

## **Academic Program Review: Review Committee Report**

Five-Year Academic Program Review for:

- Education Studies, B. S.\*

Ten-Year Academic Program Review for:

- Certificate in Educational Policy Studies\*

\*Given that both programs draw from the same set of course offerings and are housed within the single department of Educational Policy Studies within the School of Education, a single review committee report has been drafted that will serve as the review for both programs.

Date Submitted: **January 31, 2023**

Committee Members: Professor John L. Rudolph, Chair of the Review Committee (Dept. of C&I)  
Professor Travis Wright (Dept. of Counseling Psychology)  
Professor Aydin Bal (Dept. of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Ed)

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### **Summary of Review Committee Process and Activities**

The review committee received the self-study documents from the Department of Educational Policy Studies (EPS) and was charged with the review task on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022 with instructions that the review be completed and report submitted by February 1, 2023.

Following an initial planning meeting on November 4, the review committee requested the materials listed below for additional program background in addition to the self-study reports provided and the material that is accessible on departmental and university websites. The committee asked for all materials produced over the past five years in each of these areas. \* Kristin Dalby (EPS Graduate Program Manager) provided these items in a Box folder on November 9, 2022. All these materials can be accessed via the Box link below.

<https://uwmadison.box.com/s/r5fugikp3j5l73xbjox0ivr13lrbec2p>

- Annual undergraduate student survey results
- Copies of the bi-weekly electronic bulletin sent to undergraduates
- Meeting minutes and/or agendas from the EPS undergraduate committee
- Complete list of undergraduate course offerings and enrollments by semester (including summers)

The Department also provided the following documents (also in the Box folder):

- EPS Undergraduate Skills Table (Excel Spreadsheet)
- ES Major Career Outcomes Summary

\*The undergraduate student survey and EPS undergraduate committee were initially organized in 2019 and so only three years of those materials were available for review.

In early November, the review committee scheduled meetings with Professor Lesley Bartlett (EPS department chair), Professor Linn Posey-Maddox (EPS undergraduate programs chair), and Michael Dixon (EPS student affairs program coordinator in charge of undergraduate programs). Interview questions were drafted by the committee to guide discussion of the two programs. The meetings were held on the dates indicated:

Professor Posey-Maddox — November 14, 2022

Professor Bartlett — November 21, 2022

Michael Dixon — December 2, 2022

The discussions with the interviewees, naturally, centered on the substance and operations of the two programs including their strengths and weaknesses from the perspectives of the various relevant stakeholders (e.g., undergraduate students, faculty, staff, graduate students, campus partners, etc.).

During the meeting with Michael Dixon, he volunteered to connect us with students in the Education Studies major who would be willing to meet to answer questions about their experiences and give their thoughts on the program. Four students from what the department refers to as the EPS “Undergraduate Ambassadors” group were able to participate in the discussion. Since only the review committee chair was able to be at that meeting due to scheduling conflicts, it was held via Zoom and recorded (with the students’ permission) so that the feedback could be viewed by the other members of the committee.

Meeting with Education Studies Major Students — December 9, 2022

The students participating in the interview included the following:

Lindsay, senior, ES Major with certificates in Environmental Studies, Jewish Studies, and Arts and Teaching — Planning to work in educational policy in the future (via grad school)

Lily, junior, dual majors in ES and Political Science with a certificate in Public Policy — Planning to attend graduate school in education policy and analysis

Yining, senior, dual majors in ES and Psychology — Applying for graduate school in school counseling and to a teacher certification program in social studies

Mikayla, junior, triple major in ES, Elementary Teacher Educ, and Special Education — Plans to teach and complete an online masters in educational psychology while teaching

Identifying students in the EPS certificate program to meet with proved to be more difficult as there is no easily accessible list of students working toward earning the certificate. Moreover, given the onset of the winter break, it seemed unlikely that any such students could have been identified, contacted, and been able to schedule a meeting. Thus, no students taking the certificate program were interviewed for this report.

Following the meeting with the EPS Education Studies undergraduate majors, the members of the review team re-read the self-study documents, the materials provided in the Box folder by EPS staff, and the interview notes taken during the meetings with the EPS department chair, chair of undergraduate programs, student affairs program coordinator, and the undergraduate students in the major. The review team then met on January 19, 2023 to compare notes and outline the findings of the review.

### **Distinction between the Education Studies Major and the EPS Certificate Program**

As explained in the self-study documents, the Education Studies major requires students to complete 30 credits from the approved course list (in addition to courses necessary to meet the School of Education liberal studies requirement and the university general education requirements). The major coursework consists of three core courses (9 credits) and four courses (12 credits) in either the U. S. or global concentrations. All these courses are offered within the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Courses to meet the breadth requirement of the major can be taken from a variety of departments as well as from EPS.

To earn the Educational Policy Studies Certificate, students simply complete a minimum of five courses (15 credits)—the department has plans to reduce this to four courses (12 credits)—offered by the department (with two of those courses numbering 300 or above).

Both programs are administered by the EPS department staff and rely on the undergraduate courses taught by department faculty, two faculty associates (each teaching four courses each semester) and approximately twenty-five graduate students who serve as Teaching Assistants and/or Lecturers for the courses offered. Advising and monitoring of student progress in both programs is handled by the office of Education Student Services (ESS), which performs these duties for students across the School of Education. Direct assessment of student learning is classroom based.

All this is to say that the two programs are quite similar in that they are grounded in a selection of course offerings from the department (primarily) with the main distinction being that the ES major requires more coursework, naturally, and coursework that is more specified in belonging to particular categories, meeting the core, concentration, and breadth requirements. Students in the major as well as those pursuing the certificate all elect courses from the same pool of offerings, thus the ability of the department to support both programs derives from the same effort, which entails ensuring that a sufficient number and variety of courses are offered on a regular basis.

Given this, one of the main concerns raised with the introduction of the ES major five years ago was whether it might negatively impact the number of students seeking the EPS certificate, that is, whether the major would cannibalize certificate enrollments. Data provided in the EPS Certificate self-study appears to indicate that that has not happened. Certificate enrollment has remained steady despite the rapid enrollment growth in the ES major.

Moreover, it is important to indicate that program faculty demonstrate clear commitment to ongoing assessment, programmatic review, and improvements across both programs. Conversations with stakeholders indicate an awareness of programmatic goals, shared vision, consistent areas for growth and expansion, and evidence of ongoing, reciprocal conversations among faculty, staff, and students. Though formal assessments seem to be targeted at the level of course instruction, our review indicates that ongoing program assessment and refinement are embedded in regular faculty and staff meetings.

### **Strengths and Weakness**

After consulting the self-studies, documentary evidence provided by the staff, faculty, staff, and students, the review committee identified what it sees as the primary strengths and weaknesses of the two programs. Given the considerable overlap between them, the committee decided to pool the list of strengths and weakness. In some instances, program-specific distinctions are included by item. The strengths and weaknesses, however, are grouped by stakeholder, which we limited to students and the department.

#### **STUDENT PERSPECTIVE**

The committee came to this list based on the student surveys provided by the department, its interviews with the ES major students on December 9, and (indirectly) from the interview with the Undergraduate Student Affairs Coordinator, Michael Dixon.

Although approximately the same number of items are listed under each of the strengths and weaknesses categories, it should be noted that student survey results demonstrate high levels of student satisfaction with most aspects of the programs (for example: faculty accessibility-95% satisfied, course quality-91% satisfied, and course offering/availability-77% satisfied). Areas in which survey results showed less satisfaction were career development (48% satisfied) and research support (39% satisfied).

#### **Strengths**

- Strong focus on social justice and inequality in education — Topics addressed, such as education as it relates to race, gender and sexuality, poverty, inequality, and stratification were seen as extremely important and why students were drawn to the programs.
- High quality of instruction/faculty expertise — Students couldn't say enough about how much they valued the knowledge and experience instructors brought to the classrooms.
- Small class sizes — Students commented specifically on the benefits of this, both in terms of forging personal connections with caring faculty and with other students.
- Flexibility — Students found the ability to easily complete the programs within the time constraints of their undergraduate degree extremely attractive. This was primarily due to the low number of required courses and courses needing pre-requisites as well as the relatively wide range of courses available that meet the

program requirements. This made it possible for students to easily double and even triple major.

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of field experiences — Students expressed interest in opportunities to work with policymakers and/or learn about schools at local sites.
- Few research opportunities — Students indicated they would benefit from working alongside faculty on research projects to prepare them for graduate school and/or careers.
- Few policy courses — Students expressed a desire for courses focused on nuts and bolts of policy work and/or the application of course ideas to real-world contexts.
- Lack of information about career opportunities — Students were unsure about the specific occupations or positions available with the degree or certification.
- Repetition in content across classes — Students commented on having encountered the same ideas, readings, and/or podcasts multiple times across courses in the programs.

### **DEPARTMENT PERSPECTIVE**

The items listed below were derived primarily from the self-study documents, the materials provided by the department, and the interviews with the department chair, undergraduate programs chair, and the student affairs program coordinator.

### **Strengths**

- High-quality programs — Both the ES major and the EPS certificate programs appear to offer effective instruction from caring and expert instructors on topics of significant interest to students
- High levels of faculty investment and participation — All department faculty actively participate in teaching, oversight, and service across both programs.
- Steady/growing enrollment — Enrollment in the ES major since its inception five years ago has significantly exceeded initial projections, while enrollment in the EPS certificate has remained steady.
- Programs are well aligned with SOE and university strategic vision — Programs are meeting or exceeding enrollment targets, and the ES major draws a diverse population of students in terms of race and ethnicity and socioeconomic background.
- Professional opportunities for EPS graduate students — The teaching needs of the programs regularly provide instructional and teaching-assistant positions for graduate students.

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of financial resources to adequately support programs.
- Service and teaching demands on faculty and staff not sustainable.
- Advising and administration of programs has proved challenging.

### **Advice and Recommendations**

The review committee is unanimous in its conclusion that the ES major and EPS certificate are highly successful instructional programs that meet the overall needs of students, the department, school, and university. Indeed, they appear to be model programs that leverage the expertise and scholarly accomplishments of departmental faculty in just the sorts of ways that one ideally envisions at a major research institution.

That success, however, seems to be coming at a significant cost to the department in terms of faculty workload, which has the potential to compromise faculty morale, retention, and research productivity—the very things that have been crucial to the programs’ success.

Recognizing many of the student-perceived shortcomings identified above, the department has embarked on a plan of offering more courses in student-identified interest areas and expanding opportunities for student research and community-based experiences. These are changes that the review committee would wholeheartedly endorse. However, it’s difficult to see how such program enhancements can be made without significant additional resources.

The resource question seems to lie at the crux of the challenges facing the department with respect to these programs. Given this, the review committee offers some general recommendations followed by two sets of additional recommendations, one set that could be followed with the provision of additional resources from the school and another that could be followed in the absence of significant additional resources.

### **General Recommendations**

Continue with efforts to identify and communicate to students the range of career opportunities for students in the major — This is clearly an area that needs attention. Students don’t appear to have a good sense of the occupational possibilities that exist for this non-teaching education major.

Maintain ongoing efforts to draw a diverse population of students — While the ES major enjoys high levels of student diversity (though some improvements might be made with respect to drawing more African-American/Black and indigenous students and a more balanced/representative student profile in terms of gender), the EPS certificate student demographic is slightly less representative of the school and university student population.

Continue efforts to reduce curricular redundancies — The duplication of topics as well as specific readings and multimedia resources was a concern expressed in the student surveys as well as voiced by the students we interviewed. This should be something that's easily addressed.

### **With Additional Resources**

Note: All of the recommendations below are aligned with many of the priorities identified in the EPS self-study documents. Given the success of the programs so far, the review committee agrees that these enhancements would push the ES major and certificate program to even higher levels of excellence. While the review committee doesn't presume to make recommendations about \*how\* these goals might be realized, it seems clear that they would require the hiring of additional faculty and/or staff with the relevant expertise to bring them to fruition.

- Work to add field/community-based experiences for students — This might be done through the use of stand-alone practicums or as part of specific course offerings.
- Develop an internship program that includes opportunities for policy-related work — This would address concerns raised about both the relative lack of policy-focused coursework and the lack of real-world applied experiences.
- Create opportunities for students to gain experience and expertise in education research — This could be accomplished via the hiring of staff to identify and place students with research teams on campus or in off-campus settings.
- Pursue the development of an honors option for interested students — This would likely draw additional number of highly motivated students to the ES major (with the potential for increasing overall student diversity)

### **Without Additional Resources**

It seems clear to the review committee that without additional resources, the Department should consider scaling back its vision for the two programs. Faculty and staff would necessarily need to manage the existing elements of the programs within its already strained budget. Under these circumstances, we would recommend the following:

Limit or pause the introduction of new courses or field experiences — Without additional faculty or instructional staff it's difficult to see how any proposed expansion along these lines can possibly occur.

Encourage or direct faculty/instructional staff to channel their efforts to the development of courses that students have expressed interest in but don't currently exist (such as those focused more on policy or the nuts and bolts of schooling) — Such a redirection of effort would, of course, depend on the ability and expertise of existing faculty and staff in EPS (and wouldn't necessarily reduce demands on faculty).

Leverage faculty and staff in other School of Education departments to meet identified course needs — Although faculty in EPS are currently operating at capacity, it may well be the case that faculty and staff in other departments have courses with existing capacity that have not previously been identified as relevant to education studies that could be added to the courses approved for the major. Partnering with these other departments might be a good way to address some of the deficiencies in the EPS course offerings and might, as well, be a way to expand the range of education-related topics covered in the program thus reducing some of the existing curricular redundancies.

Leverage existing programs and/or centers that offer or provide service-learning opportunities for students — Here we're thinking that partnering with places like the Morgridge Center for Public Service, the SOE Career Center, Global Engagement Office, and International Academic Programs might be a cost-effective way to add community-based field experiences and/or internships to the programs nationally and internationally.

Create research-based practicum courses for undergrads — This could potentially provide an avenue for program students to learn about and participate in education research for credit by working alongside faculty and graduate students on existing research projects. Although such an arrangement would almost certainly require some work to manage, it could provide faculty with additional research support at the same time giving students the research experiences they have been asking for. It is certainly possible, however, that such research “assistance” or “support” might require even more work on the part of faculty—in training, mentoring, monitoring, etc.—thus defeating the purpose, at least in terms of providing additional support for faculty.

## **Conclusion**

What's clear in all this is that the Department of Educational Policy Studies has developed a remarkably successful degree program/major that has wildly exceeded enrollment expectations while maintaining a successful certificate program that draws from the same pool of undergraduate courses. Students in both programs appear to be highly satisfied with the experiences they've had in the courses and the program as a whole (with some areas for improvement as would be expected in any program).

The success of these programs is without question due to the expertise, investment, and care given by the faculty members and program staff. And it was made clear to the review committee that this investment was made in large part on the understanding that significant enrollment increases would result in the corresponding allocation of significant additional budgetary resources to the department.

The allocation of those resources would enable the department to move toward the realization of the vision it has for these programs and would likely stimulate additional enrollment growth. In the absence of those resources, the department, it seems to us, is limited to doing what it can to pick the low-hanging fruit where it can, but has few options in the end other than scaling



back its ambitions. The review committee is unanimous in its belief that these programs are highly effective, desirable, and worth continuing. The level at which they continue, however, will be determined by decisions made at higher levels within the school and university.

Far be it from the review committee to make strategic recommendations about the larger operations of any department, but if EPS is primarily concerned about generating revenue that it believes is essential for its long-term viability and overall health, we would suggest a redirection of additional effort away from these undergraduate programs and toward some combination of 131 or summer-school programs in which the budgetary payback to the department is clear and unambiguous.