February 25, 2015

TO: Sarah Mangelsdorf, Provost
FROM: David Rosenthal, Associate Dean
RE: Special Education Program 10 Year Review

The Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education Department has gone through the external review process of the special education programs at the undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels. In general, the external review team believed that the Special Education Area is meeting its research and instructional mission and that faculty and academic staff support the mission of the area. The Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education Department has reviewed the full report and discussed the implications that this review will have on future growth of the department in general and the undergraduate, M.S. and Ph.D. programs in Special Education in particular. On December 4, 2014 the School of Education’s Academic Planning Council approved the review findings, recommendations, and responses attached. The following is the Dean’s Office summary of findings.

Area Strengths:
- The teacher certification programs clearly align with the mission of the Special Education Area. There is a well-documented shortage of special education teachers in Wisconsin and the surrounding states.
- The most important resources within the area are its talented faculty and staff.
- The faculty demonstrates a strong interest and commitment to teacher preparation.
- Faculty have realigned course content and field experiences to meet the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) cross-categorical certification.
- The development and implementation of the new collaborative dual certification program with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction has increased enrollments and is meeting demands for students to be trained in special and general education.
- There is a strong emphasis on research within the Ph.D. program as evidenced by the varied courses offered, the availability of research internships, and the requirement of a pre-dissertation research project.
Area Concerns:
The greatest challenge the area faces is fully implementing the mission with existing resources. The area is faced with the following situation:

- The majority of faculty are untenured, assistant professors.
- One faculty line is currently unfilled due to budgetary constraints.
- Of the three tenured faculty, two have administrative appointments (.5 in the Dean’s Office and .5 as Department Chair) that effectively reduce the faculty by 1.0 FTE.
- Tenured faculty advise a large number of doctoral students.
- Assistant professors have unusually heavy teaching and service responsibilities.
- Coordination of practicum placements is a labor intensive task. A part-time, non-tenure line person was hired this year to coordinate practicum placements; however, there is no guarantee of this line continuing.
- The Dean questions whether area resources are commensurate with enrollments.

Recent Activities Addressing Concerns:

- Special Education faculty continue to examine each program (doctoral, masters, teacher certification) to streamline operations, courses, and requirements in ways that maintain high standards and integrity while ensuring efficiency.
- Recent Program revisions have resulted in an updated, quality doctoral handbook and several new Ph.D. courses.
- External reviewers’ suggested closing the General Master’s Program. Reconsideration of the General Master’s Program is on-going; however, faculty are concerned that this may reduce numbers of doctoral applicants.
- Revision of Ph.D. comprehensive exams is underway and will reduce faculty work load.
- Elimination of the Masters comprehensive exams will further reduce faculty work load.
- The faculty are continuing to restructure the Qualifying Exams through a re-examination of the purpose of the exams and whether that purpose can be met more efficiently and effectively using portfolios that include documentation of students’ research, teaching and service.
- To realize the goals of the revised programs, coordination is being further developed among instructors across departments and between faculty and university supervisors.

On behalf of the School of Education, I would like to thank the External Review Team and the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education for their diligent work on this review.

cc: Jocelyn Milner, APIR
Julie Underwood, Dean
Kelly Haslam, GFEC
Kimber Wilkerson, Chair Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education
Bonnie Dore, Special Education Area Chair
Beth Janetski, Dean’s Office
Jeff Hamm, Associate Dean
The evaluation team was asked to address the following overarching questions that address the Program Area collectively:

a. How well is the Area meeting its research and instructional mission?
b. Do the current faculty and academic staff affirm the mission and share in the underlying vision and values that are represented in the mission statement?
c. Are our resources appropriately allocated so that they align with our mission?

In addition, the team was asked to consider whether the faculty need to consider additional changes to the new teacher education and doctoral programs to (1) remain relevant in the changing context of education; (2) accomplish the goals set for the programs; and (3) most effectively use limited resources.

This report describes the evaluation process and sources of information consulted; responds to program specific questions relative to the doctoral, masters, and teacher certification programs; and concludes with a discussion of the overarching questions posed by the Area.

**Evaluation Process and Sources of Information**

Prior to an on-site visit, the review team examined several documents. These documents included a self-study review completed by program faculty with guiding questions for the external review, reports from previous program reviews conducted in 2000 and 2004, course syllabi, program handbooks, faculty vitae, student enrollment statistics, and outcomes data (e.g., student follow-up surveys, cooperating teacher surveys, graduation data).

During the on-site visit, the team met individually with key administrators in the College including the Dean, Associate Dean for Teacher Education, Associate Dean for Student Services, Associate Dean for Academic and International Affairs, and Chair of the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education. Individual meetings were also held with each of the tenure line faculty members in special education, one part-time clinical faculty member in special education, and two faculty members from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Finally, group interviews were conducted with graduate students (doctoral and master’s), undergraduate and master’s certification students (special education and dual certification), and cooperating teachers from the Madison Metropolitan School District.
Doctoral Program

Numerous changes have been made to revise and strengthen the doctoral program. Most notably, there is a new focus on secondary education and diversity and equity, and four new tenure line faculty members have been hired who align with this focus. The program revision has also resulted in an updated high quality doctoral handbook, and several new courses. There is a strong emphasis on research within the program as evident by the varied courses offered, the availability of research internships, and the requirement of a pre-dissertation research project. The doctoral students we interviewed indicated that they have opportunities to work with a variety of faculty on research projects both within and outside of special education. They felt these experiences were especially useful in helping them to apply the skills they learned through their coursework and understand how to conduct research in school settings. Equally important, these experiences assisted them with learning to disseminate findings through publication and conference presentations.

What students are we attracting?

The composition of students in the graduate program (master’s and doctoral) includes 66% domestic and 33% international. Over the last 10 years there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of domestic students enrolled (i.e., from 86% to 66%) while the percentage of international students has increased (i.e., from 14% to 33%). Evidence in this shift is especially apparent when considering the composition of new students who are enrolling in the program. In the last two years, the number of new domestic students entering the program has been approximately equal to the number of new international students. Also noteworthy is that the number of applications from domestic students is decreasing while the number from international students is rapidly increasing. A small upward trend in enrollment of students classified as domestic targeted minorities has occurred (i.e., from 7% to 15%), although this percentage has fluctuated annually. In general, the majority of domestic students who have enrolled in the graduate program over the last 10 years are White (65-89%) and female (65-82%). (Please note that data were not disaggregated by type of graduate program so percentages reported include both masters and doctoral students.)

How well do students’ interests align with our mission and faculty expertise?

The faculty we interviewed appeared deeply committed to doctoral preparation. They expressed dedication to their students and to having all students meet high standards, particularly in the area of research. Although we were unable to interview doctoral students individually, it appeared that students’ interests aligned well with faculty interests. When asked why they chose to come to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the most frequent responses were faculty expertise and the reputation of the program.

Are the exam structures in place (i.e., qualifying and preliminary exams) providing faculty with useful data on student demonstration of doctoral competencies?

The committee noted that a doctoral student currently takes two exams before achieving dissertator status: a Qualifying Exam that is administered after the completion of a minimum of 18 credits of coursework, and a Preliminary Exam that is administered after the completion of all coursework (the
norm at peer institutions and in related disciplines is one qualifying exam). We found that faculty members were uniformly pleased with the procedures, function, and outcomes of the preliminary exam structure. Through this exam doctoral students are able to demonstrate their ability to independently conduct and implement a small-scale study prior to moving into the dissertation phase. Following the exam, many students also gain additional skills in writing for publication and presenting at conferences, thereby strengthening their scholarly credentials. In contrast, it does not appear that the Qualifying Exams (content paper and research methods paper) provide faculty with useful information. The exams were originally designed to “weed out” students from the program while they were still in the early stages of coursework; however, the exams currently do not appear to serve this function. Students who do not pass on the first attempt are given one more opportunity to revise their exam, and in recent years only two students have failed it a second time. These exams are extremely time-intensive for faculty, particularly if students must revise their papers.

Do our students feel adequately supported to prepare them for future careers in higher education?

The committee met with doctoral students as a large group and so the information we obtained was limited and may not be representative of how all doctoral students perceive their programs. The majority of doctoral students with whom we spoke indicated that they enjoy their program. They commented on the exceptional quality of the faculty stating that they are approachable and willing to provide needed support. Other strengths they noted were the ability to take courses outside of special education (e.g., Rehabilitation Psychology), opportunities to present at conferences, collaborating with faculty on research and professional writing, and the research and teaching internships.

International students seemed unsure how to negotiate the program and campus, and noted that they need more structure to understand what to do, especially in the early stages of their programs. Some international students commented that they did not understand the options they had for coursework and would have liked a list of possible electives. Others indicated that they were unaware of the expectation to attend conferences or conduct research, and were uncertain how to obtain these experiences.

What recruitment opportunities should we address to attract students whose interests align with our mission?

The doctoral program was recently redesigned to focus on the areas of secondary education, and diversity and equity. To support this initiative, the last four tenure line faculty members were strategically hired to align with this focus. Building a core group of faculty with similar areas of research interest may help with securing external research and training grants, which in turn, will attract doctoral students and provide funding to support them in their program. The impact of this core group might also be strengthened by collaborating on research and grant writing with faculty at the Waisman Center.

Consideration should be given to pursuing multiple doctoral leadership grants through the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. These grants currently provide $1.25 million across five years to support doctoral students in obtaining their degree. Several of the
doctoral students with whom we talked mentioned that funding was a factor in deciding to come to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Being able to offer consistent and enhanced funding to students across the length of their doctoral program would make this program more competitive in attracting domestic doctoral students.

The program is not attracting the types of students it would ultimately like to recruit. The goal of the revised program is to attract 7-8 scholars annually and prepare them for positions in research-intensive universities. Members of the review team questioned whether this goal is attainable given changing student demographics. In our own universities we are finding fewer students willing to relocate to attend a Ph.D. program, and have needed to provide increased funding to attract students. We also find that our programs produce a substantial number of scholars who choose to work at universities that focus on teacher preparation, despite graduating from a research-intensive university. Broadening the population targeted for the new program to include those with aspirations to work in Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) that emphasize teacher preparation may result in a higher rate of recruitment.

Finally, the program has seen a substantial increase recently in international student applications. International students bring an important level of diversity to a program, although such students often require more intensive mentoring due to language and cultural differences, as well as their limited experience in the U.S. education system. Limiting the number of international students accepted each year (e.g., focusing on those who most strongly match faculty research interests, present strong academic skills, and come with a teaching background) might allow faculty to better maintain focus on the mission and needs of the program.

**Recommendations**

1. We support the faculty’s continuing examination of the structure of the Qualifying Exams. The information we gathered suggests the need to re-examine the purpose of the exams and whether that purpose can be met more efficiently and effectively in an alternative manner (e.g., portfolios that include documentation of students’ research, teaching and service competence, completion of certain courses with required products).

2. Provide additional structure in course selection during the first two years of the program so that doctoral students (particularly international students) understand the expectations of the program. If not already in place, a face-to-face orientation meeting at the beginning of the program may prove helpful in making program expectations explicit.

3. It was not clear to the review team whether all students participate in a research, teaching, and service internship. This expectation was outlined in the 2013-14 Special Education Doctoral Handbook and may be a requirement for newly admitted students. If not, establishing an expectation for all students to participate in at least one of each of these internships would increase consistency in perceived expectations by students.

4. To attract more domestic doctoral students and increase funding for these students, consider applying for U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Leadership...
grants. Demonstrating ongoing collaboration with research and service projects at the Waisman Center and the Rehabilitation Psychology Area of the Department will strengthen grant applications.

5. Although the focus of the doctoral program has shifted to two primary areas, it will likely be necessary to remain open to a broader range of research areas in order to attract sufficient numbers of doctoral students.

Master’s Program – Non-Certification

The Master’s non-certification program is the program that the review team felt they understood the least. It appears that the program admits approximately 3-5 students annually. These students live within driving distance of the university. There did not appear to be a clear sequence of courses in which students enroll once they enter the program. Instead, decisions about courses are made on an individual basis in consultation with the student’s advisor. Faculty indicated that these students require substantially more time than other master’s students due to the individualized nature of their program (i.e., individually selected courses, comprehensive exams, and a final project). We were uncertain why students select this program or what positions they pursue following their degree.

The master’s non-certification program attracts few students, requires extensive faculty time, and results in unclear benefits to the students or community at large. The review team questioned whether the program was a good use of limited faculty resources.

Recommendations

1. Consider suspending admissions to the master’s non-certification program at this point in time. This would allow faculty to focus on the programs that have been strengthened in recent years (i.e., doctoral program, certification programs), and those that are more central to the mission of the program area.

2. Gather additional data about past program graduates to determine why they enrolled in the program and the positions they now hold. These data may indicate that the program, although small, serves an important function in the community and should be reinstated when resources are available.

Undergraduate and Master’s Certification Program

The Special Education Area offers special education teacher certification at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Students may choose to pursue a cross-categorical special education certificate (K-12) or dual certification in special education and elementary education. The dual certification program was added in fall 2013 and is in its first year of implementation.
The faculty with whom we talked demonstrated a strong interest and commitment to teacher preparation. It was evident that faculty has spent a good deal of time realigning course content and field experiences to meet the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) cross-categorical certification. It was also evident that extensive work has been completed to redesign the special education certification program and to develop a new collaborative dual certification program with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Coordinating efforts across departments can be extremely difficult and the faculties in both departments are to be commended for persevering to design and implement the new dual certification program. There appeared to be several new resources added that were identified by faculty as essential to supporting the program. These included the presence of new part-time clinical faculty to coordinate practicum experiences and the appointment of a full-time individual (i.e., Virginia) in student services to increase consistency of student advisement. Cooperating teachers appeared deeply committed to the program and to mentoring students during field placements.

To what extent have the revisions to the special education certification program and the addition of the Dual Certification program resulted in improved outcomes of interest including: (a) increased enrollments, (b) diversification of student body, (c) student satisfaction with program, (d) alignment with area mission, and (e) responsiveness to local, state and national needs regarding special educators?

A. Increased Enrollments. Data from 1990 to 2012 show a downward trend in the number of students exiting the program with teacher certification. The highest number of certificates issued in any given year was 65 in 1992 whereas the lowest number of certificates issued was 17 in 2012. Some declines in enrollment may be due to the elimination of the early childhood special education certification program in 1995; however, the trend in diminished enrollment continues from 1995 to 2012. In the last 10 years (2003-2013), the number of certificates issued ranged from 17 to 49 with most years averaging 25-35 students.

The number of students admitted to the special education program for the 2013-2014 academic year suggests that the implementation of the dual certification program will substantially increase the number of students who graduate with special education teacher certification in 2015. Enrollments in 2013-2014 include 25 undergraduate students in the dual certification program, 21 undergraduate students in the cross-categorical program, and 3 master’s certification students. This will bring the total number of students exiting with certification in 2015 to 49.

In our discussions with faculty and administrators we heard about the importance of increasing student enrollment, but perceptions of the impact of the dual certification program on enrollment were not consistent. Some people felt the numbers of students in special education were continuing to decline and that the dual certification program was pulling students away from special education to elementary education. These individuals viewed students in the dual certification program as belonging to elementary education (i.e., Curriculum and Instruction). Other people with whom we talked were pleased that the number of students in special education had increased. These individuals viewed students in the dual certification program as being part of the Special Education Area.
B. Diversification of Student Body. We were unable to determine what, if any, impact the new program has had on diversifying the student body in the teacher education program. Data were not available on undergraduate diversification trends.

C. Student Satisfaction with the Program. Students in the first year of both teacher certification programs were interviewed as a large group in order to assess their experiences. Individuals who selected the cross-categorical special education program indicated that they chose this focus because they were told it provides the strongest preparation in special education, the amount of time spent student teaching is longer than the dual certification program, and/or the certification will allow them to teach at the high school level. In contrast, students enrolled in the dual certification program said they chose that program because it matched their philosophy of inclusion, they intended to be general education teachers and wanted to be able to differentiate instruction, and/or they wanted the option to teach general or special education. It would appear that students who were absolutely certain that they wanted to teach special education chose the cross-categorical special education program, and students who were uncertain or wanted to work with younger children chose the dual certification program.

Overall, the students seemed pleased to be able to choose between the special education and dual certification programs. They indicated that the strengths of both programs were the practical, hands-on nature of the courses and practicum experiences, and the ability to have an experience in an inclusive classroom. Student comments focused on program weaknesses more than strengths. This is not surprising given that this is the first year that the dual certification program has been implemented. Student concerns are summarized below and should be considered as faculty work to refine the program.

- Students from both programs (special education, dual certification) feel there are redundancies in the classes they take together. In each course one group of students believed they came in with more knowledge than the other group. This meant the instructor had to help students from one program “catch up” while those in the other program who already had received at least a portion of the content in another class listened to the same content again.
- Students view the literacy courses taken in C&I and special education to be duplicative with different philosophical perspectives on literacy.
- Students were not clear when the one-credit hour modules would be assigned and experienced difficulty completing them when they were scheduled later in the semester.
- Some students felt that there was a good connection between coursework and practicum experiences, while others felt the connection was weak.
- The length of practicum experiences is not consistent between the programs, which led to equity concerns among students.
- The number of seminars is not consistent between programs.
- Some students are not sure what they are supposed to be doing during their practicum.
- Most students were satisfied with their university supervisor for practicum, although some indicated that expectations across supervisors are not consistent.
- Some students said they did not trust what their university supervisor recommended and valued their cooperating teacher’s recommendations more highly because they are more explicit in telling them what to do in the classroom.
• Master’s certification students voiced concerns about taking courses with undergraduate students. The few students with whom we talked did not understand why their coursework was the same as the undergraduates.
• There is no one person to go to with questions or concerns about the program.

D-E. Alignment with Area Mission and Responsiveness to Local, State, and National Needs.
The teacher certification programs clearly align with the mission of the Special Education Area. There is a well-documented shortage of special education teachers in Wisconsin and the surrounding states. Furthermore, the increasing numbers of students with disabilities who are included in general education classrooms in Wisconsin and across the nation has created a need for teachers who are certified in both elementary and special education. The dual certification program will increase the capacity of program graduates to effectively educate a more diverse array of children in inclusive settings.

The faculty may want to consider strengthening the manner in which the teacher education programs align with the mission of the Area. It appears that the program prepares teachers to serve the majority of students with disabilities but not all of these students. Based on our interviews, there did not seem to be sufficient attention to educating students with low incidence disabilities. Courses that typically would address the needs of these students were limited to two 1-credit hour courses taught by doctoral students. If the goal of the teacher certification program is to prepare teachers to serve the breadth of students with disabilities in its schools and promote social justice, then consideration should be given to infusing additional content into coursework and fieldwork experiences that addresses the needs of these students.

Are these changes appropriate and comprehensive enough within the context of PK-12 educational changes?

Many positive changes have been made to strengthen the certification programs in recent years. Students like having the two options for certification, and faculty and cooperating teachers are supportive of both program options. There are some issues the review team identified that relate to the comprehensiveness of the program, and therefore warrant additional discussion among faculty.

1. As previously mentioned, faculty should consider whether additional content and field experiences should be infused into teacher certification program coursework to more fully address the needs of students with low incidence disabilities.

2. In order to realize the goals of the revised programs, coordination is needed among instructors across departments and between faculty and university supervisors. We saw a high level of coordination and collaboration emerging between some faculty and practicum supervisors, but this did not appear to be the norm. Additional structures are needed to promote a high level of continued collaboration throughout program implementation.

3. Many universities are moving to hire clinical faculty to assume responsibility for coordinating teacher education programs. Given the large number of assistant professors and faculty
turnover in the special education program area, this may relieve some of the substantial workload associated with teacher preparation.

4. There does not appear to be a clear process for training new university supervisors or for supervising their work to ensure consistency in expectations of students across practicum placements. In addition, we were uncertain whether the role of university supervisors and cooperating teachers was sufficiently defined in the new program. These issues should be investigated to ensure that practicum experiences allow students to demonstrate competencies that are required for their programs.

Recommendations

Before addressing these recommendations, it is important to note that the review team felt that the faculty have done a fine job of developing and implementing the dual certification program, and that this program is working very well considering the recent implementation. Thus, the following recommendations primarily relate to the need to continue to refine and improve the program.

1. Meet with students as a cohort each semester to inquire about their experiences in the program (e.g., what is going well, concerns, questions). This will provide valuable information as the faculty makes ongoing adjustments to refine the program. These meetings will also provide a forum to explain why some program requirements or practices are in place, including differences that exist in program requirements across cohorts.

2. Continue to expand the number of faculty who are engaged in curriculum mapping in order to reduce overlap among courses and ensure appropriate sequencing of content. Several faculty and supervisors are already engaged in this process and have found it helpful.

3. Compare the requirements of the dual certification and cross-categorical programs to determine whether program requirements are consistent across essential components. Currently there are differences between the programs with regard to requirements for practicum hours and number of seminars. It will be important for students to be clear about similarities and differences in the requirements as they select and go through their programs. Comparison tables should assist students and new faculty/staff in understanding the requirements and in addressing some of the issues noted by the students.

4. If not present within the program already, consider developing a practicum handbook for students, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors that identifies roles and responsibilities, policies, assignments, and any other necessary program information.

5. Consider gathering input about the program from cooperating teachers at least on an annual basis. This information can be used to modify the program as necessary and alert staff to any training needs for cooperating teachers. In our interviews, cooperating teachers advocated a) having students in the classroom for practicum at least 4 days a week to increase consistency in the school day for children and b) scheduling seminars outside of school hours. In addition,
they stated that they were unclear what to do when a university student is experiencing difficulty (e.g., professional behavior, late to practicum, not following through).

6. There does not appear to be a clear sequence of activities that students are expected to perform at each practicum and student teaching placement. As a result, students are not sure what is expected and activities are dependent on what assignments instructors assign for their courses. If there are specific competencies for each semester’s practicum they were not clear and should be made explicit.

7. Consider eliminating the comprehensive exams for master’s certification students. The presence of a comprehensive exam in combination with a final applied research project is more than most programs require, and places substantial demands on faculty resources.

8. Collect data to determine if students who enroll in the Freshman Interest Group apply, are admitted, and complete the teacher certification program. These data would verify whether adding this FIG had the impact intended.

9. It would be more efficient to have a staff person (non-tenure line) continue to advise students regarding their programs since both teacher certification programs include prescribed coursework. This could ensure that faculty resources are used more efficiently to address career advising issues, and leave specific program issues to a specialized advisor.

10. Field experiences across both programs could be coordinated more efficiently by hiring one person who cuts across programs rather than two different people who are each assigned to different departments. This person could coordinate practicum and student teaching placements, training of supervisors, and coordination with schools.

**Overarching Issues**

The review team believes that the Area is meeting its research and instructional mission and that faculty and academic staff support the mission of the Area. The greatest challenge the Area faces is fully implementing the mission with existing resources. The most important resources within the Area are its talented faculty and staff. The Area is faced with the following situation:

- The majority of faculty are untenured assistant professors.
- Of the 3 tenured faculty 2 have administrative appointments (.5 in the Dean’s Office and .5 as Department Chair) that effectively reduce the faculty by 1 FTE.
- Tenured faculty have a large number of doctoral students.
- Assistant professors have unusually heavy teaching and service responsibilities.
- A part-time, non-tenure line person was hired this year to coordinate practicum placements but this position may or may not continue.
- The Dean has indicated that the Area receives more resources than it warrants based on student enrollment numbers.
It appeared to us that faculty are stretched very thin with responsibilities for teaching and service. We are concerned that the high service and teaching load for assistant professors may adversely affect their abilities to obtain tenure and may cause them to leave the university even if they are on track to obtain tenure. It is noteworthy that at our universities and other research intensive institutions, service responsibilities of assistant professors are very limited and teaching loads are at times reduced to provide these faculty with sufficient time to build their program of research and seek highly competitive grant funding to support this work. If additional resources are not available to provide some relief for assistant professors, then the Area must look to become more efficient in providing high quality programs. Options that the Area might consider include:

- Eliminate the master’s degree program (non-certification)
- Eliminate the Qualifying Exams for master’s certification students
- Eliminate the Qualifying Exam for doctoral students and develop a more streamlined process for achieving the desired goals of this exam (e.g., building requirements into course work).
- Reduce service obligations, especially for assistant professors, by eliminating activities that are non-essential to the Area’s mission (the team did not review service obligations and thus cannot comment on these).
- Pursue funding for doctoral leadership grants in order to attract more students and fund them in activities that support the work of the Area and prepare them for the professoriate.
- Reduce the proportion of international students who are accepted into the doctoral program since these students often require substantially more faculty time as they progress through their programs.
- Combine the functions of the two part-time non-tenure line staff that coordinate practicum placements into one position that cuts across departments. This will save money and allow greater coordination between departments. This person could take on increased responsibility for coordination between the program and practicum.
- Continue to examine each program (doctoral, masters, teacher certification) to streamline operations, courses, and requirements in ways that maintain high standards and integrity while ensuring efficiency.

The Dean would like the Area to move up in the national rankings. In order for this to happen, assistant professors need to have adequate support (time, resources, reduced teaching and service loads) to build strong research agendas that will allow them to be retained and build the prestige of the program. The next five years appear to be critical for rebuilding the faculty and programs.

**External Review Committee**

Stacy Dymond, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
James McLeskey, University of Florida  
Debra A. Neubert, University of Maryland  
Aparna Dharwadker, Graduate School Representative, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Special Education Responses to Reviewer Recommendations

Recommendations for the Doctoral Program

1. We support the faculty’s continuing examination of the structure of the Qualifying Exams. The information we gathered suggests the need to re-examine the purpose of the exams and whether that purpose can be met more efficiently and effectively in an alternative manner (e.g., portfolios that include documentation of students’ research, teaching and service competence, completion of certain courses with required products).

SE Area faculty concur with this recommendation and has begun to redesign the qualifying exam process. Area members have agreed to maintain two qualifying exams for doctoral student, one focused on special education content knowledge and one focused on the results of a systematic literature review. The first content qualifying exam will be a culminating product of RPSE 871 Foundations of Special Education, and the primary grader of the exam is the professor of the course. A second grader will be added only in cases where the primary grader is concerned that the exam does not warrant a pass. The second exam is to be completed outside of designated coursework but only after the student completes RPSE 872, Seminar in Special Education Research. Grading of the secondary qualifying exam will follow the current process with two faculty graders for each student exam. An additional third grader will participate in cases where grader disagreement necessitates another grader’s opinion. Details about the process for generating questions for the first qualifying exam, and the timing of the second qualifying exam have yet to be specified.

Also in agreement with the reviewers, the SE Graduate Studies committee (GSC) has initiated a discussion about adding a portfolio for evaluating graduate students’ progress. Details of the portfolio including its purpose, content, process, assessment, and evaluative feedback are yet to be determined.

An additional support for the exam processes and schedules has been the inclusion of the Student Services Coordinator (SSC) as a member of the GSC. The SSC serves as a key organizer of exam materials and results; receiving and distributing submitted and graded exams from students and faculty, and tracking and documenting exam scheduling due dates and assessment results. The SSC also fields initial student questions about the exam process.

2. Provide additional structure in course selection during the first two years of the program so that doctoral students (particularly international students) understand the expectations of the program. If not already in place, a face-to-face orientation meeting at the beginning of the program may prove helpful in making program expectations explicit.
The SE faculty are in agreement that the importance of program introduction and other opportunities to create shared expectations is key to success of all graduate students. SE Area faculty believe that these key processes are in place. For example, the graduate students attend a departmental orientation led by the SSC and attended by faculty. Breakout groups for the departmental Areas provide new students with opportunities to meet one another and to hear about programmatic resources and requirements in an overview fashion. Following that initial activity, graduate students meet individually with their faculty advisors and plan the individual trajectories of studies. These meetings are ongoing and as-needed. Further, the students have access to an Area doctoral handbook, available in PDF and via the Internet, and are required to submit an annual progress report each year. Together, the handbook and the annual reports provide documentation of expectations and how these are being met. Throughout their program, graduate students have access to the SSC who is knowledgeable about programmatic details and who conducts degree audits as requested or needed. Graduate students also have access and opportunity to meet with their advisors individually, at their request. The newly approved program has more required courses and fewer opportunities to individualize the course of study; therefore, expectations in the new program will likely be clearer for students. Finally, in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Psychology Area, a departmental student organization group of doctoral students and faculty advisors has been formed to informally mentor and share program expectations with new doctoral students.

3. It was not clear to the review team whether all students participate in a research, teaching, and service internship. This expectation was outlined in the 2013-14 Special Education Doctoral Handbook and may be a requirement for newly admitted students. If not, establishing an expectation for all students to participate in at least one of each of these internships would increase consistency in perceived expectations by students.

While teaching, research, and service internships were required of all doctoral students in the previous program (last cohort admitted in Fall 2014), the newly approved program requires a minimum of one research and one teaching internship, omitting the service internship as a formal course offering. Additionally, the aforementioned departmental student organization group of doctoral students and faculty advisors may incorporate service opportunities such as serving on departmental committees where appropriate, into the mission and processes of their organization, as this is developed during the 2014-15 academic year. The SE Area faculty will detail all internship requirements and service opportunities in the handbook for the new program, which has yet to be written. Under the new plan, service will be valued and promoted, but it will not be associated with a grade or course as in the previous program. The new teaching internship can be fulfilled through the instruction of an undergraduate teacher preparation module (RPSE 401, 402, 403, 404, 405), through team teaching with an advisor, or potentially through other methods to be outlined in the handbook.
4. To attract more domestic doctoral students and increase funding for these students, consider applying for U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Leadership grants. Demonstrating ongoing collaboration with research and service projects at the Waisman Center and the Rehabilitation Psychology Area of the Department will strengthen grant applications.

The SE faculty is in complete agreement with this suggestion. Efforts to forward this goal have focused on program redesign and approval (accomplished in Spring 2014), so that the faculty could address calls for proposals with specificity and competitively. Dr. Kimber Wilkerson recently received federal funding to train 5 master’s students as part of a five-year personnel preparation grant. This exciting opportunity, the faculty believes, will cultivate a path for strong master’s students to be encouraged and accepted into the doctoral program. Further, Dr. Wilkerson’s grant is in conjunction with existing opportunities for practical learning at the Waisman Center, and thus affords cross-disciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration among professional as well. Also, through the efforts of Drs. Trainor, Wilkerson, and Ruppar, the SE Area is part of a postdoctoral training grant led by the University of Kansas. If funded, this work will also lead to opportunities to establish relationships with national faculty and increased awareness about our programs so that colleagues will refer interested and highly qualified students. Additionally, Drs. Ruppar and Wilkerson will have postdoctoral fellows with whom to collaborate on research.

5. Although the focus of the doctoral program has shifted to two primary areas, it will likely be necessary to remain open to a broader range of research areas in order to attract sufficient numbers of doctoral students.

The SE doctoral program will remain open to a broad range of research areas, as demonstrated by the range of areas of expertise representative of the SE faculty. There will continue to be opportunities for students to pursue areas of interest with individual faculty through independent studies and/or to take electives and complete minors in other areas of study outside of SE. The foci of the new program, however, were agreed upon only after much discussion about the national scope of graduate programs in special education. Secondary/adolescence and diversity and equity issues were selected in part because these areas align with faculty interests and expertise, but also strategically because there a few other programs that offer targeted leadership preparation in these areas.

Recommendations for the Non-Certification Master’s Program

1. Consider suspending admissions to the master’s non-certification program at this point in time. This would allow faculty to focus on the programs that have been
strengthened in recent years (i.e., doctoral program, certification programs), and those that are more central to the mission of the program area.

We are considering dissolution of the masters noncertification program, as well as a range of options that includes improving the alignment of Area resources for all master’s programs. Discussion began this summer with Drs. Wilkerson and Ruppar, and Virginia Waddick, department SSC, as a work group. Suspending admissions for the 2015-16 academic year will require Area discussion and possibly a formal vote. This issue is slated for the October 2014 Area meeting agenda.

2. Gather additional data about past program graduates to determine why they enrolled in the program and the positions they now hold. These data may indicate that the program, although small, serves an important function in the community and should be reinstituted when resources are available.

SE faculty agree that this is an important endeavor. While we successfully capture feedback from those master’s graduates who continue in the SE doctoral program, expanding this to a more formal activity by surveying the total pool of master graduates would likely be fruitful.

**Recommendations for the Certification Master’s and Undergraduate Programs**

1. Meet with students as a cohort each semester to inquire about their experiences in the program (e.g., what is going well, concerns, questions). This will provide valuable information as the faculty makes ongoing adjustments to refine the program. These meetings will also provide a forum to explain why some program requirements or practices are in place, including differences that exist in program requirements across cohorts.

Cohort meetings have been organized and will begin this fall. SE faculty will share this feedback with the lecturer who has recently been hired to coordinate the dual certification program.

2. Continue to expand the number of faculty who are engaged in curriculum mapping in order to reduce overlap among courses and ensure appropriate sequencing of content. Several faculty and supervisors are already engaged in this process and have found it helpful.

In accordance with this recommendation and in alignment with the implementation of the new teacher certification standards at UW, the SE faculty who are engaged in undergraduate certification will meet to continue curriculum mapping this fall.

3. Compare the requirements of the dual certification and cross-categorical programs to determine whether program requirements are consistent across essential components. Currently there are differences between the programs with regard to
requirements for practicum hours and number of seminars. It will be important for students to be clear about similarities and differences in the requirements as they select and go through their programs. Comparison tables should assist students and new faculty/staff in understanding the requirements and in addressing some of the issues noted by the students.

The special education program requirements are clearly articulated in the preservice teacher program handbook. The dual certification program has not yet had any student teachers and is currently in the process of development of activities, expectations, and evaluation criteria. The handbook for the dual certification program is currently underdevelopment and will follow the special education certification handbook as a model.

4. If not present within the program already, consider developing a practicum handbook for students, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors that identifies roles and responsibilities, policies, assignments, and any other necessary program information.

A practicum handbook for the special education certification program, authored by Dr. Wambold and cohort coordinator Sara Bringman with input from Drs. Wilkerson and Ruppar, has been in use and is regularly updated. The handbook spells out the sequence of activities that students are expected to perform at each student placement. It is distributed and reviewed with preservice teacher special education cohorts at orientation and beyond, apprising the students of the certification program resources and requirements. Coordinating teachers and university supervisors are all given the handbook and encouraged to use it as a reference.

The dual certification program has not yet had any student teachers and is currently in the process of development of activities, expectations, and evaluation criteria. The handbook for the dual certification program is currently underdevelopment and will follow the special education certification handbook as a model. The dual certification handbook, however, requires Curriculum & Instruction coordination and collaborative authorship. Currently, regularly held meetings for both Special Education and C&I faculty are occurring and will address this issue together. The Area goal is to streamline all resources and regulations into a cross-program handbook.

5. Consider gathering input about the program from cooperating teachers at least on an annual basis. This information can be used to modify the program as necessary and alert staff to any training needs for cooperating teachers. In our interviews, cooperating teachers advocated a) having students in the classroom for practicum at least 4 days a week to increase consistency in the school day for children and b) scheduling seminars outside of school hours. In addition, they stated that they were unclear what to do when a university student is experiencing difficulty (e.g., professional behavior, late to practicum, not following through).
The Area faculty note that we do have processes for gathering feedback (e.g., the UW SoE has an annual feedback opportunity for cooperating teachers, individualized feedback sessions with SE Area coordinators); we will focus on disaggregating SoE data to inform the TW education committee within the area.

6. There does not appear to be a clear sequence of activities that students are expected to perform at each practicum and student teaching placement. As a result, students are not sure what is expected and activities are dependent on what assignments instructors assign for their courses. If there are specific competencies for each semester’s practicum they were not clear and should be made explicit.

Practicum and student teaching definitions have been explicitly defined and consistently implemented in the SE certification program. We are currently working with Curriculum & Instruction faculty and academic staff to finalize these definitions and their implementation for the dual certification program.

7. Consider eliminating the comprehensive exams for master’s certification students. The presence of a comprehensive exam in combination with a final applied research project is more than most programs require, and places substantial demands on faculty resources.

The SE Area agrees that the comprehensive exams deserve consideration for elimination. In addition to the substantial demands necessitated by the grading procedures, early feedback from the first cohort of the newly redesigned special education program (includes the master’s certification program) has reflected student concerns that more concerted efforts are needed to prepare for these exams. Eliminating these exams would not violate any UW Graduate School requirements. The SE Area has updated the course content to reflect differentiated assignments in teacher preparation courses also taken by master’s students.

8. Collect data to determine if students who enroll in the Freshman Interest Group apply, are admitted, and complete the teacher certification program. These data would verify whether adding this FIG had the impact intended.

We are in the process of considering how best to incorporate student FIG participation data into our overall data collection activities.

9. It would be more efficient to have a staff person (non-tenure line) continue to advise students regarding their programs since both teacher certification programs include prescribed coursework. This could ensure that faculty resources are used more efficiently to address career advising issues, and leave specific program issues to a specialized advisor.

Since the addition of Virginia Waddick as the SSC, the SE has followed this model. Faculty advise students on career issues and the specific program questions and
advisement are handled by the SSC. We agree with this recommendation and will continue to implement the suggestion.

10. Field experiences across both programs could be coordinated more efficiently by hiring one person who cuts across programs rather than two different people who are each assigned to different departments. This person could coordinate practicum and student teaching placements, training of supervisors, and coordination with schools.

The SE Area has proposed, on multiple occasions, to have a consistent line in our budget for two coordinators. Currently, Sara Bringman coordinates the TE special education licensure program. The TE dual certification program has a temporary coordinator for 2014-15.

Our program has evolved and grown into two certification programs. While the TE special education licensure is established, we agree that the dual certification program needs consistent academic staff support for coordinating with cooperating teachers in area schools, coordinating the overall program and its governance, finding placements for the additional student teachers, collaborating with Curriculum & Instruction faculty and academic staff, supporting EdTPA among our students, etc. As the external reviewers note, and we agree, the SE faculty need clinical support so that their resources can continue to build a national, visible research agenda. Nationally top-ranked programs such as the University of Illinois, University of Kansas, and the University of Oregon all implement similar models of support for teacher education. Our goals include successfully garnering personnel preparation grant and leadership grants, as well as raising our rankings in the national arena.