

## RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT 2021

### DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The department of Curriculum and Instruction is grateful for the studious insights provided by the external review committee Chair, Professor Lynda Stone, and the committee members Professors Keffrelyn Brown, Noah Sobe, Lynne Paine and Earlise Ward. The report summarizes strengths and challenges of the past decade and recommendations for future action. Our response is organized around these three sections of the report.

#### Strengths

We appreciate the committee's recognition of how our multiple strengths have contributed to our number one ranking in graduate education (*US News & World Report*) for 19 of the last 20 years. We agree with the committee's assessment that lauds our unique intellectual reputation in the competitive national and global landscape of education. Our department's signature of outstanding interdisciplinary research, extremely strong mentoring of graduate students who succeed on the world stage, and innovative and creative teaching underscores what becomes possible when excellence and equity are seen as mutually constitutive. The review has highlighted that for the Master's and Ph.D. degrees our department's emphasis on social justice, along with high quality research, teaching and service, have produced a vibrant, exciting and forward-thinking intellectual and social milieu in which epistemological and demographic diversity are foregrounded in ways that benefit the student body, the faculty, the UW and the state of Wisconsin.

#### Challenges

Three main domains within which the committee observed challenges were related to how areas function in different departmental tasks, the workload for faculty, and the ways in which different assistantship opportunities can be offered to graduate students.

**Areas and department functions.** We recognize the challenges that the new admissions policy for full funding of all admitted students presents to a department that has built its distinctiveness and reputation on more decentralized academic excellence and admissions. The centralization of the process represents integrating difficult intellectual, ethical and organizational tasks. It requires a new departmental organization with new responsibilities and obligations of faculty in decision-making. Among the latter are comparing department-wide candidates for admission who have extremely different epistemological commitments, backgrounds and fields, disciplines that are not reducible to each other, and a wide range of intended research projects. While faculty are clearly able to discern strong candidates in their respective areas, the intellectual and programmatic diversity make it not possible to set criteria in advance that would genuinely embrace or honor such differences equally across the department or that could account a priori for all variables applicants present. Even with this complexity, however, in the two years of new admissions that the faculty has engaged, the department has voted unanimously for the pool of candidates put forward and we have

successfully recruited an excellent student cohort, the majority of whom are students of color. The issue of admissions is not one of departmental areas of study per se but rather the requirement that links admission to full funding which in turn requires centralization of decisions about who should receive that funding.

While we applaud the move to full funding and support having our students receive admissions offers competitive with our peer institutions, we also realize that different tasks require different solutions. Our new approaches to hiring, for example, make use of the area strengths and the faculty crossover between areas to suggest creative and imaginative ways of recruiting outstanding faculty who then draw outstanding graduate students. The new admissions process requires a different kind of creative solution. The areas still have an important role to play in drawing strong applications and faculty review prospective applicants in their areas with deep knowledge of the specificity of content. We believe that the manner in which the area structure of the department has and will evolve in the coming years, and that the very real intellectual and community value of the areas (see Recommendations section below) offer compelling reasons for its continued evolution. The current situation provides a functional inflection point that should be permitted to grow and change in ways that preserve what is good about the area's flexible structure and that adjust to the different kinds of tasks required.

**Faculty workload.** The external review committee noted the issue of faculty workload and asked whether there were creative solutions for acknowledging this load in different ways: "Are there possibilities, for instance, in currently informal practices becoming venues for credit and expertise?" We concur with the committee's assessment of the extensive nature of our mentoring and non-course-based time commitment to students. Faculty regularly engage in giving extra time to mentoring for such things as anti-racist pedagogy, addressing xenophobia, building connections with disadvantaged communities beyond campus, running weekly reading groups in addition to set seminars, teaching writing and publication skills, practicing interviews and public presentations with students, and more. This goes beyond simply advising students how to do a research thesis or dissertation and constitutes a large unspoken, informal and time-heavy commitment to the department's principles of social justice and excellence in teaching. These informal practices are essential to the department's graduate mission. They reflect a mature workforce who understands the holism of graduate mentoring and takes responsibility for addressing structural issues within increasingly time-poor institutional circumstances. We appreciate the suggestion to more creatively explore ways of acknowledging how these non-formalized contributions can be recognized and legitimated beyond word of mouth or intangible understandings. We will explore these positive possibilities going forward.

**Range of student assistantships.** The external review report considered the balance and weight of different kinds of assistantships that our graduate students could take up. The report noted that "The issue is a balance across these experiences. Some students appear to spend time teaching; others working with advisers who have grants, spend time in research but have little teaching opportunities." Faculty remain cognizant of the wide array of possibilities for mentoring that occurs through different kinds of assistantship. To respond to the complexities and balances of assistantships, we have created a specific committee devoted to assistantship

allocation in the department that operates in tandem with the new funding model. That committee gathers pertinent information before allocations are made, balancing departmental instructional needs with graduate student strengths and experience and state-mandated licensing requirements in teacher education.

While we are working toward a vision that would enable all students to experience a variety of assistantships that offer opportunities across teaching and research there is a cost to this process that requires campus attention. Currently, project assistantships cost significantly more than teaching assistantships due to the departments having to carry the burden of a differential scale for tuition remission. We cannot afford to organize assistantships across such a variety of possibilities at this point, and the difference cannot be made up by simply appealing to external funding. External funding bodies typically privilege certain kinds of subject matters over other kinds (e.g., STEM), meaning that not all areas of the department have genuine access to funding bodies dedicated to their area. We remain hopeful, however, that our vision of parity across assistantships can be realized in the future.

**Minors.** The department offers four minors: Curriculum and Instruction, Qualitative Research Methods, International Education, and Science Education. The review team did not comment on these minors, and per the instructions given to the review team, we interpret that to indicate that they did not have concerns about or see challenges in regard to the minors. While we will be maintaining the courses listed in our minors, we would like to work with XXXX and the marketing office to make students across campus more aware that these minors exist. We expect that with new certificates potentially coming on board, more attention may be drawn to what our department offers and anticipate further demand for these minors in the future.

## **Recommendations**

The three concluding recommendations addressed issues of funding, faculty areas, and new Master's degrees and Graduate/Professional Certificates.

### **1. Funding**

The external review report noted that increased funding is the central issue for current and future efforts of our graduate programs and that this included in particular issues pertaining to students beyond their fourth year of study in the doctorate, in addition to the need for a long term plan for retaining a robust cohort of international students. The department of Curriculum and Instruction draws on a variety of funding sources to support new and existing graduate students. These include the four fellowships earned through the former Graduate School Support Competition that offer two-years funding, two EDGRs/AOF fellowships offered by the School of Education, university-wide fellowships that our students compete in (e.g., Kemper-Knapp fellowship), and allocated funds from the department budget. With the transition to the full funding model the department was faced with blunt decisions that impacted the number of students we could admit relative to the past and how long we could fund them for. For equity reasons, the department made the move to full funding *for all existing Ph.D. students* within their first four years of study. This meant in practice that instead of 'grandfathering in' the

change in funding model across time, we gave funding to all Ph.D. students simultaneously in their first four years of study. This was introduced in the academic year of 2019/2020 and generated a very positive response from existing students in that category.

Our budget models demonstrated that to fund into the fifth and sixth years would have resulted in no more than 2 or 3 new admits. In a department of 30 professors, currently holding the number one ranking in the nation, and being the third largest Ph.D. program on campus this was judged as deleterious to the existence of the program and its national and international reputations. Given the available resources we chose to maintain the integrity of the graduate program by funding incoming students for four years. The department has, however, subsequently developed several models of support. We have a new endowment for graduate students pursuing dissertation research in their fifth and sixth years in the area of mathematics education (the Romberg fellowships). We have endowments for students studying in the area of science education available to students in their fifth and sixth years (the Pella awards). We have additional fellowships for all existing students that graduate students at any dissertator stage compete for. We have also worked with procuring for our senior graduate students teaching assistantships and project assistantships in units within and outside the School of Education, such as in WCER, computer science, teaching languages, and the Graduate School. Last, we have used grant budgets to fund advanced students in their later years of study.

We recognize that this range may not cover every case and propose several pathways based on the recommendations. First, we need to develop a longer-range plan with the School of Education for endowments that ensure gifts for these purposes. Second, we recognize the potential of new Master's degrees and certificate programs to generate revenue and provide employment opportunities for our advanced students. And third, while the external review noted our excellence in median time to completion for the Ph.D. and the outstanding quality of our graduates' work, at both the point of orientation and in one-on-one advising we can underscore the differences that would be faced if doctoral study took more than four years. This would be enhanced by a new tracking system developed by our Graduate Program Coordinator to identify in the fourth year of study any doctoral students who had not completed their program and who had simultaneously not procured funding for a fifth year of study. This situation that could then be communicated to the department committee responsible for allocating assistantships.

The department has recognized its commitments to diversity and to equality in its admissions practices. International students are admitted via the same processes as our domestic students and the pools are not separated. International applicants compete for the same fellowships as domestic students, except for the EdGrS/AOF fellowships. In addition to having a student-led organization for international students in the department we have worked with international students to procure grants for holding events and workshops that are meaningful to students. Two challenges remain. The first are the challenges presented by a new full funding admissions model and which pertain to the practice of provisional admission and parity in regard to how waivers are administered. The department recognizes the equity issues that arose this year around domestic applicants who are working full time in the Madison area and seeking

admission to the Ph.D. program relative to full time employees in other domestic locations and to international applicants. Domestic applicants working full time, such as teachers or applicants working in IT, elect not to accept departmental funding and to pay tuition out of private means. Domestic students not in the Madison area and/or international students who are restricted from full time employment by immigration and visa policies, may have similar desires to not participate in the assistantship structure and to fund their own study at the UW out of private means. This may especially be the case for more mature age applicants who have already had a long and robust career in an educational system. Seeking consistent solutions with the Graduate School regarding students paying for credits once they have equally gone through the approval process and are deemed admissible would enable us to retain our good standing in national and international education and underscore our concern for equitable pathways to completion. The second challenge pertains to social integration of international students. Over the last two years the department has hired a greater number of international faculty and indeed the current Director of Graduate Programs has been an international student in the US. Despite this representation, we agree with the review that a longer term plan that addresses attitudinal, linguistic and epistemic barriers to full inclusion and the power dynamics among domestic and international students and faculty would be helpful in addressing more subtle social issues that can arise and would sustain our very high ratings from graduate students for their satisfaction with overall program quality.

## **2. Organization of areas**

The external review report recommended delimiting the number of areas through which the faculty affiliate and then allowing cross-affiliation between areas. The external review committee was right to note that “faculty expressed a strong desire to uphold a basic commitment within their program to intellectual vibrancy, autonomy, and flexibility across all matters of program concern. These include faculty governance and program area maintenance.” The report also noted that our website lists five general areas and that faculty researched and taught within groupings that exceeded what the website portrays.

While the previous design of five areas was mentioned in the self-study, underscored as now non-functional, and its genesis explained in meetings, the committee was not aware that the five areas listed on our website (Curriculum and Global Studies; Disciplinary Studies; Multicultural Education, Teacher Education, and Childhood Studies; Digital Media; and Languages and Literacies) were a function of a request from a previous Dean to reorganize for the purposes of hiring. They have no practical purposes within the instructional program or graduate student course or research interests. They are not used for hiring or recruitment, did not generate the desired clarity, and should be removed.

The values of the current departmental organization are multiple.

**Hiring:** The departmental areas our faculty work within and across enable our department to recruit excellent hires who then attract excellent graduate students. The current area titles match the demarcations in the field, the research lines of faculty, the teaching and programmatic commitments of the department and job market classifications. The areas in

alphabetical order are: Bilingual/ESL/World Language Education; Curriculum Studies and Global Studies; Design, Informal and Creative Education (DICE); Early Childhood Education; Literacy; Mathematics Education; Multicultural Education; Science Education; Social Studies Education; and Teacher Education. Many faculty cross-affiliate with two or more areas and participate in search committees and admissions decisions for our graduate students in multiple areas.

**Allowing Flexibility and Responsiveness to Changing Intellectual Movements and External Educational Priorities:** The area arrangement structures both stability and innovation. The areas align with yearly teaching assignments, intellectual practices, and communities and cohorts of students, and they allow cutting edge research and innovations to evolve into new formations (e.g., the redefinition of the old Educational Technology area now as DICE). The epistemological diversity that the department is renowned for has been supported in part by this flexible structure. The stability of intellectual communities permits national and international visibility and recognition of their contributions e.g., in mathematics education, science education, literacy, etc., and aligns well with professional organizations, journals, intellectual communities, and funding agencies. As new social and intellectual movements arise and epistemologies evolve, the area structure permits their introduction and is flexible enough to allow morphing into new domains, such as the introduction of a multicultural education area, the addition of global studies to the curriculum studies area, and the expansion of ESL into world languages and bilingual education.

**Mentoring of Graduate Students:** The area arrangement generates and maintains an intellectual vibrancy that operates to attract the most outstanding graduate students domestically and internationally. Prospective students are drawn to the robust cohorts studying in the areas and these affiliations often end up in lifelong networks of alumni and influence. In addition, because so many faculty work across more than one area our intellectual and professional mentoring of students delivers a breadth and depth that has become the hallmark of our department. Thesis and dissertation committees are typically cross-area which also gives our graduates the opportunity to compete for multiple positions upon completion.

To that end, we recognize the areas are more than administrative conveniences. They allow our students and faculty to forge social and intellectual connections within and across interests which constitute our department's signature and its reputation for a kind of interdisciplinary focus that remains robust. These connections are communicated in our required class C&I 712 Introduction to Research in Curriculum and Instruction in which faculty from all areas present their research to new students and in the methodology requirements of our doctoral program. There is also a tremendous amount of cross-fertilization already occurring, reflected in the topics and titles of theses and dissertations and joint grant applications. The department, therefore, has to weigh the multiple functions and dimensions that areas fulfill alongside the most effective and efficient ways for implementing its mission. We recognize the challenges that a new centralized admissions process layered over the top of departmental areas has posed in the last two years and we are working through the process to refine it for upcoming rounds.

### 3. New Master's degrees and graduate/professional certificates

We are appreciative of the questions and challenges raised by the committee in regard to potentially developing a new Master's degree and/or Graduate/Professional certificates. The report captured the difficulties of implementing such projects in a time of transition and uncertainty and we are appreciative of the external review committee's recognition of the complexities of both structure and timing. As a department, we have already taken steps to consider what and how such innovations could be developed. In the last several years, two committees, the Graduate Program Committee and the Curriculum Committee, took up the responsibility of examining different possibilities for redesign and the impact that the addition of new certificates and a new Master's degree would have on our existing graduate programs, on faculty workload in the context of other duties, and on the wider community need for such programs.

**Master's Degree:** The Master's degree has been a vital component of professional upskilling and a rich intellectual program, historically recruiting largely from Wisconsin-based teachers who received financial compensation for obtaining advanced degrees. Since this state law has changed and only a small number of school districts now offer this incentive we have started to recruit from a more diverse pool of Master's candidates. We recognize the potential revenue stream that a new kind of Master's degree may generate and the need for faculty and administrative support to both develop and sustain such programs. The external review committee noted "The general impression is that faculty members are not opposed to these directions but are not highly invested at this time." We believe that faculty have and do display energetic interest in developing new programs and that we are in the learning stages of what this process requires. Over the last several years faculty have met with excitement around these new possibilities. Multiple departmental committees, repeated faculty meetings, meetings with the Dean's office, with Continuing Studies, and with other departments within and outside the School of Education who have successfully generated such programs have taken place. The faculty also have recognized that undergraduate certificates can foster opportunities for on-ramps into a Master's degree, for our graduate students' teaching experience, and as revenue for our department. Our existing undergraduate certificate in Games-based Design generates a large number of teaching assistantships for our graduates in the summer months, as well as significant revenue for the department as a whole. We also have two new undergraduate certificates in different stages of the program approval process whose relevance here is related to generating opportunities for our graduate students in their future teaching assignments and for recruiting Master's students. The multiple meetings and efforts in these regards have also been accompanied by an uncertainty in regard to time commitments, to the ethics of creating a Master's degree online for an inherently social discipline steeped in holism and affective labor, to the overall impact on our existing in-person programs, and in regard to sustainability.

**Graduate/Professional Certificates:** In the years prior to the review, the department developed a list of potential Graduate/Professional certificates that we shared with the external review committee in the spirit of seeking guidance regarding their potential impact on the Ph.D.

program. These certificate development ideas have been previously presented to the Dean's office, discussed with PLACE, and with Continuing Studies. Such Graduate/Professional Certificate programs could be generated in time, but we remain uncertain about both the possibility for significant direct revenue to the department from them, about the intellectual benefit to our C&I graduate students of such certificate programs, about the logistics of marketing and maintenance of robust enrolment, and about the general impact, positive or negative, on the existing Ph.D. program. Overall, we agree that the external review report represents an appropriate reflection on the questions of balance between administrative burdens, revenue generation, intellectual interests, and institutional capacity.

## **Conclusion**

The department of Curriculum and Instruction is a rarity on the UW campus and globally for all of the right reasons. Despite changing external circumstances, significant faculty attrition over the last two decades, the highly competitive landscape of a large and broad discipline, and the Covid-19 pandemic context, we are the only department that we know of that has sustained the number one ranking in graduate education for nearly two decades. This is not just a rare feat in regard to the University of Wisconsin, but in terms of our ranking and reputation domestically and internationally. It is testimony to the dedication of different and ongoing generations of faculty and staff who create conditions that generate the respect the department has accrued and that remains attractive to graduate applicants. We are grateful to the review committee for recognizing the outstanding quality in our programs and the quality, time and dedication our faculty and staff give to research, mentoring, teaching and service. We are also grateful to the review committee for striking a balance between identifying the unique strengths of our graduate programs and pointing to the real and ongoing challenges that we face. As the committee has observed, the most important of those challenges arise at the intersection of shifting external conditions and long-standing norms of the department – norms that also contribute to our strengths. These challenges, such as the challenge of graduate admissions and the challenge of departmental area structure, require thoughtful long-term solutions that respond to a shifting resource context and build on, rather than seek to replace, constructive departmental norms and traditions related to autonomy, interdisciplinarity, and intellectual and demographic diversity. In many cases our proposed responses are already underway. These responses underscore the excellence of our graduate programs, our faculty's research, mentoring, teaching and service commitments, and the inherent creativity we bring to sustaining our position at the very forefront of the field.