

Sonoma State University  
Master of Arts in Education  
External Review  
Spring 2019

Submitted by

Dr. Cathi Draper Rodriguez, NCSP from California State University, Monterey Bay

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## **I. Executive Summary**

This report includes a critical analysis of the Master of Arts in Education program from Sonoma State University. This report identifies areas of strength in the program and provides recommendations for program improvement based on a close review of the self-study document including documents in Google Drive and interviews conducted with several stakeholder groups (i.e., administration, faculty, and students).

## **II. Review Process**

This external review was conducted by Dr. Cathi Draper Rodriguez, Professor and Department Chair from California State University, Monterey Bay. The reviewer would like to thank Dr. Karen Grady, Graduate Studies Director, for the detailed self-study and supporting documents. The reviewer would also like to extend appreciation to the administrator, faculty, and students who participated in the interview process and provided valuable information that informed this report.

The reviewer visited the Sonoma State University campus on March 13, 2019 and met with the following individuals:

- Dr. Karen Moranski, Associate Vice President for Academic Programs
- Dr. Karen Grady, Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies and Secondary Education
- Dr. Aja LaDuke, Department of Literacy Studies and Elementary Education
- Dr. Paula Lane, Department Chair, Department of Literacy Studies & Elementary Education
- Dr. Edward Lyon, Department of Curriculum Studies and Secondary Education
- Dr. Charles Elster, Professor, Early Childhood Education
- Approximately 30 students from the Educational Administration and Early Childhood programs

### **III. Findings: Areas of Commendation**

The MA in Education program currently has five concentrations with two (TESOL and Reading and Language) being sunset or put on hiatus this year. The program faculty refined the Program Learning Outcomes for Fall 2018. The data presented in the report were from the previous learning outcomes. After review of the written materials (e.g., syllabi, self-study report, and student work), the program faculty are to be commended for their work. There are specific themes that arose during the review.

The MA in Education has faculty who are active and highly recognized in their field. Their faculty remain active with publications and presentations. It should be noted that many faculty present with their students. Involving students in this type of scholarship is a highly effective strategy for working with graduate students. The MA in Education program faculty are to be commended for reviewing their learning outcomes with some frequency and ensuring that they continue to meet program and student needs. This work is only one way in which the program faculty are responsive to their students. Students in this program appreciate their faculty, curriculum and program flexibility. When students are heard, they believe and trust that faculty will address the issues that they raise. It is these things that has led to very strong completion rates for all of the concentrations.

In terms of resources, it appears that the dean has been able to support faculty time in a few important areas. The dean has started funding a Graduate Studies Director. This position is vital for the success of this program. As the program faculty are housed in other departments, this director position allows for a focus to remain on the needs of the MA in Education program and

students. In addition, the dean has provided good support for faculty to support their ability to effectively mentor students through their final products (e.g., thesis or product). This is important and time consuming work. The program faculty requested some support from the dean to assist with student recruitment. The dean was able to provide some financial support for this work which may alleviate one of the program concerns of low enrollment.

The MA in Education has a strong reputation in the community. Students indicated that it was this reputation that led them to complete their graduate work at SSU. One of the reasons for this is that the program faculty are responsive to the community. Program faculty are currently considering both a MA + Credential and a Master of Teaching (MAT) programs to continue to meet need in the local area. During the visit, a program faculty member shared how a student research project was being used to inform new practice in the student's school community. The program faculty then invited this student to present her practice at an upcoming training for teacher candidates and their district supervisors. Using alumni to continue to move educational practice in the community forward is another reason for the program's strong reputation.

Students indicated many strengths of the program. The students like that their professors are accessible, approachable, and work with students if life issues arise. They find that their faculty are knowledgeable of their field and also have practical experience. The students appreciate that the hours of the program work well for full-time employees. They also appreciate the diversity in their classes and enjoy taking courses with students in other concentrations. The students also value the small, dialogue-based courses. The students were able to confirm that the program

makes the connection between theory and practice clear. They also affirm that the program is meeting its' goal of clearly examining issues of equity and education in schools.

#### **IV. Findings: Recommendations**

After completion of the review process, some recommendations are suggested. It does not appear that the concentrations in the MA in Education program are in compliance with EO 1071. EO 1071 requires that concentrations share a core of at least 51%. This is not currently the case with the three remaining concentrations. The program faculty will need to decide how to move forward. There are a variety of ways they may want to do this. As they are already planning for the MA+ and/or MAT programs, these programs may be useful as they move forward with this program revision. The program revision will require resources to allow for appropriate planning for compliance with EO 1071.

During this review low and, in some cases, declining enrollment was found. This is evidenced by the suspension and/or cancelation of two concentrations. There are a some factors that may be contributing to the enrollment issues. SSU is largely an undergraduate institution and it can be difficult for graduate programs to get financial support for recruitment. It would be beneficial to identify ways to increase university wide resources for the grad programs that can be tied to the current undergraduate efforts (e.g., working with the undergraduate recruitment office). As there is less financial aid support for graduate students, it would be beneficial for the college and university to identify ways to provide financial aid or scholarships specifically for graduate students (e.g., add dedicated scholarships for MA candidates to dean's advancement platform). One suggestion raised during conversations was for program faculty to find ways to tap into the

high enrolled undergraduate major (i.e., Early Childhood Education) in the college. This may also provide opportunities for restructuring as part of the EO 1071 work.

Through discussion with students and syllabi review, a couple of curriculum and program issues were identified. Students strongly feel the need for advising improvements. They indicate that at times faculty have given them outdated, conflicting, or incorrect information regarding academic progress or program policy. The program may want to consider using a centralized person for advising or holding more brainstorming/advising sessions as held by the Ed Admin program.

Another issue raised by students was that faculty are leaving and not being replaced. Students report that they are feeling the results of this as the remaining faculty are being required to take on additional non-teaching work. Students are starting to feel like they and their programs/concentrations are afterthoughts. Some students report that there are issues with the four unit classes. The four unit offerings make it double the cost to take two classes in the semester. Due to scheduling of four unit courses, students are required to be on campus two days/week and this is difficult for them. Students indicated that the library is an amazing support. They would like more university support for graduate-level writing. It is recommended that the Graduate Studies Director work with the undergrad writing center to provide graduate level writing support. CSUMB has had success with this option and online resources/tutoring for CSUMB graduate students.

Students also report that they would like to see a greater rigor difference between the Bachelors and Masters degrees. Some of the MA in Education courses are covering content that was

previously taught in the undergraduate majors. Other concentrations (not EDL) want a cohort model. As the concentrations have rolling admissions, students indicate that they go over basics in every class because there are always new students. It is recommended that program faculty review their courses for this issue and as there appears to be content overlap. This will help with the assessment work that also needs to be completed.

As Program Faculty begin their work with the new Program Learning Outcomes, it is recommended that they begin with the course review. This course review will be a strong foundation for them to set up a new assessment cycle. The course review will allow faculty to map course learning outcomes (after removing any repetition) to the new program learning outcomes. The assessment data presented in the self-study were student perception data. There were no data provided which demonstrated students' ability to master the course and program learning outcomes. Faculty in the MA in Education program are doing good work, but this lack of assessment data does not allow them to document this work. A strong assessment cycle will show students, faculty, and administration how well the program is meeting its goals.

## **V. Summary**

This report was prepared after review of the MA in Education Program at Sonoma State University. The MA in Education Program has strong and dedicated faculty. The program is meeting its' goal of providing students with increased knowledge around equity issues in education. While the data presented were not measures of student learning, Student perception indicates that they are learning the course and program outcomes and that they are well prepared for their chosen career. Through its interdisciplinary format and strong social justice framework,



the program is directly aligned with Sonoma State University's Guiding Principles - Inclusivity, Integrity, and Respect.