

November 9, 2005

TO: Professor Haixia Lan, Chair, Academic Program Review Committee,
University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

FROM: *John B. Mason*
John B. Mason, Dean, College of Liberal Studies, University of Wisconsin –
La Crosse

RE: Department of Educational Studies Academic Program Review

Dear Professor Lan:

I have received from the Department of Educational Studies a copy of several self-study documents for its academic program review, covering the undergraduate programs in early childhood-middle childhood, middle childhood-early adolescence, early adolescence-adolescence, and graduate programs in special education, reading, and master's of education-professional development (MEPD). I have reviewed these documents as well as a summary of the review written by Department Chair Kent Koppleman, a response written by Director of the School of Education Richard Swantz, and the evaluative report on our education programs prepared by the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction.

My overall assessment of the review is that the Department of Educational Studies is performing well despite its being understaffed and without permanent leadership. The movement of the department to the College of Liberal Studies has created significant stress for the faculty; however, the faculty has responded in positive, productive ways in adapting to the change, and there is ample reason to believe that the department will thrive in its new location. At present the department is conducting searches for six new faculty members, including a new department chair. In addition, the School of Education is searching for a permanent Director. With these new individuals in place, the department and the School of Education will be well poised for improvement in the future.

Significant Strengths:

The department's faculty are highly dedicated to the preparation and development of teachers. They have developed a sophisticated process for tracking the progress of teacher candidates, and they have recently adopted a comprehensive system for evaluating student teaching performance. In general, the department is committed to both an outcomes-based and standards-based approach to teacher preparation. Several members of the department have been influential in the development of standards for their sub-disciplines. They are committed to continued adherence to the PI34 certification rules of the Department of Public Instruction. Clinical experiences for our students are generally very strong, though I recommend a review of our clinical requirements and our configuration for oversight of clinicals. As the self-study of the reading programs notes,

we must provide new means for providing tutoring and other clinical experiences in the area of reading.

Along with their other colleagues in the School of Education, faculty in the Department of Educational Studies have successfully designed new structures to assure integration of the units within education. Specifically, the School of Education Leadership team (SOEL) and the Teacher Education Governance Council (TEGC) have been invigorated, with significant contributions from the Department of Educational Studies.

A major strength of the department lies in its healthy relationships with area PK-12 schools. The department's two professional development sites assure close interaction between university faculty and school personnel. These sites permit students to replace some of their traditional classroom experiences with hands-on work in collaborative groups of professors and PK-12 teachers. Even the faculty not engaged in PDS are in close contact with the schools, through grant activity and through informal relations.

The Learning Communities program has received some recent attention in areas of organization and accountability. The program is healthy and under solid leadership. It is a model in the nation for alternative approaches in professional teacher development.

Areas for Growth:

Need for Resources

As Professor Koppleman notes in his summery, resources, especially in the area of personnel, are a significant problem for the department. Several vacancies among the tenure-track faculty have been created by retirements and resignations, and some searches have been unsuccessful. Salaries have not always been set at competitive levels. The College of Liberal Studies will seek to bring needed resources to the department.

Curricular Distress

As Director Richard Swantz notes, the early childhood-middle childhood and middle childhood-early adolescent program are "credit laden." Our programs need to be streamlined, and we need to increase opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of learning objectives outside of courses. Improved opportunities for access to our programs must become a priority.

Without adding credits to our programs, I urge the department to explore possibilities for improving the skills of our teacher candidates in the areas of classroom management and the assessment of learning. Without a solid basis in assessment, our graduates will not be able to undertake career-long professional development focused on pupil performance.

