

Regents approve UWO's first doctoral program

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The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents gave approval to UW Oshkosh to begin offering its first doctoral program in its 138-year history.

The doctor of nursing practice (DNP) program, starting in summer 2010, will help advanced practice nurses in Wisconsin meet new educational recommendations. Beginning in 2015, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing recommends DNP education as the entry level for advanced practice nurses; currently a master's is required.

The DNP degree is a "professional" doctorate, which is a terminal degree for those engaged in a specific profession. Examples of other professional doctorates are Medical Doctor (physician) and Juris Doctor (lawyer). Meanwhile, basic research doctorate holders typically conduct research or teach at a university level. While it is anticipated that future professional doctorates could be offered at UW Oshkosh, basic research doctorates such as Ph.D.s will continue to be limited to UW-Milwaukee and UW Madison within the UW System.

"The ability to offer a practice doctorate for nurses seeking an advanced practice degree is very important for UW Oshkosh and the community," said Roxana Huebscher, graduate program director for the College of Nursing at UW Oshkosh. "More primary care providers are needed. The DNP will offer educational and advanced practice clinical opportunities beyond the current NP requirements. Examples of the DNP offerings include population health, epidemiology, leadership and systems thinking, evidence-based practice and practice inquiry all with a focus on the practice setting. These allow DNPs to move beyond 'sick care' within the complex health care system."

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the nursing profession is moving in the direction of other health professions by requiring a doctorate for advanced practice. Other health professions that require doctorates include medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and psychology.

"The DNP will prepare nurses to practice in an ever-changing health care environment and to play a major role in influencing the health care system," said Rosemary Smith, College of Nursing dean. "UW Oshkosh is aligned to help meet the region's need for more health care providers."

UW Oshkosh and UW-Eau Claire are the only two comprehensive universities in the UW System to be granted the approval for a DNP. UW Oshkosh's strong nursing program — particularly its master's degree program — made it an ideal candidate for the degree.

"We are pleased to be offering the University's first doctoral degree in this high-demand area, which is a great need for the New North region," said Interim Provost E. Alan Hartman. "Our strong College of Nursing and exceptional faculty were innovative and forward-thinking when they identified the need several years ago for us to offer this degree."

“While the nature of a comprehensive university’s educational mission doesn’t include offering basic research doctorates, there is potential for additional professional doctorates to be offered where UW Oshkosh has strong centers of excellence at a master’s degree level,” said Chancellor Richard H. Wells. “For example, we could offer in the future a Doctor of Education (EdD).”

The College of Nursing plans to offer programs for current advanced practice nurses who wish to obtain a DNP as well as for Bachelor’s prepared nurses. The program is planned to begin in Summer 2010 with MSN to DNP students.