EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
Doctoral Program (Ed.D.) in Learning and Instruction
Department of Learning and Instruction
School of Education
Summer 2005

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The School of Education invited two highly respected consultants from the fields of educational psychology and learning and instruction to act as external reviewers for the Doctoral Program in the Department of Learning and Instruction. Dr. Steven Bossert is dean and professor of the Graduate School of Education at University of California, Riverside and Dr. Michael Gerber is professor at the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara. Drs. Steven Bossert and Michael Gerber reviewed the Learning and Instruction doctoral program during their campus visit from March 3 to March 5, 2005. Prior to their visit, reviewers were sent the Department’s comprehensive self-study document. To further assist the team in their work, they were provided copies of various documents that included, in part, the sample program assessment questionnaires, registration statistics, the University San Francisco’s Mission Statement, the Collective Bargaining Agreement, and the USF catalogue. The team met with the dean, associate deans, full-and part-time members of the faculty, staff, current students, and alumni.

This Executive Summary addresses six basic questions regarding the quality of the Learning and Instruction’s Doctoral Degree Program (Ed.D.). The narrative below reflects the external reviewers’ assessment of the programs.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the Learning and Instruction program? How do the programs compare with top-tier programs nationally?

Overall, the consultants concluded that the quality of the Doctoral Program in Learning and Instruction is excellent. They went on to commend the program faculty for preparing a clear and concise self-study and complete set of program documents for their review. Everything they reviewed and all they interviewed signaled that the program is well managed. The external reviewers identified five areas of strength.

1. Curriculum and Teaching: The Department has developed a doctoral curriculum that emphasizes the fundamentals of applied educational psychology and research methods and the students follow a clear sequence of courses and requirements. In their two day visit they repeatedly observed “tangible evidence of very good to excellent teaching and advising... and creative pedagogy and exemplary use of technology,” also citing students who “talked openly about the high
expectations of faculty and the hard work and dedication needed to progress” in the program.

2. Advising and Mentoring: “The advising and mentoring went well beyond the normal expectations for university faculty.”

3. Student Climate: “The program’s solid core curriculum . . . helps ground the students in a common body of theories, concepts and methods” and students talked about the power of the cohort friendships in supporting and completing the program.

4. Faculty Climate: The reviewers sensed “a strong climate of mutual respect, support, and collegiality among the program faculty.” The L&I faculty work as a team in their teaching, scholarship and service and look out for one another, especially senior faculty support of new faculty.

5. Quality of Student Work: The reviewers examined portfolios and dissertations and found they were very good to excellent: well written, each containing a systematic literature review, a carefully designed data strategy, and well-reasoned analysis. The ultimate complement paid by the reviewers was their assessment of the dissertations -- “comparing favorably with Ph.D. dissertations at prominent research-intensive universities.”

The reviewers assessment of the program is supported by the 2001 survey conducted by the National Association of Graduate School Professionals (NAGSP) whereby L&I doctoral faculty were rated as outstanding with respect to teaching excellence, supportive program climate, student mentoring, strong research practices, and effective advisement (Attachment A).

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

In addition to the reviewers’ commendation of a strong, dedicated faculty, good students, and solid curriculum, they noted some concerns needing to be addressed to maintain the excellent quality of the program in the future:

a) Future Program Leadership. The anticipated retirement of the current department chair raises some concern about future department leadership.

b) Enrollment. Due to the enhanced reputation and success of the program, another concern raised by the reviewers was the need to consider consequences and opportunities of expanded enrollment.

c) Faculty FTE. With regard to staffing, the external reviewers expressed concern regarding the depth and breadth of faculty, recommending two new FTE for the department.

d) Dissertation Advising. The current system for crediting faculty members for dissertation advising should be rethought to reflect the actual mentoring work provided.
e) **Space and Facilities.** The dean should help secure the current instructional and departmental space from unproductive intrusion and noise and assure that the program has adequate space to sustain its strong cohort model of instruction and mentoring.

3. **What specific recommendations for improving the program’s quality?**

With regard to the previously raised concerns (a-e above), the following responses and actions have been made to address these needs and to maintain the excellent quality of the L&I Doctoral Program.

a) **Future Program Leadership.** A young and talented department chair has been identified and elected by the faculty. She already exhibited excellent leadership last year in her role as co-chair of the School of Education Curriculum Committee. Also, in anticipation of her new responsibility as department chair, she attended the AACTE Chairs Institute in May, 2005 and continues to develop her leadership skills.

b) **Enrollment.** The department has responded to the increased demand for the program by being very selective in the students they admit. This, in turn, increases the stature and credibility of the Doctoral Program.

c) **Faculty FTE.** One of the strengths of the L&I Department is in its faculty. They are not dependent on adjunct faculty to teach core classes, all the faculty are active scholars, and one in six faculty will qualify for sabbatical each year. All these concerns need to be addressed in a new five-year strategic plan and through the School of Education decision making process for allocation of faculty lines and resources.

d) **Dissertation Advising.** The current system for dissertation advising credit was devised several years ago and should be reviewed by the faculty and administration to properly reflect comparable work. One possibility might be to move from a process model to an output model whereby credit is provided “doctoral students produced” rather than “doctoral students advised.” A comparative study of doctoral advising at other institutions would produce baseline data to begin discussion.

e) **Space and Facilities.** When the School of Education moved into its current location, a complete educational specifications plan was not used to guide where departments were to be located and how the space was best utilized. Recent discussion of the possible location of a “black box” theater in the space currently occupied by the L&I Department caused additional concern and consternation. At the time of the writing of this Executive Summary, the short term solution for the “black box” theater will not impact this department. However, the long term vision for the School of Education should be considered as it relates to space allocation and utilization.
4. Is the program following the University’s strategic initiatives?

a) Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars? Yes, absolutely, as currently all six faculty (four women, two men, one faculty of color) and an African American field coordinator work well as a team and recruit outstanding doctoral students through a variety of methods. Mentoring and retaining students are important components of the doctoral process.

b) Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body? Yes, the majority of L&I doctoral students are female (72%) and approximately 35% are members of underrepresented groups. In addition, $3.2 million dollars in OESP grants (1997-2003) and other grants support 10-12 doctoral students per year. The overall retention-to-graduation rate is exceptionally high at 85%.

c) Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning? The faculty collaborate and work together as a team to offer quality instruction in a student-centered learning community. The program is rigorous and highly regarded within USF as well as the greater Bay Area and the State of California.

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University a premier Jesuit Catholic urban university?

The reviewers found that the program is fulfilling its mission, in the Catholic Jesuit tradition, to prepare knowledgeable and compassionate leaders in professions where the principles of learning and instruction can make a difference. It is committed to the Jesuit tradition of academic rigor and excellence in scholarship and fully develops the intellectual and professional potential of its students with emphasis on social science methodology and application of scientific knowledge to the professions.

The national and statewide reputation of the L&I Doctoral Program speaks for itself. Currently, it is the largest producer in California of doctorates with a special education emphasis and the only doctoral program in the state to specifically prepare doctoral candidates for careers in special education - a field in tremendously high demand. In addition to the training special educators, the L&I doctoral program prepares more nurse leaders for careers in higher education than any other doctoral program in the region and possibly the state, including one-third of the faculty in the School of Nursing at USF. This new emphasis will also attract leaders in other areas of allied health care such as speech pathologists, audiologists, physical occupational therapists, and dental educators.
In addition to its national and state stature, the program's favorable impression is shared by deans in other colleges (Dean Tyrone Cannon is a fourth year doctoral student and Dean John Lantz collaborates with the L&I Department with a new Ed.D. emphasis in Allied Health Care). Personally, as a new dean, I value this Department and view the Program as an example of quality and professionalism to which we strive to achieve in the School of Education.

6. What is the timetable for implementation of recommendations?

The L&I Doctoral Program challenge in the future is not how to move from "good to great" but how to maintain the high quality that has already achieved. Establishing a new five-year strategic plan will help clarify the program's needs and establish priorities for resource allocation within the School of Education. The need for new faculty resources for the L&I Department is not just to support its doctoral program but the support needed for all the other doctoral programs in the School of Education since the L&I Department teaches the required General Education courses. As a dean, my philosophy would be to invest in excellence. Clearly this is an excellent program worthy of further investment.