

REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT FOR THE Ph.D. IN NURSING PROGRAM

Presented to the
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
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REVIEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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REVIEW COMMITTEE CHARGE

The Review Committee was charged with assessing the Nursing Ph.D. program and its overall quality, educational value, role within the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, role within the academic discipline and profession, and resource requirements. The Review Committee examined the School's self-study and additional materials that provided more details to the self-study:

In addition to these materials, two web links provided access to the UH system strategic plans and UH Mānoa vision:

- **UH System:** <http://www.hawaii.edu/ovppp/stratplansys.html>
- **UH Mānoa:** <http://Mānoa.hawaii.edu/strategicplan/>

COMMITTEE AGENDA:

In the two-day visit, the Nursing PhD Review Committee members met with Vice Chancellor Dasenbrock and members of his staff; Dean Boland and the Department of Nursing Chair, Graduate Chair, PhD Program Director and PhD Program Coordinator; the Information Technology Services Manager and Instructional Designer; Director and Coordinator of the Office of Student Services; a representative of the Mānoa Assessment Office; the Vice Chancellor for Administration, Finance and Operations; and with Nursing PhD students (one in person and six by videoconference). The Review Committee debriefed with Vice Chancellor Dasenbrock and his office team, Dean Boland and her Department of Nursing team and gave a

brief exit report to School faculty and staff. This following represent the written summary of the Review Committee according to the established program guidelines.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT OF ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS

This section discusses the six questions that guide the assessment of established graduate programs (as established by [E5.202 Review of Established Programs](#)). The Review Committee used the self-study and site visit observations to respond to each question.

1. Is the program organized to meet its objectives?

PhD in Nursing Program Objective: The stated goal of the Program is to graduate independent nursing scholars capable of conducting research that generates new knowledge focusing on health and wellbeing of a diverse population primarily from Hawai'i and the Asia/Pacific region.

As a review committee, we determined that the School administrative leaders and faculty have been assessing the Nursing PhD Program (hereafter referred to as the Program) in the spirit of improving or preserving quality and future sustainability. We noted the following output and outcomes related to meeting the Program objective.

Outputs:

- With a focus on quality, the faculty leaders have assessed the Program for missing elements. Courses were shifted out in order to add courses focused on missing elements. This included shifting away from mandatory teaching and curriculum courses (except for those specifically entering academia) and adding philosophy, proposal development, and cognate courses from other disciplines.
- The Program has been conducted as a post-master (in nursing) PhD. Going beyond this, the faculty members have addressed the need for a BSN to PhD pathway and how to encourage BSN honors students to accelerate attaining a PhD degree.

The external nursing members of the committee noted that the PhD courses, as now configured, represent the content areas relevant and present in leading nursing PhD programs.

Positive Outcomes:

- The majority of Program students are working professionals studying part-time. The Program, graduation rates (average 4.5 years of part-time study) are in line with national program completion rates.
- The Program graduates show a respectable rate of publishing in highly regarded refereed journals.
- Students currently in the Program and interviewed during this review (N = 7) testified to being very positive about their education and the faculty scholarship mentoring they have received.

2. Are program resources adequate?

Challenges to Matching Resources to Student Enrollment:

As the Program Review Committee, we noted that a significant challenge is the matching of resources needed by the Program to the number of qualified applicants attracted year over year. Currently, there appears to be a shrinking qualified applicant pool. As currently configured, ten (10) admissions (roughly 40 -50 enrollees) is seen by the leadership as necessary in order to make the Program financially viable, i.e., to conduct the necessary online courses each year. However, current data show that admitting a cohort of 10 each year to the online UHM Nursing PhD Program is increasingly difficult and this benchmark may no longer be feasible. No students were admitted in 2013 while changes were being made to the Program, seven (7) students were admitted in 2014 and none were admitted in 2015 as the applicant pool was not considered robust enough to meet a benchmark of 10 admissions per year. In 2016, no students will be admitted for the same reason. Two positives are that the faculty members have refrained from admitting lesser qualified applicants just to meet quota and that the Program leaders diligently work to maintain fiscal responsibility. While the Nursing leaders believe that initially the Program was very necessary to meet the needs for doctoral research faculty in the region, the need seemingly has tapered off (maybe due to some saturation). Other dynamics that may be influencing the observed change in demand include that a practice doctorate (DNP) was initiated and could have impacted the number of faculty seen as requiring a science doctorate rather than a practice doctorate. Furthermore, as other nursing schools have launched online PhD in Nursing programs, the competition for admitting from other states has grown.

Given the evident difficulties in sustaining a qualified applicant pool, two strategy pathways could be considered: 1) increased efforts at sustaining the present annual enrollment size by more strategic marketing to students from in and out of state, and 2) a downward re-sizing of

the Program through curricular changes that would reduce the need to teach as many courses from nursing or at least every year. See more detail in the Recommendations section.

Challenges to Online Learning Delivery

For higher education in general, there is a growing emphasis on providing online learning, either by fully online degrees or hybrid programs (online blended with on-campus requirements, the relative ratio being variable). The online version of the Program with a small amount of on-campus presence likely has promoted applicants that would not otherwise be aligned and careful consideration should be applied as to whether this advantage would be lost if the Program were to revert to being more fully on-campus. However, keeping the Program online is seen by the Program leaders as a challenge, partly because it restricts integration with other disciplines whereby courses are not online. If or once the university has a directional strategy related to online learning, the Program would benefit from sharing in an expansion of university-derived technical supports for online learning and/or an overall plan for interdisciplinary online and on-campus PhD studies.

3. Is the program efficient?

The committee identified three areas that we consider indicative that the Program is efficient, i.e., financial accountability, curricular efficiency, and sustainability. Overall, we found the Program to be efficiently operated, although, as mentioned in the prior section, a threat exists to sustainability in its current form.

a) Financial Accountability:

The Program leaders have made a strong commitment to operating a fiscally sound Program. They have considered the costs of taking faculty from teaching undergraduate courses to participate in the Program, and the consequent costs of hiring temporary faculty to teach the undergraduate courses. As described in the prior section, they have calculated that the Program must accept ten students every year to remain fiscally sound. In those years when ten qualified candidates are not in the applicant pool, suspension of student enrollment was enacted. This has actually occurred for the past two years – the Program did not accept any students because there were not ten qualified applicants.

Since the UHM does not have tuition-centric budgeting and the School budget consists mostly of an appropriation not based on generated tuition, this makes it difficult to determine financial efficiency. However, the overall budgetary impact of the Program is not seen by the Dean and her team to add significant excess financial strain because of the way the way faculty teaching time is integrated into other programs. However, if a shift is made to tuition-centric budgeting and the costs are shifted to units, the number of UHM employees accessing this Program and receiving tuition reduction would place significant burden on a

small program like the Nursing PhD Program. One possible resolution would be to absorb such costs centrally at the University level, thus amortizing over the all the schools/colleges and/or at the minimum, the number of tuition-waived students per year could be capped by the school according to budget constraints.

b) Curricular Efficiency:

In the course of the recent and continuous assessment for improvement, much work has been applied to promoting substantive engagement of faculty to facilitate timely progression of the students and conferring of degrees. This has included an impressive set of tools for articulating clear milestones and processes for faculty to document the status of student progression and completion. To this end, despite the Program being taken on a part-time basis by most students, the time to graduation has been approximately 4.5 years. This represents meeting what would be considered a benchmark that is well within what is normally seen for PhD programs in nursing or other disciplines. In addition, it is worth noting that the Program was one of the first to be placed on-line, accurately reflecting the future of the degree pattern nation-wide. The curriculum has many features that make it attractive to students across the nation.

c) Sustainability:

The dedication to fiscal responsibility and the lack of extra system support for the Program have resulted in no students being accepted in the past two years. This presents an obvious problem of sustainability for the Program. Part of this reduction in PhD students has resulted from the Nursing success in developing its DNP program, another doctoral tract that is geared more towards professional development of clinicians than to the scientific pursuits of PhD programs. In other sections of this report, we have outlined why we think it is important for UHM to continue to produce PhDs in Nursing in Hawai'i, but it is clear that the Program as it currently stands cannot support 10 students a year. Also in other sections, we have noted some suggestions for changing the Program that might help address this problem. At this point in the report, we will only note that it is a problem that needs to be addressed if the Program is to remain viable.

4. Is there evidence of program quality?

The committee considered three ways in which quality of the Program is indicated, i.e., quality of enrollees and student outcomes; student support and diversity of experiences; and quality of faculty mentors.

a) Enrollee Quality and Student Outcomes:

Program quality can be identified in a variety of ways, for example, the extent to which the Program admits and graduates students of the highest quality. The fact that they have not admitted any or less than full cohorts to the Program in the past few years is based on holding to high standards for matriculating students. Thereby, maintaining a strong pool of students who are engaged in active research and publishing – as noted in the materials reviewed by the committee – 27 students had published 61 scholarly papers. These key student outcomes are evident in the Program and distinctive for doctoral programs with a focused attention on carrying out independent research or scholarship in academic or other positions that require such skills and abilities.

b) Strength of student support and the diversity of the academic experience:

We noted that the administrative leaders and faculty have been making curricular and process changes to the Nursing PhD Program as outlined in above sections of this report. In both the self-study and through conversations with students we noted at least three markers of quality: (1) the students are expected to process a good amount of knowledge; (2) students are mentored to think critically as they define a unique research agenda (developing a hypotheses, utilizing appropriate methodologies, conducting research); and (3) students are guided to communicate their ideas effectively through a variety of avenues, e.g., oral reports, written documents, publishable materials. Both faculty and students spoke to conducting ethical and culturally responsible research. An effective marketing and recruiting strategy could include this strength of the Program - emphasis on culturally congruent science and attention to dissemination (publishing).

c) Quality of Faculty Mentors:

An additional indicator of a quality PhD program can be found in its research faculty. While the number of investigative scientists in the Nursing Department is small—given that nursing, as a clinical practice discipline, educates entry and advanced clinicians (this is also true at most university nursing schools)—faculty are engaged in research programs. However, a present concern of the review team was that none of the faculty are currently funded by NIH or similar funding agencies. While a substantial number of presentations at research and clinical practice meetings were documented, the team encourages the investigative faculty to increase their external research funding. In response to building a stronger investigative faculty, the team acknowledges that because school leaders have concerns about pending retirement of faculty the Program has been working to attract investigative faculty holding nursing credentials as well as those who represent disciplines that do aligned science.

5. Are program outcomes compatible with the objectives?

At this present time, Dean and Department leaders do not believe that the online model serves its originally envisioned purpose and a lock-step curriculum prevents flexibility in when courses are taken and which ones students take. The need is for a more flexible model.

6. Are program objectives appropriate functions of the UH at Mānoa?

- a. The direct relevance of the contribution of the field of study to the professional, economic, social, occupational and general education needs of Hawai‘i.

The Nursing PhD Program at UHM is considered very appropriate for a highly research-intensive university such as the UHM and is crucial to sustain on the basis that there is a growing shortage of healthcare providers and a substantial need for nurse educators for higher education programs. It is a challenge to recruit into academia with robust competition for higher salaries and growing opportunities within healthcare practice. Many of the graduates of the Program are now teachers in other nursing schools across the State of Hawai‘i, indicating a clear need for the Program in the state.

- b. A "national needs factor" that emphasizes the direct relevance of the contributions of the field of study to national needs and where Hawai‘i and the University have unique or outstanding resources to respond with quality.

Very importantly, there are no other Nursing PhD programs available for Hawai‘i and the region. The Program at the UHM has a unique multi-cultural emphasis highly congruent with Hawai‘i and the region and of a type aligned with critical health-related knowledge development and application. The students reported the specific multi-cultural emphasis within the Program as a crucial feature in applying to UHM. Moreover, they testified to not seeing it in other programs that they explored.

- c. An "international needs factor" that emphasizes the direct relevance of the contributions of the field of study to international needs and where Hawai‘i and the University have unique or outstanding resources to respond with quality.

To reiterate, there are few to no universities within the Pacific Rim capable of offering or offering the type of specific culturally congruent educational opportunity and quality of PhD studies that are offered through the UHM Nursing Department. The cultural diversity of the Program is uniquely reflective of the Pacific Rim and a similar program does not exist anywhere else. It might be noted that UHM nursing Department has created a simulation-learning laboratory for which utilization by international groups is occurring. This particular resource might be used to leverage for Nursing PhD recruitment connections.

- d. An educational needs factor that indicates the direct relevance of a field of study to basic educational needs for which there is a demand by Hawai'i's population.

See our comments above. Specifically, we reiterate that nursing teachers already in the State are educated to provide better nursing instruction. Because of the difficulty of recruiting qualified professors to all the islands, developing those who are already here is an important resource for the state. See our comments above.

- e. The relevance of a field of study as a necessary supporting discipline for quality programs identified by the above criteria.

Based on the evidence cited above, the committee concludes that the Program is a vital part of maintaining high quality health care in the State of Hawai'i. It fulfills an important UHM mission in serving the citizens of the state.

REVIEW COMMITTEE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The review committee found ample evidence that the Program faculty members are dedicated to delivering a quality program and graduating quality scholars. A Nursing PhD Program at UHM is essential since no other universities in Hawai'i or on most of the Pacific Rim have the capabilities to deliver a high quality research-centric degree. However, currently it appears that only a small number of PhD graduates are needed for the area. At present, the ability to sustain the Program is challenged on many fronts: applicant pool; faculty workload; faculty scholarship; fiscal resources; and online vs. on-campus programming. In summary, the committee members detected the following strengths and challenges, followed by a set of recommendations.

STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAM:

- Emphasis on knowledge generation and application related to multicultural health, especially Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, and Asian derived communities.
- PhD students feel very positive about the Program, saw the website as very informative and appreciate the high quality of mentoring.
- Mandatory progression reporting has been systematized.
- Instructive curriculum map has been developed.
- Onsite librarian is available as a resource.
- Department of Nursing has established a practice doctorate (DNP) that may be a resource on which to leverage PhD changes.
- UHM has a fee to file dissertation – with potential to waive if dissertation is published – this represents an incentive to publish.

CHALLENGES:

- UHM Nursing is geographically separate from the medical school and cancer center which can impede the team science critical for successful NIH funding of faculty and students.
- UHM Nursing lacks faculty capacity to attract extramural and NIH funding. Steadily eroding state budget support is impacting ability to recruit research-intensive faculty.
- Strong faculty governance (heavy collective bargaining environment) presents challenges to being nimble, UHM Nursing has had some faculty refuse to mentor online PhD students – policies prevent administrative adjustments to impact the workload of such faculty.
- Students are widely scattered geographically and few strategies have been generated to promote collaboration among them regarding dissertation research.
- Articulated recruitment strategies seem standard and perhaps not strongly enough incorporating social media and other contemporary strategies.
- Hawai‘i apparently has need of a smaller number of PhD Nursing graduates per year than previously evident.
- Clearer profile of Program costs is needed to reveal need for underwriting.
- Meager endowment and student scholarship monies.
- Little access to centralized online learning resources.

PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

PROGRAM CONTENT AND CONFIGURATION:

Although graduating independent nurse scholars is stated as the goal of the Program, in order to strengthen the Program and further enhance efforts to attract top-notch students, plus assure quality graduates, Program leaders might focus attention on:

- A greater emphasis on collaborative science and the skills for formulating and leading scientific teams. The emergence of *team science* in many disciplines offers the opportunity to develop team scholarship, perhaps with a revised Program goal statement, such as: *to graduate nurse scholars capable of leading and functioning on scientific teams addressing complex health and well-being problems.*
- Having options besides writing a formal dissertation for documenting research competence upon earning the Nursing PhD – e.g., a series of publications.
- Integrating some mandatory experiential learning assignments related to being scientists in the field, e.g., publishing a paper, submitting a grant proposal - in forms that do not retard time to graduation.

- Consider strengthening a “group” environment on line by adding a journal club course throughout the program so that the students learn how to present data and maintain discourse with other students throughout the curriculum.

PROGRAM STUDENT RECRUITMENT:

Regardless of any decision to change the configuration of the Program, a recommendation is to re-invigorate applicant recruitment. Possible strategies include:

- Market more effectively (i.e., articulate what is truly unique by studying at UHM) and engage in reinvigorated recruitment plan (e.g., use testimonials by students as to strengths of the Program) and expand use of social media (owned media) channels with a focus on states outside of Hawai‘i, particularly the Pacific Rim countries, as well as within Hawai‘i.
- Creating a defined mentored pathway for high functioning BSN and MSN entry to the profession students to consider entering the PhD Program, e.g., guaranteed admission from honors BSN program.
- Partner with other nursing practice or education entities in need of upgrading the workforce to nursing PhD degrees, perhaps with personalized admission to the Program formats, thereby capturing collective recruitment pools.
- Acquire more funding to recruit into fully or well-funded Nursing PhD scholarships.

The potentially smaller size of the qualified applicants long-range could be accommodated by strategies to re-size the Program, which could also serve to conserve resources. Possible strategies include:

- Change curricular pattern so that more than one cohort could take courses, e.g., courses offered every other year.
- Look at possible integration of some PhD and DNP courses to increase enrollment in courses now reserved for PhD only and perhaps reduce number of courses with small PhD cohort volume.
- Consider synergistic opportunities for interprofessional coursework that fits with PhD Nursing scope and allow for integration of more courses that are taught by other disciplines; this could require re-balancing the proportion of online to on-campus studies. One caution is that shifting too far toward an on-campus Program carries the risk of not being able to recruit/attract students from as broad a geographic area.
- Encourage development of an interdisciplinary PhD in the College of Health Sciences with some combination of a common core and certain specialty (i.e., nursing) courses.
- Pursue partnerships with (an) outside university(ies) with strong PhD program(s) and code-share courses difficult to match to UHM faculty resources or support with small student cohort numbers.

FACULTY RESOURCES

It was noted that few nursing faculty have extramural funding for an active program of research. Therefore, attention should be paid to considering ways to increase faculty research productivity, e.g.

- hiring funded scientists in nursing or from related scientific fields,
- forming robust teams across UHM disciplines,
- providing more grant submission support to faculty capable of securing extramural funding.
- develop opportunities for nursing faculty to collaborate with funded faculty across the nation.

As has been the practice of the nursing faculty, it remains prudent to enroll only the number of students that can be effectively matched to faculty active in research.

PROGRAM EVALUATION:

To continue to assess the quality of the Program, we encourage faculty to develop ongoing surveys of Program faculty and students/graduates. A questionnaire to individual faculty members could include educational, work, research, and co-publication history, as well as asking faculty to identify those factors critical to the quality of the Program. For Program students/graduates, a questionnaire could focus on the students' educational backgrounds, experiences they had while in the Program to include research activities, and their post-graduation plans.

PROGRAM SUPPORT:

As a program considered critical for academic and agency leadership development in Hawai'i and the region, consideration should be given to increased institutional supports, be they generated through the school or university. Especially noted by the review team were the need for UH supports for:

- Recruitment packages for attracting investigative faculty.
- Funding cost of attendance to attract and retain high quality PhD students
- Raising more scholarship monies
- Creating incentives and resources for faculty to develop and improve online courses
- Re-invigorating marketing with strategic articulation for what the Department of Nursing would like to be most known for and why students should choose the UHM Nursing PhD Program, among other elements.