Planning and Review Committee  
2004-05 Program Review

I. Program Review: M.S. in Education

Program Director: Mary Hopkins-Best

PRC Consultants: Heidi Rabeneck and Jonna Gjevre

Date of Review: April 15th 2005

Purpose of the Review: The review was conducted to assess the quality of the M.S. in Education degree program as part of the ongoing seven-year review cycle of every UW-Stout program.

Committee Findings: The committee recommends continuation of this program until the next audit cycle.

II. Abstract:

In alignment with the UW-Stout mission, the M.S. in Education program prepares graduates for professional careers in education by offering a high-quality and challenging program in two concentration options: Professional Development and Certification. Each concentration includes a professional core of 13-14 credits; Research, 6-11 credits; and Concentration, 5-12 credits. To maintain a high degree of rigor, the program coursework for the core and research components are graduate-level-only classes. Furthermore, each degree candidate must develop a portfolio aligned with program objectives. Students in both the Certification and the Professional Development concentrations have the opportunity for on-campus delivery (which combines face-to-face and online offerings). Now students in the Professional Development concentration also have an alternate option: distance education conducted entirely online. Extensive program revision for this degree was implemented by the program director in 2004. Since this revision, off-campus cohorts have been phased out and much of this off-campus audience now has the opportunity to take courses online, increasing consistency in classroom rigor. This is a high quality program offering flexibility to a diversely located audience. By maintaining strong leadership, continuous improvement in the following areas will pose no problem: (1) standardize course delivery options, (2) improve communication via email and use of the Internet, and (3) keep the needs of the online cohort integrated with those of on-campus students.

III. Process Followed for the Current Review:

In the fall of 2004, PRC consultants met with the program director to discuss the review process and to offer assistance. Data regarding several aspects of the program were collected from students, key instructors within and outside the department, and program committee members. The program director then completed the self-study report, presented the report to the PRC and responded to questions. The PRC discussed the program director’s report and after feedback from members of the committee, the consultants developed this report. The program director was allowed to provide input on a draft of this report prior to its submission to the PRC.
IV. Previous Review

The program was last reviewed in the spring of 1998, although a significant revision of the program occurred in the spring of 2004. The recommendations of the 1998 report and the program’s responses to them follow:

Previous Recommendations

1. Supplement program committee membership by adding professionals with (regional) expertise in the program’s mission and market.

2. In conjunction with the program committee, the department chair, and the dean, continue to market the program and expand marketing efforts, with special attention to local professionals. Develop marketing information that clearly describes the program mission, goals, and focus as well as its curriculum. Link the marketing information and the marketing plan to the population served.

3. Evaluate the current level and quality of instruction per student evaluations. Identify needed improvements and bring the attention to the program committee and department chair for possible revision and enhancement.

4. Determine the cost of the program to the university and seek the resources needed to provide adequate course coverage and advising without continued overload of faculty and staff.

5. Survey current students and recent graduates about course scheduling and availability to determine the most appropriate offerings. Use the information obtained to schedule courses and advertise course sequences to allow students to thoroughly plan their course of graduate study.

6. Increase resources to permit department to manage current course offerings as part of load.

7. Review marketing plan and program information for comprehensive link between program mission, curricula, and availability to current and potential students.

Responses to Previous Recommendations

1. Members of the Program Advisory Committee include UW-Stout faculty and staff from the School of Education, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, Student Services, and Continuing Education, as well as regional professionals in the field.

2. The program has moved toward more extensive use of the web to promote program clarification. Nothing is currently available on how the School of Education is marketing the program outside UW-Stout.

3. Student evaluations reflect written communication skills and critical thinking skills have been enhanced through program coursework and students felt there was not much unnecessary repetition or overlap of content between program courses. The primary areas identified for needed improvements are (a) more rigor added throughout the curriculum, and (b) some focus on teaching strategies in the classroom – classes that will help them become better educators.

4. No information is available at this time.
5. Students enjoyed experiences they had with working with professionals in the field as well as other educators out of the discipline. The flexibility of the program was a plus for many students.

6. Faculty and staff have been gearing up for the online delivery of courses. Faculty and staff will need to be identified for advisement in grant proposal and program evaluation for student applied research projects.

7. No information is available at this time.

V. Program Review

Program Strengths

1. Stakeholders have repeatedly cited the strong leadership of Mary Hopkins-Best in furthering the recent program revision. (advisory board survey; key inside instructor survey)

2. The quality and enthusiasm of instructors has been extensively praised. In addition, the advising and accessibility of instructors have received high numerical scores. (student survey; key inside instructor survey; advisory board survey)

3. Flexibility of offerings, distance locations, and special scheduling times has enabled non-traditional students to move swiftly through the program. (student survey)

4. Students give high numerical scores to the program’s quality in fostering written communication and critical thinking. Students also give high scores to the program’s resources, advising, and its structure in enabling them to readily complete program requirements. (student survey; emphasized in program director’s report)

5. Curriculum overlap is generally not a problem, and students praise the interdisciplinary nature of courses. (student survey)

6. Library resources on campus are considered satisfactory. (student survey, key inside and outside instructor surveys)

7. Graduates’ placement in field is extremely high—100% for Special Education certification—and student satisfaction with key elements of the program rated as “very high” is 89%. (program director’s report)

8. The program has shown commitment to continuous improvement and revision. (See Continuing Improvements: 2004 Program Revision, below)

Continuing Improvements: 2004 Program Revision

1. **Rigor:** Responding to concerns about rigor and accountability (cited in student surveys, advisory board survey, and program director’s report), the 2004 Program Revision has addressed the need for rigor by addressing curriculum, instructor course loads, and online program objectives.

   **Curriculum**
   
   - There was more flexibility in the old program, which in some ways worked against the program’s need for rigor.
   - Students were allowed to use courses they had already taken for credits, and there was no deliberate intent in professional development.
i. Now, most certification students are beyond the 30 required credits

- Old core had fewer 700 level courses required
  i. Now they have added more core 700 level courses
     a. more total credits are required but they’re still meeting the rigor needs for grad students to have higher level courses

- The old program had no selectives—and little direction. There were few core courses and the rest was free choice.
  i. Now students need to develop a plan from the start and justify their portfolio with evidence their goals were met at the end of the program
  ii. The research option (3 options available) was opened up and made more flexible
     a. grant proposal development
     b. program revision
     c. research project

- In addition, certification students have a transcript review to assure that curriculum needs are fulfilled
  i. Transcript review helps keep student on track with the program and points out any deficiency in courses—to maintain rigor, credit requirements are not reduced to accommodate student needs.

- Some student comments suggested there was not enough classroom intervention experience—instead students are doing “thesis” material (student surveys); however, the advisory committee has praised the curriculum as “hands-on” (advisory board survey). Clarification should be sought in this area, through surveying stakeholders.

Instruction

- Previously, the program relied heavily on adjunct instruction and overloads to provide instruction for the off-campus cohorts, a reliance which appeared to have undermined the rigor of the curriculum. Now, the program relies less heavily on adjunct and overload instruction.

- With the 2004 Program Revision, online contracts are primarily part of load vs. overload as they had previously done with the outreach programs. This reduction of overload has countered the problem of instructors being resistant to going above and beyond in upholding standards.

Online Program Objectives

- The new online program is very rigorous, with a specialist designated to the online program, who distributes newsletters to foster communication and awareness, and holds instructors accountable for content and course delivery. This online program was developed in line with UW-System requirements and has been approved by UW-System. It has key features designed to maintain rigorous standards:
  i. The online program is consistent with face-to-face objectives.
  ii. Core courses have the same instructors online and face-to-face.
As a result of these online program features, the School of Education is not hearing the same “lack of rigor” comments from online students/faculty that were raised regarding the outreach program(s).

2. **Resources and Facilities:** the program revision has also addressed student and instructor concerns about facilities and resources for instruction. (key inside instructor survey; student survey)
   - A major upgrade of e-Scholar resources has been requested by instructors of online courses. (program director’s report)
   - Strong dissatisfaction with Web Board features has been noted. (program director’s report)
     - They are working with the campus to get this up and running satisfactorily.
   - Another area of concern (identified through student survey) is the use of different course delivery systems for different courses – students would like to see one system used. (Learn@UW, Blackboard, e-Scholar)
     - They are now working to standardize this in some respect, and also have more support with specialist Joan Vandervelde now involved.

3. **Course Scheduling and Planning:** a few students desired better timing for offerings of classes for working adults. (student survey) The program revision may have resolved these issues. (program director’s report) Scheduling concerns have been addressed in the program revision with the following response:
   - The on-campus program has made evening courses available.
   - The online courses are open to anyone in the program.
   - The program will continue to work on the scheduling of course offerings. One idea was to rotate online and evening courses to hit all audiences. They will need to pay attention to this schedule to make sure required courses are always available in one format or another.

4. **Communication:** This has been reported as a concern for some distance learners. (student survey; program director’s report) Some of this is attributed to email accounts. (program director’s report) Responses to communication concerns include the following:
   - Contact with students has been expanded beyond the Stout email system.
     - This accommodates those in and out of program – part-time students whose email accounts might otherwise expire.
   - Online cohort will be taking courses each term. If they stick with the cohort schedule, they will be in classes each term so they won’t “fall off” of the campus system and be “out of the loop” with email and communication.
   - In addition, they will hold students accountable for updating contact information with the University.

**Recommendations for the Program Director**

1. Work to improve and standardize course delivery options for online cohort.
2. Work to improve communication via email and use of the web to clarify (and avoid misunderstandings) on such issues as:
   a. Requirements and transcript review for certification students.
   b. Students’ responsibility for updating contact information.
   c. Scheduling of core and selective courses.
3. Work to keep needs of the online cohort integrated with those of on-campus students.
4. Seek and respond to student feedback regarding the implementation of the new program revision and quality of curriculum, possibly through use of surveys.
5. Work to maintain enrollments sufficient to supply program needs.
6. Investigate possibilities for developing a re-licensure plan.
7. Align program with PI-34 requirements.

**Recommendations for Coordinating Chair of the School of Education**

1. Work with program director to assure that course offerings, both on-campus and online, are aligned and staffed by faculty and staff able to uphold the standards and mission of the program.
2. Work to identify and support faculty who can provide guidance and expertise for the research, grant proposal, and program revision specialization options.

**Recommendations for the Dean of the School of Education**

1. Work closely with university technology support to assure improved course delivery resources for online degree students.
2. Maintain communication with program director and other stakeholders to assure continuing implementation of 2004 program revision.