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October 16, 2008

Dr. Kevin Lemoine
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Austin, TX 78711-2788

Dear Dr. Lemoine:

As you know, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is requesting that its Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction (Reading Emphasis) be reclassified as a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction (Reading Emphasis). In this letter, I’d like to summarize the reasons I believe that the change should be made.

Before doing that, I should point out that this Ed.D. program, established in 2004, had been designed, from its beginnings, to be a research-oriented program for students aspiring to be researchers and university faculty members. However, the faculty were advised at the time that it would be more suitable to seek the Ed.D. degree, since TAMU-CC was a regional university without broad array of established doctoral programs. Shortly after the Curriculum and Instruction program was implemented, the Counseling Department at TAMU-CC successfully made the change to the Ph.D., and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction began taking steps to have their program reclassified as well. The proposal for the title change received all requisite approvals at the university level by November 27, 2006, and it was approved by the Texas A&M System Board of Regents on February 2, 2007. The proposal for the title change was received by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board on February 15, 2007, but on September 17, 2007, the Coordinating Board took the action of “return to institution” (RTN).

Faculty immediately began working on a revised proposal designed to answer any questions that they thought the Coordinating Board might have had and to provide an update. On June 30, 2008, the revised proposal was received by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. With its status designated as pending, I understand that it will likely be acted upon sometime before January, 2009.

In my opinion, there is a very strong rationale for making the change in degree title. The authors of the revised proposal have already presented their case, but I would like to highlight some of the reasons that I consider most compelling.

- The program fits the description of a Ph.D. program (researcher/scholar emphasis) instead of a description of an Ed.D. program (practitioner emphasis). The researcher/practitioner distinction
is recorded in the Policy and Procedures Manual of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Universities Division (pp. 48-49). The coursework in this degree program prepares the students to be creators and conveyors of new knowledge.

The 60-hour program has a strong research component. The program requires 15 hours of coursework in research tools (statistics, methodology, and research design), 3 hours in an advanced literacy research seminar, and a minimum of 6 hours of dissertation-in-progress research. As pointed out in the proposal, this research requirement equals or exceeds requirements in Ph.D. programs in Curriculum and Instruction elsewhere. In addition, the TAMU-CC program requires 9 semester credit hours of courses focused on theory: theories of literacy, curriculum theory, and philosophy of education. Research and theory are infused in other courses as well.

Students enrolled in the program do aspire to have positions as scholars, researchers, and university faculty. Of the 52 current students, 42 indicate that they intend to seek positions as university faculty teaching and conducting research. These students will benefit when they enter the job market if their degree reflects the program they have completed and the scholarly work they intend to do.

These doctoral students are making highly visible contributions to knowledge in their field nationally and internationally. They are actively engaged in research projects and present their findings in national and international peer-reviewed conference papers and in publications. In the proposal submitted in June, 2008, there was a list of their national/international papers in Appendix D on pages 42-47, and in an attachment to this letter, I’ve included an updated list showing 65 refereed papers.

- The location of TAMU-CC—on the Gulf Coast, near the border with Mexico and at the gateway to Central and South America—contributes to the nature and importance of this work in curriculum and reading/literacy.

These students are doing graduate work in a research-rich environment. Within the Texas A&M System, TAMU-CC is second only to TAMU-College Station in terms of externally funded research, and at TAMU-CC the College of Education is the unit generating the largest external funding from grants. For instance, the College of Education has recently received a million-dollar grant from the Texas Education Agency for investigating issues associated with limited English proficiency (F. Lucido, principal investigator), and doctoral students from the C&I program are involved in that project.
Much of the students’ work arises from the issues of the border and the contact zone between cultures. All students address issues of culture and language as well as reading/literacy and curriculum and instruction in their program. For their own individual studies, a number of them are focusing on aspects of border literacy, which is becoming a central theme in literacy research, and attention also goes to issues of globalization, including the notion of intercultural dialogue. One-fourth of the students have presented or are presenting papers at international conferences in Mexico or in Central America.

- With the Ph.D., these students will have increased access to the positions for which they are preparing themselves, and participation in a Ph.D. program will provide increased opportunities for financial support.

Forty-one percent of the current students are Hispanic, and certainly there is a strong need for Hispanic faculty in research universities. A 2007 report from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that only four percent of the faculty in higher education are Hispanic. Most universities seek to have a diverse faculty, and TAMU-CC graduates should be strong candidates when they seek positions, particularly if they hold the Ph.D.

If the degree title is changed, all the graduates, not only Hispanic students, will be more competitive in the job market with others who have the appropriate title for their degree. The Ph.D. is increasingly becoming the more common degree in Curriculum and Instruction. In the proposal, Appendix B on pages 29 and 30 provides information on the availability of the two degrees (Ph.D. and Ed.D.) at universities in Southern and Western states. These data show that the Ph.D. is awarded widely at regional as well as flagship universities.

If their program is changed to a Ph.D., these individuals will have access to fellowships currently denied to Ed.D. students. For example, the Ford Foundation Diversity Fellowship is limited to Ph.D. and Sc.D. students and excludes students in Ed.D. programs.

- There is a clear need for a Ph.D. degree program in Curriculum and Instruction in South Texas. Currently there are no Ph.D. programs in Curriculum and Instruction in South Texas, although there are the Ph.D. programs in Curriculum and Instruction and in Reading elsewhere in the state. In the proposal on page 14, programs are listed for North, Central, and West Texas. There are a number of initiatives to develop strong research programs in South Texas.

The South Texas area has been identified as one of the high-growth areas in the state. This identification was made in the Regional Plan for Texas Higher Education developed by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The Border Region University Plan supports the development of graduate and professional programs in the region.
Graduate students in South Texas often lack the financial means to relocate to pursue a Ph.D. degree in Curriculum and Instruction in another part of the state. Even though they must limit their doctoral studies to this general area, they should be able to pursue research-oriented work and to receive the research-oriented degree.

- There are university faculty/researcher positions in Curriculum and Instruction that will be available to our students when they enter the job market. Just since September 1, 2008, there have been 51 new postings of assistant-professor positions in Curriculum and Instruction and Teacher Education, including many top research universities, on the Chronicle of Higher Education website. These position descriptions specify the sort of qualifications that our students will have and emphasize the capacity to conduct scholarly work.

TAMU-CC students will soon apply and interview for positions as university faculty. Some of these students, who have conducted their research investigations, would be ready to defend their dissertations in the fall semester 2008. However, they have chosen to wait, pending word from the Higher Education Coordinating Board regarding the proposal to change their degree title. The abstracts of dissertation studies for the first candidates are included in the proposal in Appendix C on pages 31-41.

As you know, Robert Nelsen has joined us at the University and is spearheading our interactions with the Coordinating Board. If there is additional information that you will need before January, I am certain that he will be able to obtain it for you. And of course, I am available to discuss the program if you wish. I am also confident that the program faculty, whom I have found to be actively engaged in their own scholarship and highly committed to the students they teach, can also answer any questions you might have. Even though the curricula vitae sent with the proposal were current as of June, we thought we would update them. The current cv's are in a binder that accompanies this letter.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Flavius C. Killebrew
President/President

/icc

Appendices:  Students' National and International Conference Papers (Updated)
Program Faculty Curricula Vitae (Updated) – in separate binder