

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO  
DEPARTMENT OF INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY,  
AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Program Response to Academic Program  
Review



THE UNIVERSITY *of*  
NEW MEXICO

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## Response to the Academic Program Review Report

### Educational Psychology Program

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#### **Introduction**

The Educational Psychology program faculty members appreciate the thorough and thoughtful observations and recommendations offered by the Review Team. They have discussed the Academic Program Review (APR) Report and identified strategies that will constitute a plan for action in the years ahead. The College of Education is currently engaged in a collaborative effort to re-envision its role within the wider communities it serves. This institutional reform effort, combined with a shift to a new budgeting model, will provide new challenges and uncertainties for the program as it works to address identified shortcomings and create a stronger, more successful program. This report offers reflections on the APR Report, identifies elements that can be changed without additional resources, and describes initiatives for which additional resources are required. Program faculty members welcome the opportunity to “pursue cutting edge and fundable research on the development, learning and educational experiences of youth and families in New Mexico and the Southwest region that could ultimately inform the rest of the country.” (APR Report, p. 7). The overall goal is to initiate changes that will “strengthen program quality, visibility, reputation, and areas of distinction” (APR Guidelines, p. 8). The Academic Review Committee Report offered eleven general recommendations and seven specific recommendations, each of which are discussed below.

#### **General Recommendations (1 – 11)**

##### ***1. Shared Vision and Building Community***

*“...rather than seek to be comprehensive, we hold that the program should strive to become known for its particular focus on the academic development of diverse and special populations, which distinguishes it from the multitude of programs nationally” (p. 13)*

Faculty members agree that the pursuit of a “comprehensive” program in the way this was understood by the Review Team is problematic. The program maintains the need to offer graduate students a high quality curriculum that attends to core disciplinary knowledge. It is essential that graduate students in Educational Psychology acquire fundamental expertise in cognition and learning, human development, research, statistical methods, and assessment. Training students to become educational psychologists requires sufficient faculty expertise to offer high quality coursework and professional learning experiences in the discipline. This is the reasoning behind the program’s aspiration to become a “comprehensive” educational psychology program. The curriculum as a whole can be envisioned as a Venn diagram – research methodologies,

development and cognition are the circles, with students in the center at the intersection of all three. It is essential to have enough “comprehensiveness” in basic areas to be credible as a program. Faculty members agree that it is not feasible to build a program that encompasses *all* potential areas of specialization in the field. However, there is strong consensus concerning minimum requisite core expertise, and a shared commitment to providing students with learning experiences that go beyond this minimum.

Program faculty members agree with the recommendation that they develop a more coherent and focused vision for the future. This vision would guide program planning and resource acquisition efforts in the future. With the advent of online education, geography is now less important than in the past. The program needs to distinguish itself from numerous other programs and a way to do this is to find a distinctive niche. Faculty members are united by a shared commitment to applied psychology in Southwestern educational contexts. These contexts include the University of New Mexico as well as the local communities, regional and state settings that inform and frame the program’s work. Faculty members contribute to this broad vision in a variety of ways. The following statement expresses a more focused, timely and dynamic program identity:

“Educational Psychology faculty and students investigate teaching, learning, and educational research in the American Southwest.”

A unifying vision statement emerged through discussion of the APR Report: This program conducts research and offers graduate training in Educational Psychology *with* diverse populations to improve the academic preparation/ achievement of students of all ages (K-12 and post-secondary). The program offers a unique focus on the academic preparation of American Indian and Hispanic students. “Studying teaching and learning in the American Southwest” could be a tag line on program brochures and website.

The program’s goal is to establish a strong positive reputation in a particular domain such that other programs around the country will refer their own students to this program. An outcome of success in this area would be an increase over time in the number of students highlighting this area (e.g., diversity) in their letters of application. Articulating this unique program identity must focus on increasing visibility, public relations, and effective rhetoric.

Action items:

1. Redesign application form with area-of-interest checkboxes.
2. Redesign website to highlight program’s niche and state/regional demographics. Use search engine optimization to spotlight the program’s areas of expertise and focus.
3. Identify ways to track M.A. alumni academic career paths.
4. Develop shared strategies for recruiting, advising, writing effective letters of reference for masters’ students.
5. Recruit promising master’s degree students into doctoral program.

## **2. Dedicated Spaces for Shared Scholarly Pursuits**

*“...scholarly foci should be translated into physical, intellectual spaces within the College of Education.”* (p. 14)

Program faculty members concur on the need to develop shared spaces for collaboration and conversation that are aligned with its emphasis on the study of teaching, learning and educational research in the American Southwest. The IFCE Department will open a new Graduate Student Commons in Simpson Hall in February 2014. This space will provide IFCE graduate students with opportunities to meet other students, socialize, study and work on collaborative projects. In addition, the program is in the process of re-purposing its research laboratory space as a site for collaborative work. Establishing “a center within the program” focusing on educational measurement and assessment would require substantial resources and faculty commitment. This option would not support current program goals as well as the first option (redeveloping existing laboratory spaces).

### Action items:

1. Evaluate and dispose of research materials currently stored in the former CAREER grant offices
2. Establish offices for two Educational Psychology research lab groups
3. Redevelop the larger laboratory space to improve its utility as a mid-size group data collection venue
4. Develop guidelines and maintain a system for scheduling the larger laboratory space.
5. Given the program’s focus on research with diverse groups in the Southwest, it will examine the pros and cons of establishing a field site or field research laboratory in a community setting. This could entail collaborative work with one or more community programs, schools, or school districts.

## **3. Pursue Interdisciplinary Grants and Contracts**

*“...engage in more proactive pursuit of interdisciplinary research that reflects programmatic strengths and faculty expertise.... [and] take greater control of their involvement in external grants and contracts in a manner that promotes their professional identity and that of the program.”* (pgs. 14 & 15)

In principle, program faculty members are willing to investigate opportunities and to take leadership in this area. Given current demands on faculty time and the changing context of the COE and UNM, as noted above, other tasks are likely to take precedence in the short-term future. Relevant to this suggestion, Dr. Selig has collaborated with a Special Education colleague on an IES grant proposal. Dr. Parkes has recently (though unsuccessfully) submitted an IES grant in collaboration with faculty at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and also has submitted a Spencer Grant application with a colleague in Special Education. The program has also worked to secure funding for graduate

assistantships (through the COE and UNM Graduate Studies) that are well aligned with the program's identity.

#### ***4. Professional Development***

*"...effort [should] be directed toward the identification of appropriate models and suitable mentors both within the UNM system and nationally to support faculty development for all ranks." [p. 15]*

The University offers an array of professional development opportunities focusing on grant writing and teaching. The College of Education has offered annual workshops on the promotion and tenure process. The College also offers a mentoring program for untenured faculty members. In addition, it has initiated a new Faculty Leadership Training Academy this year. The program acknowledges the value of continued faculty professional development for all ranks. Program faculty will need to work together to maintain a collegial work environment that will support focused attention to individual and collective research agendas, teaching responsibilities and service obligations in the years ahead. Initial efforts by one faculty member to identify a prospective senior faculty mentor through the Dean's office were not well received (were perhaps not understood). Given the fact that this has been identified as an area of need in the program, the Department Chair will be asked to articulate the need for support for faculty development for all ranks on behalf of the program.

##### Action Items:

1. Individual faculty members will try to identify senior faculty mentors to provide guidance and support for professional development in specific areas of expertise.

#### ***5. Search for an Established Scholar***

*"...undertake the search for an established scholar in educational psychology... [who would] embody the shared vision of the program and ...demonstrate leadership in the pursuit of interdisciplinary research opportunities." (p. 16)*

Hiring a more senior scholar would have very significant resource implications. Further, group discussion identified a concern that faculty talent is not developed here. In lieu of searching for an established scholar, the program would rather work to create an environment that would foster talent development and high levels of career achievement among the current faculty.

##### Action items:

1. Discuss what do we want for ourselves as individual scholars? What career-related program changes do we want to see and how might they be initiated and sustained? Formulate concrete steps that might be taken to secure resources required to support these outcomes

## **6. Sufficient Distinction between Master's and Doctoral Courses**

*"...whether in terms of the course structure, readings, assessments, or assigned projects, the scholarly expectations and associated rigor should be readily discernible for master's and doctoral courses."* (p. 16)

Program faculty members agree that there is a need for more advanced courses for doctoral students. The program plans to address this by creating a more extended curriculum. This will involve developing new intermediate level courses to fill the gap between the introductory and advanced level courses. A benefit of this strategy is that it will make it possible to teach advanced courses at a more advanced level, as students will be better prepared for them. With the addition of new intermediary courses, it will be possible to offer greater depth in the areas of cognition and learning, motivation, human development, statistics, pedagogy and college teaching. Existing mid-level courses include 520 (motivation) and 515 (survey). The list below depicts areas in which new courses could be developed to build a more extended curriculum.

EDPY 503 – new course – EDPY 613

510 – new course – 610.

511 – 603 – 604/other advanced statistics courses

Program discussion of this topic identified serious limitations with respect to establishing capacity to prepare well-trained methodologists. Courses at both masters and doctoral level are primarily "survey" courses. A promising strategy well suited to the program's new shared vision would be to focus on building an excellent masters program (with a smaller, highly selective doctoral program). Outcome measures would include the number of our master's students who apply to doctoral programs, gain admission, complete degrees at other Universities.

### Action items:

1. Establish 2 or 3 mid-level courses (for master's students).
2. Consider creating a track for those interested in college teaching.
3. Reevaluate the doctoral course curriculum.
4. Increase recruitment of high quality students into the master's degree program.
5. Track student academic and career paths beyond the masters.]

## **7. Consistency in Course Content across Sections and Delivery Mechanisms**

*"...greater consistency within courses taught by different instructors or via different delivery mechanisms..."* (p. 16)

The reviewers noted that mechanisms for ensuring consistency of undergraduate courses taught by multiple instructors were not evident. The program agrees that ensuring

consistency across class sections is important. Several mechanisms are already in place, but additional actions will be taken in response to reviewers' concerns. All graduate student and part time instructors are required to use the same textbook in all sections of the same course. Course textbooks are selected and approved by program faculty members for all undergraduate and graduate classes taught by graduate students and part time instructors. Curriculum standards have been identified for undergraduate and graduate classes. For example, instructors are expected to include in their course syllabi a standard set of course objectives and standardized paragraphs describing expectations for academic honesty and research participation. Program faculty members have established guidelines for course content (a writing assignment and at least two examinations must be included in the courses). Teaching classes is a valuable professional development experience for Educational Psychology graduate students, who are expected to develop their own written assignments and examinations. Each semester graduate teaching assistants are required to submit their course syllabi for review and approval by a designated program faculty member. In addition, a faculty supervisor holds monthly meetings with teaching assistants to identify problems, help formulate potential solutions, and share pedagogical strategies. [Program faculty also meet periodically with part time instructors to communicate expectations for course content and to provide support and suggestions as needed.]

Each semester, the program coordinator and selected faculty members review IDEA course evaluations for all sections taught by teaching assistants and part time instructors. Each semester, teaching assistants meet with their faculty advisors to discuss course evaluations.

In addition to maintaining the procedures described above, the program has identified additional actions that will be taken to further ensure consistency across sections.

Action items:

1. Each semester, two faculty members will conduct classroom observations of each teaching assistant, providing either verbal or written feedback on instruction.
2. A new, 3 credit College Teaching Seminar (EDPY 630) will be offered every other year. Teaching assistants will be expected to take this course.

### ***8. Course Reframing and Special Course Offering***

*"...consider current course offerings with an eye toward updating and reframing....the inclusion of periodic 'trends and issues' courses, highlighting new developments or faculty expertise should also be considered." (p. 17)*

The reviewers recommend that curriculum review and revision take place in conjunction with efforts to increase differentiation between master's and doctoral degree courses. The program concurs with this recommendation. This process will be informed by input from constituents (#9, below). After conversations with constituents take place, program faculty will review the course curriculum as a whole. Faculty who teach research methods, measurement and assessment, and statistics courses will set aside time to

discuss, update and fine-tune curriculum content of courses in their domain. Faculty who teach human development, motivation, and learning and cognition courses will meet to discuss, update and fine-tune the curriculum content of courses in their domain. Faculty as a whole will decide on the feasibility of including specific “trends and issues” courses (EDPY 645 and EDPY 651) regularly. In addition, faculty as a whole will reappraise the master’s degree comprehensive examination process to ensure that it is aligned with changes in the curriculum and the program’s new identity and focus.

Action items:

1. Faculty will review the curriculum as a whole after discussions with constituents take place.
2. Two subgroups of faculty will meet to discuss, update and fine-tune courses in their respective domains of expertise.
3. Faculty will reassess the master’s degree comprehensive examination process.

### **9. Regular Communication with Constituents**

*“...establish policies and procedures for regular communication between program faculty and constituents groups for whom service courses are provided.” (p. 17)*

The program has met periodically with teacher education and other program coordinators to discuss the scope and sequence of its course offerings. However, program faculty members agree that more regular communication with constituent groups would be mutually beneficial. Such conversations could help to inform the program’s curriculum evaluation and revision process (#8, above). In addition, there is a perceived need to clarify the program’s two-track research and statistics course sequence (EDPY 500-502 and EDPY 505-511) to constituent groups so that this information can inform curriculum development in other units. (Program coordinators and faculty will collaborate on this task).

Action items:

1. The program coordinator will initiate discussions with key constituent groups in teacher education, counselor education, special education and physical education.
2. A strategy will be developed for sharing information about the program’s research and statistics course offerings with constituent program coordinators and faculty.

### **10. Training and Supervision of Graduate Student Instructors**

*“...provision of opportunities for training those students who will assume instructional responsibilities within the program. In addition, the supervision of students during the initial phases of their teaching by faculty...” (p. 18)*



See discussion of #7, above.

### ***11. Benchmarks for Annual Progress***

*“...programmatically milestones [should] be expanded into annual benchmarks that document growth in the areas of research, teaching and service appropriate to the students’ goals and the program’s espoused vision...”* (p. 18)

It is the program’s understanding that benchmarking of graduate students refers to a system for indicating milestones or benchmarks for student achievement as they move through degree programs. A benchmarking system would list which activities students should have engaged in by the end of each academic year. For example, by the end of year 1, students should have taken X classes; by the end of year 3, doctoral students who seek tenure track jobs should have 2 publications. In response to this recommendation, the program will modify the Professional Activities Checklist to incorporate recommended milestone experiences for master’s and doctoral degree students.

#### Action items:

1. Add a temporal and developmental component to current Professional Activities Checklist.

### ***Specific Recommendations (12 – 18)***

#### ***12. Restructure the program website to more effectively showcase the emergent vision and areas of faculty expertise.***

The program agrees that it would be beneficial to re-imagine and redesign the program website to better reflect the program’s identity and faculty expertise. The program coordinator will work on revising the program website, in consultation with faculty.

#### Action items:

1. Restructure the Program Website.

#### ***13. Consider replacing current minors with transcribed graduate certificates in areas of high need.***

The program agrees that this is a potentially promising strategy. While this idea has merit, it will need to be further developed within the ongoing context of programmatic and structural change within the College of Education. Designated faculty will contact constituents to discuss the implications of replacing the program’s formal minors with graduate certificates in high need areas.

Action items:

1. Discuss and evaluate the benefits and costs of eliminating formal minors as a program.
2. Consult with constituencies concerning other program perspectives on the value of minors versus transcribed certificates.
3. Seek specific information on the procedures and process for creating transcribed certificates.
4. Pending consultation with constituents and positive recommendation by program faculty, initiate requisite paperwork.

***14. Provide an upper division undergraduate course in statistics and measurement to address the needs of incoming students with limited preparation.***

Create an Upper Division Undergraduate Statistics and Measurement Course [or collaborate with the Psychology department]

This was suggested as a way to address the number of seriously underprepared students in the program's introductory statistics courses. The program does not think this is a practical solution to this issue. There is no identifiable market for such a course, so enrollment could not be guaranteed. Current faculty resources are stretched thin enough that augmenting the doctoral sequence (recommendation #6, above) and developing such an undergraduate class are not simultaneously possible. Also, our constituents' students only have limited space in the programs of study for methodology courses. Finally, we would have no ready mechanism to tell which students should enroll in that course prior to taking our sequences.

The program already offers two strands of research methods courses (These are EDPY 500 & EDPY 502 for those students whose professional responsibilities require that they be critical "consumers" of research, and EDPY 505 & EDPY 511 for those likely to become "producers" of research.) So relatively easy first steps are to make sure our constituents understand clearly which sequence their students should take, which can be part of our on-going constituent relations (recommendation #9); and to schedule 500 & 505 and 502 & 511 simultaneously so that time of offering is removed as a criterion that students use to decide which course to take. The faculty teaching statistics will also explore the possibility of using a mathematical skills pre-test to identify students who might benefit from existing courses, like college algebra, before enrolling in our statistics course.

Action items:

1. See recommendation # 16, below.

***15. Explore the possibility of a mixed-methods/mixed-models course that integrates the quantitative and qualitative expertise in the program.***

The program agrees that there is a compelling need for such a course in the College of Education. However, mixed-methods educational research has evolved into a distinct area of expertise. The program lacks faculty resources (faculty expertise) necessary to offer a regularly scheduled mixed-methods/mixed-models course. This is an area of specialization, along with psychometrics, for which additional faculty resources will be needed in the years ahead.

***16. Consider offering a data-based decision-making undergraduate course that serves the needs of multiple constituent groups.***

The program offers courses geared toward meeting the needs of practitioners who need to understand how to interpret data for decision-making purposes. These include EDPY 500, EDPY 502 and EDPY 472/572 (Classroom Assessment). Program faculty hold that expanding course offerings at the undergraduate level would require resources beyond those currently available. In addition, given past experience, it does not seem likely that adequate enrollments in an undergraduate level decision-making course could be achieved.

Action items:

1. Faculty will investigate the use of a mathematical skills pretest to identify students who would benefit from existing courses (for example, College Algebra).

***17. Institute a doctoral seminar to orient incoming students to the program structure and expectations.***

The reviewers recommended that the program initiate a first-year doctoral pro-seminar that would serve as a general introduction to advanced studies the field of Educational Psychology. The program supports this idea in principle, but given the small size of the doctoral program, it would be difficult to achieve adequate enrollment in a specialized course of this kind. It is also not clear how it could be staffed, given current faculty resources.

Action items: None anticipated in the immediate future.

***18. Create the means for more senior graduate students to provide peer mentoring and guidance to more junior students in the program.***

Several new and established program activities and sites provide opportunities for students to meet and establish potentially beneficial peer mentoring relationships. These include:

- Social gatherings for faculty and students
- A new Graduate Student Commons in Simpson Hall
- Program-sponsored events highlighting nationally recognized seminar speakers each semester.
- The annual IFCE Research Showcase
- Two new Educational Psychology research groups that will work in designated laboratory space in the basement of Travelstead Hall. (See response to general recommendation #2, above.)

The program concurs that more could be done to help new students establish fruitful relationships with more senior students. Faculty advisors will ask their advisees for input and suggestions as part of the Student Annual Review process in 2014. Renewed effort will be made to schedule social gatherings for students and faculty members with an eye toward facilitating sustained junior-senior mentoring relationships.

Action items:

1. Maintain current venues for social interactions among students.
2. Organize at least 2 social events each semester.
3. Seek input from graduate students through the Student Annual Review meeting with advisors.

**Conclusion**

The Academic Program Review process has provided a number of useful insights and suggestions. The reviewers identified and recognized program strengths and offered a balanced assessment of areas requiring reevaluation and change. Program faculty look forward to working together to build a top-notch Educational Psychology program specializing in the study of teaching, learning and research in the American Southwest. This new focus will fill a unique niche in the field of Educational Psychology, better positioning the program to address urgent community, state and national needs in the years ahead. It will also offer important opportunities for faculty professional growth as researchers and educators. And finally, it will create exciting new spaces for conversation and collaboration with constituents.

*Respectfully submitted by the faculty of the Educational Psychology Program:*

Jan Armstrong, Terri Flowerday, Martin Jones, Jay Parkes, and Martin Selig