May 19, 2021

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Carl W. Lejuez, Ph.D.
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

RE: Graduate Certificate in Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Trustees approve a new Graduate Certificate in Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling

BACKGROUND:

The process of establishing a trusting relationship, also referred to as a “therapeutic alliance” is imperative for all clinical relationships and not simply reserved for professional counselors. The Clinical Communication and Counseling Graduate Certificate is a 12-credit asynchronous online program consisting of four courses designed to provide foundational concepts of counseling and health communication theories. Concepts of counseling will be applied in varied formats toward creating effective provider-patient or advocate-consumer communication. Skill development will focus on supporting health care discussions for the benefit of the person and society in the era of individualized medicine.

Target Populations of Learners Include:

- Persons currently in a helping profession seeking additional education on supporting patients/consumers during health care discussions.
- Individuals desiring to become competitive for the application process of graduate programs related to clinical genetics, clinical communication, public health, advocacy, medicine, or other related fields.
- Learners without financial means or opportunity to pursue a full graduate degree for the sole purpose of applying to an advanced professional degree program.
- Career-switching adults seeking a broad understanding of health communication and consumer support.

With an online format that is flexible, in-depth, and designed to help learners refine and enhance critical communication skills, UConn’s Clinical Communication and Counseling Graduate Certificate program is predicted to draw great interest from the community at large. The Clinical Communication and Counseling certificate program proposes an enrollment target of 6-10 students per year. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has relayed that based on their investigations, this proposed graduate certificate program shows promise and viability with minimal resources required.
Request for New UConn Academic Degree Program

**General Information**

Name of degree program: Graduate Certificate in Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling
Name of sponsoring Department: Institute for Systems Genomics
Name of sponsoring College: The Graduate School
Campuses: Entirely Online
Contact persons: Maria Gyure
Type of Proposal: New
Type of Program: Graduate Certificate
Anticipated Initiation Date: Spring 2022
Program Payment Type: Fee based
CIP Code: 51.1504 Community Health Services/Liaison/Counseling

**Justification for the New Program**

Justification: The process of establishing a trusting relationship, also referred to as a “therapeutic alliance” is imperative for all clinical relationships and not simply reserved for professional counselors. The delivery of services and the relationship between the provider and patient is far more significant than a specific therapeutic technique itself (Beck & Kulzer, 2018). Additionally, effective provider-consumer communication has been repeatedly associated with important outcomes such as adherence to treatment, satisfaction with care, and improved health status (Haskard et al, 2008). Clinicians and health advocates skilled in both communication and counseling strategies can help patients and families focus their energies on the healthcare challenges at hand. Clinicians trained to share unexpected or “bad” news while attending to patients’ emotional responses have been shown to have greater satisfaction in their work and decreased levels of stress and burnout (Tulsky, 2014). Health care provider communication training programs are effective, with multiple programs exhibiting impacts on patient-perceived empathy, patient-centeredness and satisfaction with care and moreover, are highly valuable to staff (JCOH, 2016).

Given that communication and counseling skills can be difficult to master through traditional forms of teaching content (i.e., didactic instruction and examinations) and that programs able to impart knowledge through practice, repetition, feedback, and evaluation are more likely to see long lasting results, we have designed a curriculum to include experiential and performance-based learning. Need: The clinician’s role in delivering health information is readily apparent, however counseling and communication skills are requisite for health care advocates including family members as well. The addition of this graduate certificate program addresses the need to support the learning of both foundational principles and skill development for all types of
healthcare providers and advocates. The ISG faculty envision an interdisciplinary approach within counseling disciplines and a recognition of the inclusion of the individual, family and community in the support of health discussions during the era of individualized medicine. The UConn graduate certificate will provide for increased health, communication, and counseling literacy and give graduates economic and career utility. Given the broad applicability to multiple careers, the expected audience will be diverse.

Are there similar programs in CT or elsewhere?
There are no similar programs in CT. There are fewer than 30 graduate certificate programs in “health communication” across the US. Five health communication programs with models similar to this proposed certificate can be found within Boston University, Loyola University, Sam Houston State University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Western Kentucky University. Boston University, Loyola University and Sam Houston State University programs focus is digital, social and mass media-based communications and students are not typically medical professionals who interface with patients. While the certificate programs housed at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Western Kentucky University are both intended for medical professionals, the programs do not require courses on cultural competency, do not offer education on communication with patients and families during the death and dying process, are not marketed to include health care advocates and are not intended to focus on the era of individualized medicine.

What are the desired learning outcomes of the program?
Upon successful completion of this program, students will be able to:
1. apply counseling methods and helping skills utilized within a health care context
2. support health care discussions for the benefit of the person and society in the era of individualized medicine
3. develop micro skills relevant to effective communication and patient/consumer rapport
4. describe the concept of culture and how cultural beliefs influence an individual’s approach to health, illness and treatment
5. explain the impact of different social approaches to death, dying and grief on consumer decision making with respect to health care decisions

Program Description
The Clinical Communication and Counseling Graduate Certificate is a 12-credit asynchronous online program consisting of four courses designed to provide foundational concepts of counseling and health communication theories. Concepts of counseling will be applied in varied formats toward creating effective provider-patient or advocate-consumer communication. Skill development will focus on supporting health care discussions for the benefit of the person and society in the era of individualized medicine.

Target Populations of Learners Include:
Certificate, Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling

- Persons currently in a helping profession seeking additional education on supporting patients/consumers during health care discussions.
- Individuals desiring to become competitive for the application process of graduate programs related to clinical genetics, clinical communication, public health, advocacy, medicine, or other related fields.
- Learners without financial means or opportunity to pursue a full graduate degree for the sole purpose of applying to an advanced professional degree program.
- Career-switching adults seeking a broad understanding of health communication and consumer support.

Requirements
Completion of the following courses with a grade of B- or better: ISG 5200 Communication and Counseling Skills for Effective Health Care Conversations (3 credits) ISG 5201 Cultural Awareness: Working with Diverse Populations in Health Care (3 credits) ISG 5202 Creating a Therapeutic Alliance (3 credits) ISG 5203 Death, Dying, Grief & Coping (3 credits)

Proposed Graduate Catalogue Copy
The Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling Graduate Certificate is a 12-credit asynchronous online program consisting of four courses designed to provide foundational concepts of counseling and health communication theories. Concepts of counseling will be applied in varied formats toward creating effective provider-patient or advocate-consumer communication. Skill development will focus on supporting health care discussions and conversations requiring translation of genetic and genomic information for the benefit of the person and society in the era of precision medicine.

This program is designed for individuals tracking for or already practicing in the healthcare field who are interested in gaining an academic foundation to improve work performance and/or for professional advancement. Admission to the graduate program in Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling requires completion of an undergraduate degree in a related communication, health and/or science field. Requirements: ISG 5200, 5201, 5202, and 5203. It is recommended that the courses be completed in the order listed. Each required course taken must be passed with a grade of B- or higher to count toward the certificate requirements.

Faculty Involvement
Maria Gyure, MS, LCGC, will function as the Program Director/Administrator. Course instructors will include Maria Gyure, graduate students with appropriate discipline training may be used to supplement instruction of courses and adjunct faculty will be hired as needed and approved by the ISG Director, Dr. Rachel O’Neill. Maria Gyure’s development and delivery of the graduate certificate programs is covered in a memorandum of understanding between the Institute for Systems Genomics and the Department of Allied Health Sciences. Clewiston
Challenger (Ed Psych), instructor of EPSY 5308 Counseling Theories and Practice and Keith Bellizzi (HDFS), instructor of HDFS 3252 Death, Dying and Bereavement, and Judy Brown (ISG), instructor of AHS 5700 Ethical Considerations in Genetic Testing and Research, were consulted in the design of the course syllabi and curriculum content as presented within the GPAR so as to present an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach. Dr. Clewiston Challenger and Dr. Keith Bellizzi will be paid via contract from CETL for the development of specific online learning modules within specific classes primarily during the summer session. HDFS and EPSY faculty involvement is not expected or planned beyond this point. Department Head and Faculty Letters for attestation of involvement will be provided at the GEC meeting.

**Enrollment and graduate projections**
With an online format that is flexible, in-depth, and designed to help learners refine and enhance critical communication skills, UConn’s Clinical Communication and Counseling Graduate Certificate program is predicted to draw great interest from the community at large. To date, the Program Director has received inquiries from current UConn students seeking post-graduation educational opportunities that will better prepare them for MS/PhD programs in the field of medical genetics and counseling. Additionally, current employees of research and commercial industries have reached out looking for training to better translate laboratory testing knowledge to patients and the lay community. The Clinical Communication and Counseling certificate program proposes an enrollment target of 6-10 students per year with a projected graduation of 6-10 students per year. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has relayed that based on their investigations, this proposed graduate certificate program shows promise and viability with minimal resources required. This proposed graduate certificate would not be eligible for student visa sponsorship given the completely online format of the program.

**Program Evaluation**
The program will follow University-wide assessment policies for graduate courses and programs. Alumni surveys will be distributed every five years. Recommendations from reviews and assessments will be used to make programmatic and curriculum improvements. Course enrollment numbers, reviews and instructor feedback are reported at the first ISG C&C meeting following the course offering. Metrics for success of the program will include enrollment to capacity for financial sustainability, retention and graduation at 80% or higher, enrollment of learners from diverse professions across the country, and recommendations by or promotional support by other training program or program director.

**Program Administration**
The Clinical Communication and Counseling certificate program is an educational initiative from the Institute for Systems Genomics, and in this capacity, will receive oversight and
Certificate, Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling

administrative support from the ISG. The ISG C&C, Educational Committee and Director review courses, enrollment, and outcomes once per academic year at minimum. All graduate programs at UConn (both master’s and doctoral, except Law, Medicine, and Dental Medicine) formally report to the Dean of the Graduate School. The academic policies and procedures that govern the Graduate School will apply to the proposed graduate certificate as well, including admission requirements, general academic requirements, graduation requirements, and program review policies.

**Funding and Financial Resources Needed**
None

**Other Resource Needs**
None

**Consultation with other potentially affected units**
ISG Director O’Neill and Program Director, Maria Gyure provided EPSY and HDFS department heads with copies of the program and curriculum proposals, and had meetings to discuss interest in shared collaborative approach for delivery and tuition return. HDFS and EPSY indicated a non-interest, but were supportive of the program. Dr. Clewiston Challenger (EPSY) and Dr. Keith Bellizzi (HDFS) were specifically approached for collaboration with course design. Drs. Challenger and Bellizzi will be paid via contract from CETL for the development of specific online learning modules within specific classes primarily during the summer session. Course teaching and delivery expectations will be the responsibility of the ISG. HDFS and EPSY faculty involvement is not expected or planned beyond this point. Department Head and Faculty Letters for attestation of involvement will be provided at the GEC meeting.

**Who can apply to this program?**
Internal applicants (current UConn students enrolled in another UConn degree or certificate program), External applicants (individuals who are not currently UConn students)

**Anticipated term and year of first enrollment**
Spring 2022

**Admission Requirements**
Bachelor’s degree or higher from an accredited institution. Cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. This program is eligible for non-degree students.

**Term(s) to which students will be admitted**
Fall, Spring
Certificate, Systems Genomics: Clinical Communication and Counseling

Application deadline: Rolling

Initiator & Program Director
Maria Gyure, maria.gyure@uconn.edu, 203-676-1459

Administrative Contact
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