



# Cyclical Program Review of the Bachelor of Education

## Final Assessment Report

Submitted by: Dr. Colleen Willard-Holt, Dr. Pat Rogers, Dr. Deborah MacLatchy

April 22, 2013

# **PART 1: SYNTHESIS OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS**

## **SUMMARY OF SELF-STUDY**

This was the first review of the Bachelor of Education program since its inception in 2007. This consecutive (post-baccalaureate) degree offers two streams: primary-junior to prepare teachers for kindergarten to grade 6, and junior-intermediate for grades 4-10. The junior-intermediate stream requires students to have a teaching specialization; we offer specializations in English, French as a Second Language, Math, History, Geography, Science, Health and Physical Education, Vocal Music and Instrumental Music. The primary-junior stream had an initial review and approval in 2007 by the Ontario College of Teachers and a follow-up review in 2009, which is routine for a new program; the follow-up also granted approval to begin the junior-intermediate stream. At the outset the B.Ed. program had two tenure-track/tenured faculty members and two LTA positions for 70 student spaces; it now has six tenure-track/tenured faculty members for 125 spaces. The number of spaces in the program is regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). MTCU has reduced the number of spaces in all Faculties of Education by 9% over the past three years; more reductions are forecasted. There is also discussion between MTCU and the Ministry of Education about extending the length of the current eight month program.

Unique features of the B.Ed. program at Laurier include use of a Professional Development School (PDS) model, in which students complete all of their practical experiences in one school. They spend 1.5 days every week at the school beginning the first day of school, in addition to three practica in which they are at the school full time for 9, 15, and 28 days, under the supervision of University field supervisors and Board-employed associate teachers. The PDS model implies close partnerships with four area school boards. Students complete inquiry/action research projects at their PDS sites. Distinctive emphases within the program include our approach to Aboriginal education and our experimental courses that merge interdisciplinary content areas with problem based learning, creative and critical thinking, collaboration, and digital communication. Other features of the program include incorporation of technology throughout the program (including computers, Smart boards, document cameras, Mimios, digital cameras, etc.) and a Professional Learning Seminar (PLS) which ties experiences in the schools back to theory. Students begin and end the year in professional development sessions, which are also interspersed throughout the year on Fridays.

While program faculty continue to make changes in individual courses (and are piloting some innovative ways of teaching them), we are not planning to revise the curriculum as a whole until the Ministries decide upon the provincial restructuring of B.Ed. programs. The Ontario College of Teachers' examination of the curriculum at our most recent review deemed it current and comprehensive.

The Faculty has developed a multifaceted assessment system for students, including a practicum evaluation (done four times during the year); a professional dispositions review process (done twice during the year with follow-up as necessary for individual students); and course-level learning outcomes, as reflected in grades. Such a system is necessary not only for institutional quality assurance purposes, but also to assure ourselves that our graduates are suitable for teaching in the classroom.

Students have consistently rated the teaching of the faculty members very highly, with all faculty means at or above those of the University at large. As alumni they continue to comment in follow-up surveys on the strength of our full time as well as CAS professors.

The Faculty makes the best use possible of the resources available. There are several challenges: currently 64% of courses are taught by CAS members; office space is at maximum capacity and classroom space is limited and not of the type needed for several of the courses; the few full-time faculty members (half of whom are tenure-track) are stretched thinly to cover the committee and service work of the Faculty; and the budget has been cut several

times and future restrictions in student intake predict additional curtailments. The Faculty also has very few staff members to support the work. Nonetheless, the faculty members are extraordinarily productive and engaged across the University.

There is a strong demand for entrance to the B.Ed. program, with about 1 in 12 students being accepted. Retention in the program is high, ranging from 92.4 to 100% over the five years the program has been in operation. On the recent survey, alumni rated the program “fairly well” or better on all of the program goals/degree level expectations, and more than 85% stated that they would recommend the program. Importantly, more than 88% of alumni are finding employment within one year, which is far above the provincial averages. More than 70% for each graduating year are employed as teachers, with an additional 7-16% employed in education-related fields.

## SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL REVIEWER’S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reviewers were Olive Chapman, University of Calgary, and Bob Sharpe, Wilfrid Laurier University. Following is their executive summary:

This is Laurier’s Bachelor of Education program’s first cyclical review since its approval by the Ontario College of Teachers in 2007. The program clearly sets out nine academic and professional goals for its graduates which are consistent with Laurier’s mission and academic plan’s principles and satisfy undergraduate degree levels expectations. Academic achievement requirements for admission to the program are consistent with other B.Ed. programs in Ontario and ensure adequate breadth and depth to complete the program. The program has a sound structure and design consistent with current theory of what constitutes a good teacher education program. In the context of Ontario, a unique and innovative aspect of the program is the Professional Development School model and accompanying inquiry project and significant time teacher candidates spend in schools. The curriculum of the program reflects the current state of teacher education. Modes of delivery include inquiry, experiential, and collaborative modes of learning, which are appropriate and effective in meeting program goals. Technology also plays a role in contributing to a variety of modes of delivery of course content. Most of the courses are required by the Ontario College of Teachers. Student assessment is performance based and involves approaches closely aligned with the program learning outcomes. With six full-time faculty members and an enrolment of 129 students, the B.Ed. is small, but its track record shows it to be highly attractive and successful. The program is staffed and administered by individuals who are highly competent, energetic, positive and collegial. The program is well supported in terms of library resources and an information-technology staff. Classroom space and student meeting space are very constrained. The faculty is to be commended for making effective use of limited human, physical and financial resources in the delivery of its program. However, there is concern for the sufficiency of the six faculty members to sustain this level of productivity. These faculty members all have the qualifications and experience to teach in the program with most performing at very high levels in research, teaching and service. There are approximately 25 Contract Academic Staff who teach in the program and currently (2012 – 2013) teach 79% of course sections. Students’ evaluations of teaching are very strong. The program has consistently attracted a large number of applicants and has a high retention rate. Alumni survey shows that 88% of graduates found employment within one year of graduating which are far superior to the employment rates reported for the province by the Ontario College of Teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the Review Committee recommends that the quality of the program be maintained and the following recommendations be considered as ways to further enhance the quality of the program.

### **Recommendation 1:**

Given that “inquiry is a central feature of our [the Faculty] approach to teaching and learning” (Self-study report, p. 18), consideration should be given to extend the perspective of inquiry indicated in the program goals to

explicitly include use of inquiry as a way of thinking, learning and teaching, e.g., as in inquiry-based learning and inquiry-based teaching.

**Recommendation 2:**

In addition to eliminating the Essay requirement, the Faculty should consider changing the weighting of the admission criteria in favour of Academic Scores and reduce the rating of the Experience Score as suggested by the study [conducted by Institutional Research on the Admissions process, as commissioned by the Dean].

**Recommendation 3:**

a. The Faculty should continue to develop the implementation of the PDS model so it is better aligned with the theory of what its goals should be for TECs. These goals should be better linked to “action research” [even if interpreted loosely] to improve the TECs’ understanding of self as teacher, their students, their roles, and responsibilities of teachers.

b. A distinction should be made between a school-based activity/project to support learning in a particular course (e.g., the mathematics methods course) and the PDS inquiry project in terms of their goals.

c. Given the importance of the PDS activities and the inquiry project to the program, a course should be dedicated to support them. Consideration should be given to using EU404 explicitly for this purpose or create a new course if/when the length of the program is extended. This course should have a more explicit focus on inquiry and reflection to improve and inform practice, in keeping with this goal of the program. It should help TECs to understand inquiry not only from a research-method perspective, but also as a way of thinking, learning and teaching. It should help them to understand the role of inquiry and reflection in preparing reflective teachers, what it means to reflect on their own practice, how to select inquiry questions from their own practice in spite of what is used in their inquiry projects, and the value of the inquiry project to their ongoing professional development. It should help TECs to unpack their own experiences and those of their peers at their PDS sites through living-case studies based on examples of living cases prepared by TECs that involve situations meaningful to their learning and growth.

d. If the inquiry projects have the potential for others to learn from them, there should be serious consideration and attempt to share them. In particular, for projects that are exemplary and publishable, the opportunity to make them public will be an honour for these TECs, an inspiration for prospective TECs, and a way of profiling the uniqueness of the program. There seems to be a workable solution in terms of the ethics process needed to accomplish this and the Faculty should meet with the Chair of Laurier’s Research Ethics Board, who expressed willingness to facilitate the program, to clarify the nature of the project and the need.

e. At this point of the program, there should be an evaluation (systematic study, e.g., a survey and focus-group interviews) of the school-based inquiry project to understand the issues and how to support its ongoing implementation to satisfy the goals for the TECs while making a meaningful contribution to the schools involved and the professional development of the practising teachers in these schools.

**Recommendation 4:**

a. If/when the length of the program is extended consideration should be given to adding mandatory courses in outdoor/global/environmental education, aboriginal education, assessment, and classroom management.

b. There should be more attention to coordinating due dates for course assignments. Consideration should also be given to scheduling some courses differently (e.g., 2 hours per week over year and/or 36 hours instead of 30 hours per course).

**Recommendation 5:**

a. Should space become available in the future, the Faculty should be given the opportunity to design a better quality space for teaching and learning.

b. The Faculty should extend its multi-year planning to strengthen the B.Ed. program’s focus and to carefully

consider and set reasonable priority for future program additions and extensions as well as the service contributions of full-time faculty. For example, serious consideration should be given to alternative ways of engaging full-time faculty in PhD supervision other than through implementation of a PhD program in the short term.

## SUMMARY OF UNIT RESPONSE

On the whole the reviewers' report was accurate and thorough, and the Faculty appreciates their significant contribution. The recommendations were not new to the Faculty, as most of them had been discussed in faculty meetings prior to the review as the Faculty has grappled with the best ways in which to reach its goals. Several recommendations (#1, #3abcde) revolve around the inquiry project. Faculty members are committed to revising the way that this project is approached, and have begun to meet to discuss this. Similarly, the course in which this project has resided will also need to be revised. The faculty members believe that there needs to be a focus on the action research process, as well as the development of students' skills in deep reflection. The faculty plan to seek input from alumni, principals, field supervisors and associate teachers on the new direction. The discussion regarding the "publication" of the projects will occur once the new approach to them has been devised.

Admissions criteria (recommendation #2) will be reconsidered once the data from this year's cohort are analyzed. There is little the Faculty can do regarding the recommendation for new mandatory courses or revision of scheduling (recommendation #4) until the Ministries make a decision for or against an extended program. The program faculty will discuss tweaks in scheduling. Similarly, the Faculty would welcome redesigned space (recommendation 5a) but cannot proceed with planning without University direction. The Faculty already regularly engages in multi-year strategic planning and the Dean's office makes every effort to balance the workload of faculty members; thus recommendation 5b is currently being addressed.

## PART 2: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

### IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS

The following are considered to be strengths of the B.Ed.: the program's structure, design and curriculum; the PDS model; assessment of student achievement; quality of students, staff and faculty; quality of teaching; research productivity of faculty; use of resources; alumni satisfaction; and employment statistics of graduates.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

The B.Ed. program is quite constrained in three separate ways: 1) as an eight-month program in which the equivalent of 17 weeks is spent in the schools, there is little time in which to effect large changes; 2) the number of students admitted to the program is controlled by MTCU and the topics of study are prescribed by the Education Act; 3) the Faculty is limited in terms of quantity of personnel, budget, and space. That said, there are always ways to improve a program.

- Revision of EU 404 and the inquiry project that has been part of that course is necessary. Discussions among faculty have already begun so that changes can be implemented in 2013-14. Data will be collected regarding the effectiveness of the changes over the coming year, with further revisions pending the outcome (Rec. 1 and 3).
- Analysis of admissions criteria will occur over this coming summer once data from this year are available.

Perspectives of applicants, PDS partners, recruitment staff, and faculty will be considered. Recommended changes will not be implemented until 2014-15 due to timelines to distribute information to prospective applicants and impending changes to the BEd program at the ministerial level (Rec. 2).

- Data relating to the experimental integrated courses will be analyzed and the model for Winter 2014 revised as indicated by the findings. If data indicate this is a successful model, discussions regarding additional courses to integrate will ensue (Rec 4).
- Our ongoing strategic planning discussions will be enlarged to juxtapose the Faculty's desires for community service and outreach with the teaching, research and service commitments of the University; to focus on projects which further the Faculty's and University's mission and vision, and benefit the B.Ed. program; and to explore possible community partnerships to maximize impact of projects (Rec 5).
- Utilize the IPRM process to provide input on maximizing the use of resources.
- Engage in discussions about due dates and assignments to streamline the work of the TECs, if possible.

## PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Recommendations from the external reviewers are listed in order of implementation:

**Recommendations 1 and 3** relating to revision of the inquiry project and the course in which it resides are the top priority. No additional resources other than faculty time are required, and though much reflection and discussion are required, we are confident we can devise an improved approach to pilot during 2013-14. The aspect of recommendation 3 regarding "distinguishing between a school-based activity/project and the PDS inquiry project" was the result of a misunderstanding on the part of the reviewer, and hence will not be addressed.

**Recommendation 2** regarding the admissions criteria will also be addressed over the summer months. Data from this year's cohort will allow more robust recommendations, to be considered by the admissions committee with input from PDS partners, recruitment staff, and students.

Not in the reviewers' report, but a Faculty goal would be further analysis of the experimental integrated courses will occur during the fall term, for possible revisions for repeating the courses in Winter, 2014.

While multi-year planning has been done for some time, expanding the scope of strategic planning (recommendation 5b) and contextualizing programmatic, research and outreach projects alongside other time commitments is a logical step. This will be explored beginning in the fall, but realistically may have to wait until the following year when two key faculty members return from leaves.

Coordination of due dates will be tried again. The issue of time in an eight-month program constrains the optimal rhythm of learning and assessment. There is a similar issue with course scheduling, but some readjustments will be considered in time for scheduling for 2014-15 (recommendation 4b).

Adding mandatory courses and/or time to existing courses and redesigning Faculty space (recommendations 4a and 5a) cannot proceed without action external to the Faculty.

## PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Implementation Date	Additional Notes
1. Extend the perspective of inquiry; align PDS with action research (3a); refocus EU 404 (3c); and reconsider publication of inquiry projects (3d).	Full-time Faculty	September, 2013	These recommendations are interrelated and will be addressed simultaneously. Discussions are currently underway and revisions will be implemented in Fall, 2013.
2. Consider changing the weighting of the admission criteria	Admissions Committee	Summer, 2013	
3e. Solicit input on inquiry project	Full-time faculty	September, 2013	Data will be gathered in May and analyzed in Summer, 2013, to inform possible changes in September.
4b. Coordinate due dates.	Associate Dean; Full and part time faculty	August and December, 2013	This has been tried before; another attempt will be made.
5a. Design a better-quality space for teaching and learning.	NA	NA	Depends on space availability within the University
5b. Strengthen strategic planning.	Dean, with full time faculty	Continuous, beginning Sept, 2013	
Faculty Goal: Analyze the experimental integrated courses will occur during the fall term for possible revisions for repeating the courses in Winter, 2014.	Dean, with full time faculty and course instructors	January, 2014 (with analysis in the fall)	