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TO: Digvir Jayas
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: January 2, 2025

FROM: Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: PhD Education Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the PhD Education at its November 19, 2024 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review was comprised of: Amy Von Heyking (Program Review Coordinator), Danny Balderson, and Sandy Bakos.

The review produced 4 documents:

1. Self Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received March 12, 2024.
2. External Review Report. Written by Dr. Ardra Cole (Mount Saint Vincent University) and Dr. James Nahachewsky (University of Regina) based on a virtual site visit April 23 to 24, 2024. Received September 16, 2024.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received October 25, 2024.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Lisa Starr, Dean of the Faculty of Education. Received November 14, 2024.

Self Study Report

The Self Study Report asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas:

- Based on your assessment of the quality of the program as it is currently designed, would you recommend restarting intakes?
- Based on your assessment of our faculty capacity, would you recommend restarting intakes? If so, are there specific requirements or conditions that would make this feasible?
- Given that our potential students are full-time, experienced educators, is the requirement for full-time status and residency for PhD program reasonable in these economic times?
- How should faculty be compensated for PhD supervision? Are there models of compensation (financial or workload credit) that may be viable?
- To what extent should admissions to PhD students be shaped by faculty members' research priorities or fields? Should PhD students be expected to contribute to their supervisors' research programs?
- Should the faculty consider offering individualized PhD programs to suitable candidates rather than revising or developing a cohort-based program?
- Should the faculty explore offering an EdD program rather than a PhD program?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of PhD programs delivered collaboratively with other academic units in the university or among institutions?

The body of the report noted several strengths of the PhD Education:

- The program provided working professionals in the region the opportunity to undertake PhD studies.
- Graduates valued the quality of supervision, the accessibility of supervisory committee members and the support they provided. Faculty maintained a consistent and meaningful focus on what the students needed.
- Graduates demonstrated their capacity to undertake education research that reflected the stated purpose of the program, i.e. to inform professional practice.
- The program assisted graduates in meeting their career aspirations and they valued the personal growth they experienced through the experience.
- Graduates have published and presented their work in academic and professional venues.
- Most graduates participated in research assistantships that broadened and deepened their understanding of and experience with different kinds of educational research.
- The program provided some faculty members valuable opportunities to mentor researchers in their own areas of research specialization and build research and publication partnerships.
- Graduates and faculty members value the level and quality of support offered by program staff in our Office of Graduate Studies and Research.

The following weaknesses and challenges were mentioned in the body of the report:

- There was a disconnect between the program as designed and as implemented. It was designed as a full-time program but allowed working professionals to continue full-time employment. This meant that key features of the program design reflected unwarranted assumptions about the students' research expertise and focus coming into the program and the pace at which they could progress through the program. It was designed with a cohort structure, but students' programs quickly became individualized.
- There was a lack of transparency in the original program design process. Faculty members were not made aware of the financial implications of the program and their involvement in program and course design was very limited. This resulted in a lack of a shared vision for and understanding of the program and its constituent features.
- Admission committees for the different concentrations (Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum, and Formal and Distributive Leadership) used different criteria in assessing candidates' applications. They interpreted some criteria (evidence of research skills, professional experience) differently or put different levels of emphasis on these criteria. There may be valid reasons for the concentrations to emphasize or value some criteria differently, but the students took courses in educational theory and research methods together. This presented challenges for course instructors attempting to meet the needs of all the students and prepare them to conduct doctoral-level research. It may account for their recommendation to strengthen the intake process and plan a more effective orientation or transition into this level of academic work.
- Courses were originally designed with the assumption that students would enter the program with a well-defined research focus and ready to embark on the process of developing research proposals. Program modifications, such as the addition of a Masters-level research course, were made, however, graduates and faculty felt that the scope and sequence of courses should be revisited to meet the requirements of students embarking on doctoral studies after many years of experience in the profession. Additional and more suitable theory and research courses would ensure students have the depth of understanding required to design and complete high-quality doctoral research studies. Courses with clear and distinct purposes, and better communication between supervisors and course instructors, would ensure that students are not subject to various or conflicting expectations in terms of their developing research focus and that their coursework is relevant for that focus.
- Faculty and program staff reported challenges with a lack of clarity and consistency around some program policies and implementation practices. Some policies that were determined by both our faculty's Office of Graduate Studies and the university's School of Graduate Studies were at odds, for example the meaning of full-time status and residency requirement for PhD students. Policy related to program requirements such as the expectations and timeframe for the comprehensive examination were insufficiently developed prior to program implementation. Decisions about compensation to supervisors were inconsistent; principles guiding those decisions were unclear.
- Most faculty members reported that their involvement with the PhD program did not provide sufficient or commensurate support for their own research programs.

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- Evidence suggests that despite the small number of tenure-stream faculty, they are productive scholars, and their work is well-regarded. Seven of thirteen tenured faculty members have served on supervisory committees or been external examiners for doctoral students at other institutions in the past five years. Even during the time of the program's suspension, nine have received requests to supervise qualified domestic and international students. This suggests that a renewed program aligned with the faculty's research strengths may be viable. An individualized or "special case" program rather than cohort program may be feasible.
- The Faculty of Education should explore whether a redesigned PhD or other doctoral program for educators in K-Grade 12 and post-secondary settings, that potentially offers the opportunity for multi- or inter-disciplinary inquiry into education in school and community settings can be of strategic value to the faculty and the university.
- Making use of the possibilities offered under the Western Dean's Agreement, we should explore the possibility of collaborating with another university in developing a doctoral program that would be of strategic value to the institutions and the region.
- We must ensure that any future program includes clear requirements for full-time study and a specified amount of time in residence on campus. This would ensure that the program has a positive impact on the faculty's research and teaching capacity.

External Review Report

The External Review Report contained five (5) recommendations for improving the program:

- In consideration of the data gathered during the interviews, and synthesis of findings, the external reviewers recommend a re-start of intake for the existing PhD program in the Fall of 2025 or soon thereafter. This re-start will require refinement and clarity of the Program's identity, focus, purpose, rationale, student population, structure, design and delivery.
 - It is important for the design and delivery of the Program to align with the intended student population. If the intended population is full-time, experienced educators, it might be more reasonable to require a shorter requirement of full-time study and residency (e.g., an intensive summer institute) after which students could choose to continue in the Program part-time.
- Sustainability of a PhD (Education) Program requires a commitment of resources from the University to recruit and support students through to completion and to provide incentives for faculty to supervise and support students through involvement with their research. Such resources could include base funding to operate the Program, a separate funding model for PhD students with financial awards (offered to students in first two cohorts), availability of Graduate/Research Assistantships, and support for engagement in scholarly activity such as conferences, and incentives for faculty to build own research capacity.
- While there is existing expertise in the Faculty to run the PhD with a limited number of enrolments or in a cohorted fashion, faculty capacity has decreased since the program's inception. Workload flexibility along with potential compensation would afford opportunities to faculty interested in supervising.
 - Regarding compensation for PhD supervision, compensation in the form of a stipend upon a student's completion is perhaps not a viable model from a faculty perspective

given the time and duration of commitment involved in supervision. A more viable alternative might be to provide a certain number of credits towards either workload or financial compensation at major student milestones post-coursework.

- Although consideration of creation of an EDD or partnering with other institutions rather than reinvigoration of the PhD (Education) was discussed, restarting intake for the existing PhD was viewed as most beneficial overall for both the Faculty and external stakeholders in education. It was noted that research conducted as part of a PhD (Education) curriculum will both support and enhance these needs, whereas an EDD will not. The PhD is part of a growth model for a comprehensive university and better supports academic staffing both in terms of recruitment and retention.
- At this point, it makes most sense to focus on re-starting the PhD (Education) Program with attention to ongoing refinement and clarity of the Program's identity, focus, purpose, rationale, student population, structure, design, and delivery. This will lay a solid foundation on which to consider subsequent collaborative opportunities. It is our recommendation that the University continue to award PhD degrees to those who successfully complete the PhD (Education) Program.

The following, taken from the report, note the challenges discussed in the body of the report:

- "While there is existing expertise in the Faculty to run the PhD with a limited number of enrolments or in a cohorted fashion, faculty capacity has decreased since the program's inception."
- "During the external review discussions, it was noted that faculty members carry a heavy teaching and practicum supervision load. This load is seen to directly impact the ability of faculty to conduct research. For those who are in the midst of research projects, they find it difficult to hire an RA to support their work as a majority of Education's graduate students are either employed full-time as educators or enrolled part-time in their studies."

The following, taken from the report, note the opportunities discussed in the body of the report:

- "There is a collective interest within the Faculty of Education to re-start the PhD Program, clear evidence of administration's support to facilitate this process, and an indication of felt support from the University. Since the PhD Program was paused, a review of the structure of the MEd Program led to several changes that have been implemented in order to provide a better pathway to the PhD Program. In addition, there is a clear indication of support for workload flexibility and processes in place for further addressing workload issues related to the PhD Program."
- "The PhD is part of a growth model for a comprehensive university and better supports academic staffing both in terms of recruitment and retention. Further, following the program's Fall 2017 modifications alongside the University's focus on EDI and Indigenization, learning and curricula environments - including the effectiveness of program learning outcomes and the assessment of those learning outcomes - fully meet disciplinary and institutional standards."

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

<i>1. Re-start the intake for the existing PhD program in the Fall of 2025 or soon thereafter. This re-start will require refinement and clarity of the Program's identity, focus, purpose, rationale, student population, structure, design and delivery. 2019 to develop a statement of program outcomes.</i>	The committee acknowledges that it is unlikely that we can admit a cohort of students who share a research focus, but the faculty can continue to admit a sufficient number of students to facilitate a cohort structure through required doctoral seminar courses and other supports.
<i>2. Sustainability of a PhD (Education) Program requires a commitment of resources from the University to recruit and support students through to completion and to provide incentives for faculty to supervise and support students through involvement with their research.</i>	The committee supports this recommendation.
<i>3. Workload flexibility along with potential compensation would afford opportunities to faculty interested in supervising.</i>	The committee agrees with this recommendation.
<i>4. Although consideration of creation of an EDD or partnering with other institutions rather than reinvigoration of the PhD (Education) was discussed, restarting intake for the existing PhD was viewed as most beneficial overall for both the Faculty and external stakeholders in education.</i>	The committee agrees with this assessment.
<i>5. It is our recommendation that the University continue to award PhD degrees to those who successfully complete the PhD (Education) Program.</i>	The committee concurs with this assessment.

Dean's Response

The Dean of the Faculty of Education responded to the five (5) recommendations from the External Review Report:

<i>1. Re-start the intake for the existing PhD program in the Fall of 2025 or soon thereafter. This re-start will require refinement and clarity of the Program's identity, focus, purpose, rationale, student population, structure, design and delivery. 2019 to develop a statement of program outcomes.</i>	The Faculty of Education agrees. A faculty working group under the leadership of the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Research has developed a program structure that will see 3-5 students admitted in Fall 2025, then 3 students a year on an ongoing basis. We have created a seminar class that will stretch across a student's 3-4 years in program, that will include all active students in program (steady state n=12). We have developed 3 additional required courses that will be offered on a 2-year rotation (steady state n=6). This will provide rich opportunities to develop a sense of community
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	amongst the PhD cohort while also allowing for flexibility in terms of topics and research approaches.
2. <i>Sustainability of a PhD (Education) Program requires a commitment of resources from the University to recruit and support students through to completion and to provide incentives for faculty to supervise and support students through involvement with their research.</i>	<p>The Faculty of Education agrees. The recently signed Memorandum of Understanding with the School of Graduate Studies to provide reasonable graduate student funding creates much needed transparency and stability in terms of budget for funding Faculty of Education graduate students. We are planning to provide 'top ups' with graduate assistantships and sessional teaching contracts, as appropriate, for these students. This combination of centrally supported and faculty supported funding will provide a base funding allocation for each student.</p> <p>We have also been working alongside the SSHRC grants facilitator and ORIS to support faculty researchers in obtaining external tri-agency and other funding that will allow faculty members to provide research stipends. These efforts not only create conditions for rich research that will include graduate students but also provides needed supports and incentives to further support doctoral students. We are actively working with faculty to increase the number of successful external research funding applications.</p>
3. <i>Workload flexibility along with potential compensation would afford opportunities to faculty interested in supervising.</i>	<p>The Faculty of Education recognizes the issue of compensation for supervision of graduate work and agree in principle that acknowledging and rewarding faculty for supervising graduate students is important. We disagree on the mechanism proposed. A Faculty of Education working group is reviewing how we assign faculty workload. One possibility currently being considered is the option for tenure stream faculty whose responsibilities include research, to choose between a four-course load or a five - course load. For faculty who choose a four-course load, they would need to demonstrate (a) a record of applying for and/or receiving external research funding, or a commitment to applying for external research funding in that academic year; and (b) a record of active/current graduate student supervision or a commitment to supervising graduate students in that calendar year. We see this model as potentially beneficial for faculty members as it rewards them for the work of supervising graduate students in the academic year that they are doing that work. The reward of time (one fewer course to teach) is potentially more valuable to faculty than a small stipend. This said, a careful examination of the financial viability of such a model will be required.</p>
4. <i>Although consideration of creation of an EDD or partnering with other institutions rather than reinvigoration of the PhD (Education) was</i>	<p>The Faculty of Education agrees with the continuation of a PhD program as opposed to an EdD program for the reasons stated in the external report.</p>

discussed, restarting intake for the existing PhD was viewed as most beneficial overall for both the Faculty and external stakeholders in education.

5. *It is our recommendation that the University continue to award PhD degrees to those who successfully complete the PhD (Education) Program.*

The Faculty of Education agrees. The Faculty of Education has struck a working group to develop the plan for the 2025 intake of the PhD. This group has worked thoughtfully and diligently to develop a vision and plan for the PhD program. In spring of 2025, the working group along with the Graduate Studies and Research team will shift our focus to developing a longer-term vision for the PhD.

Consulting the External Reviewer Recommendations, the Program Response, and Dean Starr, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee made the following 7 (seven) recommendations for action which the Program must report on in 1 and 3 years:

1. In the immediate term, the Faculty of Education will prepare to restart the PhD Education program in the Fall of 2025, using the recommendations of the PhD Relaunch Working group to admit 5 students in the first year and 3 in Fall 2026. The Working Group will continue to meet regularly to discuss needed adjustments to the program.
2. To ensure consistency, admission committees should use the same criteria or combine their efforts into a single committee for all PhD admissions.
3. The Faculty of Education Graduate Office should work with the School of Graduate Studies to ensure that all policies (such as residency) are consistent and clearly communicated to the students.
4. The Faculty of Education Dean's office will ensure that there is clarity and transparency around workloads for faculty participating in the PhD Education program, acknowledging that all discussions of workload must include teaching, research (including funding and supervision), and service.
5. The Faculty of Education Dean's Office will also explore how PhD students can contribute to teaching and undergraduate education within the Faculty.
6. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the PhD Education program, the Faculty of Education will facilitate ongoing discussion to more clearly define the program going forward. These discussions should include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Defining the program's identity, objectives, and intended learning outcomes.
 - b. The target market for admissions to this program including EDI considerations.
 - c. The proper balance, including resource implications, between a cohort model and individualized programs.
7. The Deans of the Faculty of Education and the School of Graduate Studies will meet to discuss the potential of cooperating with other units or programs to find curricular synergies across the institution.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the PhD Education academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Kennedy", with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr. Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee
Chair and Associate Professor, Department of History and Religion

cc Michelle Helstein, PhD.
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)