27 May 2015

Dr. Clifford Fedler
Associate Dean
The Graduate School
Texas Tech University

Dr. Fedler,

Attached you will find the Graduate Program Review for the HDFS Department, submitted from the internal reviewers. Our visit took place on 20-21 April 2015. A copy of the itinerary is attached at the end of the report.

Information used to assemble our report consisted of the HDFS self-study, interviews involving departmental administrators, faculty and staff, and comparisons to comparable institutions. We also asked for syllabi for courses and other departmental data. All our requests were honored in a professional and timely manner.

Please feel free to contact me or the other members of the committee if you have any questions. Our contact information is on the itinerary at the end of the report. It has been a pleasure and an enlightening experience.

Respectfully submitted,

Lee S. Duemer, Ph.D.
Professor
Graduate Program Review
Texas Tech University

Program Reviewed: Human Development and Family Studies
College of Human Sciences

Onsite Review Dates: 20-21 April 2015 (copy of itinerary attached at end of report)

Name of Reviewers

Internal:
Lee S. Duemer, Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership
Susan Urban, Professor, Department of Industrial Engineering
Christine Robitschek, Associate Professor, Department of Psychological Sciences

External:
Kay Pasley, Norejane Hendrickson Professor Emerita, Family and Child Sciences, Florida State University
Diane W. Bales, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Science, The University of Georgia

I. Academic Unit Description and Strategic Plan

Vision, mission and goals: Good
Strategic plan: Good

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) is one of six departments within the College of Human Sciences. HDFS has approximately 18 faculty and 56 graduate students and approximately 800 undergraduates. The department offers master’s and doctoral degrees, including participation in an on-line consortium (Great Plains IDEA) offering a master’s degree. The self-study listed 28 graduate level courses, seminars, and practicum experiences. The department has had an interim Chair and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of a new Chair in Summer 2015.

The self-study presented a Vision Statement (in Section I of Self-Study) that fits well for the Department (e.g., promoting optimal growth and development of individuals and families, providing outreach and service to the community, integrating diversity throughout the department, and developing socially responsible students). The self-study also presented a strategic plan that fits well with the university’s strategic priorities, with assessment methods directly addressing these priorities.

Problems arise when looking for continuity across higher-level planning for the department. The Strategic Plan material in Appendix A of the Self-study does not map onto the vision statement (e.g., does not mention integrating diversity or developing socially responsible students). Instead
of expounding on the HDFS Vision Statement, the Strategic Plan materials flow directly from the Texas Tech University Strategic Plan Priorities. An additional concern is that the assessment methods are primarily single point data rather than comparison data. Thus, although the metric for assessment is clear, the criteria for evaluating or interpreting this assessment are not defined. No evaluative statements were made by the Department regarding the extent to which the Department perceives it has adequately or inadequately met its strategic planning objectives.

We note that the HDFS department is in flux as they have not had stability in the Chair position for some time. Thus, it is likely that the Vision has been in flux during this time, as well. There was considerable hope among the interviewees that with the new Chair’s arrival the department will refocus its vision, not only to bring greater clarity to this vision but also to align more closely with the vision and foci of the College of Human Sciences.

Recommendations:
1. Assess the extent to which the department’s strategic plan is aligned with the department’s vision and revise as needed.
2. Examine assessment methods for evaluation criteria. Operationalize goals in measurable ways.

II. Program Curriculum

Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes: Very Good
Curriculum development coordination and delivery: Good
Program learning outcomes assessment: Needs Improvement
Program curriculum compared to peer institutions: Good

The broad curriculum represents the range of faculty areas of expertise and provides considerable opportunities for a graduate student to tailor his or her individual curriculum to unique needs. Commonality among doctoral level training is found in the shared goal of training students for academic positions. There was consensus among faculty and students regarding the strong statistics and research methods training in the department.

Another strength of the curriculum is the new Minor in Cross Cultural Studies. Approved in 2012, 5 students already have completed the minor with 6 additional students in progress. Any TTU graduate student may take this minor. This provides a valuable service to the university.

Although the wide range of courses and flexibility in developing degree plans is seen by many in the department as a strength, our perception was that the curriculum lacked cohesion. This was reflected in faculty and student concerns regarding a lack of sequencing for courses other than statistics/methods topics. It also appears that there has not been an overall review of the graduate curriculum in a long time. No one we asked could recall the last graduate curriculum review. The Department Faculty Manual contains procedures for Development and Modification of courses and the program (Section E) but seems to approach the process in a piecemeal manner rather than holistically.
The Qualifying Examination component of the training program was discussed at length during the site visit. Neither faculty nor students expressed satisfaction with the process. The greatest concerns voiced were a 50% failure rate on at least one section in the first attempt (data from 2014), and lack of consistency and clarity regarding some of the procedures. For example, the review committee found information on the HDFS website indicating all three portions of the exam must be taken during the same semester; two portions are offered only immediately prior to the start of the long semesters; and the third section must be taken prior to these other two sections; making it impossible to take the third section during the same semester as the other two sections. Some efforts have been made to address some of these concerns. For example, an optional Advanced Theories course was developed to prepare students for the theories portion of the qualifying exam.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that the new Chair initiate an overall graduate curriculum review with the following aims:
   a. Determine if the breadth of course offerings is helping or hurting the department and students.
   b. Determine the extent to which the five identified themes in the department map onto the curriculum as it currently exists.
   c. Determine the extent to which the curriculum is cohesive.
2. Review of the qualifying exams process within the context of the program curriculum to determine the extent to which Quals reflect content and processes taught in the curriculum and to consider if changes could be made to course content/evaluation methods, the Quals process, or both.

III. Faculty Productivity

Qualifications: Very Good
Publications: Needs Improvement
Teaching Load: Needs Improvement
External grants: Needs Improvement
Teaching evaluations: Excellent
Professional service: Appropriate

The department currently has 18 full-time tenure/tenure-track faculty members. The faculty members are well qualified, with excellent teaching evaluations. Several faculty members have also received teaching awards.

The status of research productivity within the department needs improvement. The HDFS self-study states, “Faculty research interests in the department are broad, creating many areas in which graduate students may specialize.” The self-study then outlines numerous research areas in which the faculty are involved. When students were asked why they came to HDFS, there were very few that mentioned specific faculty and research areas. Most indicated that they came here because they were accepted or because they received financial support. The conclusion of the self-study also states that HDFS “is regarded as one of the top national programs of its type.” We could find no evidence in national rankings to support this claim. After interviewing the
faculty and students, this committee recommends that the faculty define a smaller set of well-focused research areas. It is difficult to establish a strong reputation for a department when the research interests are so broad. Broad research interests have also led to the large list of courses that are currently offered. With a more well-defined research focus, the faculty will be in a better position to streamline course offerings and provide a more focused research environment for graduate students.

The research status of the department has been partly affected by faculty attrition. HDFS has lost seven faculty members over the evaluation period, with two attributed to death and one attributed to retirement. The others faculty members that left were highly productive, research-oriented faculty. During this period, two new assistant professors have been hired. The new hires have been actively contributing to the department. For HDFS to remain competitive with peer institutions, the department will need to increase the number of new hires, preferably in well-defined research areas for the department. The College of Human Science’s resource investment areas are obesity, recovery services, and retirement planning and living. It is not clear, however, if existing faculty will be able to redirect their research efforts to these areas. The new department chair will need to work closely with the faculty to define focused research areas for existing faculty as well as new hires.

For a research department, the faculty publication rate is low. In 2013, the rate for refereed articles was 1.6 publications per faculty member. This is not an acceptable rate for increasing the research reputation of the department or for creating an appropriate research culture for graduate students. The faculty should focus less on presentations and more on the publication of refereed articles.

The research funding level for HDFS is also low compared to peer institutions ($1.2M in 2013/2014 and in 2009/2010, with a level as low as $579K in 2012/2013). The department had an increase in the number of proposals accepted in 2013, with 60% accepted. Prior to that time, the acceptance rate was significantly lower. Faculty should be more actively involved in the submission of federal research grants. It is also strongly recommended that the department seek mentoring, for new faculty as well as existing faculty, with respect to the writing of competitive grant proposals to funding agencies such as NSF and NIH.

The teaching load of 2/2 is appropriate for research-active faculty with reductions for buy-outs due to research funding. Only about one-third of the faculty, however, is actively involved in the direction of PhD-level research. As a research department, more faculty members should be participating in the advisement of PhD students. The teaching load should be increased, accordingly, for non-research active faculty.

It is clear that there has been a lack of leadership within HDFS over the last few years. There also does not seem to be any clear set of operating procedures for department activities such as student recruitment, student advising, teaching assignments, teaching assistant support, and space allocation. The incoming department chair should work with the faculty to rectify these issues.

IV. Students
Time to degree: Needs Improvement
Retention: Appropriate
Graduation rates: Appropriate
Enrollment: Needs improvement
Demographics: Needs improvement
Number of degrees annually: Appropriate
Support services: Needs Improvement
Job placement: Needs improvement
Student-faculty ratio: Needs improvement

The graduate students that met with our review team were quite articulate and highly motivated about their field of study. Many of the students commented that the faculty was supportive and encouraging of their studies and research activities. Students like the availability of TA positions and the teaching experience that they gain through these positions.

The department is also doing well with respect to retention and graduation rates. The time to graduation for doctoral students, however, has increased from 5.43 years to 7.33 years over the last 6 years. The self-study attributes this longer time to graduation to an increase in the number of post-baccalaureate doctoral students. But there are other factors that could also be affecting the increased time to graduation. One factor is that the program requires 84 credit hours to complete the degree. This is a larger number of hours than what is typically required in other Ph.D. programs here at Texas Tech as well as at other universities. HDFS should examine what is done in peer institutions and revise the program to reduce the number of hours, with an effort to increase the number of independent-study, research-oriented classes rather than lecture classes. There are also no standard leveling courses for students, no pre-requisites, and no specific course sequences. This has resulted in students being unprepared for the material in some courses and also makes it difficult to plan a program of study. Students also indicated that choices for elective courses are often limited, possibly because of the large number of other required courses that must be offered.

Another possible factor contributing to a longer time to graduation is the qualifying exam process, which is outdated and complex for students and faculty. There is a 50% rate for retake of the exam, where some students wait a year before retaking the exam. The quantitative portion of the exam is supported by an elective course. Students indicated that this course was good preparation for the quantitative exam. Students did not feel as well prepared for the qualitative portion of the exam. In general, there appears to be discrepancies between what is taught in the classroom and the content of the qualifying exams. The faculty did recently look into the issue of changing the qualifying exam process, but decided not to make any changes. The review committee strongly recommends that the HDFS faculty re-evaluate the qualifying exam process and consider an exam that would help to better evaluate the capabilities of students for conducting PhD-level research. This re-evaluation process should involve a comprehensive look at what peer institutions are doing in the way of a more contemporary approach to qualifying exams.

The graduate students indicated that they would like to see improvement in the research culture of the graduate program. Students are looking for more research opportunities and commented
that the colloquium approach to research orientation was not working (in the words of one student, “failing miserably”). Several students indicated that it was often up to the students to be proactive about their own involvement in research, which is to be expected of any graduate student. Faculty, however, should also be more proactive about getting students involved in their research. The students would like to see more opportunities for RA positions and even expressed an interest in learning more about the process of writing research proposals. This will only happen by increasing the level of funded research through faculty submission of research proposals, with graduate students included in the process.

The students also seemed to be confused about the nature of their assistantship positions. They appreciate the teaching experience, but indicated that they also wanted research experience as part of their paid positions. They did not seem to understand that most departments provide funding for TA positions only. Although some RA positions may be provided in startup packages for new faculty, most RA positions come from funded faculty research and not from department funds. We heard several comments about the difficulty of balancing teaching and research activities. The HDFS graduate students need to understand that they are expected to do research in addition to their paid TA positions. In general, the students in the HDFS program need a greater level of socialization into the culture of academia, including professionalism and the research process.

There is a process of evaluating the graduate students in the program that happens at the end of every spring semester, where faculty members get together to evaluate all students. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide feedback to students about their progress and performance in the program. The students indicated that they do not always receive feedback from this process. Some faculty advisors discuss the evaluations with their students. In other cases, students approach their advisors about the feedback. Some students never receive the results of these evaluations. The department should outline a well-defined and consistent procedure for communicating the results of these evaluations to all students.

Enrollment in HDFS is down significantly (only five students) for the upcoming 2015/2016 academic year due to an apathetic approach to recruitment among the faculty as well as the need to clarify the responsibilities of the graduate program director with respect to recruitment. Although there is a good mix of international students in the program, the diversity of U.S.-based students could be enhanced with recruitment efforts directed towards Hispanic and African-American students, based on the demographics reported in the self-study. HDFS needs to take a more serious and contemporary (online marketing and web site) approach to student recruitment with a focus on quality, research-oriented students. From the employment list provided in the self-study document, many of the recent Ph.D. graduates are not finding jobs that are indicative of a quality research program. HDFS seems to be better preparing graduate students for teaching positions, rather than research positions.

TA stipends have been increased for the upcoming year, which is the first increase that has occurred in 14 years. This increase is long overdue and could still be increased to attract quality students. Recruitment efforts, however, should also include cost of living comparisons since Lubbock has a lower cost of living than the locations of other similar programs. It was also pointed out to the review committee that the current increase is primarily due to the smaller
number of incoming students for the 2015/2016 academic year. The department will need to find a way to sustain the increased stipend together with a need to increase enrollment.

Our committee also detected that the graduate students are being unnecessarily exposed to department politics. This should not be the case. We highly recommend that the incoming department chair correct this situation and work to create a stimulating and professional research culture within the department that will ultimately be of benefit to the students and the faculty.

V. Facilities and Resources

*Facilities: Very Good*

*Facility support resources: Good*

*Financial resources: Needs improvement*

*Staff resources: Needs improvement*

The departmental operating expenses have declined from $205,994 in 2008/2009 to $103,612 in 2013/2014. This decline was paralleled to a reduction in tenured/tenure track faculty from 22 to 18 during the same time period. This loss was partly due to attrition, but also reorganization in the College intended to reduce the size of the department. During this time the college reorganized from three to six departments. More telling, however, is the department operating costs as a fraction of employees. When examined in this context, operating costs as a fraction of employees declined from $7771.47 in 2008-2009 to $5054.24 in 2013-2014. It is logical that overall departmental expenditures should decline as a result of fewer faculty; however, expenditures as a fraction of employees indicates operating costs have declined more than can be explained by faculty attrition or College reorganization. This conclusion is further supported by comparing departmental operating costs to credit-hour enrollment across the same period of time. Enrollment in 2008-2009 was 15,832 (combined undergraduate and graduate) to 17,231 in 2013-2014 while the departmental budget shrank by 50.3%.

Sponsored research has fluctuated over the past six years, but has returned in 2013 to its second highest level (since 2009) of $1,225,460. The steady increase over since 2010 shows a commitment to securing external funding, but remains well below comparisons to peer institutions as identified in the HDFS self-study (p. 44).

The department has excellent facilities that are available for use in faculty research. Facilities include the Barton Observational Research Suite, Child Development Research Center (CDRC), and TTU Early Head Start Center. Both the Barton lab and the CDRC have state-of-the-art video-recording equipment and observational capability. However, there remains a need for additional space for research teams and the secure storage of confidential data.

VI. Overall Ranking

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) is one of six departments within the College of Human Sciences. HDFS has approximately 18 faculty and 56 graduate students and approximately 800 undergraduates. The department offers master’s and doctoral degrees, including participation in an on-line consortium (Great Plains IDEA) offering a master’s
degree. The self-study listed 28 graduate level courses, seminars, and practicum experiences. The department has had an interim Chair and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of a new Chair in Summer 2015. We note that the HDFS department is in flux and there is considerable hope among the interviewees that with the new Chair’s arrival the department will refocus its vision, not only to bring greater clarity to this vision but also to align more closely with the vision and foci of the College of Human Sciences.

The broad curriculum represents the range of faculty areas of expertise and provides considerable opportunities for a graduate student to tailor his or her individual curriculum to unique needs. Commonality among doctoral level training is found in the shared goal of training students for academic positions. There was consensus among faculty and students regarding the strong statistics and research methods training in the department.

The department currently has 18 full-time tenure/tenure-track faculty members. The faculty members are well qualified, with excellent teaching evaluations. Several faculty members have also received teaching awards. The research status of the department has been partly affected by faculty attrition. HDFS has lost seven faculty members over the evaluation period, with two attributed to death and one attributed to retirement. The others faculty members that left were highly productive, research-oriented faculty. During this period, two new assistant professors have been hired. The new hires have been actively contributing to the department.

**Recommendations**

A number of recommendations are included in each of the six sections of this report. The recommendations documented below are therefore not meant to be holistic, but rather reflect those we consider to be most important to benefit and improve the HDFS department.

We recommend that the new Chair initiate an overall graduate curriculum review to be sure the department is aware of trends in peer institutions and make sure curriculum is aligned with department priorities. Part of the review could include a programmatic curricular plan three to four years ahead that can be circulated to faculty and students to assist with developing degree plans. Such a plan could also include suggested sequences of courses, for example, foundations courses in the first year. The curriculum review should also include the qualifying exams process and consider if changes could be made to course content/evaluation methods, the qualifying exam process, or both.

Our committee also detected that the graduate students are being unnecessarily exposed to department politics. This should not be the case. We highly recommend that the incoming department chair correct this situation and work to create a stimulating and professional research culture within the department that will ultimately be of benefit to the students and the faculty. The department should also conduct a thorough review of the student handbook. Both faculty and students noted some policies that were not followed, such as annual reviews of students in assistantships and little to no feedback to students.
The department’s typical incoming graduate enrollment is 15-20; however, only five have been admitted for fall 2015 semester. The department would benefit from a highly structured recruitment plan that includes all faculty, supported by training for faculty.

Additional financial resources would benefit the department. HDFS expenditures as a fraction of employees indicates operating costs have declined more than can be explained by faculty attrition or College reorganization. Resources would best be allocated to faculty hires, and training for grant preparation and recruitment.

Students and faculty mentioned a need for internal support for research methodology. This did exist at one point, but was eliminated since the time of the last review. The need for college or departmental level support is based on the idea that many methodological issues and questions are highly contextual. Faculty additionally concluded that the university’s methodological support center (IMMAP) is not useful because their efforts are focused on grants.
Itinerary for the 2015 Graduate Program Review (GPR) for the Department of Human Development and Family Studies

GPR Itinerary Details

Sunday 19 April 2015

6:00pm  Dinner at The Pecan Grill at Overton Hotel (Dr. Clifford Fedler, Cynthia Lopez and members of the GPR committee). Reservations will be under Dr. Fedler

Monday 20 April 2015

8:00am  Reviewers meet with HDFS Interim Department Chair, room 102
9:00am  Tour of HDFS Department
9:30am  Reviewers meet with HDFS faculty (1st opportunity), room TBA
11:00am Reviewers meet with College of Human Sciences Dean, room 102
Noon-2:00pm  Lunch, compare notes and discussion
2:00pm Reviewers meet with HDFS graduate students (1st opportunity), room TBA
3:00pm-4:00pm Reviewers meet with HDFS Graduate Program Coordinator, room 102

Tuesday 21 April 2015

8:00am  Reviewers meet with HDFS Interim Department Chair, room 102
9:00am  Reviewers meet with HDFS graduate students 2nd opportunity), room TBA
10:00am Reviewers meet with HDFS faculty (2nd opportunity), room TBA
11:00am-noon Reviewers meet to compare notes, discuss, and begin report, room 102

Contact Information

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Clifford Fedler: Senior Associate Dean: 806 834 3964
Priscilla Huddleston, Unit Coordinator and Assistant to the Dean: 806-742-3031
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Dr. Miriam Muslow, HDFS Graduate Program Director: 806-834-3892
Overton Hotel, 806-776-7000