

University of New Mexico

Program in Organization, Information, & Learning Sciences

Academic Program Review

Review Panel Report

October 15, 2018

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Introduction to the Report

This report is prepared based on the review of the Fall 2018 departmental self-study report and site visit by the review panel, Professors Tim Castillo (internal reviewer) , Karen Watkins, and Michael Spector (external reviewers). This report follows the same format provided by the Office of Academic Affairs for the onsite report. The contents of the report are organized according to the following sections:

- Summary of Findings
- Student Learning Goals and Outcomes
- Teaching and Learning Curriculum
- Teaching and Learning Continuous Improvement
- Students
- Faculty
- Resources and Planning
- Facilities
- Peer Comparisons

Summary of Findings

The review committee found a high degree of collegiality and a culture of mutual respect among faculty and students and a caring culture that bodes well for future developments. There is a great deal of diversity in faculty, students and the curriculum which is both a strength in terms of the potential to be genuinely interdisciplinary and a challenge in terms of being able to serve many different and disparate interests among faculty and students.

Due to its unique location within the UNM College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences and the strong culture, the strong support of administrators, the program has the potential to achieve national prominence if the support for the program and interdisciplinarity remain strong and constructive.

Strengths identified in the last review that continue to be strengths include the integrated content of the program, bringing together adult and organizational learning and learning sciences to create a more competitively trained graduate; strong ties to the UNM mission, a diverse and strong student body, as well as a productive and diverse faculty.

Weaknesses cited in the previous review that remain include course [and concentration] proliferation, faculty workload concerns, and curriculum enhancement tied not to the areas of the previous review [performance consulting and organization development] which have been addressed, but rather in new areas of concern, particularly in the learning sciences where a deeper expertise beyond instructional design and technology to include more advanced technologies, cognitive and neurosciences, design science, etc. would help grow this new direction. A key weakness is the lack of streamlining of the curriculum to more focused concentrations in the areas of current faculty expertise. Finally, the OILS website is in need of updating and strengthening to better convey the unique aspects of the degree programs. Overall, our sense of the program is that it is poised for national prominence; as one student put it, they are “pushing the edge of possibilities”.

Student Learning Goals and Outcomes

The program has well demonstrated its significance and is clearly advancing the UNM mission to serve the state and to develop new research. Grants in engineering and other units, contracts with international organizations, and a new online degree option evidence the program's continuing innovation to meet the needs of the university and the state. At the undergraduate level, the outreach to local community colleges through both the 2+2 program and the External Advisory Group ensure that the program will remain up to date in establishing student goals that meet the needs of external constituents. The program has also taken a number of steps to meet the weaknesses identified in the previous review, the most important of which was the move to the College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences. The program is in the midst of a number of curriculum revision efforts to respond to feedback from students and other key stakeholders. These efforts should continue in light of the new directions the program is taking.

Weaknesses emanate in part from outdated web information and student handbooks that are not up to date which creates communication problems both to students and to the campus. It was especially confusing to see the long list of skills on the website describing what the program is [see APR p. 12 and Figure 1A1 on p. 29]. It is unclear from these descriptions what succinct aspirations the program is preparing people for at each degree level. Students specifically asked for a list of the types of jobs they could apply for upon graduation and particularly in terms of the five concentrations at the Master's level but also in terms of the undergraduate degree.

Teaching and Learning Curriculum

Much of the curriculum is delivered online and there is high student satisfaction for these courses. In addition, faculty are responsive to other units on campus, providing service courses for the campus [a course for teaching assistants, information studies and diversity courses, etc.]. Strategic planning has been ongoing with recent input from an external advisory group whose work is focused primarily at the baccalaureate and master's levels. An advisory group more focused at the doctoral level might further development of the doctorate. The focus on internationalizing the curriculum including international development opportunities is a significant strength of the program.

It seemed a bit odd that the title of the degree at the baccalaureate level and the new MOP degree are different: B.S. degree in Instructional Technology & Training and a Master's in the managed online program in Learning Officers vs the M. A. and Ph.D. in OILS. The title of the baccalaureate probably best fits the curriculum, but it seems challenging for a small group of faculty to meet the curriculum demands of a diffuse set of degrees.

The curriculum needs streamlining and concentrations need to maintain consistency with disciplinary standards. The program frequently mentions that it is an interdisciplinary program yet the program operates more like a multidisciplinary curriculum with separate tracks for the subfields of current and former faculty. These issues are areas of opportunity. Currently, the baccalaureate is focused on instructional technology and training with coursework in management and communication augmenting the OILS core courses in theoretical foundations, instructional technology, and training. The theoretical foundations could include a core course

in OILS—an integrative course that, like the current course [OILS 440- survey of human resource development and instructional technology], could reflect the integration of organization, information, and learning sciences. Similarly, at the PhD level, a more advanced version of this course— the *foundations* of organization, information, and learning sciences could again integrate these disciplinary foci and help students see the way they fit together and what kinds of dissertation studies might follow from this marriage of disciplines.

With the retirement of key faculty, the move to the College of UL & LS, and the addition of new faculty with differing expertise, the time is ripe to revisit the concentrations in the masters [Adult Education & Professional Development; Organization Development and Human Resource Development; Instructional Design & Technology, eLearning; and Learning Officer]. With 6.4 faculty, three of whom affiliate with human resource and organization development and three of whom affiliate with instructional technology and learning sciences, it seems reasonable to consolidate these foci into two streams. Courses currently reflect prior emphases and maintain separate specializations which is useful for deeper skill development but might also be more integrated at the doctoral level. Many courses run with low enrollment and this consolidation of foci and integration has the potential both to reduce course proliferation and ensure stronger enrollment in all courses.

Finally, faculty have concerns about the quality of some of the work produced at the doctoral level. Given the large number of UNM employees and practitioners in the doctoral program, two tracks. with one a more scholar practitioner focus and another a scholarly research track, might allow the faculty to set appropriate standards of rigor for each focus. In addition, faculty could more specifically recruit a few strong students for a more traditional

scholarly trajectory which would strengthen the program's research emphasis. In addition, consideration of specific strategies to reduce time to graduation among doctoral students [now an average of 9 years]. Some options others use for a predominantly part-time doctoral cohort include an annual doctoral student review with definite steps to take if a student is not on track [red-line students at the 5 year mark who have not advanced to candidacy; offer doctoral support courses that support doctoral students and keep them enrolled past core courses [i.e. the critique of the literature, the dissertation proposal, academic writing for the discipline, research practicum, etc.]; require continuous enrollment of at least 3 credits; etc.].

Teaching and Learning Continuous Improvement

A particular strength in the area of teaching and learning is the existence of identified outcomes and rubrics for programs at all levels (undergraduate, master's and doctorate). Assessment methods and measurements for students at all levels are clear, although they could be more prominently displayed and available on the OILS website. Students are being tracked continuously as they make progress towards their degrees though there are some concerns at the doctoral level about time to degree.

It is not clear how programs will evolve in the future as there probably needs to be some focusing and further integration across the various disciplinary perspectives now in programs. Assessment data were not previously available with UNM databases which indicates a concern that program results may not be widely known with UNM. To achieve the potential of a nationally prominent program, OILS may need to first achieve prominence within UNM for the

support needed to reach that level. The committee did not have evidence of assessment results and how they were being used to improve programs, although some of those interviewed indicated that this was happening. As a result, the committee rated criteria 3e and 3f as not met, although these two criteria could be met with some effort to communicate results and use results to monitor and improve programs.

Students

The committee found many strengths with regard to students. There are clear admission policies. Enrollments are being monitored and student persistence in programs is being analyzed. An alumni database exists and alumni are being involved in program planning and program events, and continued alumni involvement should be emphasized. The committee's interactions with students indicated generally positive attitudes towards programs at all levels. Student advising and the program advisory group were also noted as strengths.

A few shortcomings were also uncovered by the committee. Of particular note was the long time to graduation at the doctoral level. The long graduation rate is due in part to (a) students working full-time and taking courses part-time, (b) the diverse interests and backgrounds of students with many being the first in their family to pursue doctoral degrees, and (c) the program culture of serving the interests of the university and state in terms of recruiting and accepting non-traditional students. However, the doctoral program should set a goal of shortening the time to graduate to below 7 years without sacrificing the quality of the doctoral program. The committee believes this might be accomplished by having two tracks

within the doctoral program - one for those aiming to pursue academic and research careers and one for those aiming to pursue careers in professional practice. While research methods are important for both tracks, the types of research pertinent to each track is somewhat different. All doctoral students should be able to understand and analyze the findings of a variety of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies. Having competence with just one methodology should be related to a student's intended professional career, which might mean emphasizing program evaluation (e.g., fidelity of implementation and impact studies) or action research for some. and in-depth design-based qualitative and quantitative research studies and randomized control trials for others.

Many doctoral students are currently employed at UNM. The program has plans to implement a new program involving Learning Officers which implies national outreach. The program also has interest in strengthening international outreach. Such interests are worth pursuing and need to be focused on specific target audiences with specific short- and long-term outcomes established going forward. One reasonable goal would be to have a doctoral student population that was less than 50% UNM employees. Such goals will help the program achieve its potential for national prominence by recruiting a population more clearly aligned with the program's mission.

Another shortcoming pertains to the unique location of OILS within the Library College – namely, the availability of student support services (e.g., grievance procedures, online support, grant submission support, dissertation writing, etc.). The committee believes a shared services model might be implemented to address this shortcoming.

Faculty

The OILS program has a strong faculty and particularly strong new faculty. At the same time, recent and anticipated retirements are likely to impact how the program moves forward without losing its uniqueness and sense of a caring culture. Students generally reported excellent mentoring, and the pursuit of new curricula for learning officers is creative with the possibility of adding strength to the program. Some faculty have already received prestigious awards and significant grants. A strong team, however, cannot be built on the prominence of one or two faculty. Teams that succeed are generally those which manage to involve all team members so the team gets stronger over time. What counts in the long run is not having a superstar on the team – rather it is a team that performs as a team so that the program becomes the superstar.

Given the many interests of faculty and areas covered in the program, integrating those interests and curricula so that all faculty contribute is a challenge going forward. If all existing areas continue to remain part of program integrative efforts, then additional expertise in areas such as adult education and learning science (broadly conceived) might need to be acquired. Given the new focus on learning sciences- with its theoretical underpinnings in neuroscience, cognitive science, instructional design, data analytics, anthropology, linguistics, computer science, psychology, and education which have formed the foundation of the discipline and its focus on design, learning, and research with advanced technical proficiencies in areas such as simulation modeling, robotics, game development, video production, museum display, etc.; current faculty span only a portion of these areas of expertise. Perhaps faculty from other disciplines would affiliate as some do now to offer additional depth in this robust area.

Active involvement in multiple professional associations is also needed to achieve national prominence as a unique, interdisciplinary program.

Resources and Planning

The committee found that the OILS program clearly demonstrated effective resource planning and allocation. The budget overview articulated a clear understanding of Instructional and General funding, student scholarships, student assistantships, technological support and adjunct faculty resources to demonstrate a clear vision for success in the future of the program. The development of an external advisory board was an important asset that the faculty implemented. The board is represented by individuals from a variety of corporations and institutions in the region. The committee agreed that this was a solid foundation to ensure future success of the program currently and clearly fulfilling the University of New Mexico's mission to contributing to the state's economy.

The one concern that was uncovered was in securing new funding to hire a new staff position in the program. This staff position would be to support the undergraduate program coordinator and aid in academic advisement at the graduate level.

Facilities

The current space needs of the OILS program are fully supported by University Libraries in the Zimmerman library. The upper administration (including the Dean and Associate Dean) have supported the growth and expansion needs of the program as it has evolved since

migrating from the College of Education to University Libraries. The Learning Lab is an excellent learning environment and appears to support a multiplicity of programmatic needs for the faculty.

The one recommendation would be to reconsider the graduate scholar space. The current venue lacks natural light and potentially could be moved to another space to better support the activity of the graduate students.

Peer Comparisons

With regard to criterion 8 (peer comparisons) the review committee has rated this one as met with concerns. Overall, OILS met this criterion but we have one concern that reflects both a strength and a weakness. OILS divided the self-assessment comparison report into two groups of programs: (a) HRD and OL, and (b) ISD & IT. In each of those two categories, 4 and 5 university programs were chosen for comparison, and analysis was reported at three levels – undergraduate, master’s, and doctorate. That level of effort is noteworthy but could have provided deeper insight into OILS.

First, it is curious that those two categories were selected which does not align very well with the three areas associated with OILS at a high level – Organization, Information and Learning Science. One might assume that the ‘O’ in OILS led the self-study team to the HRD/OL group of programs and that ‘ILS’ led the self-study team to the ISD/IT group of programs. If so, then other questions might arise, such as how learning science of the learning sciences maps onto instructional systems design/development and information/instructional technology or

how organization maps onto human resource development and organizational learning. This initial observation relates to prior remarks in our response that to some outsiders it could appear that OILS is trying to do too much with too little resources and expertise. On the other hand, what is really strong about OILS and what could and should have been emphasized is the effort to integrate these various efforts rather than create silos which has been the predominant approach at many other places, including the comparison programs cited in the self-assessment report.

That superficial observation leads to a second comment. The strength of a peer comparison study could have been that OILS is unique in many ways that make a direct peer comparison quite challenging. All of the peer programs cited are in colleges of education. OILS is not; OILS is in the College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences rather than being located in an academic college with multiple academic departments. All of the peer programs cited have a 2-2 teaching load as they are at major research institutions. OILS is also at a research university but the teaching load is nominally 3-2. All of the programs cited have larger full-time faculty even though the scope of those comparison programs is not as broad as the scope of OILS as suggested in the previous paragraph. When looking through the data and based on the review committee's direct knowledge of most of the comparison programs, they might more properly be characterized as aspirational programs. If the comparison programs were considered as aspirational programs, then additional questions and concerns arise. First, which of those programs would OILS like to be more like and why? Second, should OILS narrow its scope and focus to become more like one or two of those programs? In response to the review committee's consideration of such questions, the conclusion we arrived at was that OILS is

genuinely unique in many important ways. A number of programs around the country are also not in Colleges of Education and others are quite innovative in ways that might be interesting for faculty to examine.

Being an academic program within the University Library brings a number of opportunities as well as challenges, as we have noted in other places. The College of University Libraries and Learning Sciences benefits from having an academic program within its organizational function; libraries and the roles and functions of librarians are changing dramatically in the digital information age, and OILS adds credibility and substance to those changing roles and functions. OILS has a number of freedoms that are not typically available in a College of Education, including (a) the freedom to focus on both formal and informal learning, (b) the freedom to focus on learning, instruction and performance both inside and outside K-12 settings, (c) the freedom to pursue collaborations that are not common in a college of education, and so on. Thus OILS is unique due in part to its location.

Concluding Remarks

The committee would be remiss if we did not mention the excellent report provided by the faculty and the enthusiastic cooperation and responsiveness of the faculty and students in providing us the information we needed during the site visit. Our thanks to the program and to the provost's office for their support during this process.