

Program Review

Executive Summary

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Coordinator, DEL/COE

Western Oregon University:
Department/Program of (Division)

Majors Reviewed:

MSEd: Educational Technology

Instructional Design Certificate

Dates of Program Review:

2022-2023

External Reviewer Visit:

April 24-25, 2023

Date of Executive Summary:

5 October 2023

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: MEd: Educational Technology & Instructional Design Certificate
(DIVISION: DEL)**

Program Review: People, Strategy, External Review

People

The program review (PR) leader is Gregory Zobel, Ph.D. He is the only tenured or tenure track faculty in WOU's MEd: Educational Technology (EdTech) and Instructional Design Certificate (IDC) program since July 2020. While some Education Core courses are taught by Education faculty, all EdTech courses are taught by either Zobel or Non-Tenure Track (NTT) faculty. No other faculty were included in the program review for simple reasons. First, the Education Core courses will be covered in the MEd program review. Second, I could not offer any compensation or release time to NTT faculty for their assistance, so I did not ask for any. Third, there are no other faculty in DEL or CoE who understand the program scope beyond an individual class. Hence other faculty had minimum participation

Strategy

Enrollment

EdTech and IDC have been struggling with enrollment for at least three to five years. The PR document shows this with graduate enrollment data and FTE hours. The core strategy was to identify EdTech's strengths and weaknesses. Once understood, we can increase enrollment by building on the former and strengthening the latter.

Data Collection

As solo faculty, I am relatively isolated from peers and colleagues. This makes it challenging to have a good sense of the field. Reviewing comparator institutions' websites and federal education data in my initial survey, and later in the focused analysis, gave me a much more solid understanding of where we are strong, weak, and what other institutions are doing. I would encourage smaller programs to do this every three to four years. It's insightful.

The Graduate Office provided helpful historical enrollment data. As the program has had less than 30 students since 2020, I saw no point in attempting to analyze student demographics since our N is so small. This frustrates any attempt to have a sense of who our students are and where they come from. Additional data about graduated students' income, success, etc. is impossible beyond anecdotes because it's impossible to run an effective alumni program with only one faculty member. In the future, this would be helpful; it's hard to sell or promote a program without having data to support claims about the program's value.

Other important data sources were state and federal employment and pay statistics related to the EdTech and IDC fields (see the PR). This data was problematic because EdTech degrees can be used in many fields and environments, but I had to focus on Education. Similarly, there is limited information about the field of Instructional Design (ID) at the state level. This information was moderately helpful.

External Review

Aside from reviewing comparator programs, external review was the most helpful part of the process. I knew the selected reviewer professionally because we attended some of the same regional conferences 5+ years ago. Also, several of our program graduates earned Phds from Boise State University (BSU). The reviewer is a prolific researcher who has worked at multiple universities and has worked professionally in EdTech and ID. He's highly qualified, networked, and engaged. This is why I sought him as a reviewer. From past interactions, I knew he would be direct and not sugar coat any problems he observed.

In less than an hour, he got me up to speed on what's happening in our field with graduate programs, challenges EdTech shares with other similar programs nationally, what our program strengths/weaknesses are, and where there's room for innovation and improvement.

Having an open conversation with a colleague from my field reinvigorated my interest, attention, and engagement. Working solo has its benefits, but it can be exhausting, alienating, and isolating. Talking about the program with a peer and expert energized and motivated me. I plan to maintain this relationship and recommend engaging with external reviewers broadly for our small programs. The insight gained strengthens the program and allows me to align with current student needs better.

Challenges with the Review

Aside from those mentioned above, there's nothing to add.

key findings including areas of alignment and misalignment to WOU mission and strategic plan (highlight student success and academic effectiveness)

WOU Mission & Strategic Plan

Mission

"Western Oregon University creates lasting opportunities for student success through transformative education and personalized support."

- Virtually all students speak—during and after the program—about student choice in projects and the program’s focus on students' assignments being directly connected to their work or career.
 - This attracts potential students when it’s described to them.
 - It keeps students engaged during courses.
 - It fosters their workplace success while they are still in the program.
 - Small classes mean they get faculty and peer feedback.
 - Their experience of education is transformed from one of mostly theory, abstract, and non-praxis into an experience where they are directly applying the theories/ideas they are reading about into artifacts they can, and do, use in their work.

Strategic Plan

I have only identified those areas where the EdTech & IDC program align with the strategic plan because there are so many which are not directly relevant to us or would require us to be ten times our current size to have any actual impact. Right now we are doing what we can to maintain this valuable program. That is our only priority.

Student Success

1: Cultivate academic success

- Rigorous, consistent training in multiple writing and communication styles and media with ample feedback and options to revise.
- Adjusting due dates and deliverable descriptions based on working adults lives, realities, and workplace needs.
- Scaffolding and coaching through the capstone Portfolio process.

2: Streamline university requirements and academic pathways to graduation

- Regular, supportive advising for current, future, or potential students.
- Customized plans with course substitutions based on individual student history, professional experience, and technical skills.
- Consistent independent study courses offered to students to support job-market related skills, projects, or deliverables.

3: Align, assess and improve the academic effectiveness of learning outcomes.

- Course content and assignments are regularly reviewed and revised based on both market needs, student feedback, and quality of student work.
- More consistent work is needed here, but that is challenging with one faculty member.

Academic Excellence

1. Student initiatives

- a. Small classes: usually capped at 22.
- b. No funding for student presentations given; however, with the new summer conference WOUtechCon, students are encouraged to present.

- c. Individualized student “welcome to the program” Zoom calls that last 30-90 minutes: enculturation, orientation, program plan, exits, course planning.

The program review emphasized the following programmatic strengths:

- Variety of course offerings, course quality
- Student work quality
- Authentic learning, project-based learning
- Alignment with external organizations’ standards

The following challenges were identified:

- Student enrollment
- Number of course offerings—too many for a small program
- Program name change—EdTech old, associated with K-12 programs
- Reduce number of preps (4.5 credit courses instead of 3 credit courses)
- Time-to-completion (shoot for 3 terms instead of 4)
- Limited certificates
- Low/no program visibility
- Limited student feedback
- Limited investment in faculty development, travel
- Workload all on one person

The following opportunities for improvement were suggested:

- Combine or condense similar courses into a single course number and then rotate the content
- Shift credits per course from 3 credits to 4.5 credits
 - Decreases time-to-completion for degree
- Add more certificates
 - Accessibility; AI-related
- Increase visibility:
 - Program name change: Learning Design & Technology
 - Sponsor online conferences, webinars
 - Attend more local, regional, national conferences
- Increase spending to support conference travel and collaboration
- Hire half-time faculty to share workload and collaborate with

Summarized overview of recommendations and priorities based upon the review.

In order of priority:

1. Increase enrollment via program visibility

- a. Program name change: Design Learning & Technology
 - b. Online conferences & webinars
 - i. Hosted WOUtechCon 1 in August 2023; continue
 - ii. Hosted webinars in the past; resume the practice
 - c. More active, assertive social media presence & self-marketing
 - d. Survey students upon entry, exit, and post-graduation to better know who's coming in and where our graduates are going and succeeding.
2. Make program easier to understand, and promote, by simplifying offerings
- a. Condense multiple multimedia courses into one course that can be repeated with different content
 - b. Condense social media courses into one course
 - c. Cut older courses that have not been used in years
 - d. Simplify course rotation schedule
3. Develop certificates, simplify certificates
- a. revise current 24 credit IDC certificate into three smaller, scaffolded certificates—each with 9 credits
 - i. all but 3-6 credits would be wrapped up in EdTech degree
 - b. develop Supporting Teaching, Learning, & Training with Generative AI certificate
 - i. all or all but 3 would be wrapped up in EdTech degree
 - c. develop Accessibility Certificate
 - i. all or all but 3 would be wrapped up in EdTech degree

Brief summary of current status of program and reflection on review experience.

Over the summer, EdTech/ID enrolled 9 new graduate students. This helped save our program since many graduated last Spring and Summer. We have about 12 students currently.

Over summer, the first free WOUtechCon—an online EdTech conference, was held in August. Attendance was small, but I'm confident this can grow. This conference was done based on conversations with the external reviewer and several DEL colleagues. Our goal was to get the EdTech program publicized and to engage with professionals around the world—and we did. We had presenters from France and Australia.

Over summer, I have been researching, reading, and dabbling in online and social media marketing for a non-WOU-related project to start building my skills. Rather than wait for MarComm to support a 1 faculty program, which would be a resource burn, I think our only chance to thrive is for us to go directly to market. I am currently working on this project and hope to recruit 10-20 students this year—hopefully more.

Our courses all made. This is the first time in a long time that has happened. Fortunately, students from the MEd program and the OL program are taking some of our courses and see it as relevant.

There are only two things that matter in this program right now. First, provide students with the best teaching, training, content, and learning experiences possible. Second, grow or die.

The review experience was far more helpful than my older cynical self anticipated. While I found parts of the review tedious, the PR was worth doing alone for the comparator program analysis and the external review visit. Doing the review also got me inspired and out of my hopelessness lethargy.

Final comment: I don't need money to grow my program; I need professional time to grow my program (I realize course releases do cost money). As such there will be little to no research, writing, or scholarship coming from me—likely for the next several years. Why? I can either revive my program and miss out on scholarship, or I could publish and watch my program die. I will not work 70 hours per week in order to market my program and publish. I see what this has done to some of my colleagues; no thank you. It is frustrating that work on program growth and development is not regarded as “valuable” in terms of moving from Associate Professor to Professor. This strikes me as isolationist, ivory tower, and market-ignoring. There are few things more practical than figuring out how to have a product or process (an EdTech degree, for example), identify the potential buyers/market, and be able to ethically and honestly persuade the right people that my program is for them. Until 5 months ago, I had the same dismissive attitude towards sales and marketing—especially with academic programs. At this point, I know that my hubris and classism resulted in my program nearly dying. So I no longer care. Whether or not I get “credit” for the future marketing and sales of my program is irrelevant. I'm simply not going to publish until my program is healthy. If this is a problem, I'd appreciate a solutions- and resource-driven response.

My program is amazing, and we provide incredible learning experiences for our students. It's time more people had that opportunity. That means they need to know about us and the amazing work we do. And that means marketing and sales.