

2018-2019 IBHE Program Review

1. **Eastern Illinois University**
2. **Special Education, M.S. Education**
3. **Date: January 23, 2019**
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5. Overview

The graduate program in Special Education mission, as stated in the Graduate Catalog, "is to prepare graduates for the diverse roles they will be asked to play in special education". The Eastern Illinois University mission statement reflects, "students learn the methods and outcomes of free inquiry in the arts, sciences, humanities, and professions." The Special Education graduate program prepares professionals for advanced practice in education and faculty use instructional methodologies to assure students learn the methods and outcomes of free inquiry. The faculty of the department is committed to teaching, research/creative activities, and service serving as role models for special education graduate candidates. The University mission of graduate education, as stated in the Graduate Catalog, "is to provide superior graduate degrees, certificate and post baccalaureate options designed for career specialization and advancement, certification and credentialing, professional and leadership development and preparation for advanced scholarship." The special education program addresses the graduate program mission through provision of a superior program with advanced licensure options that provide graduates with a career ladder beyond the provision of direct services that may include being a supervisor, a technical assistant, or special education administrator.

All graduate programs at Eastern address four "Student Learning Outcomes": depth of content knowledge including effective technology skills and ethical behaviors; critical thinking and problem solving; oral and written communication skills; and advanced scholarship through research and/or creative activity. In addition, professional education programs assess two additional learning outcomes: ability to work with diverse clientele, recognizing individual differences, and ability to collaborate and create positive relations within the school, community, and profession. These six learning outcomes are addressed and assessed across the graduate course offerings of the Department of Special Education. In addition the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) seven advanced content standards: Assessment; Curricular Content Knowledge; Programs, Services, and Outcomes; Research and Inquiry; Leadership and Policy; Professional and Ethical Practices; and Collaboration are addressed and assessed across graduate course offerings in Special Education.

The University Graduate Council adopted the four University graduate outcomes in spring of 2006 with the additional professional education graduate outcomes adopted in fall of 2007. CEC revised the seven advanced content standards in 2012. The combination of standards and the revisions to the CEC Advanced Standards required the integration of assignments and activities and the use of rubrics in graduate special education courses to assess these sets of standards and outcomes being revisited and revised commenced AY 2013-14. The aligned assessments, with a key assessment embedded into each graduate course, are used consistently each time the course is taught; courses are taught on a rotating 2 - 3 year cycle. The Department has three years of data that has been generated using the assessments and rubrics aligned to the 2012 CEC Standards, the University Graduate Outcomes and the additional two professional education graduate outcomes. All graduate candidates must complete an issues and research course as part of their 32-36 graduate hours; these are offered each academic year. Each of the other

graduate courses are offered in a two- to three-year rotating cycle. The Department Chair and Graduate faculty analyze the resulting assessment data annually. The review results are used for program and course improvement and evidence of program quality and candidate performance in varying University, State, and other required reports:

At the Masters level, candidates may elect to complete coursework resulting in State of Illinois Learning Behavior Specialist II (LBS II) endorsements or Director of Special Education endorsement on an administrator license. In the courses leading to a LBS II, Curriculum Adaptation Specialist (CAS), the State of Illinois LBSII Standards for Curriculum Adaptation Specialist are addressed and assessed. In the courses leading to a LBS II, Behavior Intervention Specialist (BIS), the State of Illinois LBS II Standards for Behavior Intervention Specialist are addressed and assessed. The State of Illinois Director of Special Education Standards are addressed and assessed in the courses leading to the Director endorsement. Approval by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) of these three standards based sequence of courses was granted in February 2007. The courses required to earn the additional endorsements are offered on-line with the exception of the “Independent Study” and the “Field Experience/Practica.”

With the addition of the course sequences, resulting upon passage of the State of Illinois licensure test, in the LBS II endorsements or Director of Special Education endorsement, candidates in the graduate program in special education may choose to complete the M. S. in Education with the intent of being a master teacher or a master teacher with a LBS II endorsement or Director endorsement. These endorsements, if elected by the candidate, provide graduates with a career ladder beyond provision of direct services, which may include being a supervisor; a building or district level technical assistant who works with classroom teachers to design and implement curriculum adaptations or behavioral interventions for individuals with disabilities; or a special education administrator.

Admission to degree status requires that candidates have an initial license to teach in special education. Candidates cannot earn an initial special education endorsement and a master’s degree within the 32-36 semester hour graduate program. This program characteristic is unique to Eastern’s program and distinguishes it from other state graduate programs which allow candidates to concomitantly complete an initial special education endorsement and earn a master’s degree, allowing candidates to count all initial licensure courses towards their master’s degree. Eastern’s program is designed to not allow for concurrency for the philosophical reason that an advanced program should be an advanced program resulting in graduates with advanced professional knowledge, skills and dispositions not entry level knowledge and skills. This philosophy is consistent with the philosophy underlying the Council for Exceptional Children advanced standards. An additional significant noteworthy feature of the Eastern Illinois University Master’s program, with major in Special Education, is that across the past 4 years, the graduate special education coursework has segued from being hybrid to an on-line format, with the exception of practicum and independent study coursework. This delivery of the majority of the Masters in Education with major in Special Education through an on-line format is another unique characteristic of this graduate program versus other State supported Universities.

6. Major Findings and Recommendations

a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program

The primary target audience for the graduate degree, as reported in the 2011 IBHE report, were individuals: with an initial certificate in special education; practicing special educators who lived and worked within commuting distance of Eastern; and special educators who wanted to earn a Master in their major field rather than earn additional non-special education endorsements in administration or counseling. The addition of the LBSII and Director course sequences in 2007 provided access to a career ladder specific to special education for special educators residing in the EIU geographic area. The

significant difference between the graduate program in 2011 and currently is that courses have been redesigned and are now for the most part delivered in an on-line format. Delivery on-line provides access to the program and to the LBSII and Director sequence to licensed and practicing special educators outside of commuting distance to EIU and broadens the candidate base to special educators across the State of Illinois and outside the State.

Using the survey generated specific to the IBHE review of 2010 and this current, 2017-18, review 128 responses of graduates of the Masters' program with major in special education were analyzed. When asked, "Overall, how do you view Eastern Illinois University's Special Education graduate program?" 120 of 128 respondents said the program was a "strong program (3.00)" or a "quality program (4.00)"; the mean response to this question on a 4.00 scale was 3.66. To the query: "How do you perceive that other professionals view Eastern Illinois University's graduate program? 119 of 128 respondents said "well (4.00)," or "very well (5.00)."

Fall 2010 when the prior IBHE report was written the official tenth day number of graduate candidates enrolled was 15. This fall 2018, the number of graduate candidates enrolled in coursework was 37. Curriculum surveys are done each semester in each graduate course; across fall 2017, spring 2018, and summer 2018, 6 major only courses have been taught on-line. To the question on the survey asking to what extent they felt their "knowledge and skills had been increased" the mean response across the 6 courses was 4.47 on a 5.00 scale with the 5.00 representing "strongly agree" and 4.00 reflecting "agree."

The major change in the program since the 2011 report was submitted was the change of delivery style from face to face to on-line delivery of the majority of the coursework. The increase in majors from 15 in 2010 to 37 fall 2018 reflects the positive result of the change of delivery format.

b. Description of major findings and recommendations

Professional Education programs are reviewed as part of the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) national accreditation process; this process occurs on a 7-8 year cycle with the most recent on-site visit being spring 2018. Eastern's educator preparation programs, as a result of the most recent process, were fully accredited through 2025. While advanced programs were not part of the most current review prior reviews have resulted in accreditation of these programs also.

"Student Learning Assessment Program Summary Forms" are submitted annually (or biannually if the program demonstrates it has a strong process of assessing student learning). This report is submitted to Eastern's Center for Academic Support and Achievement (CASA). This report addresses the learning objectives of the program; how, where, and when these are assessed; the expectations; results; and who is responsible and how results are shared.

Assessments for which data are reported in the most recent "Student Learning" report to CASA included direct and indirect measures. Direct measures used are: comprehensive written exams; issues scholarly paper; and a required oral presentation of an issue with both sides of the issue addressed. An indirect measure, a candidate self-assessment, is also used to assess the four Graduate Learning Objectives and the two unit objections. Each candidate not completing a thesis must take and pass written comprehensive exams. Candidate performance on the 9 issue/research written exams taken by 9 masters candidates was rated as "consistently exceeded standards" for 2 of the 9, 5 were assessed at 4.0 "exceeds some standards," 1 of 9 "met standards and 1 "inconsistently met standards," A rubric is used to assess candidate performance on the issues scholarly paper and the oral presentation of an issue. Performance on the issues paper across the 2016-18 time period was strong with 9 of 20 "consistently exceeding standards (5.0)," 8 of 20 "exceeding some standards (4.0)," 2 of 20 "meeting standards (3.0)," and only

1 “inconsistently” meeting standards. Relative to candidate performance on the oral presentation of an issue 4 of 20 “consistently exceeded standards” with 13 of 20 “exceeding some standards” and 3 “meeting standards (3.0).” Candidate assessment of their own performance and dispositions occurs at the conclusion of their graduate program. Ten graduates completed the self-assessment 2014-2016. Candidate responses relative to “professional and ethical practices” reflected that 9 of 10 perceive they “always demonstrate” ethical practices with 1 responding “most of the time.” Four candidates (40%) in gauging their own “effective communication” considered themselves to effectively communicate “always” with the other 6 saying “most of the time.” Nine of 10 candidates' self-rating for “sensitivity to diversity, social justice and equity” reflects they perceive they “always demonstrate” this behavior with only 1 responding “demonstrates most of the time.”

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) revised its advanced standards in 2012. This resulted in the graduate faculty engaging in realigning the graduate courses to these 2012 CEC Advanced Preparation Standards and the revision of graduate programmatic assessments and rubrics 2012-2014. An analysis of the data resulting from use of the realigned assessments and rubrics, 2016-2018, reflected that across 15 programmatic assessments candidates’ ability to relate research to practice and their demonstration of “advanced scholarship” were rated at a mean of 4.33 on a 5.00 scale with a mean of medians across the 15 sets of candidate performance data of 4.53. The range of means across the 15 graduate programmatic assessments aligned to the CEC 2012 Advanced Standards was 4.82-3.63 on a 5.00 scale.

The survey sent to former graduate program completers reflects when asked “At what level do you consider your knowledge and skills to work with individuals with exceptional learning needs” that 77 of 128 responded “very high”; 45 of 128 said “high”; 4 of 128 indicated their skill level was “moderate” and 2 did not respond to this question. To the question: “At what level do you perceive your ability to create positive learning environments for student learning” 90 of 128 said “very high,” 35 of 128 responded “high,” and 2 said “moderate” with one not responding to this question.

The Director of the Center for Academic Support and Achievement (CASA) in her remarks relative to the department's graduate assessment system reflected: “Direct and indirect measures are used to provide a comprehensive view of student learning in this graduate program. Collecting and analyzing data is integral to the work of the department. Data are used to make changes to the curriculum and the assessment instruments themselves.”

c. Description of actions taken since the last review

The most significant change beyond realignment of course, assessments, and rubrics to the 2012 Council for Exceptional Children Advanced Preparation Standards was the decision to deliver the majority of graduate special education coursework on-line. The delivery mode segued from face to face delivery of all graduate coursework; to hybrid mode of delivery, face to face with less than 50% on-line, 2015-2017; to on-line delivery of all graduate coursework with the exception of “Independent Study,” Field Experience/Practica,” and thesis, Fall 2017. The phased timeframe provided that faculty as they increased the use of on-line in the hybrid format were able to learn how to best use this medium and prepare materials for this delivery format.

Assignment of hybrid courses does not require the faculty to have special training thus they self-engage in the learning curve with little to no support provided. In order to teach a course fully on-line faculty must complete specialized training. This training requires a significant time commitment from faculty; the phase in to on-line gave faculty time to complete this training. As the on-line training requires each faculty design a course it also provided that the Chair could guide faculty as to which course to design as part of the required training consistent with the next time the course would be on the academic

year schedule and the likelihood they would be assigned that given course. The Chair developed a four-year on-line course rotation schedule and recruitment for the on-line program began spring 2017. Twenty-three candidates were enrolled in the first semester of on-line delivery of the program fall 2017. The graduate program, as of December 2018, has admitted 51 candidates; 37 were enrolled in masters coursework fall 2018 and the additional 14 admitted will commence coursework in 2019.

d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review

The special education curriculum is continuously scrutinized and modified as needed. An example of this since the 2011 IBHE review was the careful review of all course outlines and assignments by the faculty and chair to assure that 2012 CEC advanced professional preparation standards and the 4 University and 2 Unit goals were being addressed and assessed across the curriculum to the extent essential to assure that graduates demonstrate the requisite advanced knowledge, skills, and dispositions and can relate research to their professional practices.

Based on the faculty and Chair analysis of the data generated for the 2016-2018 Student Learning Assessment Report graduate faculty deliberations are in progress relative to perceived needed changes to coursework and embedded assessments. Considerations include: strategies to help candidates improve their professional writing skills and revisiting assignments in course as the data seemed to reflect too much repetitive inclusion of “unit plan” type assignments and assessments of these. The data also reflects that candidates perform collectively better on project- based assessments than on assignments that are research based; strategies to strengthen candidate research skills need to be further embedded in the graduate curriculum.

Additionally, curricular changes and practices responsive to legislation and litigation at the federal and state level will be a department focus in the near future as the federal law governing special education, the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),” is reauthorized. Special education courses and assessments will need to be modified as the federal laws change and the federal rules are promulgated. State laws will then be modified to be congruent with the revisions of IDEA and this will necessitate additional curricular modifications.

7. Institutional Questions

NA

8. Outcome

8.1 Decision:

- Program in Good Standing
- Program flagged for Priority Review
- Program Enrollment Suspended

8.2 Explanation

On behalf of the Office of Academic Affairs, I appreciate the efforts of the faculty and program to assure high quality student outcomes through assessment and innovation. The department is to be commended for its efforts with respect to accreditation standards and in the area of enrollment, particularly online program

development. Finally, the report demonstrates the faculty's commitment to academic excellence and student success.