Concept Paper for New Degree Program Proposal

1. Program Name: **MS in Health and Wellness Management**,College of Health Sciences & Technology
2. Justification and Goals
   1. Justification
      1. Growing emphasis on wellness within the US population, partly the result of the Affordable Care Act, has created the need for experts in the combined field of exercise training and nutrition in corporate America, primary care and in the community at large. The Masters of Science in Health & Wellness will build on the undergraduate education obtained through Biomedical Sciences, Nutrition Management, or other appropriate undergraduate degree programs. Students will learn to integrate health promotion services into primary medical care, corporate wellness and community based health enhancement programs.

Americans are in the midst of a “lifestyle disease” epidemic.(1) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified four behaviors - inactivity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and frequent alcohol consumption - as primary causes of chronic disease in the United States, causing increasing prevalence of diabetes, heart disease, and chronic pulmonary conditions.(2) With the staggering and growing healthcare costs in the USA, the federal government is now moving towards finding the best ways to develop interventions that are both therapeutically efficacious and cost-effective.(3) This has stimulated the need for more comparative effectiveness research.(4,5) The Affordable Care Act has numerous provisions intended to contain health care cost growth and expand health promotion and prevention activities.(6)

* + 1. The RIT MS in Health & Wellness must be inherently dynamic because it is creating a class of professionals whose skills and abilities will be in demand in a rapidly arriving future. Many employers today regard workplace wellness programs as an effective tool to contain health care costs and, thus, a viable business strategy. Almost half (44 percent) of all employers that offered wellness programs believed that they were effective in reducing the firm’s health care costs, according to a 2010 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Health Research and Educational Trust.(7) According to the New York State Department of Labor, employment of health educators is expected to grow by 39.3 percent in the Finger Lakes region of New York State between 2010 and 2020.(8)
    2. The MS in Health & Wellness will provide students with numerous opportunities to conduct and participate in research and practice activities. RIT has, for many years, possessed some of the most outstanding fitness facilities to be found on a college campus anywhere in the Northeast. In spite of this the campus lacked a formal program of education that incorporated those assets into a degree granting program. This proposal is a remedy for that situation. When approved and enacted, the guidelines laid out here will close the loop between facilities and program and allow RIT to integrate its tremendous physical fitness facilities into a quality Health and Wellness promotion program. As well, formal relationships that will support practice sites and research partners have already been established with a substantial number of health/health care organizations locally and within New York State via longstanding cooperative education requirements of current programs. Examples of these relations start with the RIT-Rochester General Health System *Alliance* supporting students in the Physician Assistant, Diagnostic Imaging, Nutrition Management program, and others; and there are many more affiliations supporting students including URMC and Unity.
    3. As of June 12, 2013, the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) informed program directors of its decision to require a Master's degree in any major by 2023 for the Registered Dietitian (RD) credential. RIT’s undergraduate Nutrition Management program has been accredited by CDR since 1975. The availability of this graduate degree will ensure the viability of this successful, long-term degree program.
  1. Program Goals

The following goals represent the knowledge, skills and abilities needed by likely employers of the graduates of the Health & Wellness Management program.

* + 1. Demonstrate skills in the design, delivery, and evaluation of individual and group interventions/programs that are consistent with evidence based social and behavioral theories as well as safe and effective functional movement experiences.
    2. Demonstrate the ability to conduct medical, physical, nutritional, behavioral screening of clients to prescribe a safe and effective health promotion program for both healthy and health impaired individuals.
    3. Collaborate with other disciplines to promote and administer health related research, practice, and policy at the community, state, or federal level.
    4. Develop skills and experience necessary to market program services to appropriate community recipients including the ability to categorize subsets of the worksite/organization population and identify appropriate intervention strategies for each subset.
    5. Design and execute a capstone project that is relevant to the health promotion industry.

1. Description of New Program
   1. Curriculum: The curriculum will require the completion of 30 units of coursework with five required courses (15 units), one capstone course (for 6 units) and 3 electives (nine units) and can be completed in one academic year plus a summer term. The six required courses are:
      1. Introduction to Health Promotion and Wellness Management-new course (3)
      2. Health Promotion Programming Approaches/Techniques in Wellness/Health Promotion-new course (3)
      3. Health Risk Identification and Management –new course (3)
      4. Research Methods in Health and Wellness – new course (3)
      5. Health Systems Policy and Law –existing course required for MS Health Systems Administration (HSA)
   2. Electives:
      1. will be developed in topic areas such *Contemporary Health Problems*, *Applied Exercise Physiology, Applied Nutrition Counseling/Education*
      2. may be taken from existing Health Systems Administration courses in *Health Care Leadership and Finance*
      3. will be developed in collaboration/identified as already available from other CHST or RIT programs in topic areas such *as Applied Statistics in Health and Wellness, Grant and Contract Writing, Bioethics, Digital Tools*

* 1. Within the next three years, it is our intention to deliver at least half of the required courses and some of the elective courses online. Enrollment management suggests consideration of both online and campus-based options which will attract two distinct markets, as well as consideration of a hybrid delivery model wherein on-line can be combined with a time shortened (2 week) residency for learners from outside the region. In addition, development of an advanced certificate consisting of 3 – 4 courses from the MS program would be desirable.

1. Fit with RIT Mission and Strategic Direction

The program’s mission is aligned with the University’s mission through the development of a new and emerging career area which is set to experience substantial growth in the coming years. The technological association with the mission is achieved through the utilization of online learning and development of online health promotion delivery systems. Students will also have the opportunity to use the technology in the Fitness Lab for gaining functional fitness assessment and metabolic measurement skills; courses that fit with an emphasis on experiential learning. This lab provides students with an appropriate facility to develop the technical skills necessary to assess the fitness of individuals using sophisticated measurement instruments. Technology for sophisticated analysis of diets and recipes is already available to students in labs in the Eastman Building. The curriculum fulfills the University’s mission of developing curricula relevant to emerging social conditions by innovatively addressing the need for better systems to encourage and support the use of exercise and nutrition to improve the health of the U.S. population. On review of the basic principles of RIT’s newly created *Academic Blueprint*, this graduate level program appears to address all the key elements and provides growth in health-related professions, a priority for RIT with the new College.

1. Synergy with Other Programs

The MS degree in Health & Wellness will integrate undergraduate programs in Biomedical Sciences, Exercise Science, and Nutrition Management, as well as other potential disciplines such as Physician Assistant, into a degree that provides students the opportunity to move into one of the most important new fields in healthcare. Integrating health promotion and enhancement services into the health care model of our society is a necessary and appropriate development to address the most pressing health issues faced by our nation. The RIT MS in Health & Wellness Management will integrate with the Health Systems Administration curriculum giving students an understanding of the administrative issues that will influence health promotion programming. The study of behavior change models will be influenced by cooperation with an expanding expertise in clinical forensic psychology. Synergism between these two growing areas will be both dynamic and effective. Students will develop the skills necessary to counsel people on behavior change strategies that lead to the establishment and maintenance of a successful wellness lifestyle.

The RIT Human Resources Department is the home to a position consistent with employment opportunities that would be available to graduates. The Associate Director of Wellness at RIT is the type of position to which many of the CHST graduates may aspire. Students will have opportunities to collaborate with the Associate Director on many health promotion projects conducted right here in the RIT community. As well, students will have opportunities to integrate their studies with the “Better Me” campus wide employee health promotion program. This synergistic relationship will give students first-hand experience in worksite health promotion and provide the Better Me staff with some capable students with which to work.

RIT’s outstanding fitness facilities, which supports not only the previously mentioned Fitness Lab, but also the Center for Recreation and Intramurals plus Wellness Instructional and Intercollegiate Athletics, provides research and practice opportunities as well.

The above are simply examples of synergies with other RIT programs at this time; however, the inclusion of additional opportunities will likely emerge. The inclusion of existing courses from other programs will be utilized as appropriate.

1. Administrative Structure

The MS in Health and Wellness Management will be administered under the College of Health Sciences and Technology (CHST). At present the Director of Exercise Science and the Co-Directors of Nutrition Management will perform administrative duties under the supervision of the Vice Dean of the CHST. Instructional responsibilities will be assumed by the Directors and associated adjunct faculty as necessary. Courses will be delivered in an online format to maximize the convenience of the target market of students.

1. Enrollment Management Expectations

During a recent meeting with the Office of Enrollment Management, the proposal of an MS in Health and Wellness Management and the timeliness of its addition to the RIT portfolio of programs were discussed. Conclusions made by Enrollment Management are reflected in excerpts from their correspondence to the CHST and noted below.

The proposed MS program in Health & Wellness Management provides the opportunity to leverage current courses and resources and target a growing market segment in the health and wellness area. The program could attract undergraduates who have completed degrees in areas related to health and wellness such as physical and health education, science and medical sciences, and business, recreation and sports management. In addition, if offered online working professionals with backgrounds in nursing, health and medical sciences, nutrition, business and related areas with interest in working as directors and managers in the health and wellness field would be potential candidates.

The MS in Heath & Wellness Management should leverage current courses and offerings, as well as marketing initiatives in Health Systems Administration, Service Leadership and Innovation, and Human Resource Development. In addition the RGH partnership, connections with health care providers and companies such as Excellus and MVP provide opportunities for marketing, experiential learning and research, and enhance employment outcomes. The development of articulation agreements with targeted undergraduate programs at RIT, as well as selected colleges and universities will support marketing efforts. As provided from EMCS, the enrollment goal of 10 – 15 new students per year in this full-time, one year program is realistic.

We recommend consideration of both online and campus-based options which will attract two distinct markets, and encourage consideration of a hybrid delivery model wherein on-line can be combined with a time shortened (2 week) residency for learners from outside the region. In addition, development of an advanced certificate consisting of 3 – 4 courses from the MS program would be desirable. Particular attention should be given to flexible admission criteria that allow consideration and options for students with related experience and broad academic backgrounds.

1. Impact on Resources

The impact on the resources available to the College of Health Sciences and Technology for the operation of this program is substantial. Current faculty are highly committed and dedicated to this program and will bear the workload for a period of time, however the need for additional personnel will quickly become critical. A search for an appropriately prepared PhD candidate should be undertaken so the program’s growth and the installation of the new personnel can coincide successfully. The Dean of CHST, as well as other leaders at RIT, consider this initiative as a prime opportunity to engage donors from this community.

1. Conclusion

This document lays out, on a conceptual basis, the general proposal for a formal program of study in Health & Wellness Management. With its coordinated mission and integrated presence on campus, the Master of Science in Health & Wellness Management will be a welcome and exciting addition to the University’s programs. The students will create a new avenue of scientific inquiry and be seen as a very physically robust and intellectually capable group of people. This program takes the values of health and wellness, long held and practiced on the RIT campus, and puts intellectual muscle behind them. With the resources and culture of RIT, the Health & Wellness program will soon be producing some of the best health promotion professionals in the United States.

References:

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8. New York State Department of Labor, “Report of the Healthcare Workforce Development Subcommittee to the New York State Workforce Investment Board, Transforming the Health Workforce for a New New York”, March 2012.