

**TOPIC: PROPOSAL TO OFFER MASTER OF ACCOUNTING DEGREE
AT UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO**

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I. SUMMARY

This action item requests approval for the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) to offer a Master of Accounting degree. The standard level of education has been evolving over the past fifteen years and now requires 150 hours of education to obtain a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) certificate. With this increased number of hours, a graduate degree is preferable.

II. BACKGROUND

The following is summarized from the University of Northern Colorado's proposal for the Master of Accounting degree:

ROLE AND MISSION SUPPORT

The Master of Accountancy (MAcc) degree supports the role and mission of the University of Northern Colorado. The statutory mission states:

- (1) There is hereby established a university at Greeley, to be known as the university of northern Colorado. The university shall be a comprehensive baccalaureate and specialized graduate research university with selective admission standards.*
- (2) The university of northern Colorado shall be the primary institution for undergraduate and graduate degree programs for educational personnel preparation in the state of Colorado. The university shall offer masters and doctoral programs primarily in the field of education. The university has the responsibility to offer on a statewide basis, utilizing where possible and appropriate the faculty and facilities of other educational institutions, those graduate-level programs needed by professional educators and education administrators. The Colorado commission on higher education shall include in its funding recommendations an appropriate level of general fund support for those programs.*
- (3) As part of its mission as a graduate research university specializing in programs for educational personnel, the university of northern Colorado shall include the education innovation institute created in section 23-40-106 for the purposes described in section 23-40-106 (2). C.R.S. 23-40-101*

EVIDENCE OF NEED/DEMAND

In an effort to standardize education requirements at 150 credit hours, the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) is encouraging all state boards to require substantially equivalent educational requirements with 150 hours as the standard. The Colorado State Board of Accountancy passed regulations in 1998 to require 150 hours of education, but in a review of regulatory agencies in late 1999 the State revoked the requirement and Colorado reverted to a 120 credit hour educational requirement. Colorado is the only state to have moved backwards in this respect. If Colorado passes legislation to require 150 credit hours of education by 2012 (as desired by NASBA) and UNC does not offer a MAcc degree, a significant number of students, primarily accounting majors, will choose to attend other universities, which will have negative consequences to UNC, the business college and the accounting program.

In a survey of accounting major students conducted in the spring of 2008 and fall of 2009, over 90 percent of the respondents expressed their desire to be conferred with the advanced master's degree after completing the 150 hour requirement to become a CPA. The demand for the MAcc program likely will be approximately 50-60 percent of the accounting majors, or 30 to 35 students per year.

Two years of data-gathering and analysis by the College, coupled with identifying an appropriate number of highly qualified faculty in anticipation of offering the graduate degree, revealed that students and employers see an undeniable need for the graduate degree in accounting. UNC's business college's advisory board, which consists of local and national business leaders, further recommended the re-introduction of the graduate degree. University leadership has ratified the program and the governing board unanimously approved the program at its March 12, 2010 meeting.

The proposed degree program will offer graduate education opportunities to UNC's undergraduate students and the addition of graduate coursework in business and accounting will enable other graduate education related disciplines to draw upon the expanded competencies for students. UNC envisions adding relevant graduate coursework in business disciplines to the curriculum in nursing education, arts education, public health, and school and college administration degree programs to offer students additional opportunities in their educational experience.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

A review of the business plan for the proposed degree program demonstrates its financial sustainability starting within its first year of operation, without requiring additional resources from the University.

III. STAFF ANALYSIS

Department of Higher Education (DHE) staff has collaborated with UNC on building a framework to assist in determining the fit of programs with statutory role and mission. Within the framework, UNC and DHE have discussed a cluster of variables to ensure the centrality of institutional role and mission statements. UNC has provided staff with the data requested in order to make such a determination. In this case, DHE staff has used indicators to evaluate the graduate school focus to demonstrate that UNC is honoring its mission and that the new program does not move the institution from the centrality of its statutory mission.

Factors, or indicators, should include graduate student enrollment (not ideal, since it is an input variable); graduate student completions (preferred, since this is an output indicator); research volume generated by faculty discipline; full-time tenure-track faculty by discipline; and instructional expenses by discipline at the graduate level. These types of indicators are typical for describing the quality of a graduate school. The intent is for UNC to present a qualitative summary that addresses this cluster of quantitative indicators. DHE staff does not expect a numeric, solely quantitative benchmark for each variable. Rather, UNC should speak to the larger mission at the graduate level relying on these indicators as parameters for presenting a narrative justification.

Fifty-three percent of UNC's 32 master's level degree programs are in education related disciplines. Sixty-six percent of the master's level and specialist students are in education related disciplines. Of the 584 degrees awarded in Fall 2008, Spring 2009 and Summer 2009, 429 (73 percent) were in education related disciplines. The University of Northern Colorado currently has 384 full-time faculty, 70 percent of which engage in mentoring their graduate students, garnering nationally sponsored research projects, and co-authoring scholarly work in education-related disciplines.¹

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes 23-5-129 (6)(b), Department staff finds that the proposed program fits the centrality of the institution's statutory role and mission.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the Master of Accountancy degree submitted by University of Northern Colorado.

VI. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Copies of all relevant statute and policy are on file in the Academic Affairs Office.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

C.R.S. §23-5-129(6)(b)

¹ Data provided by Dr. Abe Harraf, Provost and Senior Vice President for University of Northern Colorado and Dr. Robbyn Wacker, Dean, Graduate School & International Admissions