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Proposing an Academic Program in Human Lactation

With the advent of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) new Committee on Accreditation, the Lactation Education Accreditation and Approval Review Committee (LEAARC), the lactation consultant profession is entering a new era in educating lactation professionals. CAAHEP's *Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Lactation Education Programs* provides a curriculum to assist educational programs in providing instruction through certificate and degree offerings that will be able to become accredited by CAAHEP. Moving in this direction gives credence to the specific education needed by lactation professionals at a critical time in the evolving health care arena.

This shift reflects a change in the educational arena for current providers of pre-certification lactation education, as the profession supports the move toward a longer more formalized method of providing education to those seeking to become lactation consultants. New educational processes will be needed and it may be necessary for partnerships to be developed with education entities so these goals can be achieved. This is a guide to assist educators in approaching an academic institution in this type of endeavor.

Post-Secondary Education Systems

Post-secondary education systems offer courses, certificates and degrees in applied areas such as health care, as well as transfer programs and community education. Colleges and universities develop new certificate and degree offerings, customizing coursework for specific purposes and education to meet workforce needs. They frequently partner with other organizations to achieve those goals (for example, to provide clinical instruction) and this can include other for-profit companies.

Proposing a New Offering

When an institution is going to consider a new program there will be specific requirements that must be filled. While these requirements vary from one institution to another, some standard information will be needed in order to consider a new program.

1. **Occupational Need:** This information should include supporting documentation that this is an in-demand occupation. The data should include local and state needs, including estimated numbers of individuals needing this occupational training. It should also include supporting evidence that the demand will be sustained over at least the next five years with an estimated number of employment positions locally and the salary level for this job title. In some cases, a new program will be needed to provide additional education for individuals that are already employed and need the additional credential.

2. **Assessment of Employer Support:** Academic institutions must demonstrate that the program is needed in their community and will need to have an advisory board made up of employers and professionals in the field. They will need to document how employers will benefit by hiring those who complete the program and any incentives employers provide to employees for completing it. It will be necessary to indicate the number of employers the program will benefit and serve as well as if any other programs already exist in the vicinity that might impact the effectiveness of a new offering.
3. **Assessment of Resources Needed:** The institution will need to know what resources will be necessary to offer the program and the costs of those resources. Typical resources would include facilities, equipment, faculty, and instructional resources. It may be helpful to project budgets for the first year or two. In most cases the institution will have the lecture capability for the general education content and if they have health programs they will likely have lab capability. A program coordinator must be factored in as a necessary faculty resource.

Partnering with a College or University

Partnering with a college or university may be a solution to establishing a new program. Partnerships can involve sharing of space, faculty and content. The institution may be able to start the program on the continuing education side and later transition it to the credit side. Or they may start the program as a one-year credit certificate program and later transition it to an associate or bachelor degree program if the occupational field supports that move. Consortium or articulation agreements can be worked out to provide partnership opportunities between colleges and businesses.

Other resources available on LEARC website:

Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Lactation Education Programs

Curricular Approaches to Programs for Lactation Professionals

Sample Associate Degree Program in Breastfeeding and Human Lactation