

**Minutes**  
**Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing**  
**September 27, 2017**

**Members Present**

Chair Terrye Seckinger  
Ms. Allison Dean Love  
Dr. Louis Lynn, via teleconference  
Mr. Kim Phillips, via teleconference

**Members Absent:**

Admiral Charles Munns

**Staff Present**

Dr. Argentini Anderson  
Mr. Clay Barton  
Ms. Laura Belcher  
Ms. Anna Grubic  
Ms. Trena Houpp  
Dr. John Lane  
Dr. Kimberly Walker

**Guests**

Dr. Fred Carter, Francis Marion University  
Dr. Christopher Kennedy, Francis Marion University  
Dr. Peter King, Francis Marion University  
Mr. Tom Nelson, Lander University, via teleconference  
Dr. Ruth Wittmann-Price, Francis Marion University  
Dr. Darlene Shaw, Medical University of South Carolina, via teleconference

**Welcome**

Chair Seckinger called the meeting to order at 3:31 pm and announced the meeting was being held in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

**1. Program Proposal**

Francis Marion University, Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.), with 1) Practitioner track (BSN to DNP) and 2) Practitioner track (MSN to DNP)

Chair Seckinger introduced the item, and the Committee **moved** (Love) and **seconded** (Lynn) a motion to accept the staff's recommendation for approval.

President Carter explained the process for pursuing the proposed program's approval, including the development of master's degree programs in nursing during the past few years and the mission statement revision and a legislative change during 2016-2017 to enable the University to offer the doctoral program upon Commission approval. Dr. King then described the demand for the program, citing imminent and chronic needs for healthcare professionals trained and retained in the Pee Dee region. He stated that offering the proposed program is a more strategic solution than solely attempting to recruit and retain practitioners to the area. Dr. King referenced the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) recommendation that advanced practice nurses be trained at the doctoral level, and a 2014 report, *Competing through Knowledge, South Carolina's Education-Workforce Matchup: 2013-2030*, which identified healthcare practitioners as an area of great need for the near and long-term future in the state,

particularly for doctors and nurse practitioners. Chair Seckinger asked about the rationale for the AACN recommendation. Dr. Wittmann-Price explained that the recommendation resulted from a desire to meet chronic and complex national healthcare needs, and that given the credit hour requirements of many master's programs to prepare practitioners, a transition to the D.N.P. was logical.

Chair Seckinger mentioned the proposed program's focus on preparing practitioners to serve in rural areas and asked how the curriculum is focused on rural areas. Dr. Wittmann-Price referred to the student learning outcomes to illustrate the focus on both rural and underserved area needs. Chair Seckinger then asked about the federal grant mentioned in the proposal. Dr. Wittmann-Price clarified that the University was awarded two federal grants for the master's degree program in nursing (M.S.N.), one of which provides full scholarships to 34 students (a four-year, \$2 million grant) and the other (a two-year grant worth more than \$1 million) which provides scholarships to students who will practice in rural areas and to purchase equipment to support the program.

Chair Seckinger asked about the M.S.N.'s record of retaining students in the Pee Dee area. Dr. Wittmann-Price responded that more than 50% of the students in the M.S.N. program completed their undergraduate education at Francis Marion University and that most of them stay in the area after graduation. President Carter mentioned that the recruitment and retention of students for the M.S.N. program is representative of most of the healthcare programs offered by the University. He stated that four (4) of the 25 medical school students in the cohort at Florence are from the Pee Dee area. He then further explained that advanced practice professionals are important for the area, but that the program will produce graduates who will serve other pockets of poverty in the state, including the Savannah River Valley area.

Commissioner Lynn asked about access and equity for underserved student populations. President Carter described the profile of students who attend Francis Marion University, many of whom are first-generation college students, and are from families with annual earnings below the median income for the state. As such, he affirmed that Francis Marion would continue to proactively serve underserved student populations.

Chair Seckinger asked whether the M.S.N. would continue and if the D.N.P. would build upon the M.S.N. to allow for stackable credentialing. Dr. Wittmann-Price described the nursing profession as a ladder, explaining the progress from the associate's degree to the bachelor's degree to the master's degree and then to the doctoral degree. Dr. Kennedy stated that given the need for nurses trained at the master's level, the M.S.N. would continue to be offered.

Chair Seckinger asked about the University's plans to recruit students from the Pee Dee area to serve the area given that program delivery would be online. Dr. Kennedy responded that online students have access to all of the services offered on campus. He then reiterated earlier comments that students who tend to enroll at Francis Marion University are from and want to stay in the surrounding Pee Dee area. Dr. Wittmann-Price added that students feel as though the campus is their home and the online students do use the resources such as faculty advisement and dedicated labs to practice their skills and apply their knowledge. President Carter also mentioned that the local area hospitals have been supportive of and advocate for the nursing programs offered at the University and many offer tuition assistance for their employees to further their education.

Commissioner Lynn asked if there is sufficient infrastructure in place to offer the program. Dr. King assured Commissioners that the infrastructure is in place. Dr. Kennedy also stated the M.B.A. is currently offered online so the platform is in place. Chair Seckinger then asked about faculty and their expertise. Dr. Wittmann-Price stated the existing faculty is sufficient and has the expertise to offer the program and that they have completed professional development and are certified to teach online.

Commissioner Lynn questioned the impact to existing D.N.P. programs in the state and to the research sector. President Carter explained that the proposed program should not impact existing programs or the research institutions. He again mentioned the University's focus on serving the surrounding eight-county rural and underserved region and the need for healthcare professionals in the area. He also stated the University has the capability, competence, and attentiveness to offer the proposed program. He noted the University may be more attentive than other institutions because the D.N.P. will be the only doctoral program offered.

Chair Seckinger asked about the maximum number of students who will be enrolled in the program. Dr. Wittmann-Price explained the enrollment projections and stated that 12 students are expected to enroll in the program in 2018. Commissioner Lynn asked if enrollment in existing D.N.P. programs would decline as a result of this program. Dr. Wittmann-Price commented that almost every institution currently offers a M.S.N. program and that there is ample demand for and adequate student enrollment to support offering those programs. She said she expects the demand to continue as programs move to the D.N.P. Dr. Carter reminded the Commissioners that the proposed program is not a research program; it is a practitioner program.

President Carter reiterated that university staff responded satisfactorily to any questions representatives from other in-state institutions posed about Francis Marion potentially offering the new program, and that no presidents he talked with expressed concerns. Commissioner Love asked about the consideration of the proposed program at the Advisory Committee on Academic Programs (ACAP). Dr. Lane confirmed that the program was approved unanimously. Chair Seckinger commented there is room for the program based on it being a geographically-oriented program and the need for the program in the marketplace. President Carter stated the University has to grow its own because professionals do not move to the area.

Chair Seckinger asked that the executive summary be updated to include more of the details of the mission revision and legislative change process completed to date that allowed for consideration of the proposal. Dr. Lane then provided additional details of the mission statement and legislative change process and verified the details would be included. President Carter emphasized that the language used in the legislation that required the University to present the program to the Commission for final approval was included at the University's request. Commissioner Love asked about the approval process timeline. President Carter described the steps completed to seek approval of the program, beginning with discussions with Commission staff in December 2016; the Commission's approval of the mission statement in February 2017; the subsequent approval of the mission statement by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC); the legislative change approved in April 2017; and the submission of the proposal to the Commission. He explained these steps were taken to avoid circumventing the Commission's program approval authority. President Carter mentioned the University wants to implement the program in January 2018, so he is grateful that the Committee agreed to a special meeting to consider the proposal so it can be included in the October 5<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting agenda.

Commissioner Love commended the institution for its assessment of need and for its record of retaining students in the area. Chair Seckinger referred to the program objectives identified in the proposal and requested that three of them be included in the recommendation. She also requested annual reports about the demographics of students enrolled in the program. Dr. Wittmann-Price stated that the University already collects that data and agreed to provide the requested information.

Chair Seckinger **moved** to amend the motion to require the program to meet the following benchmarks specified in the proposal: student completion rates - 60% within five years; job placement rates - 90% with 80% in the Pee Dee region; and job placement rates in rural areas - 75% of graduates with documented employment. Commissioner Phillips **seconded** the motion.

Commissioner Lynn asked if there were any cybersecurity issues that needed to be addressed since the program is to be offered online. Dr. King stated that there is no additional burden created by this program and that all University systems are secure. President Carter mentioned plans for the University to offer doctoral programs in Physical and Occupational Therapy in two to three years.

Without further discussion, the Committee **voted unanimously to commend favorably** to the Commission the Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) with 1) Practitioner track (BSN to DNP) and 2) Practitioner track (MSN to DNP) at Francis Marion University, to be implemented in Spring 2018, provided that the program meet the following benchmarks specified in the proposal: student completion rates - 60% within five years; job placement rates - 90% with 80% in the Pee Dee region; and job placement rates in rural areas - 75% of graduates with documented employment.

## **2. Other Business**

Chair Seckinger thanked attendees for their participation and staff for their work. Hearing no further business, she adjourned the meeting at 4:12 pm.