Planning and Review Committee 2010-11

Consultant Report

I. Program Review: B.S. in Early Childhood Education

Program Director: Kari Merritt

PRC Consultants: Lopamudra Basu and Pete Schlosser

Date of Review: December 3, 2010

Purpose of Review: The review was conducted to assess the quality of the B.S. in Early Childhood 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 through the next scheduled review in 2017.

II. Abstract:

UW-Stout's B.S. in Early Childhood Education program prepares early childhood professionals to support the developmental and educational needs of young children in our diverse and changing world. The program provides best instructional practice through applied experiences for candidates who are preparing to educate young children in the context of home, school and community.

The Early Childhood Education Program promotes the fundamental belief that the goal of early childhood is to prepare candidates to meet the developmental and educational needs of young children in a global community. The program infuses and models professional standards in teaching and learning to prepare candidates to educate young children in the 21st century.

The Early Childhood Education program at UW-Stout prepares candidates who utilize evidence based practice and tools of technology to educate a diverse population of students. The curriculum is delivered through a tiered developmental sequence model incorporating a micro-clinical approach that incorporates theory with practice.

The program was revised several years ago and currently includes 48-49 credits of general education requirements, 11 credits in a professional core, designed around Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and 68 credits of professional coursework.

The B.S in ECE has 344 students, showing a steady increase over the past three years. This is down from 373 in 2005, at the beginning of this review cycle, but is considered a sustainable and realistic number given the demand for graduates and the available resources. While there is concern that the supply of candidates may exceed demand it is worthy of note that, the placement rates for the graduates of the Early Childhood Education program remain high, being reported at 100% in the 2008-09 Career Service report.
It is recommended that the B.S. in Early Childhood Education continue as a degree program at UW-Stout and that recommendations made by the committee be implemented to further strengthen the program.

III. Process Followed for the Current Review:

Under guidelines developed by the PRC, information regarding the program was gathered from the Placement Office, Institutional Research Office, the program director, key instructors, Program Advisory Committee, students, and one-year and three-year graduates. Fifty-three students, mostly juniors and seniors, participated in the survey of current students conducted on-line. Seven key instructors from outside of the program and three from within the program responded to the questionnaires.

Observations were made by the consultants based on these surveys and institutional data and were reported to and discussed by the PRC. The program director presented a summary of her report to the committee and had an opportunity to address concerns. The dean from the School of Education was also available to answer questions.

IV. Previous Review:

The last PRC review of this program occurred in the 2003-04 academic year, with Dick Tyson and Ann Cross serving as consultants. That review resulted in the following recommendations. In her 2010 report, the program director has responded to these recommendations. Her responses are summarized in italics below.

The following are the recommendations from the 2003 PRC directed at the ECE program’s continuous improvement process.

#1: “Student responses suggest a “disconnect” between the program and the students’ perceived needs and experiences.

Action and Progress: Based upon the recommendation of PRC in 2003, the program currently surveys students during their student teaching experience. Information from that survey is shared in the discipline area work group and with the advisory committee. Information gleaned from these surveys has been instrumental in guiding development of a major program revision. Additionally, based upon the Program Survey conducted for this review, students consistently comment about the strengths of the professors in the program, opportunities for hands on experiences and being prepared for the “real” world.

#2: Significant course overlap continues to be noted in this review, as was the case in 1996.

Action and Progress: Surveys of students have indicated that the perceived overlap in the 2003 PRC report is no longer evident. This is due to the fact that many of the courses where overlap may have existed, are no longer required in the program. Additionally, lines of communication between courses housed within the School of Education are clear and open. For example, the instructor of HDFS 124/Human Development and ECE 303/DAP: Infants/Toddlers are co-leaders of the ECE Learning Community. This partnership has created many benefits and facilitated communication.
While students are still noting some overlap, many of these concerns have been addressed in the proposed program revision.

#3: Student's perceived preparedness for teaching the early primary grades remains a concern, as it was in 1996.

Action and Progress: Through the micro clinical approach, students have the opportunity to teach many of the content areas in the public school setting. Additionally, the proposed program revision provides a “tier” approach to learning that includes a micro clinical at each of the four tiers. Tier four, semester seven of the suggested course sequence, has a significant focus on grades one, two and three.

V. Program Review

Program Strengths:

1. The micro clinical component provides students opportunity early in the program to integrate theory into practice.

2. Enrollment in the program remains strong. There were 373 in 2005 and 344 in fall of 2010. This appears to be a sustainable size if not even a bit higher than potential demand.

3. Placement of candidates remains high, with Career Services reporting 100% placement in the past two years, increasing each year of the past five from 93% in 2005.

4. The program receives certification from the Wisconsin DPI, which has a profound impact on its curriculum. The 2010 program revisions are reported by the program director to be in conformance with the standards (PI-34).

5. Cohesive faculty and program director with shared vision and values.

6. The availability of an added certification in Early Childhood Special Education as a part of their program with the addition of five courses.

7. The introduction of an Early Childhood Education Learning Community has resulted in increased retention rates, 81% as compared to 74.4% for all new freshmen.

8. Recent graduates surveyed reported higher than average employment and satisfaction with their career development. ECE students are more likely to want the same program if they were to do it over again.

9. Current students perceive that the program offers diverse challenges and relevant experiences, praising the staff’s knowledge and passion.

10. Current students indicate that they are really pleased with the "hands-on" experiences of the micro clinical series, pointing to the relevance to the curriculum.
11. Program Advisory Committee members believe that they have been able to contribute to the improvement of the program.

**Opportunities for Further Program Enrichment**

The 2003 PRC Consultants of the Early Childhood Education Program identified the following concerns: “Recent graduates rated skills in problem solving, analysis of information, decision making, conducting research, using math and computers lower than other Stout grads.” 2010 student surveys indicate encouraging numbers in all these areas of student learning and satisfaction with the program. The mean score for most of these questions was 4.7 out of a possible 5, suggesting overall improvement in student satisfaction. The lowest rated items were: The laboratory equipment for my program is up to date (4.22) and My program has few or no problems with unnecessary repetition or overlap of content (4.30). While the highest rated items were: Instructors in my program provide current and relevant information (4.85) and My critical thinking skills have been enhanced through my coursework (4.77). Written comments also indicate overall satisfaction with the program.

The Self-study identified the following as the major areas needing improvement:

1. The program is understaffed. Although a new faculty member has been hired and began teaching in Fall 2010, the program revision will clarify the areas in which staff expertise will be needed. Faculty in the program, have expressed the need for more staffing to serve the 344 students. Student surveys also express the need for more faculty and not have the same instructor offer too many courses.

2. Inadequate access to interactive whiteboards equipped classrooms.
   “The program shares a mediated classroom with Family and Consumer Sciences, Art Education, and the Early Childhood Special Education certification. The mediated classroom provides wireless Internet and a interactive whiteboards. Because of the heavy usage of this classroom, it is extremely difficult for our students to have access to this technology outside of class to practice on.” Student surveys indicate the need for greater access to technology in order to be prepared to enter the classroom environment. In the most recent survey of current student teachers, a student sums up the need with their comment “I wish this program gave us more opportunity to interact with technology that we are going to experience (i.e., interactive whiteboards, Smartboard, Skyward, etc.)” (2010 Early Childhood Self Study).

3. Inadequacy of the Child and Family Center facility and acute need for a newly designed facility.
   “Additionally, the Child and Family Study Center is inadequate in terms of size and design. It does not reflect best practices, which is a detriment for students currently in the program but it also works against us in attracting students to the major. Our students utilize the on campus laboratory in a variety of classes and at multiple points in the program so it is critical that this facility is state of the art” (2010 Early Childhood Self Study).
Other areas identified from student and faculty surveys were:

1. Three quarters of student body finish their teaching experience in the middle of the semester, leaving them with a significant amount of time between finishing their training and being able to transition to the next step. This creates problems with turning in computers and other administrative details.

2. Students have mentioned in their surveys that there is insufficient focus on the school age child. The program needs more depth and/or experience in the lower grades.

3. Areas of course overlap have been cited by students in ECE 364/Observing and Guiding Children and ECE 426/Advanced Classroom Management. This needs to be addressed in the program revision and overlaps need to be reduced or eliminated.

Recommendations:

Further Recommendations for Program Director:

1. Continue to monitor student concerns over course overlap and concerns about not feeling fully prepared to teach K-3 grades. In the light of the major upcoming program revision, continue to track student responses in both these areas.
2. Work with Chair and Dean to meet faculty and technology needs.

Recommendations For Department Chair:

1. Support Program Director to fill additional faculty needs especially after the program revision reveals needs for particular areas of faculty expertise.
2. Support Program Director to fill the needs for technologically advanced classrooms especially the need for more interactive whiteboards.

Recommendations For the Dean:

1. In the 2003 report the Problem of the Child and Family Study Center was noted, “The problem of the Child and Family Study Center needs attention. Six courses use it for observation and practical experiences. With 500 students in the program, growing community childcare needs, and modern standards for such facilities, the Center is increasingly inadequate. Further efforts to replace the CFSC needs to be made.” The present report continues to urge the dean to campaign vigorously for a new center.
2. Support the program director and Chair in acquiring more interactive whiteboards.
3. Support the Program Director and Chair in hiring additional faculty.