External Review of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Reviewed by James Vornberg and Genevieve Brown
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Introduction:

The doctoral program in educational leadership was the subject of this review. That program, as it now stands, is closely associated with educational administration programs at A&M-Corpus Christi, but is not housed within that department. This, plus the fact that the program is a joint program with A&M-Kingsville, appears to have made the teaching faculty of that program somewhat independent of any regular academic department. The fall semester of 2001 will see the program housed within the Educational Administration department.

A joint committee of both universities admits the students of the program. The reviewers met with twelve of those students from four cohort groups and found them to be involved, dynamic and supportive of the program as they have experienced it, but not without some thoughts about how changes could make it better or more responsive to their needs.

Faculty members assigned to the program from A&M-Corpus Christi have a range of publication records from very developed including many refereed journal articles to somewhat limited with most publications of a local project nature. The reports of students on the teaching aspect of these individuals were satisfactory. Comments as to the status of research skills developed were satisfactory to very fine, with more specific comments in some areas of research.

The curriculum of the doctoral program seemed to be somewhat cross-disciplinary in nature, due in part to the fact that the program did not limit instruction to one major department. Three components of focus seemed to be evident: leadership, curriculum and instruction, and research. An examination of the course syllabi revealed that the course titles did not always reflect the major area of focus within the course material.

Facilities at the campus appeared to be satisfactory in appearance and function, although the team had limited time to review these. Reports on research resources in the library indicated that this area might be in need of additional funds to acquire journals and other resources need for the research components for a doctoral program.

Outcomes/Assessments:

The review team was unable to determine that there is a comprehensive assessment plan tied to specific program and student outcomes in place.

Students experience working for and presenting at regional professional conferences and seminars the research that they have done while in the doctoral program. This involvement builds a knowledge base and experience level that is expected as a student completes a doctoral program. The course syllabi also indicate many opportunities for research, writing and
presenting were available within the cohort experience. An examination of a limited number of completed dissertations indicated that an appropriate level of research was evident; however, there were some indications that a more defined expectation in stating the research problem and purpose would have enhanced the quality of the studies. (It is noted that this was a limited selection and not a comprehensive review of dissertations.)

There was a perception indicated by several Education Leadership Advisory Committee (ELAC) member(s) that the level of research conducted may not have been as rigorous as they would have desired.

Strengths:

The program is broad based in nature with a variety of roles being served to include teachers, principals, superintendents, and higher education personnel. The program is not tied to a credential, but focuses on leadership in a broad sense. A Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) program, the focus is on the practitioner.

Diversity of the student cohorts is indicative of the breadth of the clientele served in the South Texas, an area that has been under served by higher education.

The location change of this leadership program to the educational administration department should prove to be a positive move for both the doctoral program and the programs now in this department.

With a completion rate of 75% of the students entering the program within 4 years, the graduation has been high when compared to more traditional programs. This completion rate is partly made possible by the time frame of three years from entrance to graduation, if the student stays with the cohort schedule. The cohort arrangement is seen as a strength of the program, in spite of the fact that it also locksteps some aspects of the program’s time frame.

The program is student oriented and is small enough to have a high degree of personal attention for each of the students. The cohort model builds a support system for the student that is cohesive and promotes completion of the degree.

The students pointed out that this institution’s faculty was accessible and willing to meet at times to accommodate the student’s schedule. (This reflection is only about Corpus Christi faculty; data was not sought out concerning the Kingsville faculty).

A dedicated faculty that is highly enthusiastic and concerned for the student seeks to insure a high quality program is in place for the students’ benefit. Students pointed out that faculty are concerned not only about the progress in their studies, but also their personal well-being and balance in their lives. The faculty is open to modification of the curriculum and program where it will best meet the students’ needs.

The students feel that the concern for their work and preparation for the dissertation is a focus throughout the program and not just at the end of the coursework.
The faculty members of both institutions involved in the joint program seem to have high regard for each other and confidence in their personal ability to work together for this program.

There now is a sizable number of graduates of this program; however, it does not appear they are organized in any way in an effort for promoting the program.

Concerns:

The mission of the doctoral program has evolved somewhat since it was established 13 years ago. Current documentation and conceptual framework is somewhat unclear at this point.

The circumstance of two institutions sharing in this program has made communication and collaboration somewhat difficult at times. Problems of having two sets of documents for records/transcripts, duplication of fees, and scheduling expectations are unsettling to students. Students pointed out that changes in scheduling of classes, particularly in the summer, which were contrary to historical expectations, were difficult to accommodate without advance warning.

Policies are not always cleanly defined so each of the two institutions can make decisions based on these without having to have informational contacts; this circumstance requires more time to deal with issues.

Funding levels for a doctoral program seems inadequate for meeting certain needs and expectations of doctoral programs, faculty requirements for research, and student needs in presenting at formal conferences of a level greater than local or regional settings.

Released time is necessary for faculty to accomplish research required of doctoral level faculty. Research assistants are needed by faculty to assist with accomplishing research tasks in this process. Also the teaching load required for faculty in a doctoral program that also has a masters program attached should be focused on for the benefit of program concerns and the expectations for faculty productivity.

Availability of research journals either in library or the departmental professional center is limited. These resources are needed by both faculty and students in graduate programs to assist in publication goals.

Students indicated that a resource room for their use would be a practical resource that is needed and would be utilized effectively.

Faculty publications in peer reviewed journals are limited. This is a necessary activity for doctoral level faculty to be considered as active researchers.

There are faculty concerns with the cohort course requirements for the degree. The extensive locked-in requirements tend to be restrictive in offering students options that might meet individual needs.
There is a perception that sometimes faculty are teaching courses in which they have no expertise because of the arrangement that only primary doctoral faculty can teach doctoral courses.

The lack of a qualitative research methodology course in the program limits the real availability of doing qualitative research as a viable methodology for the students.

The overload and demands on the doctoral faculty tend to impact the quality of the dissertations that result. The lack of guidelines from the graduate school also impacts this area.

Faculty members are concerned about the nine semester-hour requirement for three semesters to complete the residency. Students all reflected the intensity of this; however, all had completed it and saw it almost as a rite-of-passage for them now that it was behind them.

A lack of coordination of expectations among the professors teaching, related to projects and assignments due during the semester, does not produce quality work on the part of the students. Contributing to this issue is the three semesters of 9 hours graduate work required for the residency requirement.

Students have noted that there was an inconsistency in course expectations and the comprehensive exam topics that followed at a later time. Possibly contributing to this problem was the change of faculty in the program during that period.

Writing for publication appears to be a goal of some program components. Students have expressed a need for more guidance and help in this area.

Students have indicated there is sometimes a need for a leveling course in mathematics or writing to prepare them to take a statistics course or to write formally for a dissertation or publication.

Admission policies, as stated in the policy manual of the Joint Committee, have not been adhered to as listed. Attention to this needs to be addressed by adjusting the requirements or revisiting the policy.

Both faculty and students have repeatedly listed concerns of having a joint program and the lack of coordination and collaboration between the two institutions. If this is the requirement to be able to offer a program in this part of the state, the two institutions need to address these problems and resolve them. With a Joint Committee of equal votes from each institution, differences cannot be resolved and problems are not dealt with for the benefit of students or programs. More accommodation is necessary by the institutions or they should offer independent programs. A possible solution could be forming a federation of the two universities, similar to the one in which University of North Texas, Texas Woman’s University, and Texas A&M University-Commerce participate. The federation concept uses the cooperation of all school resources; however, each school’s program is independent as to granting of degrees.
The observation was made that the JUDC is almost completely made up of males, and females are very much underrepresented, particularly considering that females make up a large part of the students enrolled in the program.

**Recommendations:**

1. The appointment of a graduate dean and organization of the Graduate Council is a positive step in establishing support for graduate programs, in promoting structure and consistency of expectations of graduate level faculty as well as students in creating a graduate education culture at this University. As a further step in developing this culture, it is recommended that a graduate council representative be in attendance at the dissertation proposal defense and the dissertation final defense to secure the interests of the institution, the graduate school and the student. With additional doctoral programs being established at A&M-Corpus Christi, the Graduate Council should establish policies and procedures that guide the decisions and actions of departments, professors, and students in the accomplishment of degree requirements. One area that should be addressed, if not already included, is the protection of human subjects procedures for the research which is conducted under the auspices of the University.

2. The mission and goals of the educational leadership doctoral program have evolved from the original statements of the program established 13 years ago. The mission is now somewhat unclear and no longer totally reflects the participants enrolled in the program. This mission as well as goals should be revisited by the JUDC and the institutions in order to update and clarify these for all concerned stakeholders.

3. Following the re-clarification and articulation of the mission and goals, a re-examination of the curriculum should be accomplished in order to structure the knowledge base and skills that reflect the current state of educational leadership and research. At this time the program appears to have three areas of concentration including: leadership, curriculum and instruction, and research. Consideration should be given to how this structure meets the needs of the students, the core requirements including the number of specifically named courses, the residency requirement, the delivery of the instruction, and the course sequence. Since the establishment of the curriculum 13 years ago, both institutions have employed new faculties as a result of retirements and resignations. Such a change, coupled with thirteen years of maturation of academic thought and societal change of the region, make such a curriculum reconsideration necessary for the best interests of the program, the universities and the students.

4. The Joint University Doctoral Committee should play a critical role in solving some of the bureaucratic concerns of both students and faculty members such as record keeping (dual transcripts), student fee collection and allocations, scheduling class problems, and selection and assignment of doctoral committee chairs and members. The use of associate faculty members (as now identified by program nomenclature) as committee members and course professors should become a part of the expectations of the program. Some of these
individuals have the strongest records of scholarly work. A strong doctoral program uses a variety of instructors to teach courses to capitalize on the expertise of various professors.

5. With additional doctoral programs entering the A&M-Corpus Christi campus, some sharing of core research courses might take place such as statistics, so the institution’s resources are better used to serve more than one program.

6. Resources need to be identified to support faculty development and scholarly activity opportunities to attend professional meetings and present research findings in order to assist the faculty in meeting scholarship expectations for doctoral level professors. Research/graduate assistants and other types of support for research, such as software, and library resources, should be allocated. Research assistants are important in order to provide opportunities for graduate students’ growth, as well as to assist faculty with their research activity. These come together to support a graduate culture in the institution.

7. The work of the professors to integrate students into the research community through attendance and presentations at academic conferences and expose them to the research culture is to be applauded. Funds should be identified to support and expand these activities for the students. Funding to help support such activities should be sought from internal and external funding agencies including institutional funds and foundation funds.

8. A regular review of the programs in a graduate academic institution is a necessary task that falls on the department and the graduate council. Standards need to be identified for the program and an assessment needs to take place on a regular schedule including an evaluation of student competencies achieved, program achievements, and faculty accomplishments.