Academic Program External Review Report 2023
Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology

Review Team
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Overview

Degree Programs Areas and Program Levels

School Leadership (M.Ed., Ed.S., Ph.D.)
Higher Education (Undergraduate Minor, M.Ed., Ph.D.)
Adult and Community Education (M.Ed., Ed.S., Ph.D.)
Research Methodology (Service courses in support of all programs)

Summary of Visit
This report provides the findings of the review team Dr. Mark D'Amico, Dr. Mariela Rodriguez, and Dr. Stephen D. Engle. The findings are based on review of the Program's self-study document, web materials, and a site visit on March 23 and 24, 2023. The team met with a wide spectrum of constituents, partners, and students from the Educational Leadership and Research Methodology Program and the individual meetings were well organized and extremely participatory. Additionally, the Associate Dean provided a thorough self-study report to review in advance of the visit. The review team met with the following:

Administrators:
Ms. Debra Szabo, Director of Assessment, Accreditation and Articulations
Dr. Robert Shockley, Department Chair
Dr. Steve Silverman, Dean College of Education
Dr. Bill Kalies, Interim Dean, Graduate Studies
Dr. Karen Scarpinato, Executive Associate Vice President for Research

Department Faculty Members:
Dr. Maysaa Barakat
Dr. Jennifer Bloom
Dr. Ira Bogotch
Dr. Michael DeDonno
Dr. Deborah Floyd
Dr. Mary Lieberman
Dr. Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski
Dr. Meredith Mountford
Dr. Daniel Reyes-Guerra
Dr. Cristobal Salinas
Dr. Maria Vasquez
Dr. Jarrett Warshaw

Adjunct Faculty:
Peter Zsiga
Ginger Featherstone
Tiffany Peterson
Ted Loomer
Larry Faerman
Jolande Morgan
Valerie Wanza
Angela Fulton
Katie Burke

Clinical Instructors:
John Hardman
Joyce Krzemienski
Taka Mays
Sharon Moffitt

District Partners:
Melinda Springman-Herrera
Janet Butts
Denise Rodriguez
Heather Platt
Christine Semisch
Tiffany Peterson
Ted Loomer

Graduate Students:
School Leaders
Jeffrey Baumiller
Kelan Williams
John Critelli
Patty Brown
Amelia D'Costa
Mary Wilson
Higher Education
Allison Rodgers
Michael Miller
Kadene Mennell
D'Amour Edwards
Monica Martinez
Patrick Dempsey
Adam DeRosa
Marlynn Lopez
Siena Del Mastro
Kimberly Chirinos
Susan Richard

Alignment with Mission/Strategic Plan
Florida Atlantic University is a multi-campus public research university that pursues excellence in its missions of research, scholarship, creative activity, teaching, and active engagement with its

communities. It aspires to be recognized as a university known for excellent and accessible undergraduate and graduate education, distinguished for the quality of its programs across multiple campuses and classified as a very high research institution that is internationally acclaimed for its contributions to creativity and research as well as its collaborations with regional partners. To that end, the Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology contributes significantly to the mission and vision of the university at the graduate level and garners significant broad-based attention across the university and the south Florida community.

Faculty in the Educational Leadership and Research Methodology program are a uniquely competitive set of researchers and scholars who excel in focused academic areas and engage in enriching activities that drive the success of their program. They have connected their talented faculty, staff, and students to the broader needs of the South Florida educational communities and have expanded a robust culture of nationally respected research and inquiry in developing best practices (and partnerships) in leadership. Presently, the Educational Leadership and Research Methodology department fits most appropriately within the Pillar of Leadership, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and will be central to the University's quest for the Carnegie Classification of R1. Faculty, staff, and students have invested heavily in engaging professional development of leadership skills in higher education.

In addition, the Department faculty engaged in an 18-month long process to develop a shared department mission and vision accompanied by their five core values of integrity; learning community; social justice, diversity, equity & inclusion; innovative action; and excellence. These documents have been signed by department faculty and provide a guidepost as they are displayed prominently in the department office.

Overall, the team found that the Educational Leadership and Research Methodology Program provides a robust and relevant educational program at the graduate level. The department houses a team of active scholars who are recognized in the profession and actively contribute to the body of scholarly knowledge. Likewise, the program holds a strong tie to the practice community.

Major Changes Since Last Program Review
- A key area of concern from the previous review was the lack of consistency regarding expectations related to research productivity. It is evident from the 2023 review that faculty members have dedicated their efforts to establishing and maintaining strong publication portfolios. They are published in well-respected journals and disseminate their research findings at international and national conferences. Several faculty members also engage graduate students in research efforts and take them to conferences and have incorporated national conference attendance into the curriculum. These efforts help to extend the visibility of FAU and the leadership programs, and they extend student socialization within academia.
- A related change since the last program review was an increase in securing external funding. This was a recommendation by the review team to help establish a stronger research culture. Today, a few program faculty members are highly engaged in grant-getting efforts. Such engagement helps to support funding for graduate students and for research enhancement. External funds help to establish research projects.
- Since the last program review, faculty members participated in a joint review of curriculum for program improvement. A key takeaway from previous recommendations has been the addition of more quantitative methodology courses that are offered by experts in this area. Having a dedicated team to teach such courses adds value to the doctoral experience for students. Such courses offer structured methodological experiences that guide students toward decisions about their own dissertation research studies.

Findings

Curriculum

Strengths

- **Purposeful Redesign of the Curriculum** - Faculty members make a concerted effort to keep the curriculum current and voiced a commitment to blending theory and practice in all programs. They attend to state and national standards for their respective program areas. There is a strong commitment from faculty in engaging in curriculum development that fosters contextual knowledge as well as professional growth for students. Faculty members offered examples of the time and effort that they engage in for purposeful redesign, and the department chair commented that this was a highly dedicated faculty regarding such efforts. Faculty members are able to pool their expertise and work collaboratively toward program improvement across programs and program areas within the department. This collaboration extends to Tenure-Track faculty members supporting non-tenure track (NTT) faculty members with course development. Lead faculty instructors' mentor and provide support to NTT faculty who teach courses for the department. Such alignment extends the purpose of the curriculum redesign and affords students consistency in course expectations and instructional delivery.

- **Strong Ties with District and Community Partners** - There is evidence of relational trust and team building between program area faculty members and community partners. Such endeavors foster a community connection to FAU, to the School of Education, and to the Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology. This is positive in the resulting commitment by district partners to teach courses for the program area, and to be supporters of FAU as an institution of first choice for students across Florida. By having adjunct faculty members, some of whom are alumni from this department, who have positive experiences with faculty and students are better positioned to speak favorably of the program and the institution. Strong ties also align to the context of the greater community where students reside and work. Such professional connections are mutually beneficial for district partners and FAU faculty members. In this way, students benefit from both the research expertise of the faculty and the practical experience of district partners. The various cohorts in the K-12 educational leadership program area that exist within and outside of FAU's proximity are evidence of strong student recruitment efforts and increases to graduate student enrollment.

- **High Degree of Student Satisfaction** - Students who shared their learning experiences with the committee, both in-person and through Zoom, confirmed their high degree of satisfaction with the curriculum and the dedication of faculty members. Students felt that the programmatic curriculum, overall, was what they needed to move forward in the program through scaffolding of course content in course sequencing (additional discussion of dissertation sequencing is included in the section below). Several students used the word 'amazing" to describe faculty members in the department. It was evident that the relationship-building efforts by faculty members helped students feel a sense of belonging in the programs. Various students offered examples of times when faculty members had gone "above and beyond" to help them. Alumni, some of whom are also adjunct faculty, stated that they felt prepared to assume their current positions. This is key, given that alumni serve as primary examples of program quality, and the support and mentorship of program faculty.

Weaknesses

- **Lack of Congruence in Priorities** - Overall, there seems to be a lack of congruence between department goals, leadership priorities, and policy mechanisms to meet the needs of students and faculty. One notable example is the removal of Graduate Assistant tuition benefits for master's students, which has a deleterious effect on enrollments in the higher education program putting FAU at a competitive disadvantage with other universities. Another example is the incongruence

that stems from bringing the College of Education in line with the rest of the university that does not pay faculty for summer theses or dissertation work. With more than 50 Ph.D. students in the dissertation stage, and only 11 department faculty who can chair dissertations, faculty are struggling to meet their needs, and the students are aware, which seems to be a threat to the future sustainability of the program. In addition, the standard 3:2 teaching load of faculty with no release time for dissertations or program direction service, places a significant burden on them and creates an environment where the university is at risk of losing faculty and students. In addition, the department feels pressure to keep enrollments high to support the pursuit for R1 status and meet course enrollment thresholds, while another perspective provided during the visit was to lower doctoral enrollment and consider alternate year admission.

- **Dissertation Sequencing** – In addition to the dissertation support issues above, the curriculum may be structured in a way that does not provide the most efficient path to the degree. For instance, students called for earlier and more sequenced dissertation support throughout the program, from literature synthesis early in the program, to an opportunity to focus on the research methods most aligned with their dissertation, to additional support through tutoring and supplemental instruction particularly around statistics. The current situation is further exacerbated by the inability to receive dissertation mentoring during the summer due to the change in policy. One student noted, "If I could defend my proposal during summer, I could begin dissertation in the Fall."

- **Delivery Mechanisms** – Some program offerings have continued to be all online since the onset of COVID-19. While some students communicated the value of convenient online offerings, others noted the lack of social capital built in the online setting, some noting that they were meeting classmates in person for the first time during the review committee's meeting with them. Additionally, students saw the value in blending some foundational courses at the doctoral level among students from different concentrations (e.g., school leaders and higher education), but at this time some of those courses are being offered separately, also placing pressure on the department to meet enrollment thresholds in multiple sections.

- **Social Environment** – Both students and faculty noted the strained political environment in Florida creates uncertainty about program/course content and results in uneasiness about the university's priorities and whether they can be achieved considering the social and political pressures.

Recommendations

1. **Dissertation Relief** – A series of potential remedies appear to be needed to address the significant workload required to mentor doctoral students in the Ph.D. program. These include the following: (1) maybe encourage the university to consider exploring a university-wide compensation plan and/or flexible assignment plan for dissertation advising during the summer; (2) expand the pool of potential dissertation chairs, including permission for the research methods faculty to serve in the chair role; (3) consider curriculum revisions to potentially require reduced dissertation hours across the program by offering seated courses that guide students through elements of the dissertation; (4) consider revisions that allow students to focus on the research method most appropriate to their dissertation inquiry, and (5) new faculty lines are needed for educational research and higher education, in particular, to ensure course and dissertation coverage.

2. **Engage in Strategic Enrollment Management** – Considering the university's goal to achieve R1 (Carnegie Classification), it is critical that the department undergo strategic enrollment management to identify appropriate enrollment thresholds that (1) account for the university's goal number of graduates each year, (2) fulfill the programs' expected contribution to that goal, (3) maintain minimum course enrollment thresholds, (4) provide a predictable course schedule/sequence for students, (5) serve the demand of the region, (6) match faculty capacity to

teach courses and chair/serve on dissertation committees, and (7) consider the delivery modalities preferred by the student population.

3. **Provide Greater Support to Students on Research** – Considering the constraints on faculty to support dissertation research (i.e., no summer compensation for dissertation service; too few faculty able to chair dissertations), students expressed the value of their faculty and described systems that prevent them from receiving the support they need particularly around research methods. In addition to expanding the faculty with diverse expertise in quantitative and qualitative methods, additional support at the college or university level for statistical tutoring and consulting would enhance students' experiences and supplement their classroom learning and reduce requirement for individual mentoring on methods. The focus on research methods could also be bolstered through the creation of a doctoral strand in educational research.

Student Learning Outcomes
Strengths

- **Competency Assessments** - Faculty members identified Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) through "competency assessments" for students. They are deemed transformational learning objectives by the faculty. The "competency assessments" reflect state standards, as applicable by program. Faculty members used "competency assessments" to assist in program improvement processes. This work took place through consistent meetings throughout the year between the department chair and program coordinators. Evidence includes programmatic revisions that have been sent forward to the Graduate College.

- **SLO Data used for Continuous Improvement** - School district partners, mostly from the cohort program models, shared that they engaged in four continuous improvement meetings per year with department faculty members based on competency assessment data. In this way, changes were able to be made in less than a year based on any program updates. Adjunct faculty, in general, confirmed that they post SLOs in each course syllabus then offer students formative assessments through rubrics.

Weaknesses

- **Students Need to Understand SLOs** - The students who spoke with the external review committee were not aware of the SLOs or in which classes/projects they were assessed. This contradicted what adjunct faculty told the review committee about having SLOs posted in each course syllabus.

Recommendations

1. **Inform students about SLOs directly** - Faculty members need to communicate to students that "competency assessments" are Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Point out the SLOs to students to where they can be found on course syllabi. Invite students to co-construct the SLOs and help to determine the assessment measures. In this way, student participation will help faculty to understand criteria that students want to see measured. Student participation can also help inform students about SLOs more effectively.

Faculty Professional Development
Strengths

- **Highly Committee Faculty** - The faculty is highly committed to the personal and professional well-being of their program colleagues, and informal mentoring appears strong. This is evidenced by anecdotes shared, perceptions of the program review team, and the dedication they exhibited to develop and embrace the values signed and posted in the department.

- **Engaging Adjunct Faculty** - Meetings with adjunct faculty and district partners showed a strong commitment from the department and program leaders to prepare part-time faculty to teach, particularly among the adjunct faculty in the master's-level School Leadership program. Their regular practices include a 1-2-day meeting to bring adjuncts up to speed with the program content and regular meetings to discuss curriculum and student success. In addition, materials are well-developed and shared with new instructors. Adjunct faculty clearly understand their importance as members of the FAU community.
- **Some Support for Mentorship and Research** - While issues involving support for doctoral students as well as support for grant seeking and administration are noted below, it is also important to acknowledge that dissertation chairs receive $1,500 for each student who graduates and the university research office disseminates professional development through asynchronous Canvas courses, hybrid workshops, and an early career academy.

Weaknesses

- **Grant Support** – The discussions with different constituent groups led to conflicting information about pre- and post-award support for grants. While some grant support (particularly for pre-award grant identification and post-award set up) is offered at the university level and the college has a pre-award person, faculty and administration had different perceptions about the level of support offered. An additional concern is the reduced administrative staff lines in the department from four to two. With department staff largely responsible for working with faculty to spend grant funds, the administrative environment does not seem conducive to positioning faculty for productive grant seeking.
- **Excessive Service** – At present, faculty are not offered any compensation or course releases for program directorship, despite there being very successful programs across programs from the undergraduate minor with 250 enrollees to the master's and doctoral programs that are serving the enrollment needs of the institution and the educational needs of the region. In addition, the Graduate College seems very limited in its capacity to support recruitment, and the department only received $1,000 for recruitment in the most recent year. One person noted that the true university values do not seem to be focused on investing in staff and faculty but rather "doing more with less."

Recommendations

1. **Grant Seeking Support** – Even with a great deal of expertise and significant national research prominence among the department faculty, the department does not have a strong culture of grant seeking. An exception is the receipt of IES funding by Dr. Daniel Reyes-Guerra. The review team attributes this lower focus on grants to a heavy workload of teaching, dissertation mentorship, and service with limited perceived support for grant seeking and grant management efforts. While informational resources are offered at the university-level, and there is a pre-award staff member in the college, the faculty do not feel these support adequate to engage in productive, department-wide grant seeking. An investment of time and energy into faculty to seek grants, coupled with the curriculum/workload issues discussed in the prior section could yield additional opportunities to seek grants to support the university's quest for R1 and potentially bring additional full-time, fully funded, and research-focused doctoral students into the department.
2. **Assured and Deliberate Professional Development** – Enhancing national presence and achieving R1 status will require significant support for faculty. This support could be provided in multiple ways, including: (1) provide guaranteed travel funds each year above the $1,100 currently offered if presenting at a conference, since inflation makes it difficult to cover expenses at that amount; (2) offer a stipend or release time for those who take on the burden of directing

programs at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels to help faculty to both serve and maintain active research agendas; (3) assign each new faculty member a formal mentor with resources to support that onboarding and mentorship; and (4) provide graduate assistant research support to new faculty in their first three years, which includes an investment in graduate assistants with tuition benefits.

3. **Offer Targeted Professional Development to Support Instruction** – Current perceptions of faculty professional development is that current offerings are to learn administrative processes and technology use rather than helping them to grow as instructors and scholars. Consider a professional development needs survey to gain a better understanding of the gaps, followed by targeted professional development to address those needs.

Overall Recommendations
1. **Need more tenure-track faculty lines** - Both faculty members and students commented on the need for more tenure-track faculty lines to help support doctoral students, especially those who have reached. Hiring faculty members with experience chairing dissertation committees would help balance the current advising load for faculty members. These faculty members have a very strong commitment to the academic and social well-being of their students. Offering a more balanced distribution of students would be beneficial to faculty members so that they can concentrate their efforts on advising fewer students, with more time for research. Given FAU's push toward the Carnegie R1 designation, infrastructure needs to be in place to help support faculty expectations consistent with R1. A more balanced workload that frees up faculty time for conducting research and writing for publication is one such example of an infrastructure need.

2. **Establish a departmental mentoring program for new faculty members** - This recommendation could help to foster a stronger learning community among faculty members. Establishing a departmental mentoring program for incoming faculty members could assist with team building, and in clarifying expectations for research, teaching, and service. Then mentoring and coaching sessions need to be offered to potential mentors. In this way, the professional growth for mentors will be extended while preparing them to engage in best practices with faculty mentees.