Department of Child Development

April 20th, 2025

Re: External Review Report, ECS Program at Sonoma State University

Dear Dean Alamillo and ECS colleagues

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as the external reviewer for the Early Childhood Studies program at Sonoma State University. I reviewed the report thoroughly—once prior to my visit and twice following it. The self-study provides a thorough reflection on the program's performance, identifying strengths and areas for growth while proposing thoughtful, actionable steps for improvement. The comprehensive nature of this document underscores a clear commitment to both student success and faculty development.

On the following pages, I provide my comments on each section of the report, informed by my review and the insights gathered during the external review visit to SSU on March 13th-14th. I had the privilege of meeting with the department's chair, assessment coordinator, faculty, students, college dean, the ASC, the professional advisor, the Director for Children's School, and the AVP of Academic Affairs. Additionally, I observed two classes, where I was able to engage with students in those classes without their instructors present. The student data from the three meetings has also been included in this report.

As an external reviewer and a professional in the field of Child Development, I assessed both the strengths and areas for growth of the program. I also view my role as a strong advocate for securing resources for the ECS program. Consequently, my report is structured with this perspective in mind.

Please reach out to me at meenal.rana@humboldt.edu, if you have any questions.

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Comments on

Section 1: Program Context and Curriculum of the Early Childhood Studies (ECS) Program

Strengths of the Program

1. The ECS program features four clearly defined concentrations—Early Childhood Education (ECE), Community, Health, and Social Services for Children (CHSSC), Early Prevention and Counseling (EPC), and School, Education, and Teaching (SET). These pathways are thoughtfully designed to align with diverse student interests and career trajectories in education, social services, and related fields. Consider adjusting the formatting of the numbering and indentation in the report to enhance readability and clarity (page 1).

2. The program's stated mission—or purpose, a term increasingly preferred in higher education to move away from colonial language—closely aligns with the foundational values and strategic goals of Sonoma State University and the College of Education, Counseling, and Ethnic Studies. This alignment is particularly evident in the program's emphasis on diversity, equity, and social justice.

3. The ECS curriculum is built upon anti-racist, equity-focused, and culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks. This foundation ensures that graduates are well-equipped to engage with and support diverse children and families with thoughtfulness and cultural awareness. The report's strong articulation of anti-racist principles was especially commendable.

4. The PLOs are comprehensive and well-articulated, demonstrating clear alignment with both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards and the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) core competencies. Key themes include ethical engagement, inclusive practices, advocacy, and continuous professional growth. Note: WASC should be referred to

as WSCUC in formal documentation. Some minor suggestions on this area are provided on page 28.

5. Courses are mapped across the curriculum using a structured "Introduce, Develop, Master" (I-D-M) approach. This ensures that students build and deepen skills progressively throughout the program.

6. Drawing from diverse academic fields such as Psychology, Education, Sociology, and Ethnic Studies, the ECS curriculum offers a rich, interdisciplinary approach to child development, fostering broad-based knowledge and perspective.

7. Reflective practice is intentionally embedded into coursework, culminating in the senior portfolio, which promotes metacognitive skills, goal setting, and personal/professional growth.

8. Instruction within the ECS program embraces multiple modalities and incorporates Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Courses are crafted with attention to adult learning theory, accessibility, and student strengths, ensuring inclusive and adaptable learning environments.

9. The program provides rich, well-structured fieldwork opportunities across a variety of community settings, including schools, clinics, and social service agencies. These placements facilitate direct application of classroom learning in diverse, real-world contexts.

10. The ECS program has taken significant steps to address feedback from its last review, including improving advising for transfer students, increasing diverse faculty hiring, and expanding field placements and classroom spaces.

Recommendations for the Program

1. While trauma-informed courses are actively taught within the program—and a dedicated faculty member leads this area—this important component is not explicitly reflected in the program description. Many courses already incorporate trauma-informed pedagogy and practices of care. As with other foundational elements such as the program's transdisciplinary approach and its commitment to

anti-racist, equity-centered teaching, the trauma-informed nature of the curriculum and program should be clearly highlighted in the narrative.

2. Through conversations with both administrators and students, it became clear that the program description would benefit from explicitly incorporating terms such as "lifespan development" and "ecological perspectives." A persistent misconception—common not only at SSU but more broadly—is that Early Childhood Studies focuses solely on infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. The field encompasses development well beyond age six and includes understanding children within the broader context of their families and communities, which naturally involves adulthood as well. Clearly articulating this expanded developmental scope and theoretical grounding in the program description is essential.

3. While steps have been taken to improve consistency, student feedback still points to variability in advising and teaching quality. High faculty advising loads and inconsistent experiences across instructors, especially for transfer students, remain concerns. Although improvements have been made (e.g., new courses like EDEC 378 and a bilingual advisor), there's still room to streamline transfer pathways and further enhance advising for transfer students entering the major. Some students in the focus groups mentioned that transferring from other CSU campuses was challenging due to the absence of clearly defined transfer pathways.

4. While some progress has been made in enhancing classroom spaces, there remains a strong need for more specialized, hands-on environments that support the collaborative, interactive, and experiential learning central to ECS teaching methods. A walk-in closet stocked with supplies for student and faculty use in these spaces could serve as a valuable resource.

5. During meetings with the external reviewer, students noted that their courses rarely require collaboration beyond the classroom setting. I strongly encourage the development of more out-of-class collaborative assignments to help students

engage with the complexities and real-world challenges of teamwork in the field of Early Childhood Studies.

6. It's important for the program description to highlight its foundation in a lifelong learning philosophy—emphasizing the idea of learning as an ongoing, unfinished process. This approach should be clearly connected to assessment practices, reinforcing that even when students demonstrate mastery of certain Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), they enter their professional fields with an understanding that their learning journey is continuous and there is always more to explore and grow.

7. While the department demonstrates strong advising and mentoring of current students, an important next step in program development would be establishing a systematic process for tracking alumni career trajectories. It would provide critical data for assessing the long-term impact of the curriculum and credential pathways and help evaluate the effectiveness of the department's efforts to prepare students for diverse roles in early childhood education, advocacy, and community-based work. Additionally, it will help strengthen alumni relationships, opening opportunities for guest lectures (in person or zoom), mentoring current students, or developing field placement partnerships (if they are still in the area).

8. Additionally, collaboration between the ECS department and other college programs—such as Counseling, Credential, and Liberal Studies—is vital, as ECS pathways serve as important feeders into these areas. Tracking how many ECS graduates enter these programs could help strengthen and inform these partnerships.

Recommendations for Resources

1. The program recognizes the need to increase tenure-track faculty positions to help address workload imbalances and maintain high standards in teaching and advising, particularly as enrollment continues to rise. As the student population becomes more diverse, having faculty who share similar cultural and linguistic

backgrounds would be especially beneficial. A new tenure-track hire with bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish could also act as a bridge between the department, community organizations, and Spanish-speaking children and families.

2. The field placement coordinator currently receives only two units of assigned time per semester, which may be inadequate given the growing demand for diverse and high-quality placements across all concentrations. Moreover, supervised work is only feasible when dedicated time is allocated alongside the teaching WTUs. With the addition of two new concentrations, there is significant potential for expansion in field placement opportunities, but this requires focused efforts to build new partnerships and maintain existing ones. During the external review, it was noted that faculty are also responsible for establishing Learning Site Agreements (LSAs) with placement sites—work that typically requires at least an additional half-time staff position. Increasing assigned time for the coordinator or centralizing the LSA process through a campus office, such as the Community Partnerships Coordinator role (if available), would be beneficial.

3. Furthermore, I recommend providing financial support for faculty involved in field placements to travel throughout Sonoma County and to organize departmental events that include and honor community partners. Inviting community partners to campus helps foster a greater sense of ease and strengthens their collaboration with faculty and students. Funding Faculty Learning Communities focused on integrating service learning and academic internship pedagogies into the curriculum could also enhance the quality and reach of field placements in ECS. Additionally, the University could help reduce equity gaps by covering student expenses related to mileage, Live Scan background checks, TB testing, and other required costs for field placements.

4. Maintaining an alumni database is essential for advancing institutional goals related to equity and access, as it allows the program to evaluate how effectively it prepares graduates from diverse backgrounds for career success. To support this effort, it would be valuable for the SSU alumni office to collaborate closely with the

department in distributing program-specific alumni surveys on a regular basis, helping to establish a comprehensive longitudinal assessment system.

5. To strengthen the infrastructure of the Children's School, it is important to allocate resources toward maintaining and expanding the spaces that serve both children and students completing their practicum and field placements. The Dean of the College, in collaboration with ECS faculty, has taken a valuable step by securing funding for an endowed position to serve as a liaison between the ECS department and the Children's School—a role the Dean has committed to continuing beyond the initial three-year period, as confirmed during the external review visit. This initiative is commendable, as it enhances practicum and fieldwork opportunities not only for ECS students but also for those from other academic programs. Additional staffing, such as a front desk coordinator to manage check-ins and check-outs, would further support the school's daily operations. Moreover, the director would benefit from expanded support to help grow the site. The inclusion of observation booths in classrooms, as suggested by ECS faculty, would significantly enrich students' observation and practicum experiences.

Section 2: Program Assessment

The Department of Early Childhood Studies (ECS) at Sonoma State University implements a comprehensive and collaborative assessment strategy. This approach combines direct measures—such as signature assignments and senior portfolios—with indirect measures like the Exit Survey. Assessment is woven into the department's culture, and although an assessment coordinator leads the effort, it remains a shared responsibility among faculty.

Strengths of ECS Departmental Assessment

1. **Holistic and Over Time Data:** The ECS program employs a multi-method approach with ongoing data collection across time, using triangulation to provide a well-rounded view of student development. Through written work, reflective assignments, and practical field experiences, students showcase their competencies, offering faculty meaningful insight into their preparedness and progress.

2. **Purposeful Alignment with Learning Outcomes:** Courses are intentionally aligned with Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and NAEYC standards. Faculty collaboratively develop rubrics and evaluation guidelines, which helps maintain consistency and inter-rater reliability across courses and semesters. Assessment data is regularly reviewed in department meetings, often prompting meaningful curricular and pedagogical changes. For example, when students struggled to articulate the value of play, both the PLOs and course content were revised to better emphasize this theme.

3. **Responsive Curriculum Development:** The program adapts to student needs and workforce trends by creating new concentrations and courses. The development of tracks like Elementary Pre-Credential and Special Education Teaching responded directly to student interest and credential requirements. Similarly, courses such as Children's Literature for Justice and Empowerment and Equity for Children and

Families emerged from student feedback on the importance of equity and justice, demonstrating evidence-based responsiveness.

4. **Expanded and Enriched Fieldwork:** Field experiences are central to ECS education, and assessment data has guided improvements in this area. Faculty broadened placement options to include settings such as hospitals, mental health agencies, and child welfare services—offering students diverse, real-world experiences that enhance skill development and career readiness.

5. **Standards-Based Assessment:** ECS aligns its assessments with national (NAEYC), state (California ECE Competencies), and university (GE outcomes) standards. This alignment ensures students graduate not only meeting academic expectations but also embodying core professional values like ethics, advocacy, and professionalism, enhancing the degree's credibility and relevance.

6. **Effective Use of Exit Surveys:** Exit surveys provide valuable insights into student experiences and perceptions. These surveys evaluate student preparedness in each PLO and gather feedback on advising, curriculum, and fieldwork. Faculty use this feedback to guide program improvements, ensuring that student voices directly influence change. Commendable work!

7. **Collaborative Assessment Culture:** ECS faculty share responsibility for assessment through co-designing assignments, analyzing data, and participating in grading calibration sessions. This collective effort promotes coherence and consistency across the program and was praised during the external review.

8. **Adaptability During COVID-19:** The department demonstrated agility during the pandemic, quickly transitioning key assignments and experiences to remote or hybrid formats. Despite the disruption, student learning outcomes remained strong, showcasing the program's resilience and commitment to academic rigor. The data also shows the program's recovery after the Pandemic.

9. **Strategic Use of Assessment:** ECS uses assessment not just for compliance but as a tool for intentional program planning. As an assessment coordinator myself, I

admire the thoughtful and thorough work the ECS department has done in making assessment meaningful and impactful.

10. **Commitment to Growth:** The department is actively working on refining inter-rater reliability, improving signature assignments in new courses, and deepening the integration of critical thinking and writing. Additionally, the ECS department is advocating for institutional support, such as reassigned time for assessment leadership and better infrastructure for sustaining assessment work.

Together, these strengths underscore the ECS's dedication to a reflective, evidence-based, and student-centered approach to assessment. By embedding assessment in all aspects of teaching and learning, the department ensures its graduates are both academically prepared and professionally empowered.

Recommendations for Assessment Practices

1. Your team is already making progress in enhancing inter-rater reliability and addressing grading inconsistencies among instructors. One effective strategy is to hold additional grading calibration sessions where faculty collaboratively review student work and clarify the application of rubrics.

2. Once a consistent level of inter-rater reliability is achieved across courses, it's important to revisit the assessment plan to evaluate the volume and frequency of data collection. Consider key questions such as:
   a. What insights are we gaining from collecting the same outcome data over 12 semesters, especially when most scores are consistently 3.0 or higher?
   b. How much data is truly necessary to inform meaningful decisions?
   c. Given that this is cross-sectional data collected over time, and assuming inter-rater reliability is strong, and no major external disruptions (like the pandemic) are influencing results, is the ongoing data collection still adding value—or is it contributing to unnecessary workload?

Considering the substantial effort your team has invested, the currently allocated assigned time appears insufficient—though it's good to see some support is in place. That's why developing a realistic, focused assessment plan is essential moving forward.

3. Initiate department-wide conversations to critically reflect on current assessment strategies, especially considering new concentrations and recent curriculum changes.

4. Adjust curriculum and assessment tools to reflect newly introduced courses (e.g., EDEC 238, 290/290L, 291/291L). Since PLO7 pertains only to the newly launched Elementary Pre-Credential concentration, an assessment strategy needs to be designed and implemented as students' progress.

Recommendations for Resources

1. It is important that the College of Education, Counseling, and Ethnic Studies, along with university leadership, continue to allocate assigned time for the department's assessment coordinator to sustain the current level of rigor in assessment practices.

2. The university's assessment office could enhance its role by offering greater support to departments across campus. Centralizing aspects of the assessment process could help ensure accreditation standards are met while also creating a more manageable workload for faculty. Additionally, the office could contribute to strengthening the infrastructure and resources needed for effective assessment and long-term planning.

3. Departments like ECS, which exemplify strong, strategic assessment practices, should be acknowledged for their efforts. Recognizing such exemplary work not only validates their commitment but also inspires other departments across the university to adopt and invest in evidence-based approaches.

Comments on

Section 3: Faculty

Faculty Expertise:

The ECS faculty at SSU bring a rich and diverse range of expertise that collectively supports a robust, equity-driven early childhood education program. Their program-wide areas of specialization include early childhood development and education, anti-racist teaching practices, and equity in ECE. Faculty members are deeply engaged in promoting culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies, supporting child and family transitions, and advancing literacy and language development. Their scholarship and teaching also emphasize parent-child interactions, family engagement, social justice, and policy advocacy. The faculty are leaders in early childhood teacher education, with additional strengths in infant mental health, STEM and nature-based learning, and the integration of technology and media in early learning environments. Several lecturers are also active professionals in the field, contributing valuable human and social capital to the department by leveraging their networks to create field placement opportunities for students.

1. The faculty, collectively, ***demonstrate a strong scholarship record*** across multiple areas. Their scholarship reflects both depth and breadth, with consistent presentations at national and international conferences, numerous peer-reviewed publications, and success in securing funded research.

2. They are ***highly experienced in curriculum development*** for diverse learner populations, designing and overseeing field experiences and practicum placements, and developing online and hybrid courses—many of which are QLT-certified—to ensure accessible, high-quality education for all students.

3. The department's faculty bring strong expertise, ensuring active representation in statewide Early Childhood Development/Education/Studies, establishing the ***department as a leader in teacher preparation***. The ***new PK-3 credential initiative*** promotes interdepartmental collaboration and strengthens professional

training in child development. Faculty are also deeply involved in professional community engagement through **regional and statewide early childhood education efforts**, including participation in PEACH, Ca EC Baccs, and local advisory councils, further expanding their impact across the field.

4. Their commitment to **student-centered advising/mentoring** is evident in their robust advising practices, holistic student support, and active mentorship in student research. Their interdisciplinary and collaborative work includes team-designed credential programs, cross-campus initiatives, and faculty co-development projects.

5. They also contribute to a **strong professional development culture** through participation in CTET trainings, DAP meetings, mentoring structures, and self-assessments. Finally, they exhibit service leadership through key roles in departmental operations, university-level committees, and professional organizations, including AERA and RECE.

According to the three different groups of students that I met during the visit in March 2025, the most recurring theme under the strengths of the ECS department was **strong faculty**, "the department faculty are passionate professionals with diverse backgrounds and experiences that offer varied perspectives. Faculty members foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming atmosphere both in the classroom and during office hours. They are kind, supportive, resourceful, and connect us with their professional networks. The department is student-focused, and our diverse faculty bring various perspectives and experiences to the classrooms."

During the faculty meeting, several colleagues shared what they value most about being part of the ECS faculty. Common themes included trust, happiness, mentorship, and resilience. Phrases like "getting to know the students," "students first, even when we disagree," and "interactions with students" were frequently mentioned. Faculty members highlighted the department's rich linguistic diversity, with representation from Spanish, German, Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Japanese, Chinese, and English. Many expressed sentiments such as, "I'm excited to come back to work because of my colleagues," "I love

the teamwork in the department," and "we embody the true meaning of community." Overall, the team demonstrated a strong, resilient sense of community, united by diverse expertise and perspectives, and a shared commitment to supporting students, children, and communities in the Sonoma area and beyond. The meeting with Dean Alamillo highlighted the strength of the ECS team, as she praised them as a "model department."

Areas for Growth

1. **Faculty Diversity:** There is a clear need for increased Latinx/Hispanic faculty representation to better reflect SSU's status as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and the demographics of its student body. The program has recognized this as a key area for growth, and I fully support that assessment. Increasing Latinx/Hispanic representation would not only benefit their students—who have been majority Hispanic since Fall 2019—but also serve the broader Sonoma County community, where the Hispanic population continues to grow steadily. Additionally, having a Spanish-speaking faculty member would greatly enhance the effectiveness and ease of field placements in bilingual organizations.

2. **Sustainable Workload Distribution:** During the external review, two students noted that "they can sense their faculty are overworked and under-resourced. They wear many hats and genuinely care for us. We're reluctant to ask for more because we see how stretched they already are." This is a striking and insightful reflection from students. While the department has made progress by steadily hiring more tenure-track faculty—many of whom have now earned tenure—there remains a heavy dependence on lecturers. Additionally, the significant teaching and service responsibilities, combined with limited resources, continue to constrain faculty research time, particularly after initial course release periods for newer faculty. During the faculty meeting, several members expressed concern about the limited availability of professional development resources, particularly for attending and presenting at conferences (and writing grants). Although they continue to produce scholarly work despite time constraints, they miss the opportunity to engage with peers in the field—an essential aspect of staying current and enriching their

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teaching. This lack of connection can lead to a sense of stagnation, which may negatively impact faculty morale and, in turn, affect the student experience.

3. **Community Partnership Management**: More faculty assigned time is needed to maintain and expand external collaborations with ECE stakeholders and community partners for the placements for the newly added concentrations.

4. **Teaching Courses in Atypical Child Development**: I value the department's collaboration with special education faculty in offering courses on atypical child development. However, I offer a gentle reminder of the importance of grounding this content in developmental theory and considering familial and cultural contexts—elements that can sometimes be underemphasized in special education approaches. I encourage faculty to reflect on how these perspectives can be thoughtfully integrated, if they aren't already doing so.

5. **Transfer Student Advising:** Although there has been improvement, further refinement of advising quality and consistency is still needed, particularly for new and transfer students. During the student meeting, several students mentioned that additional support is necessary for those transferring from other CSUs.

6. **Trauma Informed Education:** I had the opportunity to speak with a faculty member who is an expert in the field and teaches courses focused on trauma and stress. Given the increasing relevance of this area of work, I encourage the department to consider promoting their program more explicitly as trauma informed. This could help highlight the program's strengths and attract students who are passionate about supporting children and families through a trauma-sensitive lens.

Recommendation for Resources:

1. There are limited resources available for professional development. While it is encouraged and supported in the department, faculty could greatly benefit from the resources for ongoing training in areas such as inclusive pedagogy, online teaching, or high-impact practices. Additionally, during a meeting with faculty, I observed a lack of support for grant writing. Given the heavy teaching and service load faculty are already managing, it is crucial to offer writing support through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. A simple starting point could be subscribing to a grant writing opportunities platform (like Pivot) to help faculty discover various grant options within the ECS field. Furthermore, a pre-award specialist could assist by brainstorming with faculty and providing feedback on their proposals.

2. It is essential to maintain ongoing professional development by securing resources that enable faculty to attend conferences in their respective fields. These opportunities allow faculty to bring valuable insights and knowledge wealth back to the program. Additionally, such support plays a key role in faculty retention and in upholding the overall quality of the program.

3. I understand that there is currently a hiring freeze at Sonoma State, as many other campuses are facing similar resource challenges. However, it is strongly encouraged and highly recommended that, as resources permit in the near future, the hiring of a new tenure-track faculty member be considered—particularly someone whose background reflects the diversity of the student body.

4. The ASC in the Department of ECS is currently shared between the two programs in the college, which places additional strain on faculty and limits the ASC's ability to engage meaningfully with students. ASCs serve as a vital support system and primary point of contact for students, but when their time is split between departments, it increases the administrative burden on the department chair—often beyond the scope of the chair's allocated time. As of Fall 2024, the department serves 249 students, an increase of 23 students from Spring 2024, reflecting a trend of growing enrollment in recent years. Additionally, the department oversees an

M.A. program and is in the process of developing a new PK–3 credential. Given these demands, the current workload for the department chair is a lot within the assigned time. I strongly recommend bringing the current ASC as full-time to the ECS department and increasing the assigned time units for the department chair.

5. Summers play a key role in advising new students, so it's essential to allocate additional resources to the department chair to help streamline the process.

6. Overall, greater collaborations are possible with university leadership to sustain high-impact teaching and mentorship efforts in the department.

Comments on

Section 4: Program Resources

The report acknowledged having access to numerous resources that support their productivity, while also thoughtfully identifying existing gaps. I commend the self-study team for their thorough and reflective evaluation.

Advising & Student Support

- A bilingual Spanish-speaking professional advisor supports first- and second-year students. During the external review visit, this advisor shared their role as a key liaison between the ECS department and other campus programs.
- As students advance to their junior and senior years, they begin working with faculty advisors who assist with academic planning, career development, graduate school applications, and credential pathways. However, students expressed some confusion about this transition process, indicating a need for clearer communication.
- The program demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting at-risk students through consistent progress monitoring and regular departmental discussions.
- Student feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction with advising services, with a reported 95.5% satisfaction rate in the 2023–24 academic year.

Available Campus-Wide Student Services

- Writing Center and LARC: Support with writing and tutoring.
- University Advising Center: General academic advising.
- Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS): Mental health support.
- Disability Services for Students (DSS): Accommodations and guidance for students with disabilities.
- Career Services: Resume, interview prep, and job search help.
- Cultural Centers: HUB, DREAM Center, and food pantry supporting diverse student needs.

- CARES Team: Basic needs and emergency support.

Consider the following questions: In what ways does the department coordinate with campus student support services? What systems are established to ensure clear communication and minimize student confusion?

Program-Specific Initiatives

- ECS Resource Day: Centralized access to program and campus information.
- Fieldwork Courses: Practical experiences with children and families in community settings.
- Faculty-Led Research: Funded opportunities like Koret Scholars and presentations at national conferences (e.g., AERA).

Recommendations for Resources:

1. During the external review visit, students shared that holding regular social events within the department would greatly support community-building. They expressed that these gatherings would foster more informal interactions with faculty and staff, enhancing relationships and a sense of belonging. Additionally, such events would create valuable opportunities for commuter students and those living on campus to connect with one another, strengthening peer support and engagement across the program.

2. Student employment opportunities—such as peer mentors, student assistants, and paid positions like Dean's Office assistants for social media—play a vital role in fostering a strong sense of community within the program. These roles not only provide students with valuable professional experience but also empower them to support their peers, contribute to departmental communication, and take active leadership within the ECS community. When students are engaged in meaningful work that directly connects them to faculty, staff, and fellow students, it strengthens relationships, increases retention, and cultivates a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

3. Expanded scholarships and fellowships for ECS majors and minors are essential for promoting equity, access, and student success. Many students in the program may juggle academic responsibilities alongside work and family commitments, and financial support can significantly ease these pressures. Increased funding opportunities not only help reduce the financial burden of tuition and living expenses but also enable students to participate more fully in internships, research, and community engagement activities that enrich their academic and professional development. By investing in scholarships and fellowships, the program can attract and retain a diverse student body, support degree completion, and foster the next generation of leaders in early childhood education.

4. Consider offering financial support for field placements by covering costs such as stipends, mileage, Livescan background checks, and TB testing. This type of assistance can help reduce equity gaps, as students with greater financial resources are often more able to participate fully in field experiences and benefit more from these opportunities. Providing this support would ensure that all students, regardless of financial background, have equitable access to valuable hands-on learning.

5. The advising in the department could greatly benefit if the current professional advisor is appointed full-time exclusively to the ECS department.

6. Several of the resource recommendations outlined here were also discussed in Sections 1 through 3.

7. The ECS team has done an excellent job highlighting resource gaps in this section, and I fully support their assessment.

Comments on

Section 5: Student Profile

Trends in Student Profiles Over the Years

Over the past several years (spring 2019 through fall 2024), the Early Childhood Studies (ECS) program has experienced notable demographic shifts. The percentage of first-generation college students has grown significantly, rising above 40% by Fall 2024. The program has also seen a steady increase in underrepresented minority (URM) students, with URM enrollment surpassing non-URM students. Hispanic/Latinx students now represent the largest racial/ethnic group in the program. Although the student population remains overwhelmingly female (over 90%), there has been a modest increase in students over the age of 25, indicating a growing presence of non-traditional learners. The majority of students continue to enroll full-time, which correlates with relatively strong retention and graduation rates compared to university-wide trends. Transfer student retention has remained stable and high. These evolving trends highlight both the diversity and dedication of ECS students, while also pointing to the need for tailored support strategies.

Strengths of the ECS Program in Supporting Students

The ECS program demonstrates a strong commitment to student success through personalized advising, high-impact coursework, and career-focused field experiences. Advising satisfaction remains high, with a 95.5% approval rate in 2023–24, reflecting the responsiveness and compassion of faculty and staff advisors. The program's curriculum integrates inclusive, experiential learning across four specialized concentrations, preparing students for a range of careers in education, health, and social services. Courses emphasize child development, social justice, and practical application, while opportunities such as peer mentoring, research projects, and internships deepen students' academic engagement. Additionally, the program supports career and graduate school readiness through targeted advising, senior portfolios, and field-based exposure to diverse community settings. ECS graduates

consistently go on to earn advanced degrees or enter impactful roles in early childhood education, advocacy, and family services.

Areas of Growth

Summary as reflected in the report: Despite its many strengths, the ECS program faces several challenges that present opportunities for growth. Second-year retention rates have declined in recent years, and both transfer and first-time students face increasing barriers to timely graduation, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. Faculty advising loads remain heavy, and advising continuity can be disrupted by changes in faculty availability or student concentration. There is a need for expanded academic support, targeted career services, and more robust field placement partnerships, especially for students pursuing non-teaching careers. The program also seeks to diversify its student body by increasing male representation in a field traditionally dominated by women. Limited tenure-track hiring and a lack of compensation for essential leadership roles, such as field experience and assessment coordination, strain faculty capacity. Addressing these challenges will require additional institutional support, strategic recruitment, improved student services, and enhanced funding for faculty development and community partnerships.

Considerations and Recommendations:

1. It is important to recognize that the gender data collected by the CSU system is limited to a binary framework, which excludes individuals who identify as non-binary. As a result, these students may either feel compelled to choose between two inaccurate categories or opt not to respond at all. This limitation should be acknowledged when presenting statistical data, and it also highlights the need to consider and provide appropriate support systems for students within the LGBTQIA+ community.
2. Although still a small portion of the student body, the number of non-traditional students over the age of 25 is gradually increasing. It's important to consider that some of these students may be raising children or caring for dependent family

members. What kinds of resources could support student parents in balancing their responsibilities and academic goals? Potential supports might include classroom accommodations, priority registration, flexibility around group work, and access to child- or family-friendly spaces on campus. The ECS department could lead in this area by advocating for policies and resources that benefit student parents—especially those within the program—and by modeling inclusive practices that can be adopted campus-wide.

3. In the most recent year of the report, student enrollment has grown by 10%, with a 4% increase in the Hispanic student population. It's important to consider what additional resources may be needed to effectively support and respond to these shifts in student demographics.

4. A key factor contributing to some students taking longer to graduate is their financial situation, including the need to work—often off-campus in jobs that may not align with their academic schedules or career goals. These outside commitments can limit the time and energy students are able to dedicate to their studies, potentially delaying graduation. Creating more on-campus employment opportunities would help alleviate this burden by providing students with convenient, flexible jobs that support their financial needs while keeping them more engaged with the university community. Campus-based roles also allow students to build stronger relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, which can enhance their academic motivation, sense of belonging, and overall success. Prioritizing student employment within the department or across the university could play a meaningful role in improving retention and timely graduation rates.

5. During their meetings with the external review team, students highlighted the need to establish a student club (Registered Student Organization) with a faculty advisor. A long-standing faculty member mentioned that the department previously had a student club, but it was disbanded due to heavy faculty workloads and a lack of student interest. Tenure-track faculty could potentially

serve as advisors, with the added benefit of receiving credit for their service in their RTP. The RSO could act as a bridge between students and faculty. Students involved as officers and members could develop leadership, communication, and collaboration skills, and research indicates that such activities enhance students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy.

Student Data During the External Review Visit

Four undergraduate students participated in the Open Forum organized by the Department of Early Childhood Studies, with three living on campus and one commuting. Additionally, two 20-minute focus group discussions were held with a total of 43 undergraduate students. The first group, consisting of 22 students, participated after their EDEC 220 (Child Observation with Field Experience) class, while the second group, with 21 students, joined after their EDEC 411 (Infant and Toddler Development) class.

The first focus group was made up of students from various majors: 15 from Early Childhood Studies (ECS), 2 from Liberal Studies, 3 from Psychology, 1 from Criminology, and 1 from Nursing. The second group included 16 ECS students, 2 from Psychology, and 3 from Nursing.

In total, *47 students took part in the interviews and focus groups*, offering insights that were grouped into three main themes:

Strengths of the ECS Program

1. Students engage in hands-on learning through fieldwork, such as interviewing educators and observing children in preschools and elementary schools. These experiences help explore career paths through field placements.
2. Across all three groups, students expressed a high regard for the department's faculty, praising their passion, diverse backgrounds, and perspectives. Faculty were commended for creating a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment in and out of the classroom, as well as for their support, kindness, and valuable professional networks. The department is considered very student focused.
3. The program encourages peer learning, fostering collaboration through diverse perspectives and discussion-based classes that help reinforce understanding.
4. Small class sizes were appreciated for facilitating personal connections with both faculty and peers. Students valued the opportunity to work with familiar

classmates and meet new people, allowing for deeper understanding of course content and easier access to faculty for questions.

5. The program offers opportunities to work with children with special needs and from diverse backgrounds.

6. Students stated, "I aspire to teach; my major gives me subject knowledge, but the ECS program equips me with the tools to teach children effectively."

Skills Gained for Real-World Application

- Developing problem-solving skills.

- Recognizing and addressing personal biases through self-reflection.

- Professional growth, including resume and CV development.

- Strengthening critical thinking skills.

- Building a sense of belonging for oneself and others.

- Exploring different approaches to solving problems.

- Fostering collaborative relationships and long-term friendships through group work.

- Learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion and applying these principles in real-life situations.

Areas for Program Growth and Improvement

1. Students suggested incorporating real-life case studies to deepen understanding of certain concepts and expressed a desire for more fieldwork opportunities, citing more availability pre-Covid.

2. A recurring concern was the long duration of classes. While some students, particularly commuters, appreciated the 2-hour and 40-minute format, most found it challenging due to issues like difficulty maintaining focus, monotonous sessions without interactivity, and repetitive content. Most students preferred shorter, more frequent classes.

3. One group of students mentioned that some textbooks felt outdated.

4. Many students felt that certain courses seemed repetitive, likely due to the structure of the curriculum. Clear communication with students about the program's teaching approach and better collaboration between faculty could help determine whether the repetition is intentional or needs adjustment.
5. Some students reported that the work expectations in certain classes felt unrealistic and often resembled busywork.
6. After the focus group, a male student suggested that the department should focus more on recruiting male students, a need already acknowledged by the faculty.

Comments on

Section 6: Reflections

This section reflects on the strengths of the program, areas of improvement, potential collaborations, and next steps and action plans. The self-study is a thoughtful, comprehensive reflection on the program's strengths and challenges. The identified areas for improvement, particularly in faculty workload, field placements, and career preparation resources, are critical for the program's continued success. The proposed action plans and potential collaborations offer viable solutions to these challenges, and the focus on both existing and additional resources reflects a strong commitment to sustainable growth and excellence. Overall, this self-study provides a clear roadmap for addressing current challenges and building on existing strengths to ensure that the program continues to serve its students and the community effectively.

Additional Opportunities Recommendations

1. **Working with Indigenous Nations:** Sonoma County is home to 5–6 Indigenous Nations, offering meaningful opportunities to collaborate with local tribes. Incorporating Native American Studies and considering the creation of a minor in Family Studies or Indigenous Education could strengthen these connections. Such initiatives may help attract more Indigenous students to the program and enhance the cultural competency of graduates working in diverse communities. The Child Development Department at Cal Poly Humboldt currently offers three courses in American Indian Education (AIE) as part of their minor: (a) History of American Indian Education, (b) Sociocultural Considerations from an Indigenous Perspective, and (c) Instructional Practices. We are open to partnering with you and your students in developing this area further—or supporting students who wish to enroll in these courses. I also advocate for appropriate resources for the ECS department at SSU to support the expansion of such opportunities.

2. **Working with Deaf Communities:** The ECS department may want to explore the development of a minor in ASL that places a strong emphasis on developmental and family-focused content. Community college ASL courses could be articulated to count toward this minor, while additional coursework in areas such as language development, exceptional children and families, trauma and stress, and human growth and development would strengthen the academic foundation for students pursuing careers in this field. Another area worth exploring is the preparation of interpreters and opportunities to work with the local Deaf community.

3. **Social Media Presence:** Employing students through the Dean's office to manage and update social media content could strengthen the program's online presence and potentially support recruitment and marketing efforts.

4. **Use of AI:** Consider how the integration of AI tools can be thoughtfully incorporated into teaching and learning with the new generation of students, particularly as we continue to prioritize the development of critical thinking and strong writing skills. As AI becomes increasingly prevalent in academic and professional settings, it is

important to guide students in using these tools ethically and effectively encouraging them to view AI as a resource for enhancing their ideas rather than replacing independent thought.

Minor Considerations

1. Page 6, PLO6 in the ECE concentration, what is "Developing skills" referring to in relation to different kinds of ECE settings?
2. Page 6, consider "reflective" instead of "thoughtful" writing.
3. Page 7, are they PLOs or SLOs?
4. Row 6, SLO5, column three, SLO 5 numbering is missing. Or should they be PLOs?
5. Page 12, point 10, Universal Design, last sentence, replace second "students" with "their".
6. Page 14, point 3, remove "to" before choose.
7. Page 22, Figure 2, the third box at the bottom is missing a word.
8. Consider using "areas of growth" instead of "weaknesses of the program".
9. Page 51, should the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) courses have a W in front of the number? For example, EDEC 435 or EDEC 435W?