

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (COE)

December 2024

INTRODUCTION

The University of Iowa (UI) Operations Manual requires that reviews of colleges and programs be conducted regularly, and the internal and external review can emphasize specific areas of focus. In accordance with this operating procedure, UI Executive Vice President and Provost Kevin Kregel formed the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the College of Education (“the Review Committee”) and charged it to conduct a review of the College of Education (COE) and to prepare this report. The Review Committee members are listed in Appendix A.

Materials Consulted and Individuals/Groups Interviewed

Materials used to inform the Review Committee include the provost’s charge for the review, the 2017 COE review report, and the COE’s 2024 self-study. Individuals and groups interviewed were selected by the Provost’s Office and included UI leadership and individuals from the COE and its affiliated units. Interviews were conducted via Zoom on November 18–20, 2024. A full list of those interviewed appears in Appendix B.

Charge for Focused Review

In its charge to the Review Committee, the Provost’s Office identified four specific areas to be addressed, as follows: Has the College of Education

1. Developed metrics to gauge student success, and if so, what has been the outcome?
2. Audited the graduate programs and made adjustments based on demand?
3. Developed a sustainable financial plan to manage the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health?
4. Described and demonstrated the approach to transparent communication around the COE’s budget?

In addition, the Review Committee identified three additional areas that merit attention:

5. Communication in general within the COE and between central COE administration and units of the COE
6. Stresses surrounding graduate student funding and support (especially international graduate students)
7. Role and importance of research in the COE

The seven areas listed above constitute the main subheadings of this report.

FINDINGS

Strengths of the College of Education (COE)

The COE is a major contributor to the UI and the State of Iowa, and it has a range of impressive, highly respected institutes, centers, and faculty. The COE has international recognition for its research endeavors.

Institutional leaders expressed confidence in the leadership of the COE and commended how COE leaders support institutional initiatives. COE Dean Daniel Clay is reported to be a good UI citizen, a highly regarded leader, and institutionally minded. He is perceived as a team player who is invested in the success of UI writ large.

The COE has highly dedicated faculty and staff. Plans for leadership development and faculty development are in place. The COE has a culture of continuous improvement. It has strong support for writing grant applications and securing grants.

The Review Committee acknowledges the COE's entrepreneurial efforts. It has grown considerably in the last 7 years; enrollment was reported to have doubled since the last review period, which was one of the COE's strategic priorities.

The COE serves an important role in meeting mental health needs across the State of Iowa. It is investing in this area, including rural mental health initiatives. The COE is also aware of areas of need outside Iowa and is branding itself to serve varied communities, including more urban locations. It has further branded itself as a college focused on mental health (e.g., the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health) and as a place to prepare educators who serve changing needs in education and related fields.

The COE provides many innovative programs for a diverse group of undergraduate and graduate students. Roughly twenty-five percent of the COE's undergraduates are first-generation college students.

Since the last review period, the COE has invested resources into the Lindquist Center, reviving the space to be more desirable and to increase student, faculty, and staff belonging and engagement. These infrastructural improvements include a café and student gathering areas.

1. Has the College of Education developed metrics to gauge student success, and if so, what has been the outcome?

Yes, the COE has developed metrics to gauge student success. The COE demonstrates a commitment to continuous quality improvement. At the collegiate level, these metrics include graduation rate, retention, time to graduation, enrollment, student satisfaction, "yield" (the percentage of admitted applicants who attend), employment outcomes, and others.

The COE has made positive changes informed by its metrics. Notable examples include hiring a student retention specialist and implementing direct admissions for undergraduate education students. These efforts have improved time to graduation, fostered stronger cohort relationships, and enhanced the sense of community among students.

During interviews, stakeholders noted that the COE uses at least nine different data collection tools across programs. While these tools provide diverse metrics and valuable insights, they also create challenges in cohesion, transparency, and ownership of the data. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the inconsistent use of these tools and the lack of clarity regarding how metrics are developed, shared, and applied to decision-making processes. Questions arose about how data are used for decision making and whether certain areas of performance are accurately captured. This lack of cohesion presents an opportunity to enhance the use and communication of data across the COE.

Programs within the COE have their own unique metrics due to different accreditation requirements and other idiosyncratic factors. The COE is also collecting college-level data. This combination of centralized and decentralized data results in variability and misalignment between central administration and individual programs. Stakeholders emphasized the need for clearer coordination to ensure consistency and shared understanding of how metrics are developed and used across the college.

The COE also uses student satisfaction surveys and employment outcomes as indicators of success. However, stakeholders expressed concerns that satisfaction data may be overemphasized at the expense of other critical metrics. The COE incorporates market research from external consultants like Hanover Research to evaluate and adjust programs, but the process lacks transparency, leaving stakeholders uncertain about how data are used.

The COE's strategic mission includes "belonging," yet stakeholders identified the lack of formal metrics to measure perceptions of belonging as a critical gap. Without actionable data, the COE cannot fully address barriers to inclusivity and engagement. Developing an assessment of belonging would strengthen alignment with the COE's strategic plan.

Overall, the Review Committee recommends that the COE clarify how student success data are collected, shared, and used. The COE should streamline and coordinate its multiple data tools to improve transparency, consistency, and ownership of metrics. Specific actions include developing collaborative and transparent mechanisms to ensure the data are useful and relevant to the unique needs of its programs (e.g., accreditation) while also aligning with strategic goals; transparently linking metrics to actionable decisions, such as funding allocations and curriculum adjustments; and providing annual progress reports to foster accountability and continuous improvement.

2. Has the COE audited the graduate programs and made adjustments based on demand?

Yes, the COE performs evaluations of its graduate programs regularly and consistently in terms of enrollment, market demand, student satisfaction, and time to degree. The evaluation of each program is different based on the specific nature of each program and whether the program requires accreditation. The COE offers many graduate programs that address the diverse needs of the state.

The COE has closed several programs (e.g., Schools, Culture, and Society; Couples and Family Therapy) based on their audits. Decisions to create new programs were based on information from Hanover Research, market demand (including evaluation of what peer institutions are offering), trends, and the needs of the state and students.

For graduate students in programs that are being closed, the COE has been careful to continue to support and advise them so that they can complete their degree program. The associate dean has been proactive in setting up meetings with all affected students to ensure their needs are met.

Challenges remain. Some stakeholders expressed surprise and disappointment surrounding the closure of certain programs. Some concern was expressed as to whether the programs were closed for purely economic reasons, and whether those decisions might undermine the mission and values of the COE. Some were disappointed by how the decisions were communicated, with individuals expressing frustration over their lack of voice in the process.

Supporting graduate students is expensive and puts a financial burden on the COE, but graduate students are essential to achieve the research mission of the COE. The Review Committee senses tension between perceived economically driven decision making in graduate programs and how graduate programs, especially doctoral programs, affect the COE's research mission. Moreover, some interviewees reported that there has been suboptimal communication about how such decisions are made and whose voices are being included in the decision making. There does not appear to be a clear protocol to guide graduate programs in achieving their goals. Some interviewees expressed that expectations are not always clear. There is a need for clear communication about these issues to allow programs to be proactive in anticipating and making decisions.

Concern was expressed by interviewees about faculty workload. It was reported that since the last review period there has been increased burden on faculty to mentor graduate students and teach larger courses. Additionally, the COE's reliance on faculty with one-year or two-year contracts since the last review period has grown. This places strain on longer-term faculty to fill in the gaps in advising, mentoring, and service responsibilities. Similarly, there appears to be an uneven, increased workload for program coordinators in the COE.

The Review Committee recommends that the COE develop and communicate clearer expectations regarding how the success of graduate programs is measured and how decisions are made regarding when to launch, adjust, revive, or close programs. The COE should ensure those programs that are in danger of being sunset have opportunities to make adjustments that might allow them to improve, or at least prepare for these changes.

3. Has the COE developed a sustainable financial plan to manage the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health (the Scanlan Center)?

Funding of the Scanlan Center is perhaps the most crucial challenge facing the COE at present. COE leadership is in the process of developing and defining a financial plan to manage the Scanlan Center. This task is urgently important because the Scanlan Center is a valuable

differentiator for the COE. It meets a highly important need for the State of Iowa. To mention one key example, the Scanlan Center provides crisis response and intervention to Iowa schools that have experienced a tragedy and provides on-the-ground support to communities in need. This is important, impactful, and unique work.

The COE had an initial infusion of \$20 million from the State of Iowa over three years to create the Scanlan Center. Presently the Scanlan Center's annual operating budget is \$1.5 million. The challenge is to take something that was developed with the large initial infusion of funding and right-size the work for the current funding. There have been challenges in adjusting to the current available funds.

Issues the COE and the Scanlan Center should consider as they develop a sustainable financial plan include the following:

- a. **Core Responsibilities:** Current funding does not cover the scope of all the operations. The COE and Scanlan Center leadership must define core responsibilities that can be realistically supported by the Scanlan Center's current \$1.5 million annual operating budget.
- b. **Revenue Forecasting:** The COE and Scanlan Center leadership are exploring additional revenue streams, including philanthropy, charging fees for services provided, billing insurance for services, and future research and training grants. However, the timing of these potential revenue sources remains uncertain. The COE may consider developing different forecasting models for future funding to guide future operational plans.
- c. **Service Fees:** Initially the Scanlan Center provided services free of charge. The Scanlan Center must now consider if people will be willing to pay for services that were available *gratis* in the past. (This relates to the point immediately above about finances being uncertain.) It is difficult to know what the demand will be going forward.
- d. **Bridge Funding:** Some bridge funding may be available, providing the Scanlan Center with temporary leeway. If the Scanlan Center is not able to stay within its \$1.5 million annual operating budget, then the COE can explore other options—e.g., the COE has a \$2 million bridge fund. The COE and Scanlan Center leadership need to work together to decide the level of risk they are willing to take when continuing some operations until additional revenue or funding comes in.
- e. **Collaborative Leadership:** Developing a sustainable financial plan requires close collaboration between the COE and Scanlan Center leadership. While this work provides an opportunity for Scanlan Center leadership to develop financial leadership capabilities, COE leadership needs to provide scaffolding and support for Scanlan Center leadership as they identify the core mission of the center, develop forecasting models for future funding, estimate the demand for services, and determine the level of risk that they are willing to take in using bridge funding.

The Review Committee recommends that the COE leadership and Scanlan Center leadership collaborate to develop a sustainable financial plan for the Scanlan Center and ensure that mentorship is available as the Scanlan Center determines how best to operate in the wake of shifting levels of future funding.

4. Has the COE described and demonstrated the approach to transparent communication around the COE's budget?

The COE has described its approach to transparent communication around the COE's budget through shared governance processes, including regular budget meetings with its center and institute directors, department executive officers (DEOs), the faculty advisory committee, Executive Council (which consists of the dean, associate deans, and DEOs), the Research Advisory Committee, and other groups of stakeholders at town hall meetings, all-COE faculty and staff meetings, and other venues.

Stakeholder interviews revealed that COE leadership budget communication is often at the local (unit) level and may be uneven in frequency and quality across units. Therefore, current standardized messaging about the budget may be less common due to the decentralized nature of communication.

While the Review Committee received detailed information about the COE's budget itself, there was little clarity about *how* decisions are made and how faculty and staff may influence those decisions. Interviewees described the communication at Executive Council meetings as inconsistent. Some said it was clear, transparent, and understandable; others reported that the key drivers of the budget were unclear.

Questions emerged about how the COE's current budget model is driving faculty workload. The COE has been increasing class sizes. Faculty expressed concerns about how enrollment growth did not seem to result in additional support for increased class sizes. They described increased workloads associated with supervising and advising students and decreased support from teaching assistants. Thus, a disconnect exists between the COE's enrollment growth and its current support for faculty, program coordinators, and teaching assistants.

Faculty reported feeling concerned about the expectation to do more work with fewer resources. They reported having to take on the advising of more graduate students and to teach larger classes.

Faculty expressed a desire to enhance the COE's research mission, but this is hindered with the COE's current emphasis on growing enrollment while minimizing expenses. The Review Committee perceived that research, and the prioritization of research, is not well connected to the COE's current budget model. There is tension between the perceived economically driven decision making in the graduate program and how it affects the COE's research mission. (This issue is closely tied to that in the section that starts on page 3 titled "Has the COE audited the graduate programs and made adjustments based on demand?")

There are also concerns about the effects of one- and two-year faculty appointments. Limited-term appointments do not seem to be a strategic way to grow the COE, and they certainly do not grow its research mission in sustaining ways.

The Review Committee recommends that the COE build on improvements in transparent communication around the COE budget by providing consistent, clear information on how decisions are made and how faculty and staff may influence them. Regular updates should be established to ensure understanding across all programs.

5. Communication in general with the college and between central COE administration and units of the COE

The structure of the COE is complex with its multiple disciplines, programs, and interactions with community school districts and external accrediting bodies. This complexity naturally creates challenges in ensuring that all COE faculty, staff, and students are informed of collegiate-level decisions and the processes by which they are made. These communication challenges are an important area of focus for the dean and associate deans. The COE's decentralized structure, designed to address these complexities, further complicates communication efforts.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the communication challenges faced by COE leadership. Issues exist on a local level. Innovations like the Strategy Teams and town hall meetings are important steps toward addressing these inherent challenges.

The COE's decentralized structure has created perceptions of inequity across the COE and a lack of clarity around decision making processes. The Review Committee suggests that the COE create decision-making processes that specify who has voice in what decisions, who will make them, and who will simply be informed about them. Some individuals reported feeling left out of the decision-making process when they thought they should have been involved. Town hall meetings do not seem to be fully effective at present.

Feedback about trust in COE leadership was mixed. Not everybody interviewed expressed trust in COE leadership; others expressed full trust in COE leadership. Continuous efforts to increase the transparency of decision-making processes provide an avenue to increase trust.

The Review Committee recommends that COE leadership develop and communicate clearer expectations and norms about how decisions are made and how information is shared across the college, ensuring consistency across the COE's unique entities.

6. Stresses surrounding graduate student funding and support, especially for international graduate students

Funding Ph.D. students is expensive (or at least more expensive than hiring adjunct instructors), but Ph.D. students are critical to the research mission of the COE. Currently, graduate students are not guaranteed COE funding for their full degree program. This makes it difficult for some to get through their degree program. There has been some confusion and frustration about funding being discontinued or not renewed when graduate students expected it to be renewed or continued. The lack of guaranteed funding also likely makes it more difficult to recruit top graduate students to COE programs.

International graduate students are particularly vulnerable and would benefit from increased attention. Compared to graduate students from the U.S., international graduate students are faced with additional pressures to navigate, including where they can work beyond UI, and they are often entirely dependent on institutional funding. Some stakeholders expressed concern that international graduate students are undervalued because of the expense of having them in the COE, which challenges the COE's research mission and values.

Faculty mentoring graduate students may also need additional resources, as noted in section 4. When faculty mentor large numbers of graduate students, it is more difficult to give each student the support that they need to finish their programs in a timely manner. To align with the COE's goal of building a culture of belonging, predictable funding sources and faculty support for graduate students are critical.

The Review Committee recommends that the COE provide greater clarity on funding for all graduate students. While increasing graduate student funding would require an investment, it would enhance the well-being of graduate students, improve the culture of graduate programs, aid in the recruitment of future graduate students, and strengthen the research culture and productivity of COE.

7. Role and importance of research in the COE

The COE has highly regarded, internationally recognized faculty who produce excellent, important, and impactful research. The COE associate dean for research recently formed the COE Research Advisory Council to develop policy around research, including standardizing grant buyouts, indirect returns to faculty, and course reductions for research. The Review Committee commends these ongoing efforts to enhance transparency and consistency in research practices across the COE.

Some stakeholders expressed concerns that research in the COE is being de-emphasized in the interest of generating revenue through increased student enrollments. Several interviewees emphasized that research is crucial to an R1 institution and noted that it does not appear to be as central to the COE leadership as it could be or has been in the past. The UI and COE should consider other financial drivers beyond enrollment, such as research grants, including grant applications submitted in collaboration with other UI colleges. Furthermore, the COE could consider creative ways to incentivize research.

Research does not appear to be sufficiently emphasized in the COE, and it is not prominently reflected in the COE's strategic goals, which is unusual for an R1 institution. Some research faculty reported feeling stressed by expectations to publish at the same rate as faculty at peer institutions. While some reported feeling supported in their research endeavors, many expressed a need for greater support for professional development and research funding. Interviewees reported that current financial support for research is inadequate.

The Review Committee recommends that the COE clarify the importance of research in the COE, give clear guidelines of what is expected, and enhance support for faculty to meet those goals. Providing incentives aligned with research productivity may highlight the importance of research to the COE's mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations appear in and are numbered according to their respective sections above. The Review Committee recommends that the COE

1. Clarify how student success data are being collected, shared, and used. The COE should streamline and coordinate its multiple data tools to improve transparency, consistency, and ownership of metrics. Specific actions include developing collaborative and transparent mechanisms to ensure the data are useful and relevant to the unique needs of its programs (e.g., accreditation) while also aligning with strategic goals; transparently linking metrics to actionable decisions, such as funding allocations and curriculum adjustments; and providing annual progress reports to foster accountability and continuous improvement.
2. Develop and communicate clearer expectations regarding how the success of graduate programs is measured and how decisions are made regarding when to launch, adjust, revive, or close programs. The COE should ensure those programs that are in danger of being sunset have opportunities to make adjustments that might allow them to improve, or at least prepare for these changes.
3. Develop a sustainable financial plan for the Scanlan Center. The COE leadership and Scanlan Center leadership should collaborate to define core responsibilities that align with available funding. Explore diversified revenue streams such as philanthropy, service fees, and research grants, while considering transitional bridge funding. Strengthen mentorship in developing a financial plan.
4. Build on improvements in transparent communication around the COE budget by providing consistent, clear information on how decisions are made and how faculty and staff may influence them. Establish regular updates to ensure understanding across all programs.
5. Improve overall communication within the COE. Develop and disseminate clear expectations and norms for communication across the COE, addressing inequities caused by the decentralized structure. Specify decision-making roles- who has input, who makes decisions, and who is informed- to enhance transparency and trust.
6. Provide greater clarity on funding and support for all graduate students, including international students.
7. Clarify the importance of research in the COE's mission, provide clear guidelines of what is expected, and enhance support and incentives for faculty to meet those expectations and goals.

Appendix A. Members of the Review Committee

- Travis Vogan, Professor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Iowa—Review Committee Chair
- Theresa Bechtel, Associate Professor of Instruction College of Nursing, University of Iowa
- Amy Colbert, University of Iowa Distinguished Chair, Faculty Director Social Impact Community, and Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa
- Laura Lee McIntyre, Dean and Castle-McIntosh-Knight Professor, College of Education, University of Oregon—External Reviewer

Appendix B. Individuals Interviewed by the Review Committee

Dan Clay, Dean

Institutional Leadership

Ali Salem, Associate Vice President for Research

Kristy Nabhan-Warren, Associate Vice President for Research

Terry Johnson, CFO and Treasurer

Tanya Uden-Holman, AP for Undergraduate Education and Dean of the University College

Amanda Thein, AP for Graduate and Professional Education and Dean of Graduate College

Associate Deans

Mark McDermott, Associate Dean for Teacher Education and Student Services

Saba Rasheed Ali, Associate Dean for Research

Pamela Wesely, Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs

Collegiate Leadership

Chris Annicella, Director of Human Resources

Emily Campbell, Director of Finance and Budget

Lois Gray, Director of Strategic Communications

Kyle Marxen, Senior Accountant

Jeremy Penn, Director of Assessment and Continuous Improvement

Katrina Santos, Senior Accountant and Operational Support Specialist

Anne Sparks, Coordinator for Graduate Admissions and Support

Benjamin Walizer, Director of Administration

Departmental Leadership

Kenneth Brown, Educational Policy and Leadership Studies

Noel Estrada-Hernandez, Counselor Education

Martin Kivlighan, Psychological and Quantitative Foundations

Lia Plakans, Teaching and Learning

Centers and Initiatives

Allison Bruhn, Executive Director, Scanlon Center for School Mental Health
Nicholas Bowman, Director, Center for Research on Undergraduate Education
Shawn Datchuk, Director, Iowa Reading Research Center
Stephen Dunbar, Co-Director, Iowa Testing Programs
Megan Foley-Nicpon, Director, Belin-Blank Center
Kari Vogelgesang, Director, Baker Teacher Leader Center
Sherry Watt, Director, Multicultural Initiatives Research Team
Catherine Welch, Co-Director, Iowa Testing Programs

Center for Advancement

Mae Parker, Executive Director of Development
Derek Pendergast, Vice President, Principal Gifts
Duff Ridgeway, Associate Vice President, Main Campus Development

Faculty Advisory Committee

Susannah Wood (chair)
Mark Hopkins
Erika Johnson
Allison Rowe
Ann Santos

Staff Council

Dorian Aragon-Jacques
Carter Burks
Mariana Colombo
Deb Kakavas
Sarah Lobb (Chair)
Jenny McGinn
Rachel Wallace
Becky Vargas

Tenure-Track Assistant & Associate Professors

David Duys, Associate
Maria Hernando Llorens, Assistant
Matthew Lira, Assistant
Kay Ramey, Assistant
Gahyun Sung, Assistant
Carolyn Colvin, Associate
Dae Hong, Associate
Seth King, Associate
Allison Levine, Assistant
Jeff Walls, Associate

Tenure-Track Professors

Cassie Barnhardt
Mary Cohen
Brian Hand
David Cassels Johnson
Julie Koch

Kathy Schuh
Bonnie Sunstein

Clinical-Track Faculty

Theodora Kourkoulou
Randolph Lange
Ashley Rila
Stephen Murley
Alissa Doobay
Brooke Strahn-Koller
Barry Schreier
Enedina Vazquez

Graduate Student Leadership

Yetunde Mabadeje, Learning Sci & Ed Psych, PhD
Alex Pauls, School Psych, PhD

Undergraduate Student Leadership

Eva Wozniczka, ESHR
Hanna Schulte, Teacher Education BA
Claire Haag, Teacher Education BA

END OF REPORT