

From: Felicia L. Wilczenski, Interim Dean of CEHD and Joan Liem, Dean of Graduate Studies
To: Provost Winston Langley, Associate Provost Peter Langer, and Jack Levy, Chairperson, Curriculum and Instruction Department
CC: Peter Taylor, Peter Kiang, Denise Patmon, Donna DeGennaro, Mary Brady, and Learning, Teaching, and Educational Transformation (LTET) program faculty
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The University of Massachusetts Boston 1999 policy for academic program review states: “The Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQUAD) is an external review process for assessing the core academic functions of each department or program at the university, including teaching and learning; research, professional, and creative activity; and public service and academic outreach. The AQUAD review provides a rigorous quality assessment, identifying strengths and targeting areas for growth and development.” The self-study report for the LTET track in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C+I) prepared by core faculty members highlighted the many strengths of the track, included analysis of a sample of student responses, and outlined recommendations.

The review team, composed of two external reviewers, Mary Battenfeld (Wheelock College) and Paul Jablon (Lesley University), and two internal reviewers, Raul Ybarra (College of Public and Community Service) and Joseph Check (College of Education and Human Development, Department of Leadership in Education), engaged in thoughtful analysis of the self study and a series of onsite interviews with students, LTET faculty, and college and university administrators. The LTET faculty responded to the AQUAD reviewers by sorting the comments into strengths and areas in need of further development. Our response is consistent with the structure of the reviewers’ and faculty comments on LTET’s strengths and weaknesses focusing on AQUAD criteria regarding the track’s mission, curriculum, faculty quality, teaching and learning environment, and use of resources.

Mission

Through interviews with faculty and students, the reviewers found “the LTET track to be uniquely and significantly aligned with the campus mission and strategic priorities, particularly through its capacity to integrate and support civic engagement in teaching and learning, and for the way the program prepares graduates to analyze and address ‘big picture’ issues in education.” The LTET track generally serves students with interests in education outside of classroom teaching or other areas of public education not requiring a specific license from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Graduates work in community organizations, in higher education, K-12 settings, or in some cases as classroom teachers with an additional focus on evaluating the whole structure of the school in which they teach. The program is designed to provide students with a greater understanding of educational transformation as applied to their unique personal, educational and professional situations.

A major issue raised by the review committee was that the mission is not clearly articulated in the available written program materials. The lack of materials makes outreach and recruitment

difficult. Students primarily learn about the LTET track through informal channels within and outside of the University. Recruitment efforts are further hampered by a lack of data to help understand which students are best served by the LTET track and the types of employment options available to graduates. There are no data comparing students who enter the program directly with those who enroll through feeder certificate programs such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT), Instructional Technology Design, Teaching Writing in the Schools, or with those who opt out of the teacher education licensure tracks. Such data would be helpful to efforts to ensure that the various student groups that enter the program are equally well-served. LTET evolved from a non-licensure track in the teacher education program for students who could not pass the state teachers' licensing exam or decided against a K-12 classroom teaching career. It continues to serve this function for some students but also appears to serve as a flexible master's option for students entering CEHD through various certificate programs. Students in LTET are not endorsed for K-12 teaching or other licensure through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education upon completion of the LTET degree.

We share the reviewers' concerns about the need to better articulate the mission of the program in the department and college materials and actively recruit the appropriate mix of students into the program. We would like to see the program and the C&I department clarify the students best served by the program, rather than allowing the program to remain a collection of students who end up in it for various reasons not all of which may be compatible. We say more about this in the conclusion.

Curriculum

A strength of the curriculum is its responsiveness to individual students' interests and needs. LTET offers four core areas: curriculum organization and innovation; research and writing for reflective practice; mediation, dialogue, and collaboration; urban and social justice education. Seven additional required courses allow students flexibility to focus on an area of interest. The flexibility of the curriculum offers the potential for a multidisciplinary program of study.

The reviewers noted that the curricular structure and course offerings are linked as much to faculty strengths and existing courses in other programs as they are to a clearly articulated, compelling, program structure. Another curricular weakness noted by students and evident in the written materials is the variability in the number of course offerings in each of the core areas, ranging from three in urban and social justice education to ten in curriculum organization and innovation. Moreover, students transferring out of a teacher education licensure track just prior to student teaching may take as few as six credits (2 courses) in the LTET track. The review committee questioned whether a capstone comprehensive exam was enough of a culminating experience to pull together core curriculum areas and suggested other possibilities that might be more closely related to the track's mission and students' interests. We urge the program faculty to consider the need for greater coherence in the curriculum and the creation of alternative capstone experiences as one way to increase program coherence.

Faculty

The LTET faculty have a commitment to student success and strengths in teaching, scholarship, advising, and service. The reviewers' noted "Without exception, students at both the campus visit and in the written comments found in appendices described the LTET faculty as accessible, knowledgeable, and challenging teacher/scholars."

The reviewers felt that the most significant issue is that the track lacks adequate resources. No faculty are assigned primarily to the program, and the LTET coordinator(s) do not receive a stipend or course reduction. The lack of assigned faculty and leadership contributes to difficulties in providing advising services, relationship building with students, curriculum development, and support for program operations.

Teaching and Learning Environment

An obvious strength of the LTET track is its flexibility in meeting the learning goals of a diverse student population. The reviewers commented that students felt supported in designing their program of study and achieving their personal educational objectives. The student-centered orientation of the program is further enhanced through multiple course delivery formats, including online, summer, evening, and intensive short-term course sessions.

Although the track's accessibility is its strength, the 100% acceptance rate is problematic. Admission criteria for the various certificate feeder programs are not the same as the criteria for admission to degree programs. Data provided in the self-study indicated that the average time for students to complete the degree is 2.8-2.9 years, but no data are presented about dropout rates. Although the LTET program is individualized, a set of learning outcomes is needed to ensure conceptual coherence of the curriculum and assurance that the students have reached their goals.

The reviewers concluded "that a program which admits everyone, is loosely organized around individual student interests, and has a faculty with multiple responsibilities, should have clearer structures in place to ensure that all students can succeed." We agree with this assessment.

Use of Resources

The reviewers pointed out that LTET operates with scant resources and actually assists other tracks with course enrollments. The program has no core faculty or courses specific to the LTET track. Its resources are derived from other programs and in this era of budget cuts, may be viewed as a model for maximizing resources.

However, enrollment is an issue for the LTET track. Data provided in the self-study vary widely from a low of 57 in 2010 to a high of 88 in 2009. Data obtained from the registrar's office indicate 42 LTET students enrolled in courses for fall, 2009 and 40 in fall, 2010. Most LTET students transfer from the ABA program or teacher education licensure tracks. Other students are direct enrollees or transfers from other certificate programs (e.g., CCT, Instructional Technology Design).

A much better job needs to be done going forward of setting clear admissions standards and tracking students during the program and after graduation. We have concerns about students entering certificate programs that admit everyone who applies and then being allowed to transfer all their course credits into the LTET master's program. We believe that more stringent criteria for the master's program need to be established and applied and urge the C&I department to establish clear admissions criteria for the program.

Conclusions

Certainly, the need for LTET to have core faculty is “absolutely central” to the success of the program, yet there are issues with unclear enrollment numbers and redundancies with other programs. Budgetary concerns and curriculum priorities need to be weighed in decisions about whether to allocate resources to LTET.

It is not clear that LTET is the best option for students who do not meet state teaching licensure requirements or opt out of the licensure program for other reasons. Another strategy may be to decouple the teacher education degree and state licensure. Essentially all teacher education degrees would be non-licensure and students would become candidates for licensure when state test requirements are met during their course of study. If that were done, the need for LTET for students who failed to pass the MTEL exam would cease to exist.

It is also not clear why students in the CCT certificate program opt for the LTET track rather than the MA degree program in CCT. Similarly, ABA is closely related to special education. Students from the ABA certificate program may be better served by an MEd in Special Education rather than moving from the ABA certificate into LTET. These issues need to be explored more fully with the faculty in C&I.

The C&I department needs to decide how to address the different needs of the 3 or more student groups that now make up the program, first through assessment and then by redirecting some of those students or enhancing the LTET program to better meet all needs. The teaching loads of the core LTET faculty should be reviewed to determine if instructional resources can be deployed more efficiently to serve students. The reciprocity agreements for faculty who teach outside of C&I or CEHD may need updating to ensure that faculty are not overtaxed with joint teaching commitments and that there is an equitable return of resources to C&I for faculty who teach in other departments or colleges. We look forward to working on the issues raised in the AQUAD review with the LTET faculty, and the C&I Department Chairperson to ensure a strong and vibrant Curriculum and Instruction Department and an LTET program that serves the needs of a clearly defined group of students.