

Just what the **DOCTORATE** ORDERED

by Akyia Westley

Since becoming the first California State University campus to offer independent doctoral degrees in 2007, Fresno State continues to reach new milestones with its post-baccalaureate programs. In May, the University recognized the first graduating class from its Doctor of Nursing Practice Program.

It is the third doctorate degree to be offered by the University.

Originally, only the University of California schools were allowed to confer doctorates. But in 2005, the California Legislature approved independent doctoral programs at CSU campuses. Fresno State was the first CSU campus to take advantage, establishing the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership in 2007 and the Doctorate of Physical Therapy Program in 2008.

Since then, the programs have produced more than 100 graduates to help serve community needs in the Central Valley and beyond.



Doctor of Nursing Practice

The California State University, Northern Consortium Doctor of Nursing Practice, is designed to prepare nurse leaders and advanced practice nurses for evidence-based practice in patient care, leadership and educational roles.

As a joint-doctorate program with San Jose State University, classes are held online and on campus to accommodate working professionals. Unlike other programs, the culminating experience is a doctoral project rather than a dissertation, which allows research for particular areas of practice most useful to each student.

Students in the program have developed projects that influence prominent topics like health care in the Central Valley and ways to change outcomes among different populations of people, such as infants and an array of ethnic groups.

“Two years ago, I would not have had the knowledge, skill or confidence to approach these tasks and now I do,” said student Christopher Patty, a medication safety specialist at Kaweah Delta Medical Center in Visalia.

Other student projects have included topics on feeding protocol on premature infants and skills needed for a Backpack Homeless Healthcare Program team to provide services to the unsheltered homeless.

Students graduating from the program gain the skills to provide safe, effective and efficient care within the scope of advanced nursing practice; translate research into clinical practice; and design, implement and evaluate quality improvement measures.

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

The Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership is designed to equip graduates with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to shape policy and practice in ways that benefit students and communities.

“It is truly a Valley-run program aimed at improving the Valley, which is critical given the unique educational and cultural landscape of the region,” said Dr. Jim Marshall, associate dean of the Kremen School of Education and Human Development.

Improving California’s education system is a core function and mission of the CSU, making it essential for the program to train educators to work with underserved populations and build relationships with K-12 schools. Nearly all graduates from the program remain in the Valley and assume leadership positions in organizations across the education spectrum, from pre-school to college.

As the program has evolved, accommodating working professionals has become a top priority. The University offers classes on nights and weekends with small cohorts of 10 to 12 students for a more supportive environment.

Courses are taught by practitioners and faculty.

Notable alumni of the program include Fresno State Vice President for Administration Dr. Cynthia Teniente-Matson, who has contributed to the campus by helping execute initiatives such as the Henry Madden Library revitalization and fundraising, the Campus Master Plan, partnerships with other government agencies and several process improvement initiatives.

Doctorate of Physical Therapy

In 2015, a doctorate degree in physical therapy will be required to become a licensed physical therapist in the United States. Fresno State is one of just three universities in California to offer the degree.

Upon completing the three-year program, students gain expertise in directing clinical research; planning and implementing patient care and education; and learning to provide consultative and administrative services in the delivery of physical therapy services.

The Physical Therapy Department trains students in onsite clinics: the Gait, Balance and Mobility Research and Education Center and the Musculoskeletal Care Clinic. Both clinics provide services for the community and opportunities for students to integrate classroom lessons into hands-on experience with patient care.

“Fresno State’s physical therapy program is unique in that community involvement from both medical professionals and generous volunteers is high,” says Rosalie Avila, a second-year student in the program. “When I graduate I will be able to relate to the people I am providing care for and be able to work as a medical team member because of my experiences at Fresno State.”

GraduatePrograms.com ranked Fresno State’s physical therapy program No. 8 nationally in 2013 in a survey of students and graduates. Fresno State was the highest ranked program in California.

Dr. Peggy Trueblood, professor and chair for the Department of Physical Therapy, says she is proud of the University’s fast-growing program.

“We have a distinguished history of developing outstanding, competent, professional practitioners and future leaders of the profession of physical therapy.”

In May, the University broke ground on the new two-story, 22,000-square-foot Physical Therapy and Intercollegiate Athletics Building to consolidate the department’s offices and laboratories under one roof for a more collaborative environment between faculty and students.

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Left: Patty McQueen receives her doctorate at the first-ever Doctor of Nursing Practice hooding ceremony.

Above: Students get real-world experience at the physical therapy, cardio pulmonary lab.