

School of Education, University of Hawai'i at Hilo

External Reviewer's Report

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As part of the School of Education's Master of Education (M.Ed.) program review I was invited to serve as the external reviewer based on the following qualifications: earned Ph.D. in Teaching and Teacher Education, experience coordinating a graduate education program at Western Oregon University, a university that is similar to UHI Hilo in size and mission, and my past participation in accreditation cycles.

My review included analysis of:

- The department's "Self-Study"
- School of Education's conceptual framework
- Data on department and college enrollment histories
- Data on faculty work-loads
- Faculty CV's
- Program learning outcomes
- Assessment of student learning
- Examples of course syllabi

Additionally, I visited the campus December 1-2, 2016. While on campus, I met with the department chairs, M.Ed. faculty, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, current M.Ed. students, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, a community representative of the Advisory and Advocacy Group, current M.Ed. students, and M.Ed. alumni.

This report will reflect the following elements of the review (based on ACS WASC Criteria), drawing on written documentation provided by the M.Ed. faculty and staff as well as the final report, and observations made during the site visit

- Program's Mission and Learner Outcomes
- Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership
- Faculty and Staff
- Curriculum
- Instructional Program
- Use of Assessment
- Student Support Services
- Resource Management
- Community Connection

Program's Mission and Learner Outcomes

The School of Education has a clear vision for their programs that is documented in a conceptual framework they developed collaboratively that reflects the core values, desired outcomes, shared beliefs, and representative practices that distinguish UH Hilo's teacher education program from those

offered in Hawai'i. The School of Education (SOE) uses the acronym HEART to communicate these features of the program to students and the broader community, with H=Holistic, E=Empathy, A=Artistic, R=Rigorous, and T=Transforming. The use of the acronym has been highly effective in communicating the School of Education's mission and commitment to creating educators who value equity, empowerment, and critical perspectives on teaching and learning.

Evidence of this mission is reflected in all aspects of the M.Ed. Program. For example, the program recently made significant revisions to their M.Ed. in order to more effectively meet the specific needs of teachers working on Hawai'i's Big Island and other more rural and remote "neighbor" islands. Both the impetus for these changes, and program itself is reflective of the SOE's mission. These improvements include, but are not limited to, the program's curriculum, delivery, and assessment, all of which will be discussed in further detail in this report.

Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership

Both the written report and my observations during the visit to the university demonstrated ample evidence that the M.Ed. faculty sought input and support from leadership at the university, within the school systems, and community members in developing and assessing the M.Ed. program. Specifically:

- In response to the needs of working teachers the program developed web-based experiences. To evaluate and support teachers' technological resources and competencies the faculty worked with UH Hilo office of Distance Learning in order to assure participants in the program were prepared for the web-based experiences.
- Faculty received professional development from the Superintendent of the Kea'au-Kau-Pahoa complex on how to use technology and identify the best formats for delivering instruction.
- Faculty consulted with the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board in developing licensure in the field of Teacher Leadership, which is the focus of the revised M.Ed. program.
- M.Ed. faculty reviewed UH Hilo's benchmark institutions that offer Teacher Leader programs.
- Faculty consulted the US Department of Education's "Teach to Lead" and the HI Department of Education's "Teacher Leaders Academy" to evaluate their program's fit with federal and state initiatives.

Faculty and Staff

Examination of the M.Ed. faculty's CV's reflect the university's commitment to hiring highly qualified faculty with terminal degrees from reputable institutions and programs. The faculty systematically seek out feedback from students through institutional evaluations and ongoing opportunities to provide feedback as part of regular routines within courses. Faculty members are active in their professional fields as evidenced through their scholarship and service to the institution and professional organizations. Meetings with current students and alumni provided further evidence of the high-quality faculty teaching in the M.Ed. program. Students said they feel the faculty really listen to their feedback and make adjustments accordingly, noting that they are culturally responsive to them in ways they advocate the teacher participants should approach teaching in their classroom contexts. Students and alumni reported the reason they chose UH Hilo as the place to earn their M.Ed. was because of the faculty.

Curriculum

Prior to this program review cycle the M.Ed. program underwent significant curricular changes to their program in order to support student learning and create a program that is challenging, applicable, and unique to the needs of graduate students in Hawai'i and neighboring islands. In the past, the program had a more generalist focus and faculty felt students participating at this level of scholarship and experience needed a program more focused on creating leaders in terms of practice and advocacy. Faculty, as described above, examined different programs and resources and sought input from national, state, and local organizations and as a result created a Teacher Leader program. Faculty adopted the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* produced by the Teacher Leader Exploratory Consortium (2011) and aligned coursework to learner outcomes, program objectives, and the seven domains outlined in the standards. Each syllabus communicates effectively how course experiences align with the standards, providing students with a comprehensive, rigorous, research-based curriculum that is relevant and highly effective in meeting the demands of today's classroom teachers.

Instructional Program

In addition to revising the curriculum the faculty in the M.Ed. program implemented instructional strategies and methodologies to address the needs of graduate students in the program while engaging them in high levels of learning and providing opportunities for students to achieve institutional learner outcomes, licensure requirements, as well as fulfill course and program objectives.

One significant change to the instructional program was how the coursework was delivered. Because of both geographical limitations and the busy professional demands of the teacher participants in the program the faculty created web-based experiences to expand opportunities for teachers to participate in and complete a master's degree. The hybrid model, intended to deliver coursework to all parts of Hawai'i's Big Island and neighboring islands, includes face-to-face experiences as well. While students on neighboring islands are unable to meet face-to-face in the physical sense, the faculty has implemented technology to ensure the other island participants meet at the same time as students living on Hawai'i that are able to travel to campus.

Another noteworthy change to the instructional program was the modification of a diversity course entitled "Ethnic Groups in Hawai'i." This course, intentionally offered during the summer, engages participants in a variety of embedded community experiences. These experiences provide opportunities for teacher participants to immerse themselves in the vastly diverse geographical, socio-economic, and ethnic communities unique to Hawai'i.

The faculty also implemented an innovative schedule that presents courses through a staggered schedule. The current students I met with especially appreciated this feature of the program because they felt it helped them focus in-depth on course experiences as opposed to trying to complete multiple projects at the same time that dilutes their attention to the content.

In order to demonstrate mastery over the program's content, candidates conduct an action research project within their teaching contexts. The project, which includes 3 components: a

study, a written report, and a presentation provides opportunity for candidates to examine professional issues specific to their work in schools. While the use of action research is not a new feature of the program, the way the project is implemented has been revised significantly. In the past, faculty found students made completion of the action research project the focus of the program rather than seeing it as the learning tool it was intended to be. In order to address these concerns the revised program broke the project into three phases, using each phase as an opportunity to connect course content and experiences in direct and critical ways to the final project. The written action research report required of all students is used to offer a record of the scholarly work candidates accomplished in their program and the presentations provide opportunities for students to share what they learned and know to the broader educational community.

Lastly, the faculty, based on analysis of data related to graduation rates of students in the M.Ed. program, returned the structure of the program to a cohort model. Returning to this model has been highly effective for the student population in completing their M.Ed. Students whom I interviewed as part of this process highly valued the cohort model because of the sense of community it built for them with their fellow students and the impact on graduation rates has been extraordinary, from the program graduating less than half of students in the program, to almost 100% completion and graduation.

Use of Assessment

At the foundation of the revisions to the curriculum and instructional program for the M.Ed. is the ongoing use of assessment to evaluate courses, programs, and student learning. Evident in both the written report and accompanying artifacts, as well as interactions with faculty, staff, students, and alumni, the SOE uses established assessment procedures to design and carry-out instructional programs.

The following data sources are regularly collected and examined to evaluate the program's quality:

- Enrollment- Faculty and staff analyzed quantitative data (provided in Appendix C), provided by UH Hilo's Institutional Researcher and found that using a cohort model, whereby students take courses in a predetermined sequence, has led to consistent enrollment over the last 5 years.
- Graduation rates- Examination of graduation rates, as previously discussed in the prior section of this report, showed an increase in graduation rates from a 3.5% -54.5% graduation rate prior to implementation of the cohort model to a 95%-100% graduation rate with students completing 30 credits of coursework in 2 years.
- Assessment check points- In order to assess evidence of student learning, the M.Ed. faculty and staff draw on program and individual candidate assessment. Candidate assessment checkpoints occur when admitted to the program, at end of each semester of study, and at the end of the program. Key assessments have been identified for each checkpoint (see Table 6 in the written report).
- Inter-rate reliability activities to evaluate final action research project- Faculty engaged in collaborative activities to establish criteria for assessing the final action research

through a process that involved faculty independently grading the same project, then meeting to discuss their ratings in order to create tools for assessing student progress with the project. They used the activity to create rubrics for both instructional purposes, such as student self-evaluation, and more complex rubrics for collecting data on program effectiveness (see Appendix D).

- M.Ed. student surveys- (see Table 8), Student surveys are administered to students mid-way and at the end of the program to assess program effectiveness. For the M.Ed. program in particular, faculty and staff have been interested in how students are experiencing the distance components of the program (see Appendix F). Faculty are currently exploring implications related to how 90% of participants found the distance learning format beneficial to them as working teachers, but 81% found the format beneficial to their learning.

The M.Ed. program in its current form is fairly new and faculty have created plans for collecting and analyzing data as part of their ongoing assessment of the program's effectiveness, but admittedly have not yet executed the plans. However, they demonstrated a commitment to both seeking out better data and ways to use the data for improvement. The biggest challenge facing the SOE is that the data collection requirements of accreditation agencies, state and federal education agencies, and the local institution exceeds what can be expected from the number of faculty and staff teaching in the program. There exists a need for institutional support in managing the data being collected. It should be noted that faculty specifically asked for feedback from me around how they might better refine and align their assignments and formative assessments based on the newly adopted Teacher Leader Standards, and processes for establishing reliability for the action research rubrics.

Student Support Services

It is clear that the M.Ed. program at the UH at Hilo has a unique student population with needs specific to the communities it serves, such as finding ways and means for delivering quality graduate level education to working teachers across a variety of contexts, including teachers working in extremely rural communities with high numbers of immigrants in high poverty situations, and teachers working in established suburban contexts within Hilo. The program as described in the section of the report where curriculum, instructional programming, and use of assessment are addressed, provides evidence that the institution is committed to meeting the demands of teachers in Hawai'i and neighboring islands with similar school contexts.

It should be noted that the M.Ed. program at the UH at Hilo is not a standard "online program" that can be easily duplicated or serve students in other contexts. It was designed specifically for the needs of the student population and surrounding communities served by the UH at Hilo. The online experiences, coupled with the face to face components and specific coursework with particular, context specific embedded experiences are what gives the program its integrity and makes the program highly effective.

Resource Management

In its current state, the M.Ed. program has sufficient faculty and resources to run the program. However, there exists a need for personnel to manage the vast amounts of data being collected

across programs in the SOE, and technological support for meeting the instructional needs of distance students. In particular, current students in the program expressed frustration with technological delays and limited interaction with their peers on neighboring islands during whole cohort meetings and class sessions. Discussions with administrators at the institution, however, reflected knowledge of these needs and a strong willingness to provide resources as funding becomes available.

Community Connection

A cornerstone of the M.Ed. program is the active involvement in establishing connections with the surrounding community. During my visit, I met with a member of the SOE's Advisory and Advocacy group, and cadre of community members with interest in supporting the SOE in preparing teachers and providing quality post graduate experiences for teachers in partnership with the faculty at UH Hilo. Additionally, as described earlier in the report, the diversity course, which is intentionally offered during the summer, requires students to meet and travel to different parts of the island to experience the variety of communities there, and brings in community members as guest speakers to offer more insights into the diversity on Hawai'i. The faculty in the SOE are always looking for opportunities to expand their partnerships within the community.

Conclusions

The UH Hilo's School of Education has created a M.Ed. program that is research-based, instructionally innovative, that makes valuable contributions to the institution and surrounding communities on Hawai'i and neighboring islands. The faculty is made of up of talented, committed, and energetic individuals that consistently practice the ideals represented in the school's conceptual framework in all aspects of their work with students, schools, and the community. The program they developed around the Teacher Leader Standards is academically rigorous, meets the demands of today's schools, and provides teachers with access to applicable content and opportunities to develop critical perspectives on their work in schools and the tools to become leaders within those schools, potentially impacting K12 education in important ways. It is not unusual to find disconnects between the goals of colleges of education and the policies imposed on schools and teachers by Departments of Education, but the faculty and staff at UH Hilo developed a program that supports teachers in not only navigating these conflicts, but provides opportunities for the teacher participants to be leaders who see themselves as capable of improving the educative experiences of all members of the education community.

Recommendations

- Current resources limit the faculty in data collection and management demands. With support personnel to manage the data and create systems whereby faculty can use assessment data more easily and effectively would potentially improve and expand the program's effectiveness. Faculty feel the pressure to look for better data and use data more effectively, but given their teaching, service, and advising loads they do not have the resources to develop and manage data systems to meet their desired assessment goals.

- Keep the program's unique structure and purpose, serving the communities of Hawai'i and neighboring islands. This is not an online, generic distant learning program that can be effectively offered anywhere. The most outstanding features of the program is the way it is rooted in needs of the island's distinctive cultural, social, and economic needs.
- Obtain resources to better support the web-based experiences, particularly when students meet as whole groups. Students, who are overwhelmingly satisfied with their M.Ed. program, did note that the clunky technology is distracting and limits interactions with their peers on other islands.

It was honor to participate in this program review. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo's School of Education should be proud of the innovative program they developed and the documented successes of the program in developing teachers as leaders who are critical, culturally responsive, and committed to their students and profession. Their ability to meet requirements of state and federal agencies while honoring the unique social, economic, linguistic, and ethnic cultural landscape of the Hawaiian Islands is nothing short of impressive and worthy of celebration.