



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

105 Garfield Avenue • P.O. Box 4004 • Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

Date: May 14, 2021

To: Provost and Vice Chancellor, Patricia Kleine

From: MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY SENATE ACADEMIC POLICIES COMMITTEE

Subject: APC report regarding program review of the Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices

The Academic Policies Committee (APC) appreciates the time and effort of Chair, Cathy Thorsen of the Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices, the members of the Internal Review Committee (Nicholas Beltz, Mary Beth Tusing, Kyle Whipple) and the external reviewer (Dr. Wendy Murawski) for the review of the Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices. The internal review committee and external reviewer reports provided the committee useful information to assist us in forming our recommendations. While the APC recommendations are generally summarized on the attached spreadsheet, APC is providing additional details in the form of this letter.

COMMENDATIONS:

The Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices is to be commended for the following:

1. A new department name that exemplifies its commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for the administrators, faculty, and staff who work with or within.
2. The establishment of a new comprehensive major.
3. The department's ability to rapidly align curricula and new major with Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) standards.
4. Teaching excellence awards recognizing faculty at the university and college level.
5. Improvements to pre-program advising and collaboration with ARCC.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Undergraduate Students Time-to-degree/Credits-to-degree.** It is unclear what impact the new majors will have on the department's time-to-degree and credits-to-degree problems, but these have been persistent areas of concern. It is apparent from the information provided to the committee that these items are one of the reasons for the low 4-year graduation rates observed in the program. It should also be noted that enrollment caps have been put into place due to lack of instructional staffing that also contribute to this concern. As the department continues its alignment with DPI standards and new major roll out, curricula and course refinements should lead to reduction in these areas.

2. **Review Form (Excel) recommendations that APC left blank (item #1).** The Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices is requesting to operate with 10.5 FTE. According to the program narrative and internal review reports, faculty morale and a desire for a more flexible workload have been persistent themes within the department. The APC supports departments exploring alternative workload models when guidance and/or resources have not been provided/considered at either the college or university level. It was suggested that the department

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Academic Policies Committee

University Senate

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consider alternative course funding models (like ones used in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders) to possibly fund faculty lines as it pursues online course offerings.

Summary Recommendation:

The Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices is doing a great job in providing a distinctive, rigorous, and highly regarded undergraduate program. For the program to continue in these efforts, the APC recommends these immediate actions:

- Explore ways to increase online program offerings for existing and non-traditional students
- Explore ways to increase continuing education opportunities for current teaching professionals
- Consider opportunities for inter-departmental collaboration in course delivery
- Continue to explore ways to attract and retain more students and faculty of color

APC strongly supports the recommendation from all the other review levels to “continue in present form” considering the recommendations made above.

Cc.

Dr. Cathy Thorsen, Chair, Department of Special Education and Inclusive Practices

Dr. Mary Hoffman, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs