

Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies

A department in the School of Education offering several concentrations in the M.Ed. and Ed.D.

■ The Review Process

This review built on successful accreditation reviews conducted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) of master's level practitioner programs. The team reviewed all doctoral concentrations and one master's concentration not covered in the NCATE review. Reviewers were:

Dale Goldhaber (University of Vermont)
James Kaput (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth)
Eric Klopfer (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
Eleanor Kutz (University of Massachusetts Boston)
Mary O'Sullivan (The Ohio State University)

■ Executive Summary

The team found "much to praise: a committed faculty, engaged in scholarship and teaching, well-designed courses, with current and significant readings and appropriate student work." The team noted that the School of Education recently undertook a significant reorganization, and that this "process of refocusing seems to have been a productive one ... that may need to continue in the face of the current combination of resource limitations and faculty retirements." The team looked especially carefully at "questions of focus and synergy" within and among programs, including both "vertical integration" (relationships between the doctoral concentrations and related master's-level practitioner programs) and "horizontal integration" (connections across programs within the School and beyond).

- **Language, Literacy and Culture.** The team found the doctoral program to be "very strong in terms of its clear theoretical focus, the appropriateness and relevance of its courses ..., and its integration of the work done" in related master's-level concentrations. Its "cutting edge focus on the critical areas of language and literacy" leave it "well positioned to become a nationally-recognized program in this area." Vertical integration was generally praised, but the team observed that "few horizontal connections to other programs exist at present," although some preliminary conversations are under way.
- **Teacher Education and School Improvement.** The team observed that the current grouping "seems to be the result of circumstances from the downsizing that occurred in 1995-1996," and that "the rationale for grouping" faculty in the disciplines of physical education, science, and English is "unclear." The team did, however, note that the faculty "came together because of similar interests in providing doctoral experiences for experienced educational professionals." The team found that "the quality and productivity of the faculty is a recognized strength," but also cautioned that several faculty have partial appointments or may retire, and that staffing may therefore become "precarious." In general, the curriculum was viewed as well-designed, although some course syllabi were uneven or outdated. The team also found variation in faculty quality and productivity.
- **Child and Family Studies.** The team found "only a generally shared constructivist or co-constructivist vision" among the faculty rather than a "well integrated set of courses." While this was "not surprising given the breath of child and family study areas and the size of the faculty," impending retirements led the team to call for "a particular, specific focus

for this concentration,” and suggested early childhood development and education as “an obvious candidate.” The team noted that the concentration’s “individualized character” precluded any judgment as to its national visibility, but did find “great variability in the academic accomplishments of the faculty” and “uneven quality” in course syllabi. In general, the team found there to be “little synergy” in the concentration, and a “lack of apparent continuity” across the curriculum.

- **Mathematics and Science Education.** The team reported “coherence of perspective overall,” but “stark differences” between the doctoral concentration’s science and mathematics elements. The concentration was found to be “very strong on the science education side,” and “competitive with any in the country,” especially in terms of attracting extremely competitive research funding. The team also praised the “excellent progress in integrating research with practice,” thereby “informing policy at all levels.” In sum, “science education is a strength on which to build and to leverage.” On the mathematics side, impending retirement will leave the concentration with “no one who is actively engaged in mathematics education research, standards-based curriculum development, or systematic outreach.” Noting the importance of these issues in Massachusetts, the team found that “this situation borders on scandalous if allowed to occur.” The team called for strengthening of mathematics content across the School, and for two immediate hires in mathematics education.
- **Technology Program.** The team found that the educational technology concentration “does a fine job of addressing the technological desires” of practicing teachers, but “falls short” in preparing new teachers and in research productivity. While “great thought and work” has been put into the courses, they “still appears to be a collection of courses rather than a coherent program.” Impending retirements will leave the program with only one faculty member dealing with the computer side of educational technology. The team found that “the program cannot be sustained at this level,” but also that significant increases to staffing do not seem likely. In consequence, the team recommended a “short term strategy” of hiring a “technology coordinator” rather than replacing departing faculty. The coordinator would aid other faculty with technology integration. The team and the department agreed to defer for now any plans to seek accreditation for the technology program from the state.

Noting that “the educational landscape is changing,” the team called on the department and the School to continue the “refocusing and prioritizing begun several years ago” so as to develop “more centralized, more focused, and more cooperative” programs. The team found “great strengths in the leadership, faculty, staff and students” of the department that “should allow it to successfully pursue a more focused mission.”

■ **Results of the Review**

The department did not agree with all the team’s observations, but did take the main points seriously and developed an action plan to address many of the issues cited. These plans include:

- Re-examining curriculum, research and outreach priorities “with the goal of creating greater synergy among academic units.”
- Building on existing vertical integration, and developing greater horizontal integration.
- Creating collaborative structures to better respond to educational issues and to capitalize on funding opportunities.
- Finding additional ways to showcase “exemplary initiatives for innovation.”

The action plan includes a timetable and assignment of responsibility for the specific steps associated with each goal.