

Student Development and Pupil Personnel Services

A department in the School of Education offering the M.Ed. (concentrations in School Counselor Education, Social Justice Education, Special Education), the Ed.D. (concentration in Social Justice Education), the Ph.D. (School Psychology), and the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (School Counselor Education, School Psychology, Social Justice Education, Special Education).

■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Jerry Trusty, chair (Pennsylvania State University)
Bonnie Billingsley (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University)
Mark Chesler (University of Michigan)
Grant Willis (University of Rhode Island)

■ Main Issues

The review was organized around the four groupings through which degrees and program concentrations are offered: School Counseling, School Psychology, Social Justice Education, and Special Education. The visiting team offered specific findings and recommendations in each area, and also for the department as a whole.

- **School Counseling.** The team noted the importance of the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, begun in 2002, both to the effectiveness of the School Counseling group and to the department and School of Education as a whole. The team described the growing importance of school counseling in larger school transformation efforts, and found that the work of the Center is “entirely consistent with and supportive of ... a ‘new vision’ of school counseling” that sees counselors as leaders in school reform, especially through the use of evidence-based counseling practices and integration of counselors’ roles with the academic mission of schools. The team described the Center as “unique in the nation,” with strong potential to grow its productivity and collaborate with local, state, and national efforts to transform schools. Consistent with its emerging prominence, School Counseling is seeking accreditation by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The Counseling group was reported as “doing very well” in securing external grant support, largely in association with the Center.
- **School Psychology.** The Ph.D. in School Psychology is accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and the M.Ed. concentration is accredited by NASP. The team observed that only programs with “strength, vitality, and national standing” can secure these accreditations, which “attest to the high quality of school-psychology graduate education” at UMass Amherst. The programs were found to have “both external and internal processes and procedures ... to ensure continued quality,” and several faculty members were noted for their leadership in the field. The team noted that a recent retirement has left the group with only three core faculty, the minimum necessary for accreditation. The group was found to have “performed well” in attracting external support. The team noted that School Psychology already offers a popular course at the undergraduate level, and suggested that “there may be more potential for undergraduate service instruction than currently is being realized,”

especially in such areas as educational psychology and classroom management. The team urged consideration of the use of doctoral-level TAs to both expand course offerings and provide needed teaching experience to graduate students.

- **Social Justice Education.** This group was found to be “unparalleled in its strength, vitality, and national standing,” and a “pioneering and model program” that has spawned similar programs in a number of other colleges and universities. The team found the approaches used by the SJE group to be “extremely rigorous and high in quality,” and rejected concerns expressed by some in the School that SJE’s approaches “appear to be less rigorous than more traditional research techniques and teaching pedagogies.” The team concluded that the SJE group is a “national treasure,” and part of the School’s “unique intellectual legacy” that should maintain its distinct identity and see its approaches “infused” throughout other areas of the School. The team noted that already SJE faculty make important contributions to other academic units. The team found that SJE has “performed well in the area of external funding,” especially given that there is “no direct funding link to federal agencies.”
- **Special Education.** The team made several specific observations regarding the Special Education program. First, the team found it “surprising that the flagship university does not offer a doctorate” in special education, especially in light of the growing importance of the field nationally. Second, the team observed that UMass Amherst has one of the few special education administration programs in the country. Third, the team found that, with only two core faculty, the special education group is “seriously understaffed.” The team found that “the level of research productivity and grants is exceptional” given the small size of the group,” but also noted that the special education area represents the “greatest potential for large-scale external funding” in the department because there is more external funding available than for any of the other disciplines. The team therefore suggested developing a doctoral-level concentration and adding two new full-time faculty.

Overall, the team identified several issues to be addressed in order to increase the department’s scholarly and research productivity. Improving the School’s support infrastructure for research activities was seen as important, as was creation of a “culture of research collaboration.” The latter was suggested in contrast to what the team called the current “culture of unhealthy competition within the School” leading to “isolated and territorial” research efforts as individuals and units perceive the need to “compete ... for survival.” In general, the team called for efforts to “enhance the fit and the functional collaboration of the Department via a series of intellectual activities that place faculty into cross-concentration working relationships,” and suggested as two possibilities a joint doctoral program and a department-wide Public School Leadership Institute. The team saw opportunities for greater service instruction at the undergraduate level, but warned that this “could jeopardize graduate funding and research activities” if not pursued through greater use of doctoral-level TAs and other “creative means.”

■ Results of the Review

The department and the Dean expressed agreement with many of the team’s findings and recommendations. The Dean noted that it “doesn’t make sense” to have only two faculty members in special education, and reported that a new faculty member had been hired effective September 2006; that other faculty with special education expertise within the School will be encouraged to collaborate with the special education group, and that another position in special education is under consideration for the 2007-08 academic year.

The Dean addressed the challenge of balancing higher expectations for teaching productivity with a stronger research profile, and noted that some programs “need to explore effective instructional models that are less costly.”

The Dean concurred with the recommendation to reinstate a doctoral-level concentration in special education, and also found some form of department-wide doctoral program to be a “goal worth pursuing.” The Dean reported that staff support has been increased, and that other changes in School administration will “provide greater support for grant preparation and submission as well as for the administration of grants once they have been awarded.” The Dean reported that the team’s comments on competitiveness and lack of collaboration were “puzzling,” and cited evidence of “exceptional” collaboration at many levels. The Dean also acknowledged that the School may still suffer from “remnants of hard feelings created during the years of major budget cuts.”