Historical Perspective on the Development of the Graduate Program at the School of Nursing

In the 1983-84 academic year, a mere two years since the official opening of the School of Nursing, Dean Teddy L. Langford, R.N., Ph.D., C.N.A.A. appointed a task force on the graduate program which was chaired by Pat S. Yoder Wise, R.N., M.S.N., and included Helen Cox, R.N., Ed.D., and Imelda Clements, R.N., Ph.D. In a relative short period of time, the Task Force gathered data regarding the need for the program, wrote a proposal, developed a slide tape presentation and obtained Health Sciences Center and Regental approval to submit an innovative proposal to the Coordinating Board, Texas Colleges and Universities.

The proposal consisted of a Doctorate of Nursing Science with an entry and exit option at the Master of Science in Nursing level. For approximately a year, the proposal sat at the Coordinating Board awaiting additional consideration by the Coordinating Board staff. Through the Health Professions Education Advisory Committee (H.P.E.A.C.), a special state-wide review of Doctoral Education in Nursing was undertaken which expanded to be a graduate education in nursing study. After having consultants meet with this committee, a special study group of external consultants was formed. During the academic year 1986-87, all graduate programs in nursing and those proposing such were contacted to prepare or update information for the Coordinating Board. In Spring, 1987 site visits were held throughout the State of Texas to review the various proposals, current efforts, and proposed endeavors. As a result of the feedback throughout the State, new directions were taken in several instances regarding programmatic proposals. Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center believed that delaying the total graduate program to seek approval of the doctoral component would be less beneficial than phasing in activities. Therefore, the School of Nursing withdrew the doctoral component of the Graduate Program from the Coordinating Board’s consideration and proceeded with the proposed M.S.N. In January 1988, the H.P.E.A.C. Committee of the Coordinating Board, approved the proposed Master of Science in Nursing Program. In March 1988 the Coordinating Board supported this endeavor and in July 1988, final approval for the financial proposal was accepted and graduate students were immediately solicited for admissions into the phased-in approach of the graduate program for Fall 1988. Applications were processed rapidly to determine admission into the graduate program for Fall. The Executive Associate Dean (Pat S. Yoder Wise, R.N., C., Ed.D., C.N.N.A.) served as the Interim Associate Dean for the Graduate Program during its initial implementation. Thus, the School of Nursing was able to institute the program without delay.

In 1988-1989 the School of Nursing at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSC SA) approached TTUHSC School of Nursing regarding a collaborative Ph.D. in Nursing Program. Approval was granted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in 1990 and our first five Ph.D. students enrolled in 1992. Collaborative program activities have continued. In 2002 UTHSC SA determined a concentrated focus of the doctoral program should be directed to South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. A mutual decision to dissolve the collaborative was reached in 2002 and no new students were admitted from the Lubbock campus.

In 1995 the School of Nursing Graduate Program entered into a collaborative agreement with the University of Texas at Tyler (UT-Tyler) to offer a Family Nurse Practitioner Program to students enrolled at that site. Students completed all core courses and pre-requisites at UT Tyler and then were admitted to Texas Tech University Health Sciences for specialty courses and award of the degree.
In 1998 the Graduate Program received a 3 year HRSA Advanced Education Training Grant to assist students at a new collaborative school, Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, to receive Family Nurse Practitioner education, to nurture program and faculty development at this new site toward an independent status, and to place program components on-line for all three sites. In 2000, Midwestern University indicated that they had the ability to support their own program and a mutual decision was made to dissolve the collaboration.

In 2002, funded by a 3 year HRSA Advanced Education Training Grant, three additional nurse practitioner tracks were added to the list of programs offered through the UT Tyler collaborative relationship: Acute Care Nurse Practitioner (ACNP), Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (PNP), and Geriatric Nurse Practitioner (GNP). The School of Nursing continued the collaborative arrangement until 2008, when UT-Tyler gained approval to offer the MSN degree with a specialty focus for Nurse Practitioner education. While transitioning away from the collaborative agreement with UT-Tyler in 2008, the School of Nursing Graduate Program entered into a collaborative agreement with Angelo State University to offer the MSN degree for Nurse Practitioner education. The Geriatric Nurse Practitioner Program was phased out in 2009 but strong growth in the ACNP, PNP and FNP programs continued.

In summer 2002 the Academic Administration of the Texas Tech University Hill Country campus indicated that there was an interested cohort of students in Fredericksburg seeking master’s education for nurses. The first 5 students enrolled in classes in fall 2002. Students can now enroll in all tracks in the Hill Country. Also occurring in 2002, the collaborative doctoral program transitioned to a unique partnership with Texas Woman’s University (TWU) with approval for offering the PhD in Nursing. In yet another expansion for the Graduate Program, the Nurse Practitioner track established a presence on the TTUHSC El Paso campus in 2008. As of 2009, nurse practitioner courses were being broadcast to Texas Tech campuses in El Paso, Highland Lakes, Odessa, Fredericksburg, and Lubbock. As The School’s expertise in online education grew, all MSN classes were transitioned to fully online courses, eliminating the need for the broadcast sites.

**Doctorate of Nursing Practice Program**

In 2002, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) charged a task force to examine the current status of clinical doctoral programs, compare the various models, and make recommendations regarding the future developments. This deliberation included a collaborative relationship with the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF), which was also exploring the preparation needed for nurse practitioners to deliver optimum care to patients and manage systems of care. Both organizations came to the conclusion that the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for the highest level of practice should include preparation for both the clinician or advanced practice nurse (ANP) (the nurse practitioner, clinical specialist, nurse anesthetist and nurse midwife) and executive leadership roles with the Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) as the terminal degree.

In October 2004, following a deliberative process and engagement of critical stakeholders from both in and outside the nursing community, AACN adopted a position paper that advocated for the DNP. During this same time period, the National Academy of Sciences released a report supporting the development of a “non-research clinical doctorate in nursing” to prepare expert practitioners who can also serve as clinical faculty. The AACN’s recommendation for DNP education focused on the need for nurses to have the highest level of education in order to function in and improve quality outcomes for patients who access our increasingly complex healthcare systems and to respond to the growth in scientific knowledge and sophisticated technology. Additionally, the DNP degree should offer a clinical career path to attract outstanding students and retain nurses in a career in nursing. These graduates are envisioned to perform in multiple settings and have the essential competencies necessary to function and provide leadership in the healthcare system of the 21st century in clinical practice, clinical leadership, clinical research, and as academicians (SREB Council on Collegiate Education for Nursing, December 2005).

In October 2006, The AACN adopted the *Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Practice Nursing* providing curriculum guidelines for schools of nursing throughout the country who were involved in either producing DNP graduates or developing DNP programs.
Early in 2006, Dean Alexia Green recognized the contribution that DNP graduates could make to address the serious healthcare needs in West Texas, one of the most rural and medically underserved regions in the United States. Nurses with the DNP degree would help meet the demand for practitioners able to practice and provide leadership at the highest level of practice and to meet the demand for highly prepared clinical faculty for schools of nursing in West Texas. With the support of the School of Nursing Faculty, a proposal to offer the DNP degree was submitted to the Texas Tech Board of Regents and approved in May 2006.

In summer 2006, the Graduate Program Committee approved and appointed a DNP Task Force to develop the TTUHSC School of Nursing DNP program and gain authority to offer the degree from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The DNP Task Force, which began meeting in September 2006, was chaired by Dr. Alyce Ashcraft with the following faculty serving as members: Dr. Susan Andersen, Dr. Mary Fenton, Dr. Alexia Green, Dr. Barbara Johnston, Dr. Emily Merrill, Dr. Virginia Miller, Dr. Gayle Varnell, Dr. Susan Yarborough, Dr. Cathy Young, and Dr. Barbara Cherry.

In September 2006, Dr. Mary Fenton was appointed as Director of the DNP Program. In January 2007, Dr. Barbara Cherry was appointed as Department Chair for Leadership Studies with the DNP program coming under her purview.

Under the leadership of Dr. Mary Fenton, a proposal for preliminary planning authority was submitted to THECB and approved in January 2007. The full proposal to gain authority to offer the DNP degree was developed and submitted to THECB in April 2007. A site visit by THECB and their consultants was held in September 2007. The consultants were: M. Katherine Crabtree, DNSc., FAAN, APRN, BC, Professor, Oregon Health & Science University; Juliann G. Sebastian, PhD, APRN-BC, FAAN, Dean and Professor, College of Nursing, University of Missouri-St. Louis; and Marcia K. Stanhope, DSN, RN, FAAN, Good Samaritan Professor & Chair in Community Health Nursing, University of Kentucky. While the consultants made recommendations for minor revisions to the DNP proposal, they praised the strengths of the TTUHSC School of Nursing and its proposed DNP program.

On October 25, 2007, the full Board for THECB met in Austin and officially granted TTUHSC School of Nursing authority to offer the DNP degree. The first DNP class was admitted in the Summer semester 2008.

As the DNP Program became immediately successful with strong student enrollment, the collaborative PhD program with TWU was phased out in 2012 because of the need to focus resources on the DNP Program.

Additional New Program Development

As the School of Nursing has continued to grow and thrive over the past 20 years, new MSN programs have evolved to meet the healthcare needs of our state and nation and to address the national mandate for specialized advanced education for nurses. Following is a summary of the Graduate Program’s development since 2010:

2010 \(\text{MSN Nurse Midwifery launched with first graduates in August 2012}\)
2012 \(\text{Transitioned the Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Track to the Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Track}\)
Fall 2014 \(\text{MSN Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Acute Care launched}\)
Fall 2014 \(\text{MSN in Nursing Informatics launched}\)
Spr 2017 \(\text{MSN in Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Track launched}\)
Fall 2018 \(\text{BSN DNP FNP track launched}\)
Fall 2018 \(\text{BSN DNP PMH track launched}\)
In 2016 a task force was formed to evaluate the feasibility of implementing a pilot BSN-DNP program. The Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) track and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMH) tracks would be included in the pilot. Following approval from the THECB, a deliberative process and engagement of critical stakeholders from both in and outside the nursing community was conducted. The outcome was favorable for the implementation of these tracks. The first cohort for these tracks began their program of study in Fall 2018.

In March of 2019, as part of strategic planning for the School of Nursing, the MSN Council was asked to establish a task force to explore the feasibility of beginning a PhD program. The PhD task force made a recommendation to Dean Michael Evans that the school of nursing should develop a strategic plan to implement a PhD program over the next five years. The task force was co-chaired by Dr. Susan McBride and Dr. Laura Thomas. Task force members included Dr. Pat Allen, Dr. Alyce Ashcraft, Dr. Susan Andersen, Dr. Rebecca Burpo, Dr. Susan Calloway, Linda Lane, Dr. Yondell Masten, Dr. Emily Merrill, Dr. Donna Owen, Dr. Mary Madeline Rogge.