

External Program Review: MS in Curriculum & Instruction Secondary Named Options
February 18, 2021
Responses to the External Review Committee Report

Overall, we found the report produced by our external review team members to be extraordinarily useful and positive. We are extremely grateful to the review team members and the wide range of staff, mentor teachers, and alumni who participated in the review and provided feedback to the review team. The recommendations from the review team will help inform program and department planning and ongoing improvement activities. We identify some initial or ongoing activities related to recommendations from the external review report below. This report is particularly timely as we are addressing some key changes to state requirements as outlined in our self-study report. Below we note some clarifications to items from the report that we felt either did not reflect current developments or did not capture the full story of the program.

edTPA Performance Assessment: The WI Department of Public Instruction is currently in the process of changing the requirements for performance assessments. Previously, the edTPA was required for all new teachers. However, going forward university programs may develop their own teacher performance assessment aligned with state teacher education standards that, if approved, can serve as the required performance assessment. The UW-Madison Teacher Education Center is leading efforts to develop the guidelines and reporting process for this performance assessment, with SED staff involved in its development and implementation within the SED program.

Faculty Associates: The faculty associates within the SED program are valued members of the program as well as of the department. We could not run the program to the level that we do without the dedication and work of the faculty associates. In fact, the department found the faculty associates to be so valuable that they have already voted to shift the initial two-year term appointment to be renewable ongoing appointments. We also agree with the committee that the faculty associates title is not clear, given that their work is a combination of instructional, administrative, and advisory. We are awaiting new titles to be approved by the School of Education to determine which may best fit these important roles within the program and will better reflect these positions. We appreciate the recommendation of the committee on finding ways to support the work of our faculty associates, and are exploring steps to include these kinds of supports in our future budget projections.

One clarification to address a concern of a clear supervisory system – the Faculty Chair of the program, currently Jeremy Stoddard, serves as the supervisor of the faculty associates and program coordinator (Joey Lubasi) for the SED program. The lack of clarity reflected in the report was likely the result of some recent reorganization in the department service and administration structure that came with a change in department chairs. We agree with the committee that there should be a clear and supportive system of supervision and will continue to examine and clarify roles as we move forward.

ESL: We greatly value the input of the committee on the role of the ESL program in particular. The merger of the content and ESL teaching field has been an on-going area of growth and pride throughout the program's development. At present we are also working to incorporate the state's licensure shift to a K-12 model for ESL.

We found the recommendations of the committee regarding ESL (p. 8-9) to be quite useful and will incorporate these as part of our continuous improvement of the program and professional learning for faculty and staff. Two of the recommendations in particular are issues we are working to address. First, it has been a challenge to identify and place students in ESL specific teaching placements, and in particular placements where ESL and the subject area are being taught in ways that model the practices emphasized in the program. This is in part because of the local school systems and how ESL services are provided at the secondary (middle and high school) level. We are continually attempting to identify additional quality placements and are also exploring alternative models to what these experiences may look like (e.g., clinical rounds) to make what field experiences we can provide richer. We also identified the need to continue to work on the integration of the ESL and subject methods courses as well as the field experiences. We have experimented with doing combined ESL/subject area supervision visits and ways to make the most of the field experiences that do exist. For greater integration across coursework, the review team's recommendation of holding a working retreat to explore greater integration with faculty and faculty associates to explore cross-over in courses, and methods courses in particular, is something we would like to implement in the near future. We have had a large number of faculty and faculty associate changes over the past three years and it is a good time to create spaces for this kind of collaboration.

While we found the recommendations in the report to be overall useful, and in particular those identified above, there were also three assertions in the report that seemed to mischaracterize the program, its structure and goals. These could be the result of the particular alumni the team talked with and when they went through the program as well as a lack of understanding of how different elements of the program are designed to address key standards required by the state for certification.

First, the program was designed to develop secondary teachers for core content areas (English, Social Studies, Math, Science) with ESL as a complementary skill set and certification for working with English Learners in those subjects. The program is not intended or designed for teachers looking to serve as stand-alone ESL teachers. Given the shift in licensure grade bands (Secondary is now 4-12 and ESL K-12) we need to continue to consider how we balance elements of the program toward the core goals of secondary teacher preparation with these shifts in licensure. While it is true our students technically qualify for stand-alone ESL positions, that is not why they attend our program – and very few of our graduates are in these roles. As our self-study indicates, the majority of our students who reported working with ESL populations in their classes are teaching secondary content area courses. The recommendation by the review team to see how to better integrate ESL methods into subject area courses and experiences is important given this core goal of the program.

Second, it surprised us that the team found that WIDA was not a core part of our ESL instruction. Elements and resources from WIDA are embedded throughout the ESL courses. For example, in our initial course WIDA presents its definitions of academic language and its assessments. The WIDA standards and performance indicators are integrated throughout, and WIDA staff guest lecture in each ESL course. As one specific example, in ESL Methods we have a researcher from WIDA come to present a workshop on how teachers can leverage the WIDA English Language development standards to better meet the needs of the English Learners in their student teaching placements and future

classrooms. We will make the WIDA connection more visible to students and Cooperating teachers, so they can see the resources threaded throughout the program.

Finally, the notion of an imbalance in the program is not reflected in the credit count nor in how these courses work toward the UW Teacher Education standards and certification requirements. Within the first three semesters of the program candidates learn, explore and are assessed on the primary elements of teaching and learning to earn their teaching certification. During this timeframe, there are three classes with subject specific coursework that equal 8 credits, and four classes with ESL specific coursework that equal 9 credits. Further, the balance is not just between ESL and subject specific courses but also with foundational courses on topics such as human development, politics in schools, and inclusive schooling. Field experiences do lean more heavily on the subject area lens since the initial license is granted within the content domain and, as noted elsewhere, is something that we will continue to work on in terms of identifying contexts that model integrating ESL strategies within the subject area. The review committee was correct that there are constraints with the compressed 14-month program model that comprises a graduate degree and dual certification. The incorporation of ESL with secondary subject teacher preparation is a core commitment of the program to address the need for teachers who can support diverse populations of students to be academically successful in Wisconsin schools.

For those teacher candidates who have an interest in gaining more expertise in ESL beyond the initial standards, we offer additional opportunities. Any of the teacher candidates may request that their full-time student teaching be in an ESL setting. Given the dual degree nature of the program it would be ideal to have at least one of students' student teaching experiences to be in a setting that includes students receiving ESL services or that models pedagogy integrating subject-specific strategies with ESL strategies. This is a goal we will continue to work toward for all of our students, while assuring that those interested specifically in ESL contexts have that option. We also offer final summer term workshops that students may select for .5 credit each. These workshops explore targeted practice-based topics like newcomer strategies and resources, teaching reading, and working with SLIFE.

Conclusion

The specific recommendations provided by our external review team will provide useful guidance as the MS Secondary Education programs expand and work to address the needs of Wisconsin schools. In particular, we were heartened by the many strengths identified by the team and for the ideas for better understanding or improving areas of our program. The popularity of the program and affordances of the 131 financial model will provide both flexibility and financial resources to work toward the changes and improvements we identified above, and this report will be a useful resource for the faculty and academic staff in the program for years to come.