Graduate Program Review
Texas Tech University

Program Reviewed: Human Development and Family Studies

Onsite Review Dates: April 19 – 21, 2015

Name of Reviewers

Internal:
Please include name, title, and Department

Lee Duemer, Professor, Educational Psychology
Christine Robitschek, Associate Professor, Psychology
Susan Urban, Professor, Industrial Engineering

External:
Please include name, title, and Department

Diane Bales, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Science, The University of Georgia
Kay Pasley, Professor and Chair Emerita, Family and Child Sciences, Florida State University

1. Academic Unit Description and Strategic Plan

Please evaluate the following by marking an X in one of the blanks for each item:

Vision, Mission and Goals

__X_ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Good  ___ Needs Improvement

Strategic Plan

__X_ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Good  ___ Needs Improvement

Please comment on the positive components and suggested areas of improvement.

The department’s vision and mission are clear, ambitious in terms of both teaching and research, and inclusive of diversity. The seven bullet points under “vision” in the self-study document provide clear focus and direction to faculty members and graduate students. The donor-friendly version emphasizes global scholarship and worldwide engagement, which may help attract both funding and in-kind support from alumni and other potential supporters.

The department’s strategic plan provides clear benchmarks for excellence in undergraduate instruction, graduate instruction and mentoring, building a strong academic reputation, enhancing research productivity and grant funding, and engaging in community outreach. The assessment methods for the strategic plan are reasonable and will provide useful benchmarks for success.

The biggest challenge related to the vision and strategic plan is that there are places where the stated vision and strategic plan for HDFS, the specific college and university goals, and the practices of the department conflict. For
example, a stated goal of the Graduate School and the College of Human Sciences is to increase graduate enrollment. Several faculty members stated that they do not support increasing the number of graduate students. In 2014-2015, very little effort was made to recruit new graduate students into the department, and only 5 students were accepted. This small graduate class will have implications on the department’s budget in future years, because budget allocations depend, in part, on generation of student credit hours. Important tasks for the newly-hired Department Chair will include guide the faculty members in operationalizing and implementing their vision and strategic plan, and in finding creative ways to support college and university initiatives.

II. Program Curriculum

Please evaluate the following by marking an X in one of the blanks for each item:

Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes
___ Excellent ___ Very Good ___ Good ___X_ Needs Improvement

Curriculum development coordination and delivery
___ Excellent ___ Very Good ___X_ Good ___ Needs Improvement

Program learning outcomes assessment
___X_ Excellent ___ Very Good ___ Good ___ Needs Improvement

Program curriculum compared to peer programs
___ Excellent ___ Very Good ___ Good ___X_ Needs Improvement

Please comment on the positive components and suggested areas of improvement.

According to faculty members, the primary goal of the HDFS graduate program is to prepare students for academic positions. The graduate curriculum is designed to provide students with an overview of theories, methods, and substantive course content across the developmental life course. A sequence of four quantitative research methods courses, as well as a qualitative methods course, helps ground students in the methods and statistics necessary to engage in developmental and family research appropriate to the HDFS discipline. The curriculum also includes a structured teaching practicum that prepares doctoral students to teach through a preparatory course, observation of a faculty member teaching, and supervised teaching experience.

The department has begun offering new graduate program options to meet the varying needs of students, including the online GP-IDEA program taught through a consortium of 5 universities, as well as the proposed online Master’s program in applied developmental sciences intended to educate professionals already working in HDFS-related careers. The GP-IDEA programs in HDFS currently have 11 TTU students enrolled and 3 more beginning in Fall 2015, and require faculty instructional time to teach 4 online courses per year.

The minor in cross-cultural studies is an innovative program consistent with the department’s vision to be inclusive of diversity. A formal minor in cross-cultural studies is not offered in many HDFS departments across the country. The minor is intended to enhance cross-cultural knowledge and increase students’ awareness of and responsiveness to multicultural and transnational issues that affect diverse human development and families. Minor requirements include 3 HDFS courses and 6 electives approved by the program director. A total of 5 students have completed the minor since it was approved in 2012, 6 more are in process, and other students have taken one or more courses but have not formally declared the minor. Students in the minor come from HDFS and several other departments across campus. Faculty members and graduate students speak enthusiastically about the minor. The materials we received did not
provide specific metrics for success of the minor, beyond student enrollment and completion. Collecting additional data to document success of the minor would provide further evidence that the minor is effective.

The doctoral curriculum includes many more courses than are required in similar programs at other universities, including many more content-specific courses. The number of required credits in HDFS (84 including dissertation credits) is substantially higher than the 74 credits required by the TTU graduate school. This heavy course load may have negative effects on graduate students’ time to engage in active research, especially during the early years of doctoral study. No formal process is in place for regular curriculum review; changes are made on an as-needed basis as issues arise with individual courses or requirements. Formal review of the entire graduate program of study and course content has not been completed in many years, and is needed to ensure that the curriculum aligns with departmental, college, and institutional goals and priorities.

The qualifying exam is one of the major ways that the department evaluates student progress toward program learning objectives. Other indicators include grades in graduate coursework, presentation of student research, evaluation of teaching, and faculty annual evaluations of students. These learning outcome measures appear appropriate for the program. During the campus visit, we heard substantial discussion about the qualifying exam process for doctoral students. The qualifying exams include a specialization exam written by the student’s committee and based on the student’s research focus, followed by two written qualifying exams (theory and method) given simultaneously. Only about 50% of students pass both theory and method qualifying exams on their first try. Students and faculty members shared a variety of explanations about why, including a disconnect between content taught in doctoral coursework and expectations on the qualifying exams (especially inconsistencies in how well theory is woven through content courses); students who intentionally prepare for and put effort into one of the two exam on the first attempt because they have a second opportunity to pass the other exam; and a long time lag between relevant coursework (often taken in the first year) and the related qualifying exam (often taken at the end of the third year). The department has partially addressed the time lag concern through an optional advanced theories course with a philosophy of science approach.

This format for qualifying exams is not consistent with the qualifying process used in many other HDFS departments. Other departments have moved to a critical review paper, or to developing a professional portfolio that documents academic accomplishments including publication, in place of written qualifying exams. The format of the qualifying exams is decided by the faculty members. The format was reviewed within the past few years, and was not changed after that review. As the faculty members review the graduate curriculum, I would strongly recommend that they also review the current format for qualifying exams, including investigating other options used by HDFS departments, to determine whether this process is successful in meeting departmental goals for graduate education.

### III. Faculty Productivity

Please evaluate the following by marking an X in one of the blanks for each item:

#### Qualifications

- [X] Excellent
- [ ] Very Good
- [ ] Good
- [ ] Needs Improvement

#### Publications

- [ ] Excellent
- [ ] Very Good
- [ ] Good
- [X] Needs Improvement

#### Teaching Load
Please comment on the positive components and suggested areas of improvement.

Based on the summary curriculum vitae included in the self-study portfolio, it appears that faculty members are well-qualified, with doctoral degrees from well-regarded institutions such as Northwestern University, the University of Texas at Austin, Vanderbilt University, and Auburn University. The department has recently hired faculty members from the University of California, the University of Southern California, and the University of Nevada-Reno.

Research productivity among current faculty members is mixed. Some faculty members, including Assistant Professors, are clearly engaged in productive research, as indicated by their publication rate and their successful grant-writing efforts relative to their academic rank. Other faculty members are less productive in research, and have only published a handful of peer-reviewed articles in the six years since the last program review. Research strengths among department faculty are varied, including family stress and trauma, cross-cultural issues, applied developmental science, and observational research.

A greater emphasis on increasing research productivity is a theme mentioned in multiple conversations with the Interim Department Chair, faculty members, and the Dean of the College of Human Sciences. The department has lost several faculty members who were productive grant-writers in the past few years, and faculty members voiced a need for more focus on successful grantsmanship. This effort has largely been faculty-driven, with individual faculty members taking initiative to build more active collaboration within and across departments.

Both the Interim Department Chair and faculty members have pointed out a need for formal research mentoring process, especially for new faculty. This has been happening informally, as established faculty members have stepped up to get new faculty members involved in research programs. Pre-tenure faculty also receive support for research through a reduced teaching load (1:1 for one year, with no more than 2 different course preparations per year for 2 years), and have been successful in getting grants already. The relatively high number of unsuccessful grant applications suggests a continuing need for mentoring and resource support to help faculty succeed in securing external funding. One expectation of the newly-hired Department Chair (who begins her position July 1, 2015) is to be a role model and source of mentoring for securing grant funding.
Faculty members in the department teach regularly at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Because the doctoral program of study in HDFS is complex and requires many more hours than the Graduate School requirement, faculty members are required to teach a wide range of courses. The typical teaching load is 2:2. Faculty members with funded research grants can buy out some, but not all, teaching responsibilities. Members of the departmental Executive Committee (including the Associate Chair, Graduate Program Coordinator, and Child Development Program Coordinator) receive one course release per semester to provide time for administrative responsibilities. Some faculty members are highly regarded teachers, and have received teaching excellence awards.

One clear challenge in terms of faculty productivity has been a lack of stable, visionary leadership. Both faculty members and students mentioned a need for clearer faculty knowledge of department policies and procedures. A few faculty members are overloaded, especially in terms of responsibility for mentoring and advising graduate students. Among other faculty members, I heard comments that suggested a diffusion of responsibility for crucial activities such as graduate student recruitment and mentoring of graduate students into the culture of research (i.e., someone else will do these things). Instability of leadership in department may have unintentionally created a climate where faculty members either gave up responsibility or took on more responsibility than appropriate. Most faculty members and students appear optimistic that the newly-hired Department Chair will provide vision, direction, and stability for the department.

IV. Students and Graduates

Please evaluate the following by marking an X in one of the blanks for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time to degree</th>
<th>___ Excellent</th>
<th>___ Very Good</th>
<th>_<em>X</em> Good</th>
<th>___ Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>___ Excellent</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Very Good</td>
<td>___ Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate rates</td>
<td>___ Excellent</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Very Good</td>
<td>___ Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Excellent</td>
<td>___ Very Good</td>
<td>___ Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Excellent</td>
<td>___ Very Good</td>
<td>___ Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of degrees conferred annually</td>
<td>___ Excellent</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Very Good</td>
<td>___ Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>___ Excellent</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Very Good</td>
<td>___ Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Placement</td>
<td>___ Excellent</td>
<td>___ Very Good</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/ Faculty Ratio</td>
<td>___ Excellent</td>
<td>___ Very Good</td>
<td>_<em>X</em> Good</td>
<td>___ Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on the positive components and suggested areas of improvement
The HDFS department is performing well in terms of many student measures. During the six years of this self-study, the department has consistently enrolled between 40 and 55 graduate students, including between 34 and 47 doctoral students. Graduate students are predominantly White females, and approximately 20-25% enrolled each year are non-resident aliens. This pattern, and especially the predominance of women, is consistent with enrollments and demographics for HDFS-type departments at comparison universities.

Recruitment of new graduate students is an issue that was highlighted many times during our visit. Admitting more graduate students is an explicit goal of the Graduate School. The HDFS department placed minimal emphasis on student recruitment in 2014-2015, and as a result admitted only 5 new graduate students. The new Department Chair needs to guide the faculty in developing a multifaceted recruitment plan that takes advantage of online technology. The ongoing update of college and departmental websites can be a useful tool in recruitment; priority should be placed on making information about graduate study easily accessible to potential and current students in the redesigned website.

The department is successful in guiding students to complete degrees. The department consistently graduates between 6 and 12 students each year, with a high of 16 graduates in 2011. The average time to graduation for doctoral students is relatively high and has increased steadily over the 6 years, from 5.43 years in 08-09 to 7.33 years in 12-13. (Data for 13-14 were not included in the self-study.) The increase over time may be related to a reported increase in post-baccalaureate doctoral students admitted. These students require additional time to graduate because they must complete both Master’s-level and doctoral-level work. The department should consider evaluating time to graduate separately for doctoral students who enter with a Master’s, in order to ensure that students are making timely progress toward their degrees. The department is also successful in retaining students. Over the six years of the self-study, a total of 16 students left the graduate program (3 due to lack of progress, 2 who failed to pass qualifying exams, and 11 who left for personal reasons.) With the exception of 2011, when 9 students left the program, the department retains nearly all of its students.

In terms of mentoring graduate students and student/faculty ratios, there is variation among faculty members. Some faculty members are advisors to many students and serve on as many as 5 – 10 committees per year; other faculty members have worked with only a few students, and serve on fewer than 2 committees per year. This places disproportionate responsibility for mentoring graduate students on a few faculty members.

The department has a mechanism for evaluating student progress through annual evaluations and formal preliminary/candidacy meetings with the student’s advisory committee. Faculty members meet annually to discuss progress of all graduate students. The students reported inconsistent feedback from their annual evaluations; some students received oral feedback from their advisor, many students received a letter, and a few students reported receiving no feedback from their annual evaluation. The department should consider establishing a formal process, such as having faculty members and students sign and submit a copy of the written report once they have reviewed it together.

A point of pride in the department is the fact that all students receive some form of assistantship support. Because of specifics of Texas law, students on assistantships receive partial tuition remission, and have all university fees paid. Although students’ comments in the self-study describe the assistantship amount as insufficient, the amount that students pay to cover partial tuition (approximately $1,000 per semester) is comparable to the amount that students at other institutions pay for required fees not covered by assistantships. The dollar amount of assistantships had not increased in several years, but has been raised beginning in Fall 2015.
According to faculty members, the goal of the graduate program is to place students in academic positions. Although many students do go on to faculty positions, job placement immediately after completing graduate study is largely in instructor positions, rather than tenure-track faculty members. Both faculty and students report a relatively large teaching load for advanced graduate students. Graduate part-time instructors (GPTIs) teach two courses, or two sections of a course, per semester. This relatively heavy teaching load may prepare them better for instructor positions than for research-based faculty positions. Three recent graduates have taken postdoctoral positions at large universities, which may prepare them for tenure-track positions in the future.

A need for greater emphasis on mentoring students in research is a clear theme that emerged from multiple conversations during our visit. Because faculty members vary in their research activity and productivity, students have varying experiences in terms of research. Some students are active in research throughout their graduate education; others are only minimally involved in faculty research outside their thesis/dissertation work or an assigned research assistantship. Students need to be socialized to the culture and expectations of academia, including ongoing research activity, publication, and presentation, both in coursework and through the mentorship of their advisor and committee. In particular, students need to understand clearly that they are expected to be involved in research throughout their graduate career, regardless of the nature of their paid assistantship appointment. This message should also be a primary focus of the first-semester colloquium that orients new students to the department and graduate study.

V. Facilities and Resources

Please evaluate the following by marking an X in one of the blanks for each item:

**Facilities**

___ Excellent    **X** Very Good    ___ Good    ___ Needs Improvement

**Facility Support Resources**

___ Excellent    **X** Very Good    ___ Good    ___ Needs Improvement

**Financial Resources**

___ Excellent    ___ Very Good    **X** Good    ___ Needs Improvement

**Staff Resources**

___ Excellent    **X** Very Good    ___ Good    ___ Needs Improvement

Please comment on the positive components and suggested areas of improvement

The HDFS department has a variety of spaces for research, including an observational research suite on the fifth floor. Observational research space is assigned based on a priority system, with funded projects receiving highest priority. Space for unfunded projects and laboratory research is limited. In order to support faculty research productivity, the department needs additional faculty research space include additional spaces so faculty can conduct multiple research studies simultaneously, as well as additional rooms for confidential data storage and team meeting/work space to enhance collaboration between faculty and students. Faculty and students conducting child development research have access to the Child Development Research Center that supports both classroom observation and individual lab research with enrolled infants, toddlers, and young children. The facility includes both one-way mirrors and wall-mounted cameras for observation, and a dedicated room for coding of video footage. The facility is under-utilized for faculty
and student research. I recommend that the department discuss creative ways to utilize this resource to expand research related to early childhood development.

Graduate students have individual cubicles with desktop computers and storage for files and materials. Students who are GPTIs have highlighted the need for a more private space to meet with students; this could be accomplished through a shared office that is reserved when GPTIs need to use it.

The department’s operating budget, allocated by the Dean’s office, is used for a percentage of staff salaries and for supplies. The HDFS operating budget has decreased by approximately 50% over the 6 years of the self-study, due in part to a decrease in student credit hours when the Marriage and Family Therapy and Family and Consumer Sciences Education programs were moved to different departments within the college. The department has absorbed this budget reduction by reducing staff and by being more strategic in replacing computers and purchasing software site licenses. The department receives some financial support from facilities and administration costs on grant-funded projects; the loss of several faculty members who were productive grant-writers has also reduced the amount of F&A funding available to the department. The department needs a larger operating budget in order to more effectively support the teaching and research missions and to meet the strategic plan goals. Increased grant funding for research and increased allocations from the Dean’s office are two ways to increase the HDFS operating budget.

To support the TTU initiative to increase graduate enrollment, the department is receiving more money for student recruitment. The College of Human Sciences Associate Dean’s office is providing staff support for department recruitment by making follow-up contacts with students who inquired about the program but have not followed through with applying. The university is supporting recruitment through subscription to a new digital recruitment program. The college has also hired a consulting firm to help develop recruitment plans. I recommend that the HDFS department take advantage of these additional support resources to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for recruiting graduate students.

VI. Overall Ranking

*Please provide summative conclusions based on the overall review.*

I appreciate the opportunity to review this graduate program, and enjoyed meeting faculty members and students during the site visit. Based on the information from the self-study, meetings during the visit, and supplemental information supplied by the department at the committee’s request, I have drawn the following conclusions:

The HDFS department is a strong teaching department, with high commitment to teaching among both faculty members and graduate students. Doctoral students participate in a structured teaching practicum across several semesters that helps them build skills for teaching excellence. Innovative instructional programs, such as the minor in cross-cultural studies and the existing and proposed online degree programs expand the department’s ability to teach a wider range of students.

The department’s success in terms of research is more mixed. Some faculty members are highly productive in research, publication, and external grant-writing; others are not productive researchers. This unevenness in research productivity extends to the graduate students. I was surprised to see that most graduate students expect to be engaged in research only if they have a paid research assistantship or if they are working on a thesis or dissertation. In order for
the department to achieve its goal of becoming “a department of nationally known scholars in the core discipline of HDFS,” a culture of research productivity needs to become a more central focus of the department. More attention needs to be paid to the ways that the department socializes existing and new students to understand and embrace research, and to build a self-image as researchers. The fact that recently-hired junior faculty members are already showing strong records of publication and getting external funding is an encouraging step. The new Department Chair will need to provide clear guidance and mentoring, as well as a strong role model in order to increase overall research productivity.

The graduate curriculum exposes students to a wide range of content related to HDFS, and provides a strong preparation in quantitative and qualitative methods. The number of credits required in the department is substantially higher than the Graduate School requirements, and the time spent in foundational coursework may take away from time for students to engage in active research early in their graduate careers. The fact that so few students successfully pass qualifying exams in both theory and methods on the first try suggests that the coursework is not aligned with the expectations of these exams. Both the curriculum and the format of qualifying exams need to be systematically reviewed by faculty members to ensure that the graduate program of study prepares students to succeed in tenure-track academic jobs when they graduate.

Texas Tech University’s Graduate School has provided a clear mandate to expand graduate enrollment, and the university and college are providing supports for graduate recruitment, including new digital software and some administrative support. The department needs to develop a comprehensive, multi-faceted recruitment plan, and to involve more faculty members in graduate recruitment in order to meet the Graduate School’s mandate. At the same time, the department needs additional funds for assistantships to support an increase in graduate student enrollment. Sources of this increased budget for student assistantships could include increases in student credit hours generated by increased enrollment, funds from the GP-IDEA online program, increased funding allocated from the Dean’s office, and increased F&A funds from external grants.

Please provide summative recommendations based on the overall review.

Specific recommendations are described in greater detail throughout the narrative of each section above. The following are summary recommendations, based on the wide range of information reviewed through the self-study, supporting documents provided at the review committee’s request, and interviews with faculty members, students, and administrators.

- The most important need is for a permanent, long-term Department Chair who can provide guidance and direction to the department, and push them to new levels in teaching, research, service, and student mentoring. The newly-hired Department Chair who begins her position July 1 will set the tone and strategic direction for the department. The Chair needs to listen and be responsive to the ideas and concerns of both faculty members and graduate students, but also to provide thoughtful and visionary leadership to the department.
- Overall research productivity among faculty members and graduate students needs to increase, although I recognize and acknowledge that some faculty members and students are highly productive in publication and grant-writing. Both junior faculty members and graduate students need mentoring to help them become
outstanding researchers, and to recognize that research productivity is an essential part of academia. Building this culture of research should begin during the recruitment process, and should continue throughout the faculty or graduate career. Opportunities such as regular research brown bags, where research teams present their studies, can provide additional motivation and modeling of research.

- Because research productivity is so mixed (with some faculty who are highly productive and others who are not), the department should consider supporting and balancing the work of the whole department by reallocating teaching loads so that those faculty who are less productive in research have a heavier teaching load.
- In order to support faculty research productivity, the department needs additional faculty research space include additional spaces so faculty can conduct multiple research studies simultaneously, as well as additional rooms for confidential data storage and team meeting/work space to enhance collaboration between faculty and students.
- The recently renovated Child Development Research Lab is underutilized in student and faculty research. I suggest that the department (including lab school teachers and interested graduate students) discuss creative ways to utilize this resource to expand research related to early childhood development.
- A full review of the graduate curriculum, including the qualifying exam process, has not happened in many years. I would recommend that the Department Chair and the graduate faculty make this review a priority, and that they include a review of the curricula of HDFS departments at other universities to provide a frame of reference.
- Special attention needs to be paid to reviewing the qualifying exam process, to ensure that it is meeting important educational objectives to prepare graduate students for tenure-track academic positions. I would recommend that graduate faculty members examine other options used by HDFS departments at peer and aspirational institutions, in order to see a range of strategies used to evaluate doctoral students’ knowledge and readiness to complete a dissertation.
- I recommend that the department develop a clear process to ensure that all graduate students receive both written and verbal feedback from their annual progress evaluations, including ways to ensure that graduate faculty members are accountable for providing this information to their advisees.
- The department needs a comprehensive and well-implemented plan to recruit qualified graduate students whose research interests match those of faculty members. During the ongoing college website redesign, the department needs to think clearly about the most effective ways to recruit students, and to place recruitment information in an easily visible place on the new departmental website. I suggest that the new website also include stories about faculty research and graduate student successes.
- I recommend that the department take advantage of additional support resources from the college (including a consultant to develop recruitment plans) and from the university (including the new digital resource to connect with interested students) in developing and implementing their comprehensive graduate student recruitment plan.