Literacy and Reading Education
California State University, Fullerton,
External Review Report
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The Review Team members greatly appreciate the opportunity to review the Literacy and Reading Education (LRE) program at California State University, Fullerton. The Team met with the program faculty and personnel on January 22, 2025 for the kick-off review process to gain insight about the program's structure, function, context, and related aspects to its delivery for the intended audience. The program faculty and personnel shared materials, presentations, data, and details highlighting the program and its place on campus and the community it serves. The team also met separately a few times to discuss, calibrate, and deliberate the findings throughout the review. Various documents, artifacts, data, links, websites, and other resources about the Literacy & Reading Program were examined and reviewed within the institution's overarching Mission and Goals and alignment with the continuous improvement plans and contingencies.

The abridged itemized findings are found in **Appendix A,** which outlines a synopsis for the following detailed report based on various levels guided by the review template provided. Emphasis in this report focused on identifying *the strengths, challenges,* and *recommendations* that hopefully guides the program in the process of continuous improvements.

Strengths
This was recently revised/upgraded and reflect the following salient features:
- It cultivates the vital place literacy occupies in the K-20 educational system and beyond. The program personnel reflected a comprehensive, global philosophical base that drives the program's structure, delivery, and outreach. The program coordinator and department chair echoed a profound philosophy that seems to reify in the students journey as they develop knowledge and skills throughout. The strategically scoped and sequenced requirements as outlined in various artifacts (e.g. program syllabi, resources, program plans, curriculum maps…etc.) provide evidence that the program's sound vision and mission are effective.
- The program personnel and faculty are keenly aware of the historical and current mode of thinking the field of literacy education. They integrate a progressive vision in curriculum development, evaluation, and continuous improvement efforts. For example, they reflect a solid understanding of the students' needs and program completers' impact on young learners in the K-12 settings. They provide various opportunities throughout the program for program faculty to reflect on their teaching, evaluate programmatic data, and set program improvement goals.
- In addition to the clear advising strategies and guidance, the program faculty and personnel tailor their services to meet the immediate needs of students and the

community they serve. Strategic placement for the field requirements, support sessions, and seminars and like are noteworthy.

Challenges

Like most programs, the Literacy & Reading Program faces certain universally grounded challenges:
- It could benefit from more university-based resources to ensure a sufficient number of faculty lines are created.
- More adequate support to enhance recruitment efforts.
- Creating a more rigorous assessment system.

Recommendations

- Continue to build upon the vast domains of literacy vis-à-vis current trends, practices, epistemologies, and pedagogical approaches.
- Refine the program evaluation and assessment systems that aligns with state, regional, and national/international frameworks and guidelines.

Strengths
The program has undergone several modifications, refinements over the past several years. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- The program was elevated and revised in light of the evolving institutional and state requirements and guidelines.
- Refined the alignment with CSUF's Student Learning Outcomes as faculty sought to vertically align the essence of the curriculum as reflected through various course syllabi and anchor activities.
- Faculty sought to upgrade the foundational and research base that underlie literacy learning and teaching.
- Made justifiable changes in the scope/sequence of the course materials, assignments, and outcomes.
- Outlined several actionable strategies informed by data to enhance candidates' experiences, as outlined in the program document.
- Integrated the state mandated dyslexia guidelines in the program.
- Integrated emancipatory approaches to combat racism and systems of oppression through literacy education.
- Prompted equity-minded leadership through literacy.
- Outlined a future improvement plan to continue to take the program's effectiveness to the next level

Challenges

Universally, challenges around online programs occur. While the program is bichronous, more campus support is needed as well as additional opportunities for networking with the ultimate constituents of the program in K-12 schools.

It is unclear how the program ensures candidates have diverse field placements/experiences at the school sites.

Recommendations

- It is unclear what the enrollment patterns are throughout the past few years with implications with student-faculty ratios.
- While there are serious efforts to integrate equity and social justice themes and strands, the program might explore ways to actualize this as a seamless process across courses and the overall program. This requires not only vertical but also horizontal alignments within the department, college, campus, and community.

Since the first two tiers of the program are credential or certificate programs, consider a gap-and-overlap approach to address the evolving state literacy standards and guidelines.

Strengths

- The program conducts regular assessment (both formative and summative) activities. They include signature assignments used to measure Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) as well as CCTC-driven elements and aspects. Further, assessment findings are used to inform curriculum improvements.
- The program's dedication to refining its assessment processes demonstrates a strong commitment to enhancing student learning.
- Course embedded assessments, along with signature assignment rubrics, are used to assess and evaluate program outcomes.
- End of Program, Year-Out, and Employer Surveys are effective sources of programmatic data.

Challenges

It is unclear how the program assessment strategies relate to the overall assessment system for the entire college.

Recommendations

It is unclear how assessment data are systematically collected, shared, and used to drive program improvements. Beyond "closing the loop conversations," is there an Advisory Group/Committee with which to share data and make informed decisions?

Strengths

- The full-time faculty consists of two Professors, one Associate Professor, and five Assistant Professors. These faculty members are dedicated to the LRE program.
- Fall of 2023, the LRE department had two full-time lecturers. Lecturers are invited to participate in all meetings and PLCs.
- The department is currently searching for one additional assistant professor, recognizing the growing demand for the program.
- Faculty have breadth and depth of literacy expertise and knowledge.
- The number of PLCs faculty are engaged in is to be commended.
- Data-driven instruction
- Commitment to social justice

- Faculty participate in literacy-related research and presentations (locally and at national conferences)

Challenges

- Changes in faculty turnover may impact the fidelity of the program.
- Funding for research/travel with the current CSU budget.
- Teaching 4x4 graduate-level courses leaves little time for research
- 100% online courses can pose challenges for engagement and a sense of belonging.
- There are faculty names on syllabi who were not mentioned as faculty or lecturers.

Recommendations
- Encourage candidates to present their research at small local literacy conferences.
- The program is thriving and growing. It is recommended you stay focused and committed to your mission to retain the program's integrity.

Strengths
- Before admittance, there is a prospective student orientation.
- Once admitted to the program, there is an in-person, full-day, new student orientation.
- Monthly drop-in sessions are hosted for candidates to address questions or challenges.
- Since the last program review, the LRE program has implemented more frequent advising opportunities for students, including a program midpoint and end-point advising session.
- Faculty offer online meetings for students to feel supported while enrolled in this predominantly online program.
- Community Canvas page to keep all candidates informed. This houses all advising information.
- The Office of Graduate Studies works closely with LRE to keep candidates aware of requirements and on track.
- The Department Chair provides another layer of support for student advising.
- A writing specialist is available to candidates.

Challenges
- Timely feedback to candidates.
- Maintaining a strictly online program and building rapport with candidates can be challenging.

Recommendations
- As noted, READ 501 will be implemented in Fall 2025. It will offer comprehensive graduate academic advising and an introduction to university resources, such as academic support services, libraries, research tools, and professional development opportunities, such as summer workshops offered every year free of cost.
- Consider "Group Me" for each cohort to remain engaged with their peers for continuous peer support.
- Clarify who the first responder is for all candidates? It is unclear.

Strengths

The library/research resources for the program seem robust. Of particular note is the Education specialist librarian who supports the MS program. This point person for the program is able to provide initial and ongoing support for students who have research-related questions that involve the library and associated databases.

Challenges

Operating Expenses and Consolidated Course Fees provide fairly limited support for the program, since these fees support other areas within the department in addition to the program under review. Ongoing funding challenges are likely, especially considering the ambitious long-term plans that the program has established.

Recommendations

Online course fees seem to be providing the most consistent and the largest portion of funding for the program. As such, program faculty should have the discretion to establish funding priorities that are supported through online course fees. As we are entering a challenging budget scenario at the state level, online course fees, which are directly dependent upon enrollment, should be used to support program priorities moving forward, since other funding sources may be reduced. In the PPR self study, the "special facilities/equipment used by the program/department…" listed by the program were items that could be supported through the use of distance fee funding.

Perhaps a fixed percentage of the department's Operating Expenses and Consolidated Course Fees could be earmarked for this program. This would allow for easier long-term planning since budgets would be easier to predict based on fixed percentages of overall available funds for the department.

Strengths

The long-term plan of the Literacy and Reading Education department is clearly articulated, see figure 1. Three three key initiatives are outlined: submitting the Early Childhood Credential proposal to the CTC, exploring the integration of a Critical Literacy Research Apprenticeship throughout the MS degree culminating in READ 599, and establishing professional development opportunities for LRE faculty.

The pedagogical framework outlined in the self-study will guide the program's mission and vision, creating equity literacy leaders who foster educational environments that are equitable, respectful, and inclusive, ensuring that diversity is celebrated, voices are valued and all students, families and communities receive the support they need to thrive in today's educational landscape. This framework aligns well with the College of Education's missions, goals, and priorities, most notably the COE's JEIE framework. Additionally, the strategic vision articulated here supports several priorities established in the university's latest mission and goal statement.

The vision outlined here provides for continuous improvement of program courses, faculty expertise, and an ability for the program to adapt to changes in the profession.

This integration ensures that the LRE program not only advances literacy education but also embodies the values of the institution as a whole.

Challenges

To remain at the forefront of literacy education and preparation in the areas of humanizing and critical pedagogies, equity, culturally sustaining practices, and literacy leadership that adheres to evolving literacy standards/legislative changes, the program faculty developed a long-term budget plan that will include allocations for professional development for program faculty as well as in other priorities (technology, innovative curriculum design, etc.).

The budget will also reflect student resources and personnel to support the growing online program. Finally, new funding will be requested for additional staff and faculty release time to support the new PK-3 Credential Program (coordination, admissions, student teaching placement, etc.).

As we enter a tenuous budgetary scenario, it will likely be a challenge for the program to receive the level of funding necessary to support all of its upcoming priorities. As such, it may be prudent to establish funding priorities so that the most critical elements of the long-term plan are realized according to the timeline established.

Recommendations

The evidence that will be used to measure the unit's results in pursuit of its goals, and how it will collect and analyze such evidence, should be considered a programmatic priority. As such, when program faculty establish year-long priorities for the program, they should ensure that the careful collection and assessment of evidence used to determine progress toward said goals should remain a priority.

Due to the possibility of limited state funding due to California's budget crisis, program faculty should explore external funding opportunities to support the work outlined in the long-term plan. Several internal (JR/SR, FEID, RSCA, etc.) and external funding opportunities would likely be appropriate for meeting these long-term plans.

Appendix A

Overview of Strengths, Challenges, and Recommendations

1. Program Mission, Goals, and Environment

Strengths:
- The program aligns well with CSUF's mission and goals, emphasizing literacy's critical role in education.
- A strong philosophical foundation supports curriculum development, faculty collaboration, and program outreach.
- Faculty demonstrate global awareness and integrate diverse perspectives into instruction.

Challenges:
- The program faces limitations in university-based resources, which impact expansion efforts.
- Recruitment efforts need strengthening to attract a more diverse student population.

Recommendations:
- Continue refining the mission to address emerging literacy challenges and trends.
- Advocate for additional resources to support faculty growth and program development.

2. Program Description and Analysis

Strengths:
- The curriculum is well-structured, with clear sequencing and alignment to professional literacy standards.
- Faculty actively engage in continuous program evaluation and refinement.

Challenges:
- Maintaining consistency in curriculum updates to reflect evolving literacy research and policies.
- Ensuring field experiences align with current literacy education demands.

Recommendations:
- Establish a formalized process for curriculum review, ensuring ongoing alignment with educational advancements.
- Strengthen partnerships with local schools to provide dynamic field placements.

3. Student Academic Achievement and Learning Outcomes

Strengths:
- Student learning outcomes align with state and national literacy standards.
- Clear assessment measures track student progress and competencies.

Challenges:
- The assessment system requires refinement to enhance data-driven decision-making.
- There is room for improvement in linking student outcomes with long-term literacy education impact.

Recommendations:
- Develop a more comprehensive assessment model integrating qualitative and quantitative data.
- Implement feedback loops to improve instruction and student learning experiences.

4. Faculty

Strengths:
- Faculty members are highly knowledgeable in literacy education and engage in active research and professional development.
- A strong commitment to mentorship and student support is evident.

Challenges:
- Limited faculty positions create constraints in expanding course offerings and research initiatives.
- Faculty workloads may hinder opportunities for deeper program innovation.

Recommendations:
- Advocate for additional tenure-track positions to enhance faculty capacity.
- Encourage faculty collaboration on interdisciplinary literacy initiatives.

5. Student Support and Advising

Strengths:
- The program offers strong academic advising and career guidance.
- Faculty are accessible and actively mentor students throughout their academic journey.

Challenges:
- Limited advising resources may impact the quality of individualized student support.
- There is a need for enhanced career development resources for graduates.

Recommendations:
- Increase advising staff or allocate more time for faculty advising.
- Expand professional development workshops and networking opportunities.

6. Resources and Facilities

Strengths:
- The program has access to key instructional resources and technology.
- Faculty effectively integrate digital tools into literacy instruction.

Challenges:
- There is a need for upgraded facilities and additional instructional materials.
- Limited funding affects research opportunities and student support services.

Recommendations:
- Seek external funding and grants to improve instructional resources.
- Advocate for updated learning spaces to enhance student engagement.

7. Long-Term Plans

Strengths:
- The program has a clear vision for continuous improvement and innovation in literacy education.
- Faculty are committed to evolving the curriculum based on emerging literacy needs.

Challenges:
- Sustainability of program growth depends on institutional and external funding support.
- The changing landscape of literacy education requires ongoing adaptation.

Recommendations:
- Develop a long-term strategic plan with measurable goals for faculty development, student success, and curriculum innovation.
- Strengthen alumni and stakeholder engagement to support program sustainability.