seem wise to
study the roll-out of the MS-HAIL online degree, prior to replicating that intriguing, but decidedly experimental approach to a completely new degree.

Response: The newly recommended titling for the terminal synthesis project for DNP programs according to the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) is “DNP Project” rather than the former Capstone, and this term will be used in this proposed curriculum going forward. The DNP curriculum was designed so that ongoing faculty oversight of residency and project experiences could be maintained. The four project courses occur sequentially and parallel the residency experiences. Each of these courses provides opportunities for faculty to evaluate and guide student progress and activities. Students cannot move on in the project coursework series without summative evidence of readiness, such as submission of a project proposal, a plan for project implementation or evidence of project implementation.

While it is not mandated, it can be advantageous for the DNP Project and residency to occur at the student’s place of employment. We expect that much of the impetus for seeking the DNP degree is due to the student’s interest in obtaining additional practice and educational support to be able to methodically address an identified practice issue. Students already employed in a setting may be in the position to identify practice and systems issues that require additional scrutiny, and that lend to translational research. We make it clear in the proposal that eligible DNP residency hours are distinct from compensated work hours. For those students who do not have identified workplace opportunities to fulfill residency and project experiences every effort will be made to develop linkages with existing nursing faculty researchers and clinical practice leaders.

The unique curriculum was designed to provide flexibility for the practicing advanced practice nurse who seeks additional knowledge and skills. The hybrid design includes a blending of distance-based learning strategies such as online learning and web-conferencing, as well as select live coursework experiences and residency experiences at a practice site. Strategically placed live immersion sessions occur at the beginning, mid-point and end of the program, and provide opportunities for interactions among students and between students and faculty. The hybrid curriculum optimizes delivery of content across schools and affords a unique exposure to faculty resources on multiple campuses through a unified program. The selected vendor for this program, UC Irvine Distance Learning Center, has demonstrated experience with delivery of distance-based curricula that includes online and web-conferencing strategies, and is able to support content delivery and development.