230830 Aims RN-BSN feedback response

Issue as raised by CDHE: <Email from Chris Rasmussen 8/7/2023>

Hello!

I much apologize for the delay!  There are concerns about duplication of an existing program at UNC, and the extent to which a new program at Aims will result in a net value added for students (considering that the partnership program with UNC is unlikely to survive).  While the Commission on Higher Education encourages innovation and expanded opportunities for students, there are concerns about the potential harm to UNC and how a program at Aims will result in a net benefit to all involved.  Specifically, could you provide a more detailed response to this statutory provision:

*Evidence that the degree program is sufficiently distinguishable from an existing degree program at a state four-year institution provided within the community college’s service area, and sufficiently distinguishable from a degree program that had been offered in conjunction with a state four-year institution that is scheduled to be reinstated*

For example, could you provide more detail on the specific cost savings that a typical Aims student would likely receive by completing an associate-to-BSN pathway exclusively at Aims rather than through the current Aims-UNC partnership?  Also, do you have data to demonstrate how a program exclusively at Aims would provide other benefits to students?  How would the program be “sufficiently distinguishable” from the existing partnership with UNC, considering the many transfer pathways that already exist between the two institutions?  What response do you have to the suggestion that UNC may need to sunset one or more nursing programs if Aims were to be approved to award the BSN?

Let me know if you have questions.  I am attending a conference through Thursday of this week and my response to your message could be delayed.

--C

**Chris Rasmussen, Ph.D.**

**Senior Director of Academic Pathways and Innovation**

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**Specific cost savings**

When discussing the development of the RN to BSN program at Aims, our focus is on the best interests of students and the community. One of the most obvious benefits is the cost savings for an Aims student that could save $8,970 in tuition for their RN to BSN nursing program (when comparing the Aims tuition with the University of Northern Colorado for the 30 credits of the RN to BSN program).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Program Type | Student Type | Cost to student | Financial Aid Eligibility |
| Current UNC/Aims dual enrollment partnership | Aims student dually enrolled in UNC RN to BSN program | $15,390 | **Not** eligible for financial aid, all costs out-of-pocket |
| Aims proposed RN to BSN program | Aims student dually enrolled in Aims RN to BSN program | $6,420 | Yes, eligible for financial aid |
| Current UNC RN to BSN program | Registered nurse returning to UNC | $15,390 | Yes, eligible for financial aid |
| Aims proposed RN to BSN program | Registered nurse returning to Aims | $6,420 | Yes, eligible for financial aid |

* Current dual enrollment partnership:  Aims student dually enrolled in UNC RN to BSN, Cost - $15,390 (**Not** eligible for financial aid, all costs out-of-pocket)
* Proposed program: Aims student dually enrolled at Aims RN to BSN program, Cost - $6,420 (eligible for financial aid)
* Current program: Registered nurse returning to UNC to obtain BSN cost - $15,390 (eligible for financial aid)
* Proposed program: Registered nurse returning to Aims RN to BSN program cost - $6,420 (eligible for financial aid)

There are two types of students enrolled in RN to BSN programs in the state.  Dually enrolled students that take RN courses at a community college and BSN courses at a four-year university concurrently; working toward both degrees at the same time. Currently, if an Aims student chooses to attend the UNC Nursing Program as a dually enrolled student, they are not eligible for Federal Financial Aid, which means that the $15,390 UNC tuition must be paid out of pocket by the student.  With the addition of the proposed Aims RN to BSN program, the tuition savings would be approximately $9,000, but the impact to the Aims dually enrolled student would be saving them $15,000 of out-of-pocket costs due to their ability to use Federal Financial Aid. Even with UNC’s consideration to lower tuition rates for Aims dually enrolled students, that would not eliminate the barrier of students not being eligible for federal financial aid and having the burden to pay all their UNC tuition out-of-pocket, no matter the amount. Ultimately, if the Aims RN to BSN program is approved, students could be able to obtain their RN and BSN at Aims with minimal to no out of pocket expenses or incurring additional debt.

**Program exclusively at Aims would provide other benefits to students**

Other key benefits to Aims students if the RN to BSN program is approved is the ability to continue their education in a setting in which they are already established and comfortable. Students are familiar with financial aid and registration processes, the learning management system, and many other important aspects of the educational experience, which we believe contributes to positive retention and completion rates.  Many students choose a community college due to smaller class sizes and the perspective that they receive more individualized attention.

**“Sufficiently distinguishable” from the existing partnership with UNC**

The proposed BSN program at Aims will be distinguishable from the current UNC program.  First and foremost, Aims currently has one of five LPN to RN programs in the state of Colorado.  If the BSN program is approved, Aims would provide the opportunity for licensed practical nurses (LPNs) upward mobility into the BSN degree, which is currently not available through UNC.  Individuals working as LPNs would have a pathway to return to the academic environment and complete their RN degree as well as their BSN.

The curricular foci of the Aims RN to BSN program will also differ from UNC. As the nursing profession attempts to move beyond the COVID pandemic, the Aims BSN program will be developed to focus on the current state of healthcare.  The curriculum will be developed with a focus on the behavioral health of patients, and the mental health of nurses in practice.  This behavioral health focus has the potential to prevent burnout for practicing nurses, as well as increasing retention. Another focus of the Aims’ BSN program is gerontology.  The population in the United States aged 65 and older increased from 39.6 million in 2009 to 54.1 million in 2019 (a 36% increase) and is projected to reach 94.7 million in 2060.  In Weld County, the growing trend is similar, with 47,962 residents currently over the age of 65, and that number is expected to reach over 80,000 in the next 20 years. As the demographics of our country and local geographic area continually shift, the need to have a solid understanding of the unique needs of the aging population is essential to provide adequate care and ensure optimal health outcomes.

**Net Value**

* Net negative: For UNC, a potential loss of 15 new students annually
* Net Positive: For students: $8,970-$15,390 in tuition and out-of-pocket cost savings, program continuity, curriculum focusing on contemporary concepts, and expanded career mobility option for practicing professionals (LPN to BSN)

**Future of the University of Northern Colorado RN-BSN program track**

During the development of the Aims RN-BSN program we communicated with UNC and throughout that process they did not raise a concern with our program causing the need to sunset one or more of their programs. Since we have been made aware of that issue this summer we have reached out to UNC to gather additional information to better understand the nuances of this impact. According to the UNC Dean of the College of Natural and Health Sciences, the majority of students in their RN-BSN program are Aims dual enrollment students, and it is unclear how the opening of the Aims program will impact this UNC program.

IPEDS 2021-2022 completions data show that UNC graduated 178 students in the “Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse” category for that reporting cycle. Enrollment numbers are much higher than the number of program graduates, so the IPEDS completion data indicates that UNC has a very large number of students enrolled in their various Nursing program tracks. Based on information from the Dean of the College of Natural and Health Sciences at UNC, UNC has around 20 students enrolled in their RN-BSN program track, with fewer than 5 students in their RN-BSN program track above those who are in the dual enrollment program with Aims. Based on that observation, he concludes that if most of the students currently in the dual enrollment RN-BSN program chose to join the Aims RN-BSN dual enrollment program, UNC would not have enough students to maintain an RN-BSN program track.

The majority (80-85%) of the allotted enrolled student in the proposed Aims program will be Aims dually enrolled students, leaving minimal opportunity for practicing nurses to enroll in the program at Aims.  With approximately 10,200 associate-prepared registered nurses actively practicing in the state of Colorado, the potential for RN to BSN students is a niche that UNC could direct their focus of their RN to BSN program

In the Aims program proposal, we have a letter of support from Dr. Faye Hummel, Professor Emeritus, UNC Fellow, American Academy of Nursing which states that throughout her tenure at UNC “… for every qualified applicant admitted, there was at least one, if not two, qualified applicants who were denied admission.” Based on this statement, if UNC decides to discontinue their RN-BSN program track it appears that they may have additional capacity in their traditional BSN program, resulting in a net increase in BSN graduates for the region.

Nursing students at Aims will still have the opportunity to obtain their BSN at UNC as well as the other four-year institutions such as Grand Canyon University and the University of Phoenix, which Aims has affiliation agreements for RN to BSN programs.  Aims’ strong partnership with UNC will remain intact if Aims launches a BSN program.  A UNC representative currently sits on the Aims Nursing Advisory Committee and Aims also has representation annually at UNC’s Educational Advisory Board.  This long-standing relationship will remain intact. We also have the Aims2UNC program, which is a joint initiative between Aims Community College and the University of Northern Colorado. This program streamlines the path for students to transition directly to UNC to pursue a bachelor's degree after earning an associate degree from Aims. This program will not be impacted by the approval of the Aims’ RN to BSN program.