

Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies

A department in the School of Education offering Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Licensure, the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study, the M.Ed. and Ed.D.

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers concentrated on different programs within the department according to their own areas of expertise and regrouped periodically to consider findings across the department as a whole.

Reviewers were:

Laurie Katz (The Ohio State University)
Leigh Patel-Stevens (Boston College)
Michael Barnett (Boston College)

■ Main Issues

The Visiting Team described the Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies as “thriving,” with a vibrant young faculty, project-based connections with community groups and schools, “cutting edge” research, and the continued departmental involvement of emeritus professors. The reviewers placed particular focus on faculty composition: the majority consists of junior members, described as a great strength of the department, particularly through their disciplinary expertise and positive working relationships with one another.

This departmental strength, however, was also cited as cause for concern and action. The reviewers described the faculty composition as “lopsided” in terms of the proportion of junior to senior faculty. This was reflected in the department’s current numbers, but also in terms of imminent retirements and some senior faculty without an active research agenda. The resulting stresses placed on junior faculty manifests in inadequate mentoring (which in turn affects numerous areas in their professional growth, including grant development, writing for publication, and teaching loads). The team found that the junior faculty bears an excessive load in administrative roles for the department, and that overall the junior faculty do not believe that the departmental environment sufficiently supports the development of their careers, especially in terms of their research agendas.

The reviewers noted several other challenges. The need for “systematic support of grant procurement and facilitation,” to respond to a funding environment marked by growing competitiveness and privatization, was noted not only for junior faculty but for the department as a whole. The team commented that lecturers were being overworked, with heavy advising and administrative duties in addition to substantial course loads. Graduate student advising was also identified for improvement, especially in terms of communication (in such matters as changes in program requirements and information about research opportunities).

In addition to their analysis of the department as a whole, the reviewers focused on each of its three divisions in turn. The Language, Literacy and Culture division was described as “one of

the most vibrant in the nation,” but the team found the same lack of balance between junior/senior faculty and overburdened lecturers as within the department overall. The team commented that the diverse areas of research that fall under the umbrella of the Children, Families and Schools division, reflecting recent reorganization, provide a challenging context in which program revision work must occur. Program planning has also been hampered by the impending retirement of the majority of tenure track faculty. The Math, Science, and Learning Technologies (MSLT) division was characterized as having strength in its young faculty who “bring energy, new ideas, and a strong desire to collaborate with others.” Challenges for the division include the need for research administrative support, lack of clarity in the administration of budgets, and concerns especially among untenured faculty about the relative emphasis they should place on obtaining funding versus publishing.

The reviewers offered recommendations to the department as a whole as well as recommendations tailored to each of the three divisions:

Overall:

- Create a full-time position “devoted to the support of grant procurement and facilitation” to provide systematic support.
- Relieve the unbalanced workload of lecturers.
- Have each division coordinate with the School of Education’s advising structure, and provide clarified information to students through both the website and in-person advising.

Language, Literacy and Culture:

- Coordinate and ensure junior faculty members’ access to the university’s mentoring structures.
- Hire at least one more senior faculty member who can also mentor junior faculty.

Children, Families and Schools:

- Hire a senior faculty member in Early Childhood Special Education, an area that is aligned with the division’s mission, increases grant opportunities, and complements other faculty areas of concentration.
- Maintain undergraduate teaching activities, which serve to bring students into the teaching profession, provide vital instruction in the area of human development, and supports the trend for preschool teachers to obtain undergraduate degrees in early education.

Mathematics, Science and Learning Technologies:

- Hire at least one (ideally two) faculty members at the associate professor level.
- Develop a mentoring plan for junior faculty that formalizes relationships and incorporates structured development activities.
- Create a metric for the Chair to calibrate faculty workloads.
- Develop (with the School) a technology plan for the improvement of teaching spaces and research infrastructure.

■ **Results of the Review**

In response to both the AQAD and earlier NCATE reviews, and incorporating a two-year self-study process, the TECS department developed a detailed Action Plan in April of 2011. The focus of the Action Plan is on “how we can actually deliver our programs and services in more

disciplined and integrated ways,” reflecting the challenge “to re-imagine aspects of how we do our work, to make sure we embrace best practices and direct our resources to their highest and best use.” The Action Plan provides specific activities that support three goals: building a community of engaged scholarship and a culture of collaboration; developing 21st century teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers; and fostering a collegial community of scholars and students. The Dean commended the leadership of the department Chair in the development of the Action Plan and voiced support for its focus.

■ Outcomes Assessment

The TECS department uses a well-articulated set of student learning objectives, and employs a number of assessment tools to measure attainment of those objectives. This includes their Unit Assessment System (UAS), encompassing program-specific assessment, the incorporation of recommendations from national professional associations and state reviews of licensure programs, and evaluation of unit operations. They also employ program Focal Assessments (FAs), which include measurement of passing scores on state subject area licensure exams, program-specific content assessment, practicum assessment, and assessment that demonstrates teaching candidates’ actual effects on student learning.