



Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

Master of Education

Educational Studies

Education for Change with Specializations in

Environmental and Sustainability Education

Indigenous Education

Social Justice Education

Faculty of Education

April 2021

Cyclical Program Review for
Masters of Education program
Faculty of Education

Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

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Programs Reviewed

Master of Education

Educational Studies or

Education for Change with Specializations in

Environmental and Sustainability Education

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Social Justice Education

Review Team

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Background

In accordance with the Lakehead University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), a Final Assessment Report has been prepared to provide a synthesis of the external evaluation and internal response and assessments of the Masters of Education program offered by the Faculty of Education. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, the opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies:

- a. who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report;
- b. who will be responsible for providing any resources made necessary by those recommendations;
- c. who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations;
- d. any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations; and
- e. timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Review Summary

The Faculty of Education submitted a Self-Study in January 2020. Volume I presented the program descriptions and outcomes, an analytical assessment of the program, and program information along with institutional information and statistical data. Volume II provided course syllabi. Volume III provided the CVs for 27 core faculty and 13 adjuncts contributing to the delivery of the programs.

The Review Team for this cyclical program review included two external reviewers and one internal reviewer selected by the Senate Academic Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (SAC-QA) from a set of proposed reviewers. The reviewers examined materials and completed a two-day site visit on March 3-4, 2020. The site visit included meetings with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic); Deputy Provost and Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning); Dean of the Faculty of Education; Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies; Associate Vice-President (Research and Graduate Studies); Chair of Graduate Studies and Research (Education); Orillia MEd Coordinator; full-time, tenure-track faculty members; a selection of contract lecturers; a group of graduate students; University Librarian; Education Liaison Librarian; Administrative Assistant for Graduate Studies and Research; and a group of alumni. The Review Team toured the Bora Laskin Building and the Thunder Bay campus. One of the Review Team visited the Orillia campus separately.

In their report (21 May 2020), the Review Team provided feedback that describes how the Masters programs delivered by the Faculty of Education meet the Quality Assurance Framework evaluation criteria and align with the University mission, strategic plan and academic plan. The Review Team notes that the Masters of Education degree programs are of high quality and offer students a quality experience supported by the creative and scholarly contributions of the full-time faculty members and many highly qualified adjuncts and contract lecturers.

At the Masters level, students must meet the standard University admission policies which are appropriate for the Program Learning Outcomes. Curriculum structure and delivery, and teaching and assessment methods are appropriate, are aligned with comparable programs

across Canada at the graduate level, reflect the current state of the discipline, and are effective in preparing graduates to meet defined program outcomes and the University's Graduate Degree Level Expectations.

With respect to quality indicators, The Review Team provided many examples some of which are repeated here:

- student performance and achievement is taken seriously
- many courses integrate experiential or other practical work and assignments that allow students to build the capacities needed to be effective in [their] vocation and in the wider social and ethical context of schooling and education; a high level of pedagogical thinking and planning has informed the development of the program as a whole
- there is a commitment among faculty members to the kind of individualized attention and mentorship that is instrumental to graduate research and the discovery and dissemination of new knowledge in the field
- the intellectual culture is vibrant and robust; discourse and deliberation abound and faculty are clearly working together to encourage the best student experience
- the MEd is supported by strong faculty cooperation and commitment to a program approach. Faculty work together and are committed to a collective programming.
- student time to completion is both monitored and managed effectively in relation to the program's defined length and requirements
- members of the Faculty are regularly recognized for the teaching achievements having won eight awards since their last review
- the professors are among the finest in the country
- an impressive balance has been struck between the compulsory courses (that offer a general theoretical and research foundation) and the elective courses that give opportunities to "to grapple with real-world issues and opportunities for critical analysis of research and its applications"
- the research and scholarship informing the MEd program is exceptional and the faculty ought to be commended for their innovation and ability to foster an exceptional intellectual climate

Strengths Summarized

The reviewers "noted some indispensable strengths that show Lakehead to be a unique and innovative leader in the field:

a) The ample amount of Graduate Assistantships offered to the students was an excellent initiative that created a sense of community, connection, and mentorship for students. It continues to be a useful goal for expended funds. All those we interviewed (Students, professors and alumni) requested that this success story should be protected "at all costs".

- b) The Past chair is given a 0.5 Full Course Equivalent course release to mentor the incoming chair. This makes great sense for continuity – and will pay back this expenditure in dividends.
- c) The creation of the MEd Program Coordinator position on the Orillia campus was an absolute necessity to deal with the physical isolation between the two campuses.
- d) With the decision to increase the program's focus on Indigenous studies, there has been a rise in offerings, professors and research. This has shown a continued sharpening of focus in this very relevant field in Canada today.
- e) Most alumni agreed that the instructors in the faculty were very committed and energetic. This was helped by small classes (capped at 20) and flexibility of the program.
- f) The Faculty of Education has genuinely tried to create and maintain a “community of scholars” through ongoing workshops and an annual Graduate Student Conference. This has been done even in the face of increased distancing through the expanding online format. Of great importance are tech savvy people at both campuses.
- g) We were all impressed by the presence of the library in Bora Laskin. Conveniently located in the Education building, we saw it as an indispensable asset for student learning.”

Opportunities

Along with the numerous strengths that existed in the program, the Review Team identified the following areas that would improve with further attention:

- a) We found that, among faculty and administration there was a lot of goodwill (willingness of everyone to put in extra work to aid the program). However, as seen at many similar institutions, if continually pushed, at a certain point goodwill will slowly fade to be replaced by burnout and withdrawal. Providing more help for the running of the program (i.e., to the graduate chair) would be beneficial. This could involve providing more time somehow to the chair or distributing some of the duties to others in the program.
- b) The program could adopt measures to help students make transitions between various levels and routes (i.e., Mentoring students from the B.Ed. to M.Ed. levels; Directing more students into the thesis route who may have initial interest). This could, for instance, be encouraged on the program website, updates of the handbook, in the letters of offer of admission, and during initial orientation activities.
- c) Students appear to be falling *de facto* into the Education for Change route because there are few professors outside this specialty. Specifically, students had noted the loss of the administration, leadership, curriculum/policy courses without this being reflected in the calendar. Some said they came in expecting certain courses and when they were not offered, they were disappointed. At the same time, many, many Special Topics courses are being offered every term, making it difficult for students to plan in the long term.
- d) While the shift to on-line courses has its benefits (especially for students taking courses part-time and at a distance), there are definite disadvantages for full-time students located on campus. Most detrimental are the increased feelings of isolation and loneliness attached to the

university experience. While the review team does note the many features in place to help build a “community of practice” among faculty and students, we also feel a more concerted effort is needed here. Specifically, full-time students requested more face-to-face experiences, blended approaches with the online community, orientation sessions throughout the year, and perhaps more involvement with social/informal aspects (i.e., organized study groups).

e) Students, especially international students, felt there was a great cultural divide concerning knowledge of the structure, history and legal bases of the Canadian educational system. Many classes proceeded with certain underlying assumptions that led to a good deal of confusion and misunderstanding. Students requested more information, up front, which could include a foundational course in Canadian Education systems, or at least some brief introduction.

f) We note that the variety of courses in the program should be praised as aiding to a vibrant learning experience. At the same time, we note the comments emerging from various interview sessions that request more consistent interface. This included comments that expressed frustration in technical deficiencies (poor connections dealing with remote communities), and desires for a more uniform experience (not the pedagogy or material, but technical) where the presence of the instructor was always felt by the student.

g) The 2013 report raised concerns about administrative and financial supports in conjunction with the launch of the program on the Orillia campus, and we will reiterate this concern. The expansion of both the undergraduate and graduate student numbers in recent years has meant the increase in contract lecturers (this is a similar state at most Ontario programs). However, there is an unsettling unbalance between the two campuses: In Thunder Bay, 55% of courses are taught by Faculty members, while in Orillia only 35% appear to do so. Could this be ameliorated by more interaction / transfer between the two campuses?

Recommendations

As per the IQAP, responses from the Academic Unit, Dean of the Faculty of Education and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies to each of the Review Team Recommendations are included below. Where appropriate, responses from the Office of the Provost are also included.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that a program review be undertaken to address the shift of course offerings in the past few years. Courses appear in the Academic Calendar that are not offered and will not be offered in the foreseeable future, so they ought to be eliminated. Conversely, there are a good number of Special Topics courses that ought to be integrated into the Academic Calendar as stand-alone courses of their own.

Academic Unit response: Agreed. This task is partially completed and further actions are planned.

- A formal process to Calendar the most commonly offered and best-fitting courses from the Special Topics courses was initiated in June 2020. Nine courses were approved by the MEd Standing Committee and subsequently by Faculty Council. They will soon be entered into the Navigator system with the intent of having them in the 2021/2022 Calendar.

- A more comprehensive internal review of the courses in the Educational Studies and Education for Change fields is planned for the fall of 2021, which may result in the removal of courses that are rarely or never taught, and the calendaring of further MEd courses that fit the programs.

Dean of Education response: See the Academic Unit response, which again reiterates the coming program review.

Dean of Graduate Studies response: The Office of Graduate Studies will assist, as appropriate, with these efforts.

Recommendation 2: We recommend the creation of a task force or committee charged with addressing the needs of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario be created. This committee itself should be responsible for creating a list of recommended actions needed to better serve this body of students, in line with both Lakehead's mission and the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation* Calls to Action.

Academic Unit response: We agree with this recommendation and actions are planned.

- July 1, 2020 marked the first time in many years that we will have had a permanent Chair of the Department of Aboriginal Education, Dr. Paul Cormier from the Red Rock First Nation. Dr. Cormier has been integral in the Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Land-Based Cohort and he will be instrumental in reviewing the Indigenous Education specialization in the internal program review planned for the fall of 2021. The Graduate Chair looks forward to consulting with him about the most appropriate ways of responding to this recommendation.
- The Faculty is also undertaking work on exploring racism and barriers to BIPOC students, and particularly Indigenous students, in all of our programs, including the MEd.
- Consideration will be given as to whether the Faculty's Indigenous Education standing committee might provide a relevant vehicle to explore the needs of Indigenous graduate students in Northwestern Ontario. Further, it is our expectation that in the planned program review will look at the scope and sequence of the MEd Indigenous Education specialization offerings and we intend to work closely with the Faculty's Indigenous Education standing committee in doing so.

Dean of Education response: As part of the development of the Department of Aboriginal Education strategic plan, the formation of an Indigenous Education Advisory Committee has been floated. If this development comes to pass, then that could provide a vehicle for discussions around graduate programs.

Dean of Graduate Studies response: The Faculty of Graduate Studies is working with the Deputy Provost, Graduate Programs and the office of Aboriginal Initiatives in developing PLAR policy for non-standard admission procedure to graduate programs for Indigenous students.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that a block of foundational courses be developed for international students. When dealing with International cohorts (i.e., Maple Leaf Educational Systems), more thought must be given to the experience of academic integration these students

will be having. Additional support and resources are needed for these students to aid their success.

Academic Unit response: We understand this recommendation and have actions planned.

- As noted in our response to 2.7a, we prefer to tackle this recommendation by adding an introductory module rather than creating a mandatory foundations course for international students. More courses designed only or primarily for international students would move them further from integration with domestic students and give them less choice. For those in one of the specializations, another required course would make specialization requirements harder to achieve.
- We will endeavor to encourage international students who wish to know more about the Ontario K-12 system to seek out volunteer opportunities in local schools to experience Ontario school culture firsthand. That will be especially helpful for international students who hope to eventually teach in K-12 schools in Ontario; however, as previously noted, requiring such volunteerism can place an unreasonable burden on international students.
- The Maple Leaf students (a large cohort of internationally located students) are typically domestic Canadian students teaching in China so they have little need for a course on the foundations of Ontario schooling.
- We have strong evidence in the form of graduation averages (typically in the 80s) that show high levels of academic achievement by most international students. That is the case even though many work part-time jobs to help defray the cost of studying in Canada. A module on Ontario Education could help those students who want this sort of foundation, but we want to make clear that most are not struggling academically.

Dean of Education response: Please see the Academic Unit response.

Dean of Graduate Studies response: Please see the Academic Unit response.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that additional administrative support be given to the graduate chair – either by extending the number of course releases, distributing some of the workload to others in the program, or by adding additional support staff.

Academic Unit response: We agree. Our work in this regard is mostly completed although further actions are still possible.

- A new Thunder Bay MEd Coordinator position was created, effective July 1, 2020, to provide academic advising for Thunder Bay and distance (online) students given the new Chair is based in Orillia. More of the academic advising for Orillia students was also directed to the Orillia MEd Coordinator, a position we have chosen to retain. The Chair's workload will be monitored, with the potential of creating a PhD Coordinator position in the future, if required, to further relieve the Chair of some academic advising and related duties.

Dean of Education response: Please see the Academic Unit response, and earlier comments I have made about the provision of administrative supports.

Dean of Graduate Studies response: The Office of Graduate Studies is in support of these actions.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that additional resources be identified and given to the Faculty of Education at the Orillia campus (including new infrastructure). In particular, we recommend a hiring strategy that focuses on the greatest area of growth in the Faculty of Education - the Orillia campus. The review team strongly believes that any new faculty hire related to the M.Ed. program should be located in Orillia.

Academic Unit response: We agree. That recommendation is partially completed but further action will be needed.

- A new tenure-track colleague in Orillia began on August 1, 2020 and the Faculty will request an additional full-time hire in Orillia to commence on August 1, 2021. We will strongly advocate for additional hires in the next few years. We believe growing the Orillia faculty complement remains essential for MEd program sustainability and, ideally, growth in Orillia. Indeed, to grow the program more in Orillia without appropriate faculty resources would degrade our program integrity and our ability to supervise thesis and portfolio students appropriately. We also want to note that we expect the flow-through potential from the MEd in Orillia to our PhD program to be large, given the location of the campus relative to the GTA. There are many in-service teachers in the Simcoe Region who do not currently have access to in-person graduate education without a long commute. Greater capacity in Orillia will allow robust recruiting to a program with a fair complement of in-person course offerings and more capacity for supervision.

Dean of Education response: As noted earlier, the better resourcing of the Orillia campus is a focus of the faculty, and steps are already being taken to address the issues that have been raised.

Dean of Graduate Studies response: The Office of Graduate Studies is in support of these actions.

Clarifications

The Program Chair provided extensive and thoughtful responses (26 pages) to statements made in the Review Team Report. This material, although not included here, contributed significantly to our understanding of the program and the development of this document.

Implementation Plan (Part A): Program Responsibilities

Implementation of the Recommendations	Proposed Follow-up	Responsibility*	Timeline
<p>Undertake a comprehensive program review including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses and course offerings • Consideration of foundational modules/courses specific to International student <p>(Recommendations 1 and 3)</p>	<p>Prepare a report that identifies actions for consideration and approval by the Faculty. Proceed with appropriate Senate processes should changes to the Calendar be required.</p>	<p>Chair of Graduate Studies and Research, members of the Faculty Graduate council</p>	<p>Fall 2021</p>
<p>Undertake a review of programming with respect to the needs of Indigenous students in northern Ontario (Recommendation 2)</p>	<p>Prepare a report that identifies actions for consideration and endorsement by the Faculty. Proceed with appropriate Senate or other institutional processes should changes to the Calendar be required.</p>	<p>Chair of Graduate Studies and Research, members of the Faculty Graduate council, members of the Faculty Indigenous Education standing committee, Chair Aboriginal Education, Vice-Provost Aboriginal Affairs</p>	<p>January 2022</p>
<p>Develop a plan to address resourcing (personnel and facilities) at the Orillia campus (Recommendation 5)</p>	<p>Prepare a comprehensive report that identifies actions for consideration and endorsement by the Faculty. Bring forward through appropriate processes for necessary approvals.</p>	<p>Faculty Council</p>	<p>January 2022</p>

Implementation Plan (Part B): Decanal & Administration Responsibilities

Implementation of the Recommendations	Proposed Follow-up	Responsibility*	Timeline
Meet regularly with Program Chair to monitor progress on the Implementation Plan**	Report to the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) as part of the Annual Review process	Dean of Education	Annually
Consider additional opportunities to support the Chair of Graduate Studies and Research (Recommendation 4)	Prepare a report with recommendations for submission to the Provost, as appropriate. [Note - review and approval by the Provost does not constitute any form of financial support]	Dean of Education	Fall 2021

*indicates individual or office with responsibility

**Note - The Dean of the Faculty, in consultation with the Program Chair shall be responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan. The details of progress made will be presented in the Dean's Annual Reports and filed in the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic).