

**Program Review
Weber State University
Child and Family Studies
March 20, 2009**

Reviewers

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Program Description

The Child and Family Studies department at Weber State University has experienced faculty who educate students with personal and/or professional interest in young children and families. The program is designed around explicit, well assessed learning outcomes based upon national standards.

Faculty & Staff

The Child and Family Studies department has a department chair who is a tenured professor of Child and Family Studies and one full-time staff member who assists with secretarial support. There are 13.54 total faculty FTE, 6.06 are adjunct FTE and 7.48 are contract FTE.

Faculty Statistical Summary
(data provided by Institutional Research)

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Faculty FTE Total ¹	16.29	16.50	15.87	14.98	13.54
Adjunct FTE	7.86	8.11	7.48	7.50	6.06
Contract FTE	8.43	8.39	8.39	7.48	7.48

¹. Faculty FTE is the aggregate of contract and adjunct instructors during the fiscal year. Contract FTE includes instructional-related services done by "salaried" employees as part of their contractual commitments. Adjunct FTE includes instructional-related wages that are considered temporary or part-time basis. Adjunct wages include services provided at the Davis campus, along with on-line and Continuing Education courses.

Students

The Child and Family Studies department teaches between three hundred and fifty and four hundred majors each year. The department has been effective in increasing or decreasing the number of faculty to maintain a relatively constant student/faculty ratio.

Student Statistical Summary
(data provided by Institutional Research)

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Student Credit Hours Total ¹	10,814	10,366	10,225	8,927	8,265
Student FTE Total ²	360.47	345.53	340.83	297.57	275.50
Student Majors ³	412	415	454	340	345
Program Graduates ⁴ Bachelor Degree	85	71	57	77	55
Student Demographic Profile ⁵					
Female	412	415	454	340	345
Male	391	390	422	319	325
	21	25	32	21	20
Student/Faculty Ratio ⁶	22.13	20.94	21.48	19.86	20.35

1. Student Credit Hours Total represents the total department-related credit hours for all students per academic year. Includes only students reported in Banner system as registered for credit at the time of data downloads.
2. Student FTE Total is the Student Credit Hours Total divided by 30.
3. Student Majors is a snapshot taken from self-report data by students in their Banner profile as of the third week of the Fall term for the academic year.
4. Program Graduates includes only those students who completed all graduation requirements by end of Spring semester for the academic year of interest. Students who do not meet this requirement are included in the academic year in which all requirements are met. Summer is the first term in each academic year.
5. Student Demographic Profile is data retrieved from the Banner system.
6. Student/Faculty Ratio is the Student FTE Total divided by the Faculty FTE Total.

Observations and Recommendations

Strengths

The department can be described as very productive with respect to the quantity, quality, and effectiveness of instruction. By all accounts the CFS programs are highly valued by the students and effective in ensuring that students meet carefully articulated student learning outcomes. The department is also productive with respect to the number of students served, with approximately a quarter of all the majors in the college enrolled in CFS programs.

Another particularly noteworthy strength of this department is the faculty members' expertise, professionalism, and sense of commitment and loyalty to the department's mission. Each faculty member we spoke to articulated the same shared sense of commitment to departmental goals, without regard to programmatic affiliation. In addition, the faculty members form a cohesive group. New faculty members expressed a great deal of appreciation for the mentoring and tutoring they have received from their senior

colleagues. The senior faculty members have remained very active in various professional activities, with many taking leadership roles in their professional organizations. In many key ways, the department appears to be firing on all cylinders.

Weaknesses

We see a potential issue on the horizon that might impact the effective functioning of the department. Six of the ten full-time faculty members in the department have 24 years of experience or more, with most of these faculty members affiliated with the Family Studies program. Over the next decade, the Family Studies program in particular, but the department as a whole, will see a major transformation as new faculty members are hired to replace retiring ones. It is likely that replacements will be new assistant professors who are early in their career. We acknowledge that hiring new faculty members into a program is an opportunity for growth. However, we are also cognizant that the skill sets of the senior faculty members who may retire over the next several years are likely irreplaceable. In many regards the skills sets which the department will be losing, including over a collective century of clinical expertise and applied experience are central in realizing the central mission of the department. Although we make no specific recommendations regarding how best to manage this transformation, we suggest that certain critical elements of the departmental programs need to be better institutionalized to ensure its continuation in the future.

Strengths and Challenges of Each Standard

Standard A: Mission Statement

The mission statement of the department is very clear having been carefully refined over several years. The statement is informed by national standards which further define student learning outcomes. Moreover, the techniques to assess the mission-related student outcomes seem very effective. The team commends the department for the well-articulated and widely shared mission for the department, which seems to infuse all aspects of department functioning.

Our concern is minor one and addresses whether the mission statement truly embodies the core values of the department. The mission focuses on *outcomes* (students becoming educators and practitioners) without an expression of *process* beyond the use of contemporary educational practices. We think that the mission should include what appears from our discussions with faculty, students, community members, and administrators to be core department value that students learn best when they *apply* knowledge they learned in the classroom in the service of helping families and children. This change would institutionalize the applied mission of the program in the department mission statement.

Standard B: Curriculum Standards

Although none of the reviewers are experts in the discipline, the curriculum seems to us to be very coherently and consistently based on systems theoretical approach to the understanding of children and families. Students are exposed to this theoretical orientation early on and it is reinforced throughout the curriculum. We were also impressed by how well students felt prepared in terms of research and methodological skills. A number of students we talked to not only took the research course, but also followed up with additional research activities which promoted their applications to graduate school. The team commends the department for its carefully shaped, effectively taught, and well-balanced curriculum

The suggestion we make in this area was one articulated by faculty, students, and community partners, that students have an earlier practicum and professional development experience. The present practicum, available to advanced students, may be the first time some students are exposed to the range of children and families with whom that professionals regularly deal. Such an initial exposure may be best experienced by students earlier in the program when they will have a chance to fully assimilate, reflect on, and consider the implications of the experience for their professional practice. We recommend a new course in which students have a guided exposure to the world of social and educational services as an effective development opportunity for students to learn about themselves and the profession.

We also suggest that the department remove Special Education Birth to Age 5 from the Family Studies major option. We understand that this program has not yet been approved by the regents.

Standard C: Student Learning Outcome

The Departments' student learning outcomes are largely shaped by the accrediting bodies for the programs. As importantly, these outcomes seemed to be embraced by the department members and the students. It was the team's impression that the outcome assessment standards are defined with exceptional clarity, measured with a great deal of care, evaluated in a systematic and reliable manner, and used as the basis of several curricular revisions. The team commends the department for the effective implementation and broad-based support for the assessment plan.

We see no challenge in Standard C, other than the expenditure of huge resources of time and energy put into creating and evaluating the very impressive portfolios.

Standard D: Academic Advising

The advising program seems very effective. Our conversation with Dr. Campbell and Mrs. Gregg revealed a series of proactive procedures to ensure that students are appropriately informed about their status and progress in the department. Information is made available to students thorough the department advising web site. In addition students are phoned and invited to make appointments to ensure that they are on track to graduate.

The challenge we see lies in career advising, which is a challenge in many departments who prepare students for the helping professions. It is difficult to disabuse even the best informed students of popular misconceptions about the work of those in the helping professions and the pathways to arrive there. Many of the students we talked to had career goals to become Child and Family Therapists, although they did not always clearly understand the nature of the work. The suggestion of additional professional development (see Standard B) would be helpful in this regard. It may be worthwhile for further collaborations (beyond the *Pathways to the Helping Professions*) between departments who train students for the helping professions to put their heads together to better inform students of various career options available to them.

Also, perhaps the department advisor can be the point person to collect information on the graduates of the program and their experiences. Keeping alumni close is an effective way to learn about the impact of the program, not to mention a fund-raising tool.

Standard E: Faculty Standards

As noted above, the faculty members are the strength of the program. We were impressed with their collegiality, their service in the department, college, university, and profession, and commitment and accessibility to students. The faculty members are also actively engaged in pursuing new goals. As one faculty member put it, they are constantly challenging themselves and each other.

Also, as noted above, the challenge in this standard lies in preparing for a smooth transition from a department of largely senior to largely junior faculty members. New junior faculty members will need help and role models in how best to manage the demands of teaching, service and scholarship in an institution like Weber State University. Junior faculty focused on tenure, can't be expected to perform the kind of work shouldered (often without complaint or acknowledgment) by many senior faculty members that go above and beyond the normal expectations of faculty members. Moreover, the difficulties in starting up research in the present economic environment present its own concerns.

The quality of mentoring and tutoring received by the two new faculty members, Drs. Volkan and Qiu, is very reassuring in this regard. Also reassuring is that we see younger faculty members emerging to provide leadership in the department for the long term.

Standard F: Program Support Standards

The program is well supported. The availability of a department advisor is a real asset in ensuring the effective functioning of the department. The availability of funds from the faculty developmental endowment is valuable for faculty research and other scholarly activities. The team commends the college in their effective support for the department.

Like other departments in this environment, the effectiveness of the Department of Child and Family Studies appears to depend on the kindness of its faculty, who work above and beyond their contract to provide uncompensated services to the department. Although appreciated, this kind of service to the department may not be sustainable in the future. Moreover, funds will need to be provided to support new faculty and to give them course reductions when necessary. We hope that some of savings realized by the replacement of senior faculty in the department by junior ones will be spent in the department to support those junior faculty members. Also, we suggest that the department members work closely with the college fund-raising efforts to find funds to specifically support the department. The commitment of the department to train effective practitioners to serve community children and families may be a topic of philanthropic support.

Standard G: Relationships with External Communities.

The team was very impressed by the varied and rich ways the department is involved in the external community. We are equally impressed by the community's support of the department. We commend the department for cultivating such good relationships with the institutions and professionals in the community. The mutual trust and respect between the department and the institutions and professionals has had a very positive effect on students. Keep up the great work!

Standard H: Program Summary.

We are impressed with the program – both in the commitment, talent and energy of the faculty, staff, and students. It has become abundantly clear to us that the Department of Child and Family Studies occupies a vital intellectual and pedagogical niche in the university. The department's commitment to applied issues and to students' career orientation has strengthened the program. The challenges largely address the upcoming changes in the department due to the anticipated retirement of the senior faculty members after long and productive careers at Weber State University.

Recommendations

We encourage the department to not only retain the values which have proven so effective in its growth but also to better institutionalize those values in the Mission Statement and Curriculum. We recommend that expressions of the value of *applying* knowledge about families and children in the department mission statement. We further recommend a lower division practicum experience for students to get their first experience in the profession earlier in their career. Another recommendation focuses on an interdisciplinary approach to career counseling about the nature of and pathways into helping profession. We additionally suggest collecting additional information about and feedback from graduates. Finally, we recommend additional fund-raising efforts to promote the work of the department in supporting student career efforts.

Institution's Response

- a. The Department recognizes the challenges that replacing the senior faculty will entail and is committed to ensure program continuity.
- b. The department has scheduled a retreat that will focus on the "application of knowledge" as it applies to the current departmental mission statement.
- c. The department is committed to provide students greater exposure to community and agency settings at an earlier stage in the program.
- d. The department is continuing to work with the WSU Career Services Office to ensure enhanced career advisement for students.
- e. The department will explore ways that savings that accrue with the replacement of senior faculty with junior faculty can be used to provide increased support for training student practitioners.