

Senate Budget Review Committee (SBRC)

Comments and questions to School of Nursing and authors of the proposals Graduate Certificate and Master of Science in Nursing - Forensic Nursing

November 11, 2014

On October 22 and 29, the SBRC met to review the two closely related proposals for new programs in Forensic Nursing that it received from the Provost Office on October 15. As part of the review process, the committee was informed of a similar proposal for a graduate certificate in Forensic Nursing that was submitted in fall 2013 and for which the committee provided the authors with a set of followup questions on November 25 that remained unanswered at the time. In the course of its current deliberations, the committee remarked that several of the issues raised last year remain unanswered in the new proposals. For instance, it was pointed out that the fringe benefit rates used in the pro forma are incorrect for some salary accounts. This remains the case with the new proposals. The committee suggests to contact Michele Knox, Director of Budget and Financial Planning, to figure out the correct formula for the fringe benefits.

Budgetary implications of projected headcount

From the perspective of the SBRC, the greatest issue of concern with the new proposals rests with the projected total headcount for both certificate and masters students. According to the "5 Year Proforma Budget" submitted for the combined proposals, the total headcount is projected to reach 65 students by year 3 (20 certificates + 45 masters) and remain constant thereafter. In the provided "Explanation of Budget" found on pp. 29-35 of the masters proposal (or anywhere else in the proposals for that matter), no rationale or supporting data is provided to justify these high enrollment figures, which serve as the basic building block for the entire budget and its projected surplus of nearly \$320,000 by year 3 and thereafter.

For the committee, the difficulty lies in reconciling these projected enrollment figures with the marked decline in enrollment experienced by the SON at both the undergraduate and graduate levels over the last five years. According to the enrollment figures compiled by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) at Oakland University, undergraduate enrollment in the SON has declined by 12% in fall semesters and by 19% in winter semesters over the last five years. Even more significant is the sharp decline in overall graduate enrollment over the same five-year period with a 26% decline in fall semesters and 22% in winter semesters. Given this negative trend, the committee questions where the projected enrollment figures are coming from and what impact these two new programs would have upon the existing graduate programs, which are all currently losing students, with the notable exception of the gerontological specialization. Accordingly, the SBRC needs concrete supporting evidence to assess the proposed budget based on the projected enrollment figures currently stated on the pro forma.

It would also help the committee's deliberations if the authors of the proposals could provide a clear indication of the minimum number of graduate students that would be required for the proposed programs to break even. Furthermore, are there contingency plans to reduce costs if enrollment doesn't make it to break-even level?

In addition, given (a) the current enrollment figures at Oakland for graduate students in the Nurse Anesthetist specialization (60 in F14 and 40 in W14) and (b) the great differential in median yearly salaries reported by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics for graduates in this specialization as opposed to the less lucrative specialization in forensic nursing, the committee wonders what leads the authors of the proposals to project that 45 additional graduate students will favor forensic nursing as a preferred career choice.

Enrollment figures and placement of graduates in other forensic nursing programs

Although the abstracts for both proposals unequivocally state that each program would be "the first forensic nursing program offered by an academic institution in the State of Michigan and one of the few in the nation," no comparative data is provided for similar programs offered by other schools. The SBRC believes that the current proposals could be strengthened by providing enrollment figures, placement results, and average pay levels for graduates of other masters programs, such as those in nearby Ohio.

With regard to the proposed graduate certificate, why is there no information provided in terms of numbers and placement with respect to other certificate programs and undergraduate nursing programs with concentrations in forensic nursing? How much of the stated strong and growing demand for forensic nurses is satisfied by those other programs?

Would not an undergraduate concentration in forensic nursing, or at least some course work, meet demand? Is it also conceivable that the increased demand for forensic nurses might be satisfied by registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, or even possibly nursing assistants, so that there is little or no need for a masters in forensic nursing?

The proposals could further benefit from offering a justification for starting both certificate and master programs at the same time.

Salaries and other expenses

How could a potentially large program with a projected enrollment of 65 graduate students be started without clear justification of faculty budget and with no request for a new faculty line? What impact does the elimination of the MSN in Nursing Education have on faculty loads and the need for additional or replacement part-time faculty?

How can there be no additional cost for the further sections of the shared core courses that would be made necessary by the projected enrollment figures? What about the cost of instituting the new specialty courses?

In paragraph N. of the program plan on page 27 it is stated that there is no anticipated increase in workload for academic advising services due to the decrease in graduate admissions in the SON. Similarly, is there a need for a new part-time administrative assistant, or can administrative support be absorbed by staff who were providing support for the Education track and other graduate programs in which there have been a decrease?

More substantiation for the ad/marketing budget should be provided. Is this budget similar to ad/marketing budgets for other nursing programs?

Accounting for the \$25,000 gift

Why is the gift of \$25,000 designated for the forensic programs listed under revenues but the initial cost of the new equipment that is stated to be purchased with this money not listed in expenses (where the \$5000 in annual expenses for updates in equipment seems to be for stated updating)?

The way forward

Upon receipt of detailed answers to the above questions, the SBRC will reconvene in a timely manner to continue its deliberations in the hope of forwarding its recommendations to the Senate shortly thereafter.

Thank you.