

M.Ed. Academic Quality Assurance Review Summary

Review Initiated:	June 2006
Review Concluded:	September 2007
Program Review Committee:	Richard Butt (Program Review Coordinator) Kerry Bernes Wolfgang Holzmann Helen Kelley Brian Titley
External Reviewers:	Patrick Renihan (University of Saskatchewan) Jon Young (University of Manitoba)

Self Study

The U of L's first graduate program, the Master of Education has admitted over 850 students since 1984. The general Master Teacher/Educator stream has been offered continuously since program inception. Additional streams were developed in Counselling (1999) and Educational Leadership (2004).

The General stream is unique amongst other M.Ed. programs in its general focus on teaching and learning and its flexibility, with a large elective component. Other M.Ed. programs tend to be highly specialized and less flexible. This program consists of a core set of courses, up to seven electives, and a Thesis, Creative Project or Capstone Paper.

The cohort-based Counselling stream aims to develop professional skills and certification in counselling psychology. Graduates of this stream can engage in professional practice in educational or community settings. There are three components to this program: required courses; route courses (for the School Counselling or Registering route, the latter to register as a psychologist in Alberta); and culminating activity (practicum or open elective, culminating project, or thesis).

Also cohort-based, the Educational Leadership stream provides the knowledge and skills for candidates to develop a leadership focus in their teaching career. For this stream the Faculty of Education interviews candidates and screens them based on their leadership potential. The students are given course content that focuses on leadership and leadership standards. Students in this stream complete core courses plus a culminating activity (thesis or in-depth internship).

The self-study collected data and information through surveys, interviews, and discussion groups. Some of the major findings were:

- Planning efforts by the Education administration team have resulted in a sustainable funded student body of 180 for the M.Ed.
- Students and faculty members have a very high level of satisfaction with the Faculty of Education's Graduate Studies Office, which operates the M.Ed. program.
- Students are very satisfied with the Graduate Studies Office website and the M.Ed. admissions process.
- Student perceptions of resource support are positive overall, with high satisfaction for computer facilities, classroom facilities, and study space, and good levels of satisfaction with library hours, buildings, and University residences.
- When comparing alumni with current students, the need for financial aid has increased over time.
- All continuing faculty instructors have: significant professional experiences as teachers, consultants, educational administrators, counsellors, and psychologists; PhDs; and expertise, background, and scholarly records in the areas in which they teach.
- Faculty who teach in the M.Ed.: somewhat felt there were not enough M.Ed. courses; felt they could teach graduate courses in areas they were passionate about; and felt that teaching graduate students enhanced their research, gave them some access to potential thesis students, helped them stay current in their field, and allowed them to give back to the academy. They also felt that teaching in the M.Ed. energized them, enhanced their undergraduate teaching, and allowed them to give back to the teaching profession.
- Students evaluate graduate courses using a form that captures quantitative and qualitative student feedback. This evaluation method has been very successful.
- The number of applicants to the program has been healthy, with some ebb and flow due to policy changes in admissions. However, the number of applicants and admitted students in the General stream has steadily declined since 2001-02.
- Graduation rates are estimated at 95-99%.
- According to an exit survey, graduates felt that the top five skills they learned in the program were: research; critical judgement; writing; self confidence; and independent learning. They strongly agreed that the program provided the following personal and career-related learning: personal challenge; further professional development; personal development and growth; re-examination of professional practice; and enhanced understanding of teaching. Graduates felt the program provided a rich learning experience and that the instructors stimulated learning.
- 91% of exit survey respondents rated their experience of the M.Ed. program as positive.
- 53% of alumni from the previous five years experienced some significant career move after graduation.
- Faculty member perceptions of the quality of the core courses was lower than that of students. Faculty did not think the number of electives offered was appropriate. They felt the program is accessible and they supported the cohort model of delivery.
- Regarding teaching delivery, both faculty and students preferred a combination of face-to-face, online, and videoconference.

The Program Review Committee made three general recommendations for the future of the program: (1) apply the strengths of the undergraduate program to the M.Ed. program; (2) consider a modest expansion in student numbers; and (3) enhance relationships with the Zone 6 School Districts.

External Review

In their report the external reviewers stated that the M.Ed. program is of high quality, and is well positioned for a moderate expansion in enrolment. Strategically, the M.Ed. fits well with the U of L Mandate and Strategic Plan. The program is accessible and uses a flexible mode of delivery that fits well with the program content. Students in the program receive excellent supervision and support. Library, technological, and facility support is appropriate. The courses appear to have the expected rigour and student work is of a high caliber. Impressive student publication rates and success in SSHRC¹ grants point to an academically vibrant program. The high acceptance rates of graduates to Ph.D. programs shows that the M.Ed. is excellent preparation for doctoral work. Graduates are very well prepared to contribute to their profession.

The external reviewers had nine suggestions for improving the program:

- (1) Develop new specializations.
- (2) Develop a clear mechanism for graduate level decision-making and faculty involvement.
- (3) Encourage the view of the relationship between undergraduate and graduate programs in Education as being complementary.
- (4) Consider drawing students from other regions, provinces, and countries, and pursue a leadership role in First Nations graduate education.
- (5) Involve as many faculty as possible in thesis supervision.
- (6) Give faculty greater opportunity to participate in graduate programs.
- (7) When expanding faculty participation in graduate teaching, be mindful of infringement on faculty time for research.
- (8) Develop strategic partnerships with educational groups and agencies.
- (9) Explore a Ph.D. Education program for, initially, a small number of outstanding candidates.

Program Response

In their response to the external review, the Program Review Committee noted that the external review affirms the high quality, student-centred nature of the program and the richness of the learning community. The Committee agreed with the major findings and suggestions from the external review, but noted that the Faculty of Education does indeed have the academic capacity in some areas to immediately pursue a Ph.D. program.

¹ [Social Studies and Humanities Research Council](#).

Dean's Response

The Dean of Education and the Dean of Graduate Studies both responded to the quality assurance review results.

Noting that the M.Ed. review provided valuable perspective and advice on graduate studies in Education, the Dean of Education addressed the various review recommendations using five categories:

- (1) **Development and expansion**—The Faculty of Education restructured the M.Ed. program and reduced enrolment to sustainable levels, in part so the Faculty would be positioned to develop proposals for funded graduate expansions. Several proposals for such expansions are in development. Education has also created a program template that allows the development and offering of one-time thematic offerings in the M.Ed. This ensures the program can quickly respond to needs in the profession. It also addresses the self study's recommendation of integrating theory and practice. The thematic offerings will complement the existing M.Ed. streams and can involve individuals from the professional community.
- (2) **Faculty involvement and workload**—For any expansion in graduate offerings, including the thematic offerings noted above, faculty must know in advance the demands that may be placed upon them. Therefore, the M.Ed. Program Committee will identify critical planning paths, which include timelines, curriculum approvals, and anticipated responsibilities of faculty and staff. The Faculty will investigate ways to appropriately recognize the additional workload from developing and implementing thematic graduate programs. Graduate courses are already included on the course list used in planning course load assignment. Ways to extend thesis supervision opportunities, and other graduate studies issues, will be explored in a Faculty retreat and other committee meetings.
- (3) **Marketing and recruitment**—The Faculty has developed brochures on the graduate programs to inform the professional community; these brochures will be updated as required. In 2007, representatives from Education visited every Zone 6 School District, and they took this opportunity to spread the word about the M.Ed. program. The Faculty continues to run recruitment activities at teacher conventions and at the request of particular school districts. Education will also explore ways to use contacts with teachers made through the B.Ed. program as a way to promote the M.Ed.
- (4) **Research and scholarship**—The caliber of research in the Faculty is commendable. The Faculty's *Strategic Plan for Research*, approved in 2005, is designed to enhance research and scholarly activity in Education.
- (5) **Doctoral program**—The Faculty agrees with the caution to proceed carefully with a Ph.D. program in Education.

The Dean of Graduate Studies agreed with the recommendations provided by the Program Review Committee and the external reviewers, and added some further commentary:

- (1) **Expansion**—The flexible delivery of programs to meet niche demands is an excellent idea. Given Education's strong working relationship with local First Nations communities, expanding the M.Ed. to address First Nations issues is encouraged. Any graduate studies expansions will have to take into account available funding.
- (2) **Doctoral program**—The development of a Ph.D. program will have to proceed carefully, given the increased demands on faculty from expansion in the M.Ed. program. Doctoral programming must keep the flexibility built into the M.Ed., and should be directed to niche areas.
- (3) **General observations**—Highly-trained educators are in demand, and the U of L is well positioned to address this demand through its relevant and flexible M.Ed. program. The U of L can best do this with carefully planned, flexible programming directed to niche areas that engages a broad spectrum of faculty.