

BEFORE THE ALABAMA BOARD OF NURSING

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
OAKWOOD UNIVERSITY) **PETITION FOR DECLARATORY**
) **RULING**
)
Petitioner.)

DECLARATORY RULING

COMES NOW the Alabama Board of Nursing, by and through its Executive Officer Peggy Sellers Benson, RN, MSHA, MSN, NE-BC, and issues the following ruling:

QUESTION PRESENTED

Pursuant to Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(b), do the earned graduate degrees of Dr. Karen Lynch-Frater (Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching and Doctor of Philosophy in Health Sciences) constitute earned graduate degrees in a related health field, satisfying the requirements of Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(b)?

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On or about April 28, 2026, Oakwood University submitted a request for a declaratory ruling. Oakwood requested that the ABN issue a declaratory ruling finding that:
 - “Dr. Lynch-Frater’s Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching, as evaluated by ERES to be equivalent to a Master’s Degree in Health Education with a specialization in Nursing Education, constitutes an earned graduate degree in a health-related field within the meaning of ABN Administrative Code §610-X-3-.02(8)(b).”
 - “Dr. Lynch-Frater’s Doctor of Philosophy in Health Sciences, as evaluated by ERES to be equivalent to a Ph.D. in Health Sciences with a specialization in Nursing, constitutes an earned graduate degree in a health-related field within the meaning of ABN Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(b).”

2. Dr. Lynch-Frater possesses the following graduate degrees, both of which were earned in the United Kingdom:
 - Master of Arts, Learning and Teaching
 - Doctor of Philosophy Degree, Health Sciences

Because these degrees were earned in the United Kingdom, the ABN requested that Dr. Lynch-Frater have the degrees evaluated by a credentials evaluation service to determine their equivalencies in the United States. The ABN received a report from a credentials evaluation service which stated that Dr. Lynch-Frater’s graduate degrees earned in the United Kingdom were equivalent to the following degrees in the United States:

- Master's Degree in Health Education with a specialization in Nursing Education
- PhD in Health Sciences with a specialization in Nursing

3. Oakwood University submitted with its request for a declaratory ruling additional information and documentation in support of Dr. Lynch-Frater's graduate education. This information shows that Dr. Lynch-Frater's research at both the master's and doctoral levels addressed nursing-related questions. The documents also show that the program from which Dr. Lynch-Frater received her Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching was a program to prepare persons who would be teaching nurses, midwives, or other healthcare personnel in the clinical setting or in higher education. Oakwood University additionally provided information regarding Dr. Lynch-Frater's academic and clinical experience.

JURISDICTION

Pursuant to Section 41-22-11 of the Code of Alabama (1975), the Alabama Board of Nursing has jurisdiction to issue declaratory rulings with respect to the validity of a rule, with respect to the applicability to any person, property or state of facts of any rule or statute enforceable by it, or with respect to the meaning and scope of any order of the agency, if a written petition for declaratory ruling is filed by a person who states with specificity the reason why the person is substantially affected by the rule at issue. See also Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-1-.09. Oakwood University is substantially affected by the rule because it seeks to employ Dr. Lynch-Frater in a nursing faculty position.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. A petition for declaratory ruling to the Alabama Board of Nursing should state the name and address of the petitioner, a statement of facts sufficient to show that the petitioner is substantially affected by the rule, and identification of the rule, statute or order and the reasons for the questions. Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-1-.09. Petitioner has satisfied these requirements.

2. ABN rules require that nursing faculty in approved programs possess "[a]n earned graduate degree in nursing or a related health field." Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(b). Because Dr. Lynch-Frater does not have an earned graduate degree in nursing, her qualification to serve as nursing faculty turns on whether her graduate degrees are deemed to be an earned graduate degree in a 'related health field.' ABN rules do not provide a definition of "related health field."

3. ABN rules also require that nursing faculty possess "[a]cademic and experiential qualifications to teach in the area assigned." Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(c).

4. In July 2002, the ABN finally certified a rule that required that no later than January 1, 2005, nursing faculty must have a graduate degree in nursing or other health-related field. Regarding this requirement, the ABN issued an October 2004 declaratory ruling to Susie McCutcheon in which the ABN declared that McCutcheon's Master's in Guidance and Counseling, which included six semester hours credited in nursing, qualified as a health-related field.

5. Based on an individual review of Dr. Lynch-Frater's graduate education, including the credentials evaluation service report, the research interests for the degrees, and the supporting

documentation provided, Dr. Lynch-Frater's Master of Arts, Learning and Teaching and Doctor of Philosophy Degree, Health Sciences are both earned graduate degrees in related health fields. Oakwood University should ensure that Dr. Lynch-Frater, like all nursing faculty, possesses the academic and experiential qualifications to teach in the areas assigned.

RULING

The Petition for a Declaratory Ruling is hereby granted, and the Alabama Board of Nursing hereby rules as follows:

1. Dr. Lynch-Frater's Master of Arts, Learning and Teaching is an earned graduate degree in a related health field, satisfying the requirements of Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(b).
2. Dr. Lynch-Frater's Doctor of Philosophy Degree, Health Sciences is an earned graduate degree in a related health field, satisfying the requirements of Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code § 610-X-3-.02(8)(b).

DONE and **ORDERED** on this the 8th day of May, 2026.

ALABAMA BOARD OF NURSING



PEGGY SELLERS BENSON RN, MSHA, MSN, NE-BC
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this the 11th day of May, 2026, a copy of the foregoing was served on Oakwood University by placing a copy of same in certified mail, postage prepaid, and properly addressed as follows:

President Gina Spivey Brown, Ph.D., MSA, RN, FAAN, FANDL
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