



Higher Education Consortium
for Special Education

A Position Paper of the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education

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Indicators of Quality in Special Education Doctoral Programs

Adopted by the HECSE Membership on April 25, 1984

CURRENTLY UNDER REVISION

PREAMBLE

The Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) is a professional association comprised of Colleges and Universities that offer comprehensive educational programs in preparing special education personnel. Institutions of Higher Education programs must offer not only the doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) but must demonstrate excellence in a number of special education programs offerings in order to be eligible for membership in HECSE.

It has long been the consensus of the membership of HECSE that, since doctoral programs produce the majority of individuals who have assumed leadership roles in the field of special education, doctoral programs should be of the highest quality. At the present time, there are few, if any, specific guidelines or standards that provide direction for the development of special education doctoral programs. The Council for Exceptional Children, in April, 1983, accepted a set of proposed Standards in Special Education, as well as a Code of Ethics. The Professional Standards Committee of CEC is now seeking to interpret each standard and to develop implementation procedures. While the CEC Standards and Code of Ethics is a welcome addition to the establishing of quality indicators of doctoral degree institutions, it addresses the entire range of preparation, in contrast to this Position Paper, which seeks to address the issue of "indicators of quality" for doctoral programs only. It is anticipated that the HECSE Position paper will be constant with current NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) standards and with the Council for Exceptional Children standards yet to be implemented. The HECSE position paper is designed to accommodate the wide diversity of programmatic thrusts of doctoral programs, while responding to their needs for self-analysis.

It is the hope of HECSE that this Position Paper will serve as a guide for the development and evaluation of special education doctoral programs.

PHILOSOPHY

Doctoral programs within the field of special education are designed to provide leadership personnel for a wide diversity of settings. The doctoral programs themselves may well reflect this diversity, but each program also reflects a basic theoretical perspective and a cohesive program design which complements its objectives and which is constant with the goals of the broader mission statement of the institution in which it exists. While the program has a clearly defined philosophy, within program boundaries there is ample evidence of academic freedom to pursue that philosophy and the goals and objectives of the program in multiple ways. Basic, however, is the utilization of a research-base drawn from the behavioral and social sciences and explicated in a variety of ways, including the demonstrated expertise by faculty in

their research efforts and teaching. Doctoral level faculty in their research efforts and teaching. Doctoral level faculty are prime contributors to the literature of the profession. Competency and integrity are implicit within the preparation program for both faculty and students.

A large number of variables reflective of this basic philosophy have been explored, and the Ad Hoc Committee hereby recommends that the following guidelines be accepted. It is anticipated that the Position Paper will be intermittently reviewed and updated by the HECSE membership.

GUIDELINE 1:

There should be a clear definition of the mission of the special education doctoral program.

Each institution of higher education that offers a doctoral program in special education should have a clearly defined statement of its mission. This mission statement should be written in such a manner that it accomplishes three primary tasks. First, the mission should be able to serve as the conceptual underpinning for all major activities associated with the doctoral program. Second, it should serve as the basis for making decisions about short- and long-range planning and development. Finally, the mission should serve as a guide for the role of faculty members in the implementation of the mission. The remainder of this section describes the minimum topics that should be addressed within the mission statement.

The mission should specify the context within which the doctoral program operates in order to identify the major forces to which it responds in meeting the needs for special education leadership personnel. This part of the mission should describe how the institution of higher education is organized and governed and how the program fits into this structure. The relationship of the program and institution to any unique policy-making bodies, such as a state Council on Public Higher Education, should also be specified.

The major responsibilities that have been assigned to the doctoral program should also be specified in the mission statement. Similarly, if the program has adopted any unique programs as its responsibility, these should be described. For example, Departmental faculty may have decided that their particular program is particularly suited for the preparation of leadership personnel in the area of special education policy analysis. Likewise, a State governing board may have assigned the specific responsibility of preparing personnel in the area of Deaf education.

The mission should include a specification of goals for the doctoral program. These are broad, general statements under which can be subsumed specific objectives and subsequent priorities for program operation and development.

The statements of objectives and priorities should serve to accomplish a number of things. They should reflect the commonalities that the doctoral program has with other similar programs. In addition, they should identify the uniqueness of that particular program.

The objectives should, at the same time, be specific enough to form the basis for programmatic decision making, yet be broad enough to subsume all of the activities associated with the doctoral program. They should also provide sufficient flexibility to permit program modifications and growth.

Ideally, the mission statement should include both product and process objectives that can serve to guide the activities of faculty who are involved in the implementation of the mission. Such objectives might focus upon topics such as individualization of instruction for doctoral students, competency based programming, or philosophical positions such as non-categorical special education service delivery.

Through the process of defining positions on important issues, faculty can determine areas of agreement and disagreement that may facilitate or impair the implementation of the mission. By stating these in a formal mission statement, persons external to the Department will be able to better understand the

purposes and operation of the doctoral program. Such a statement should have particular relevance for third-party evaluators.

The existence of a written mission statement will also be useful in the recruitment of new faculty. Program continuity will be enhanced because replacement faculty will have a thorough understanding of the operation of the program. Similarly, recruitment of doctoral students will be facilitated because applicants should be able to determine the biases of faculty as reflected in the mission statement. Thus, they will be able to determine whether these biases are consistent with their own value systems and whether that particular program would meet their needs.

Doctoral-level students should be involved in the definition of the mission statement and the objects and priorities of the doctoral program, as appropriate. Perhaps at no other level of education is the necessity for direct involvement of the student “consumer” of more importance or interest than in doctoral programs.

Also to be taken into account must be external agencies at the state and national level, particularly those that provide external evaluation of the doctoral programs across public and private institutions and across disciplines. The “quality indicators” utilized by such external review boards are similar in scope and intent to the guide provided in this document.

GUIDELINE 2:

Roles and functions to be performed by graduates of the doctoral program should be specified.

Special education doctoral programs should have a clearly specified statement of the roles for which students are being prepared.

Permeating ALL roles performed by graduates of the doctoral programs are the skills and abilities which have emerged as a result of advanced graduate training in scholarship and research. Inherent in the success of graduates is their ability to solve problems based upon their previous demonstrated success in scholarly and research endeavors. Roles which have been previously identified for graduates of doctoral special education programs have been those of Teacher Educator in institutions of higher education (IHEs), Researcher in IHEs, governmental agencies and elsewhere, Program Administrator or Supervisor in Local Education Agencies, State Education Agencies and government agencies. Other emerging roles for special education leadership personnel include, but are not limited to: Consultant, Legislative Staff Member, Coordinator of Technology, Public Policy, Advocacy and Due Process Expert and Instructional Designer. While the roles and functions performed by graduates may appear to vary widely, all require thoughtful and insightful individuals with highly developed skills in the identification, assessment, and resolution of human and technological concerns.

Whatever the roles students are prepared for, there should be a clear statement in the catalogs, handbooks, and other written materials disseminated to prospective students. In addition, the faculty should also have clear ideas about what these roles are, since such information constitutes a parameter which influences recruitment and admission questions, and dissertation topics and methodology.

GUIDELINE 3:

The competencies associated with each professional role should be identified.

Each of the various roles for which students are being prepared requires certain competencies. The competencies should be delineated in such a way that those common to more than one role are identified along with those that are peculiar to each role.

A clear statement of competencies should show the influence of the program philosophy, the realities of the workplace, and the demands of the profession. In turn, such a statement will influence the

prerequisites for admission, the structure and design of the program, the selection of coursework, the requirements for practical and other program-relevant variables.

In specifying competencies, these should be related to the functions that are associated with the various roles previously identified. For example, the role of Teacher Educator would involve several functions, including instruction, supervision of practicum, advising, program development, evaluation, and others. The competencies should be subsumed by the functions. They should also represent higher order behaviors and they should lend themselves to the development of a manageable program.

GUIDELINE 4:

Instructional objectives should be specified for each competency that has been identified.

Competency statements should flow naturally into associated lists of instructional objectives. Indeed, sometimes they are one and the same.

In addition to cognitive objectives, affective, experiential, and consequential objectives should also be included in the program, as appropriate. The objectives should be conveyed to the students through course syllabi.

Instructional objectives, by definition, include an indication of how one would judge their attainment. Quality training programs should have several converging measures of the attainment of objectives. Procedures should be developed to ensure that competencies that consist of clusters of objectives are appropriately evaluated.

GUIDELINE 5:

Program faculty are productive scholars, researchers, and practitioners who provide doctoral level students with appropriate instruction and experiences. Such faculty serve as models and mentors.

The “quality” of the faculty may be demonstrated and measured along a large number of parameters. Indeed, it is the quality of the faculty in comprehensive doctoral training programs which is the program’s greatest asset. It is the faculty who largely contribute to the perception and/or reputation of program excellence, and it is the willingness of that faculty to share their skills and knowledge with doctoral students that provides the climate of enhanced learning which represents the finest of academic environments.

Not only do program faculty show evidence of productivity in research and writing, as demonstrated by their curriculum vitae and their national reputations, but they provide doctoral students with significant opportunities to interact with them. Faculty are available to students on an ongoing basis and demonstrate concern and interest in their progress toward the terminal degree. This may include cooperative research efforts, when appropriate to the faculty and students’ areas of interest. Active and ongoing research is the hallmark of quality doctoral training programs.

In addition, faculty in quality comprehensive doctoral programs continue to enhance their skills through a professional development plan that reveals evidence of continuing growth in their chosen field.

Individually, faculty demonstrate superior teaching skills, and as a group, the faculty in a comprehensive program reveal a wide range of knowledge which is reflected in course offerings and practical experience, as well as in their scholarly work.

GUIDELINE 6:

Program content should be current and related to the instructional objectives that have been specified for the program.

If the program faculty have carefully thought through the roles, the competencies for each role, and the instructional objectives for each competency for each role, and the instructional objectives for each competency, the program will demonstrate certain content areas. Naturally, content that has been selected for inclusion in the program should reflect the most current thinking relative to the subject to be studied.

Evidence of program content should be in the form of course syllabi that specify the topics to be studied, their sequence, and the readings and resources that will be required of the students.

GUIDELINE 7:

The structure of the doctoral program should be such that the competencies are developed and demonstrated.

The structure of the doctoral program includes two basic elements. The first element is a written description of the scope of the program. A second element is a written description of how the program will be arranged.

Program Scope

A doctoral program for an individual usually includes components that are common to all students. In addition, it also includes components that are unique to the professional goals of the individual.

Common program parts consist of knowledge that all doctoral level special educators should acquire. For example, historical milestone, medical aspects of exceptional conditions, issues and trends, social and psychological factors in exceptionalities, to list a few, typically form an area of study known as special education foundations. Other common program parts include, but are not limited to, research skills, curriculum development, instructional methods, media and technology, and program management procedures.

Unique program aspects address professional role expectations. For instance, a student selection of a specific future role will influence the actual description of the program scope. Program planning questions then must be: How can common program parts and role choice be integrated to serve a student's professional goals? In addition, what can the program provide that is unique to a specific professional role?

Program scope, then, is a clear statement of common and unique parts of a doctoral program. It conveys the integrity of the profession; but it is also responsive to individual student goals. That is, there is a body of special education knowledge that transcends roles. Simultaneously, there are also unique sets of knowledge that may be expanded beyond the acquisition point required of all that serve professional role choices of individual students.

Evidence related to program scope should be apparent from the written program plans of students enrolled in the doctoral program. Comparison of plans across students should demonstrate both those areas in which a common core of experience exists and the portion of the program that is unique to each student.

Program Structure

Once the scope of the doctoral program has been defined, the program structure for the implementation of the scope is designed. Program scope describes somewhat broad, yet comprehensive, areas of knowledge to be acquired. In contrast, program structure is a description of the means and the ordering of those means, used to achieve the program scope.

Means include such recognizable approaches as courses, seminars, and practica; the formal aspects of doctoral programs. Means also include informal aspects; those hard to describe or prescribe learning experiences that arise from student-faculty, student-student, and other human to human interactions.

How means are ordered is the sequence of the program. Should all formal courses be completed prior to practica and internship? Or should application of knowledge be concurrent with its acquisition? Sequence is akin to pacing, a movement from basic acquisition to refinement to proficient application.

Program scope, then, must be arranged in a manner that will result in a student being prepared to assume the particular role being developed in the doctoral program. It also should be arranged in a way that changes in student role choices can be managed without undue penalty in time or resources.

Program scope and structure will vary considerably from institution to institution. Quality indicators related to these factors include the existence of both didactic instruction and practicum experiences. In addition, there should be specific coursework and practica that are geared specifically at the doctoral level. It is insufficient, for example, to require that students take additional coursework that they may not have had but that may be required of masters degree students in other areas, simply to accumulate a sufficient number of credit hours.

GUIDELINE 8:

Management of the doctoral program should result in the efficient and effective delivery of the instructional program.

Management and administration address three basic components that represent a doctoral programs' gestalt. The components are: (a) resources, (b) activities supported by the resources, and (c) outcomes that activities are designed to achieve.

The most important resource is, of course, a qualified and productive faculty. Other resources consist of capable student, dollars, space, library, clinics, other agencies, faculty from other departments, and equipment of all types. Resources must be specified and in place to support program activities. Effective management ensures that people and other resources are available to complete planned activities.

If program activities are to be realized, the activities or program structure must be in place. In addition, these activities must function as planned if the outcomes are to be attained. Again, effective management provides checkpoints and controls to see that activities are completed.

A management plan provides for the accumulation of evidence that resources and activities are being used in a manner that achieves program outcomes. That is, do resources and activities actually result in planned outcomes? If they do not, then, program changes are necessary. A plan for program management allows students, faculty, and administrators to determine if all components of a program design are functioning as intended.

GUIDELINE 9:

The doctoral program should have an evaluation plan that is implemented systematically.

Evaluation, as used in this quality indicator, is different from the evaluation that is done of student performance described under Guideline 4. Rather, the emphasis here is on the effectiveness of the faculty and associated resources that are involved in the delivery of the doctoral program. Evidence should be provided that the evaluation plan is followed and that program revisions are made, based upon the data that are collected through the implementation of the evaluation plan.

At minimum, the evaluation plan should contain the five elements that are described in this section of the Guidelines.

Areas of Evaluation Concern

The broad areas of the program that impact upon program quality should be identified and a rationale developed for why these areas should be evaluated. At minimum, the areas that should be of concern for every doctoral program in special education should include the following:

- The quality of faculty who teach in the doctoral program;
- Student performance;
- The quality of students who are enrolled in the program;
- The appropriateness of the doctoral curriculum;
- The psychological and physical environment in which the doctoral program is offered;
- The policies and procedures associated with the operation of the doctoral program;
- The nature and adequacy of the resources that are available to faculty and students in the doctoral program, including the library, computer facilities, equipment, laboratory facilities, student financial aid, practicum sites, and fiscal resources (see also Guideline 10);
- The degree to which graduates of the program perceive the program as appropriate preparation for professional employment; and
- The collective productivity of the graduates over time, that is, their contributions to the profession in terms of research, publications, and service.

Evaluation Questions

For each of the areas of concern, an evaluation question or questions should be specified. These questions should identify the critical variables that faculty believe to be important in evaluating program quality.

Evaluation Instruments

Types of data to be collected in order to answer each evaluation question should be specified. Instruments that are used to collect the evaluation data should also be included in the evaluation plan.

Evaluation Procedures

Procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting the evaluation data should be described. Such procedures should include timelines that will show the sequence and frequency of the evaluation procedures. Persons responsible for the evaluation should also be identified.

Decision Making

A synopsis of pertinent evaluation findings should be provided. Descriptions of how elements in the doctoral program have been revised, based upon evaluation findings, should also be included.

GUIDELINE 10:

Fiscal support for faculty research and teaching, for doctoral student support, and for staff support and instrumentation is present in sufficient quantities to assure a quality educational program.

High quality doctoral programs in special education are supported both intellectually and fiscally by their institutions. That support is demonstrated in the hiring of tenure-line faculty of great promise, the tenuring of exceptional individuals, and the continuing fiscal support of research and training efforts. This support is likely to be a mixture of internal and external support, since doctoral programs frequently

have research and training activities which are linked to local, state-wide or national agendas. However, support in the form of scholarships, tuition waivers, graduate or teaching assistantships, etc., is also a measure of the institution's evaluation of the graduate program.

Administrative and peer support of the program's efforts may be found in internal review reports. External support of research and doctoral training efforts is also a measure of the excellence of the program. Alumni activity and support of the doctoral program also reflects the esteem in which quality doctoral level education is held. Thus, fiscal support, an important variable, may be obtained via a number of constituencies, and is likely to vary depending upon the priorities and constraints of each of the named constituencies over time.

EPILOGUE

This document reflects the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education's attempt to deal directly with the concept of "quality" in doctoral special education training programs. As such, it attempts to make explicit that which is implicit. "Quality" is defined in the lexicon of the dictionary as a "peculiar and essential characteristic." Thus, this document is designed to clarify the unique and essential characteristics of doctoral programs through a series of guideline statements which may be used by such programs to monitor and evaluate programmatic structure, content, faculty, and students. While "quality" is to some degree, in the eye of the beholder it is capable of being made at least partially manifest through Guidelines such as these.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS POSITION PAPER

During the Spring of 1983, the HECSE membership authorized the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to examine the issues related to the quality of special education preparation of a report that would describe the major variables associated with the perceived quality of such programs. Members of the Ad Hoc Committee were Drs. Edward Blackhurst, University of Kentucky; Katharine Butler, Syracuse University, who chaired the committee; Leon Hurley, Georgia State University; and Richard Whelan, University of Kansas.

The initial draft of "INDICATORS OF QUALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A POSITION PAPER OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION" underwent intensive peer review at the November, 1983 membership meeting of HECSE. The revised version was prepared in December, 1983, by the Ad Hoc Committee and was presented for final review by the Executive Board and Membership of HECSE. Final action on the document was taken in Spring, 1984, at which time the document was formally adopted by the HECSE membership.

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