

Memorandum

Date: 20 March 2012

To: University Senate

From: Thomas A. Discenna, Chair
Senate Planning & Review Committee

Re: Proposal for a Masters in Education in Higher Education Leadership

The Senate Planning Review Committee (SPRC) reviewed the proposal from the Department of Educational Leadership for a new degree program leading to a Masters in Education: Higher Education Leadership. The SPRC read, reviewed, and discussed the proposal and offers the following summary and conclusions.

Summary

The Department of Educational Leadership (DEL) of the School of Education and Human Services (SEHS) proposes a new program of graduate education in Higher Education Leadership. The Masters of Education builds on the department's successful existing programs including a PhD Cognate in Higher Education Leadership and a Post-masters Certificate Program. The program requires 32 credit hours including a capstone and offers two specializations: Academic Leadership and Student Affairs Leadership. Both specializations highlight the importance of social justice in the administration of higher education through a course requirement contained in the core of the program. The DEL argues that the program will contribute to the 2020 Vision in a number of ways including: fostering the state's goal of enhancing the college education of citizens by educating new and early-career administrators as well as students looking to retrain for careers in the burgeoning field of higher education administration; providing staff development to OU employees who wish to further their educations; and branding OU as a leader in training education professionals. The program is also intended to serve as a feeder to the DEL PhD Program and is expected to facilitate relationships between OU and area community colleges as graduates of the program assume positions in those institutions.

The DEL intends to implement this program and begin recruiting students upon approval of this proposal. The HEL projects to admit 5 students in the first year with incremental increases until year three when a steady state of approximately 12-15 students per year will be admitted. The recruiting plan indicates that students will be drawn primarily from local higher education institutions including community colleges. The proposal demonstrates that at present there are no similar programs in the Metropolitan Detroit region and that the OU program is the only program of its kind in the state with a specific focus on social justice.

The DEL rationalizes this program on the basis of anticipated growth in employment in the field of higher education administration. The Bureau of Labor of Statistics projects a 14% increase in higher education administrative positions in the next decade. As cited above, OU would be the only institution in the tri-county area that would serve this growing demand. Moreover, the DEL offers as evidence of student interest surveys distributed to OU directors and their employees that indicates that they would find such a program attractive

The DEL has identified a number of peer institutions both locally and nationally including Eastern Michigan University, the University of Akron, and the University of Nevada Las Vegas that offer comparable degree programs. An analysis of these and other programs indicate that the proposed degree is consistent with its peers but that it is differentiated due its specific orientation to issues of social justice. Indeed, the DEL indicates that only a small handful of such programs in the nation contain a similar requirement to study social justice issues in the curriculum and that, moreover, such issues of diversity and inclusivity will become increasingly important in the field of higher education administration.

The program will rely primarily on three current members of the faculty and no new hires are anticipated in the first five years of implementation. Furthermore, the Library Report indicates that current resources are more than adequate to meet the needs of the new program. Finally, the DEL indicates that no new space or other equipment resources are necessary for implementation of the proposal.

The SPRC has identified the following items as strengths and concerns regarding this proposal:

Strengths

1. The committee finds that the program responds well to a projected demand for holders of this type of degree. In other words, the projections for growth in the field of higher education provided were found to be persuasive.
2. The committee also accepts the evidence offered by the department that the program fills a need within the local community and that it is distinctive from its peers.
3. The program clearly builds on the strengths of the faculty within the DEL.
4. The MEd program adds to the higher education leadership portfolio of degrees, essentially rounding out the offerings extant in the department. The committee is also convinced that the program will serve the feeder role envisioned by the department.

Weaknesses

1. The committee had serious misgivings regarding the indicators of student demand. The proposal contained a survey of 9 director level administrators at OU who indicated support for employing holders of a degree of the type proposed here. A second surey extended this to employees of these administrators who, similarly, indicated their desire

for such a program. The committee was not persuaded by either of these instruments, noting serious flaws in sampling.

2. On a related note, the committee is also concerned that the entire program has the appearance of constituting something of a “closed loop” wherein present OU employees are sent back to OU to receive further education from OU. The committee expressed a number of misgivings regarding this closed loop:

a. We are concerned that this will lead to a certain narrowness of vision that attends to receiving all of one’s education at a single institution, an institution where those students are currently employed. We would maintain that diversity refers as well to diversity of thought and opinion, which is facilitated by learning in different environments.

b. The committee is also concerned that two items in the rationale for the program refer directly to offering education to current employees and that this rationale emanates from the 2020 Vision. Our reading of the 2020 Vision does not indicate that OU has a goal of providing educational opportunities for its employees.

3. The committee expressed some concerns regarding the social justice orientation of the program. One concern questions whether a single course devoted to Educational Equity was sufficient to characterize the entire program as committed to such issues. A second concern questions whether such an orientation doesn’t overtly politicize the academic study of higher education.

4. In examining the curriculum, the committee also finds that the Capstone internship requirement falls well short of what many on the committee believe an internship should be. The requirements of the capstone include 50 hours of work with a mentor in activities such as observing the mentor and discussing with the mentor organizational theory and the student’s career development. Perhaps this needs to be renamed but it does not seem to rise to the standard of an internship as we understand the practice.

5. Finally, the committee is concerned that while there will certainly be an increase in demand for higher education administrators we question whether this growth will be positive for universities. We note recent data that suggests that administration constitutes a growing percentage of institutional budgets and is a major driver of the increasing cost of higher education.

Therefore, the SPRC, by a vote of 2-1 with two members absent and two members abstaining, supports the Masters of Education in Higher Education Leadership.