M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Kristina M. Johnson, Chancellor

SUBJECT: Degree Authorization for the State University of New York State Downstate Health Sciences University

Action Requested

The proposed resolution authorizes the State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University to offer the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree, subject to approval by the New York State Board of Regents.

Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Resolved that the Chancellor be, and hereby is, directed to seek the authorization of the New York State Board of Regents for the State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University to confer the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree.

Background

Approval of this resolution will authorize the State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University (SUNY Downstate) to confer the Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) degree, subject to approval by the New York State Board of Regents. Degree authorization is necessary as the award represents SUNY Downstate’s first use of the OTD degree.

SUNY Downstate’s School of Health Professions has offered the licensure-qualifying, entry-level, Master of Science in Occupational Therapy since 2000. The proposed program would offer licensed professionals—who already hold a master’s degree in Occupational Therapy, a current national certification, and a state license to practice—a doctoral-level degree in Occupational Therapy. Students will be able to choose from two concentrations: Occupational Therapy for Children and Families; and, Occupational Therapy for Adults with Disability or Chronic Disease.

Students will integrate innovative evidence-based, population-specific interventions into their treatment plans, demonstrate advocacy efforts for clients and the profession, and model professional ethics in relation to client confidentiality and rights of research participants. They will be able to evaluate
and judge current socio-political, legal, economic, international, geographic, demographic, and health disparity issues and trends. Students will also be able to apply their training to interventions with either children and their families of all ages or with adults with disability and/or chronic disease conditions. The proposed program would be the only OTD offered at a public institution in the state; two current programs are offered at private institutions.

SUNY Downstate’s faculty are American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Board certified or certified in specific fields (e.g. rehabilitation, physical disabilities, and hand conditions), which makes them well suited to provide proposed program.

The program is expected to grow to a steady state enrollment of 34 students per year in year five. The proposed program, based on an alumni-interest survey, should attract a student body commensurate with the current MS program’s demographics: 19-20% African American, 15-17% Asian, and 12-13% Latinx. To recruit full-time licensed occupational therapists who represent diverse and underrepresented populations, SUNY Downstate has developed a flexible online option, particularly focused on the needs of alumni who are often first-generation students, bi- and multi-lingual, and non-native English speakers.

The current entry-level Master of Science program meets the accreditation requirements of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) that, in the absence of specific accreditation standards for the OTD, will serve to ensure quality. External evaluators noted the diversity of the current faculty and the commitment of those individuals to recruit persons from underrepresented groups. External evaluators also highlighted the part-time program option which “could enable students to continue employment while completing the program, making it possible for a wide range of students from diverse backgrounds.”

The job outlook for occupational therapists is strong: the US Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 133,000 available positions in 2018 and an expected 18% growth rate by 2028. As of July 1, 2019, there were 12,445 licensed occupational therapists working in New York State.

Offering an OTD program fits well with the mission and strategic plan of SUNY Downstate to provide a professional learning community that enables a diverse body of practitioners to advance their skills, education, careers, and leadership abilities. The development of an OTD program will provide students with additional opportunities to expand and improve their current practice through affordable, meaningful, and specialized education.

The program has been carefully reviewed and found to be sound, both academically and financially.