

**Academic Program Review**

**Special Education Program**

**University of New Mexico**

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**Submitted by**

Martin Agran

University of Wyoming

Jacki Anderson

CSU East Bay

Carole Conn

University of New Mexico

## **Preface**

This report is the 2012 Academic Program Review of the Special Education Program at the University of New Mexico. The intent of this report is an objective evaluation of the strengths of the program, as well as to suggest ways in which the program can become more efficient and responsive to overall needs and responsibilities. The evaluation team included Dr. Martin Agran, University of Wyoming; Dr. Jacki Anderson, California State University East Bay; and Dr. Carole Conn, University of New Mexico. Although the evaluation team was free to ask whatever questions they thought appropriate, Dr. Gregory Heileman, Associate Provost for Curriculum, recommended that the following questions be addressed:

- 1) What actions can the special education faculty take to improve the quality of the doctor program?
- 2) What strategies can the special education program establish to enhance program cohesion, values, and integration of curriculum while still supporting distinctive offerings to students?
- 3) The special education program would like to increase the ethnic diversity of the student body and the faculty. What specific student and faculty recruitment and retention strategies could address this issue?
- 4) The challenge of ensuring that field experiences are consistent with our preparation programs is one well documented in education in general. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing a lab school or collaborative relationships with a smaller number of charter schools or a charter district?

5) The area of special education is an area of documented need on New Mexico. Should the Special Education Program continue to expand their capacity to serve more undergraduate and/or graduate students? What resources would be needed to support any expansion?

We would like to note that all of these questions were addressed in the report, although we did not necessarily follow the sequential order listed above.

This report could not have been completed without the assistance and support provided by the faculty and students in the Special Education program and the input provided by the University of New Mexico administrators. In particular, we would like to express our appreciation to: Liz Keefe, Ruth Luckasson, Bessie Gallegos, Gloria Carol, and Nancy Middlebrook.

### **Structure and Function of Department**

The Special Education Program at UNM, housed in the Department of Educational Specialties and the College of Education, has 11 tenure track faculty and 3 full-time non-tenure track faculty. In addition, five to eight courses per year are taught by part-time faculty. The Special Education Program offers a variety of undergraduate and graduate academic programs. At the undergraduate level the program offers a BS ED in special education that is a dual license program that meets the NM Public Education Department's requirements for both Special Education (PreK-12) and Elementary Education (K-8) competencies. A minor in special Education is offered for students from programs across the University. At the Graduate level an M.A. in Special Education is offered that can be combined with alternative licensure. Two areas of concentration are available in this program: Intellectual Disability and Severe Disabilities (Concentration I)

and Learning and Behavioral Exceptionalities (Concentration II). Two transcribed graduate certificate programs: *Instruction for Students with Intensive Social, Language and Behavioral Needs* and *Applied Behavior Analysis* are available for students with a Bachelor's degree. These programs are housed in the Concentration I Masters program. A third certificate is under review for the Educational Diagnostician licensure program. An Educational Specialist Certificate (Ed.S) is available to students who have completed a Masters degree in Special Education. The program also offers doctoral programs for both a Ph.D. and an Ed.D., with a concentration in Special Education.

### **Program Review Process**

This Academic Program Review (APR) of the UNM Department of Special Education was conducted in three parts. First, there was a review of the departmental Self - study Unit Review; the UNM APR Policies, Principles, and Procedures Manual, the University and Department of Special Education websites, and additional information provided prior to on-site visit. Second, a two and one-half day onsite visit was conducted that included interviews with university administrators, faculty, students and program graduates. Additionally, a review of additional documentation was made, and visits to the UNM West campus and a local elementary school that included interviews with school personnel, district administrators and program graduates who were teaching in the school were completed. The site visit culminated with a preliminary report to faculty and administration by the review team. Third, a post site visit research of Peer Group R-1 universities regarding operating policies, salary ranges and teaching loads (Table 1) was conducted. The results of the review are summarized below. Responses to specific questions put forth to the reviewers are embedded in the narrative.

**Data Sources**

Data for this review were obtained from several sources. These included: Department of Special Education Self-Study documents; UNM APR Policies, Principles and Procedures Manual; University and Department of Special Education websites; input from College and University administration; input from faculty and students; a review of additional documentation provided on site; input from school district teachers and administrators; documentation from peer group universities; and input from administrators and faculty from peer group institutions. We believe we have ample data to support our observations and recommendations.

**Program Strengths**

UNM should definitely be proud of its Special Education Program. A few of the many areas of excellence will be briefly described to illustrate the high quality of the program.

Faculty are hard working, highly motivated, productive professionals striving to provide “state-of-the-art” teacher preparation and graduate academic training. The heavy teaching loads, research productivity and substantial service commitments of the faculty are clearly documented in the Self Study Unit review and substantiated by interviews with faculty, staff, students, and administrators. In all, faculty members are very productive and have achieved a high level of research and scholarship. In fact, it should be noted that a number of faculty are renowned nationally and internationally for their expertise and leadership in their field of study. The program is well organized with leadership delineated for each of the program areas with concurrent efforts to facilitate

collaboration across program areas. Procedures are in place to support new faculty through the promotion and tenure process and to protect them from an overload of course requirements and commitments, particularly in the area of service. There is strong support from both the Chair of the Department of Educational Specialties and the Dean of the College of Education. This is a “two-way-street” as faculty, particularly the program coordinator, are readily available and willing to work with, provide assistance, respond to requests for information in support of the department and college. In addition, faculty are actively involved in leadership and collaborative efforts across the university and, in doing so, provide visibility and positive public relations for the department and college.

The Dual Licensure BS ED program is a progressive example of preservice training that addresses both the movement toward inclusive education for students with disabilities and federal law requiring access to general education curriculum for **all** students. This is exceptional as the majority of special education teacher training programs continue to have separate programs that address only students served in Special Education. The curriculum in this program demonstrates ongoing, active efforts to keep abreast of research, legislation, and policy, and to incorporate this information into the training program.

An area of program operations that is particularly notable is the **reflective analysis** that goes into decisions regarding changes to update program offerings. This thoughtful, data-based process has informed decisions regarding program changes since the last review that was conducted in 2001. Careful consideration has been given to a variety of sources of information including: careful review of rigorous assessment of student progress and learning outcomes; emerging research and evidence-based current

best educational practices; input from local school districts regarding both general needs in their districts and specific skill areas that would improve the success of UNM program graduates hired by that district; current state and national legislation; standards/competencies required for NM licensure and accreditation by CEC; COE and UNM core values and strategic plans and input from graduates and current students. This impressive analysis produces a strong rationale for each change made in the Special Education Program.

As noted above, the Special Education Program is extremely **responsive to state, local, and university needs**. Feedback from local districts regarding the need for more expertise in the area of behavior intervention and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other Social and Communication challenges led to the development of two transcribed certificates: (1) *Instruction for Students with Intensive Social, Language and Behavioral Needs* and (2) *Applied Behavior Analysis*. To address local and state shortages of the “Highly Qualified Teachers” required by federal law, the number of students in BS ED has been doubled and an alternative license program has been embedded in the M.A.

Collaboration with and the delivery of courses at the UNM West campus addresses the wishes of both students for services closer to the expanding population on the western side of Albuquerque and the university for expanded offerings at the relatively new campus. One clear indicator of the value of the curricular and operational changes noted above is the very high demand for program graduates, 100% of whom are employed.

The extremely strong, ongoing commitment to **collaboration** is an effective vehicle for timely responsiveness to state, local, and university needs. Collaborative relationships with the local community include school and district personnel, family members, individuals representing agencies and organizations related to education and other services and supports for individuals with disabilities and more. Interdisciplinary collaboration occurs with departments within the College of Education and beyond resulting in co-teaching and joint scholarly activities such as conference presentations, publications and research projects. The work with UNM West is but one example of this. Faculty collaboration activities go well beyond UNM to include universities in other states and countries. The focus on program-wide decision making and program development, including collaboration across concentrations within the program, is facilitating improved cohesion within the Special Education Program, an area targeted for improvement in the 2001 review. Finally, the ongoing commitment to productive collaboration is further supported by the fact that the Program's five-year plan includes three objectives devoted to improvements in this area

### **Overall Impressions**

Our overall impression is that the Special Education Program is an exemplary program. Although the program is challenged by inadequate resources, low salary levels, and high teaching loads, we believe that the department has done a commendable job meeting state needs, developing and delivering a personnel preparation program to prepare teachers who will be able to meet the varied and complex needs of students with disabilities, and achieving an emerging national visibility. We believe it will serve the Department of Educational Specialties, as well as the University of New Mexico, to



advocate that the Special Education Program be considered as a Center of Excellence. Such consideration will serve to acknowledge a distinctive status that the program has indeed earned.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The following section includes a number of recommendations to improve the overall efficiency, productivity, accountability, and quality of the department. A secondary outcome is to provide the faculty increased recognition and the support needed to achieve a greater national presence and visibility. None of the recommendations below represent “do-or-die” actions that must be implemented to avert dire consequences; in all, as mentioned previously, the program operates at a high professional standard. Likewise, we understand that decisions regarding changes in resource allocations, course offerings, and program structures involve the interplay of various complex administrative, political, personal, and paradigmatic factors that will necessitate responsive dialogue and exchange. That said, we hope that the UNM administration and the Special Education program faculty and staff are responsive to our recommendations, as we believe that their implementation will benefit the Special Education Program and the overall mission and goals of the Department of Educational Specialties.

### **Faculty Salary, Teaching and Productivity Expectations, and Service Commitments**

Data were obtained from a sample of special education programs or departments in peer institutions regarding salary levels, research and scholarly expectations, and service commitments (see Table 1). We believe that these data are of value in comparing UNM levels to peer institutions so that appropriate (and deserved) adjustments can be made.

Table 1

*Comparison of Faculty Salary Levels, Research Expectations, and Service Commitments in Special Education Programs Among UNM Peer Institutions*

Institution	Salary Levels	Research Expectations	Service Commitments	Notes
UNM	Assistant: \$63,000 Associate: \$65,000 Full: \$72,000; New faculty: .40 FTE, Second and above: .65 FTE; 5 courses a year (3/2)	1-2 publications, 1- 2 presentations; New faculty: .60 FTE Second and above: .25 FTE	Not part of load	
University of Oklahoma	Assistant: \$51,000-53,000 Associate: \$57,000-60,000 Full: \$67,000- 70,000; Negotiable, 20- 40 % (typically 2 classes per semester)	Negotiable: 30- 50%	Negotiable: 10- 33%	
University of Utah	Assistant: \$65,000 Associate: \$82,000 Full: \$95,000; Teaching commitment: 2 courses per semester, 4 a year	.50 FTE	.10 FTE	
University of Kansas	Assistant: \$65,000 Associate: \$85,000- 105,000 Full: \$140,000 to 160,000; 2 classes per semester, .40 FTE	.40 FTE	.20 FTE	Faculty expected to secure external funding. Several full professors serve in administrative roles.

University of Virginia	Assistant: \$65,000 Associate: \$70,000-\$95,000 Full: \$85,000 and higher; 2-3 classes per semester	Not specified	Not specified	FTE commitments are negotiable.
University of Oregon	Assistant: \$80,000-90,000 Associate: \$95,000-150,000 Full: \$145,000-200,000; 5 courses per year (university on quarter system, 3-4 credits per course)	2 publications per year minimum (12 prior to promotion request). At least 3 publications as first author, at least half of the publications are data-based.	Variable	Service commitments are individualized and vary due to loads.
Arizona State University	Assistant: \$66,278 (average), \$72,000 (maximum), (\$62,000 minimum); Associate: \$79,555 (average), \$139,725 (maximum), (\$52,000 min); Full: \$122,238 (average), \$200,000 (maximum), (\$82,000 min); 4 courses a year, 2 per semester	Not specified	Not part of load	Faculty with heavy advising loads may have reduced course loads.

Note: These data were obtained from input provided by faculty and administrators from these respective institutions and are not from official documents.

Although faculty salary levels in the Special Education Program are comparable with peer institutions at the assistant level, they are considerably lower at the associate and full levels. Given the demands on faculty for excellence in both teaching and research and full service commitments, the salary levels are not commensurate with their professional responsibilities. We believe that an increase is deserved across all levels, particularly at the associate and full levels. The comparative data presented bear this out. Additionally, although the achievements of many faculty members in the program are noteworthy, we suggest that it is exceedingly difficult for faculty to meet the research expectations of a Research I university with 3/3 teaching loads. Indeed, the change to a 3/2 load is welcome but a 2/2 load is appropriate if UNM expects faculty to produce at a high level.

### **Curriculum/Instruction and Course and Program Offerings in the Doctoral Programs**

We appreciate that the Special Education program has recognized that major improvements are needed in the Ph.D. program so that a first-rate and nationally visible program can be delivered, and that efforts are being made to review and improve the program, although, it should be noted, it is unclear what actually is being done. Below are several concerns expressed by faculty members and students.

First, there appears to be general consensus that having only two doctoral seminars: SPCD 615 and SPCD 601 is unsatisfactory. There is no question that masters-level courses can be invaluable and contribute to students' overall academic preparation. Nevertheless, a distinguishing quality of a Ph.D. program is an array of advanced courses taught by qualified and experienced senior faculty. To a large extent, the present program is a master's program with a dissertation requirement. The reasons presented for

this are a lack of time and available faculty. We understand the difficulty of dedicating faculty time and teaching loads to this program given the many other responsibilities faculty have, but it is critical that these assignments be made if a quality Ph.D. program is to be offered.

Second, a number of doctoral students commented that they are generally satisfied with the program but are dissatisfied with the fact that there are varying expectations among faculty members serving as doctoral advisors or major professors. A number of students noted that some doctoral students benefit from active and meaningful involvement in research and teaching activities whereas other students have little or no involvement in such activities. The department may want to explore this issue further and ensure that expectations are consistent across faculty. Additionally, the fact that there is not a required teaching responsibility for doctoral students warrants further examination.

Third, we question why the department still offers an Ed.D program when no students have been admitted into it for the last two decades. Is this being done as a placeholder for future courses that may be offered? Advertising such program may be misleading to some students and provides little or no value. We in fact are surprised that the administration has not requested that such a program be dropped and suggest that this be done.

Fourth, the current admission criteria are satisfactory but we are surprised that an interview is not required nor a writing sample or examination scores. It is possible that the low number of students who complete the program may be due to the fact that the students accepted into the program do not have the writing and intellectual or analytical

skills critical for doctoral study or the motivation to complete the program, especially given the fact that most are part-time students.

Fifth, given the number of students admitted into the program, it is unfortunate that so few assistantships are awarded. No doubt the low number of “completed” students may be due in part to this failure to provide adequate financial support. The program must make concentrated efforts to petition for more support.

Sixth, it is unfortunate that doctoral-level advisement is not factored into loads. It is well understood that doctoral students may take an enormous amount of time to mentor and guide. As currently practiced, all of this time appears to be taken out of hand for special education faculty. The program must petition that such involvement is included in load determinations.

### **Licensure Programs:**

As mentioned earlier in this report, **BS ED Dual Licensure program** is a progressive and effective pre-service teacher training program. To further improve the program we will provide a few suggestions related to the field experience/student teaching component of the program. Currently, factors in determining sites for student placements appear to center around the quality of the teacher and principal and their willingness to participate with the UNM program, certainly important and one may say requisite factors in site selection. We would recommend adding consideration of innovative service delivery models and school-wide best practices such as Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Response to Intervention (RtI) and Inclusive Education, as priorities in site selection. It has been our experience that this can be an effective means of promoting systems change. Schools and/or districts that are interested in having UNM

student teachers may make changes in order to meet your selection criteria, particularly with the help of technical assistance currently offered by program faculty. In addition, when the goal is to prepare teachers to implement best practices and influence improvements in education, it is more likely to occur when the student has had hands-on experience in a context where these practices are operating. Similarly, one of the considerations in placing student teachers is matching the nature/location of the job the student will likely have after graduation (i.e., reservation, specific district or school). This provides visibility for the student with potential employers and familiarity with the system. On the other hand, it can be a means of maintaining the status quo when program graduates are hired to work in less than optimal educational situations. Unfortunately people often quickly become socialized into the situation and become reluctant to suggest or promote change. Perhaps a requirement of placements in two different situations would be useful.

We appreciate the changes that are underway for the **Educational Diagnostics Licensure** program. This program is currently conceptualized as a component of other graduate work students are completing at UNM and they must be enrolled in a masters degree program to be eligible to pursue coursework toward the NM Educational Diagnostician license. As many students begin masters programs with the goal of licensure but not a degree, an unintended consequence of this structure is a high rate of non-completers in the masters programs. The Special Education Program is in the process of establishing a transcribed certificate in Educational Diagnostics. This will allow those students interested in licensure to enter and complete the certificate program, thus meeting both their needs and the New Mexico Public Education Department's

requirements for the Educational Diagnostician license. This will greatly increase the proportion of students who will complete M.A. degrees. We urge the university to approve this certificate program.

The **Special Education Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) Certificate** program has had very low enrollment (one graduate in the past five years) and does not appear to be meeting specific needs for educators in NM. We suggest that this program be eliminated.

### **Pursuit of a Lab School or Collaborative Relationships with Charter Schools**

Lab schools can be useful vehicles for field experiences as they are often under the university jurisdiction, or have such close ties and agreements with the university that the faculty can have a strong influence on the practices in the school. Thus, providing the opportunity for experience with current best practices. The disadvantage is that lab schools may be isolated, perhaps on the university campus, and not representative of more typical public schools. Thus, the lab school may be best suited for practice of skills related to courses other than student teaching or other formal field experiences. Charter Schools can be excellent examples of effective and creative educational practices. However, the quality of charter schools varies widely and there is evidence that many do not serve the range or proportion of students in special education found in non-charter public schools. Careful assessment of the charter school and district policies and practices is needed prior to any collaborative agreements. An important consideration with the selection of one school (lab, charter, or professional development) is whether there is a sufficiently diverse student body to provide experience with the range of student abilities and support needs covered by the non-categorical New Mexico special education



teaching license. We encourage the special education program to follow the thoughtful process noted above in exploring this issue further.

### **Cohesion**

We applaud the concerted effort that has gone into improving the cohesion among the program areas in the special education program. There has clearly been progress in this area, especially in recent years. We did hear from both faculty and students that there continue to be real or perceived inequalities and tension between concentration areas I and II. Indeed, several individuals mentioned that there appears to be much “territoriality” among the faculty. For example, Special Education Law is required for Concentration I but not II; Self-Determination is required for II but not I; and Social Justice is required for I but not II. It would appear that these classes would be appropriate for all master’s students in special education. We encourage special education faculty and staff to continue and expand efforts to increase the cohesion of the program as a whole. There is a need for better alignment and understanding of core values among faculty and students. We recommend consideration of more shared learning experiences for students across concentrations. A review of both concentrations reveals that there are very few core classes students jointly take. No doubt the specificity of concentrations is justified on the basis that students in each concentration need specialized skills but this may only serve to further isolate faculty and, ultimately, teachers. It would be relatively easy to have students from both concentrations take courses together as some of the same courses are required for both concentrations. Courses can be structured so that core skills are presented to students from both concentrations and specialized strands, if appropriate, can be provided. This could be very effective given the non-categorical licensure in New

Mexico. Graduates may well be required to teach a heterogeneous caseload of students whose needs cross the two areas of concentration. There will also be a need to collaborate in the field with professionals who cross concentration areas.

### **Alumni and Follow-Up Data**

Providing top-quality education to students with varying learning needs in inclusive general education settings is always challenging for teachers, and the Special Education Program needs to be continually aware of and responsive to these challenges. The fact that the program has not collected alumni data since 2007 is a concern. We understand that it may be difficult to obtain follow-up data from alumni, nevertheless, concentrated efforts need to be made to secure such data. Such feedback may be valuable in informing faculty about needed modifications in curriculum and course offerings and will at the very least ensure to UNM administration and the general public that the Special Education Program values and seeks such input. Additionally, it is recommended that the program establish an advisory board of key stakeholders in the state (e.g., representatives from government, disability groups, parents, teachers) and meet at least once a year. This level of accountability will serve the program well and enhance its credibility and transparency.

### **Diversity**

There is a critical need in special education to be responsive to issues relating to cultural and linguistic diversity. This need is driven by the disproportionately high number of students from culturally diverse backgrounds in special education programs, and, conversely, the low number of highly qualified special educators from diverse backgrounds. The Special Education program is sensitive to these issues and, as a matter

of policy, is committed to promoting diversity. Given the demographic nature of the state, the program has the potential to create an innovative diversity model. However, it remains somewhat uncertain as to what specific actions have been taken to recruit and support students from diverse backgrounds. Are there special recruitment programs, financial incentives, or supports available? Is technical assistance or mentoring support provided to culturally diverse graduates of the certification programs? Also, as noted in the program's "Self Report," there has been a noticeable decrease in the enrollment of culturally diverse students in the undergraduate program. To what extent has this outcome been analyzed and discussed. Relatedly, what has allowed the graduate program to continue to have more or less the same number of students? A task force should be developed to address these issues.

### **Summary**

The Special Education Program deserves commendation, given resource deficiencies. Although the faculty is challenged by high expectations and teaching loads, we believe that they have "risen to the occasion" and provide a program that meets, if not exceeds, most professional standards. We trust that the recommendations presented will provide a stimulus to engage in meaningful team building and collaboration and improve an already first-rate program.