Department of Special Education

Purpose of Unit – Special Education is devoted to research-based preparation of special educators from teachers to doctoral level researchers, teacher educators and administrators. Kansas does not have an initial license for special education, so all teachers must pursue a post baccalaureate endorsement in the field after obtaining an initial teaching license. Faculty engage heavily in field-centered research and advocacy for students and adults with disabilities, their families and professionals who serve them. Special Education hosts two degree programs – an MSE in Special Education, and a doctorate in Special Education (both Ph.D. and Ed.D.). Fully 95% of those obtaining doctorates in the period under review received the Ph.D.

Data Used for Review – The Special Education review relied heavily on AIMS data, internal department data (e.g. faculty vita, doctoral graduates, placements, etc.), data compiled for accrediting agencies, and sources highlighting key issues in the field of special education. No external reviews were conducted. In addition, the program emphasized changes implemented since the last review cycle. The many tables and figures presented substantiated the information provided in the evaluation.

Two pieces of information not included in the report are significant for consideration:

- A recent Science Watch review (August 7, 2011) ranked Special Education as the second most productive special education department in the nation in terms of published journal articles in the field.
- The department has developed a hiring plan for the next few years to address the likely faculty openings due to upcoming retirements. With an average age of the faculty at 64.5 years, the plan identified specific areas for faculty hiring and recruitment related to targeted strengths in the department. The plan guided the hiring of two Assistant Professors that started fall, 2011, as well the posting of openings for a department chair and open rank faculty member currently being searched.

Key Findings of Evaluations –

MSE:

- Special Education – Exceptional
  - Same rating as prior review. Special Education faculty members are highly productive scholars and very successful in attracting external funding. The 2007 KS Department of Education and NCATE accreditation reviews highlighted its recruitment, advising and support programs for students. Enrollments have remained relatively steady with slight overall declines, though time to degree has also declined in recent years. Student admission test scores have remained steady with slight increases in recent years. The program has a concentration wholly on-line and infuses technology into the delivery of all courses.
Ph.D./Ed.D.:

- Special Education – Exceptional
  - Same rating as prior review. Special Education faculty members are highly productive scholars and very successful in attracting external funding. Students are successful in landing academic positions, the majority of whom (95%) pursue the Ph.D., not the Ed.D. degree. Time to degree is typically at or below university averages. Students report strong satisfaction with the program. Most students are well supported, though the federal decline in funds for personnel preparation grants does impact enrollments. The program attracts large numbers of international students. Enrollments have declined slightly.

Changes Made to Improve Quality –

- In collaboration with C&T, the UEC program was developed and launched during the review period. This combined early childhood and special education program is a model for other programs in KS and the nation. It was highlighted for its innovation and excellence in a Washington Briefing paper prepared by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.
- The first wholly on-line master’s degree in the SOE was developed and implemented recently. The transitions master’s program evolved from grants initiated by a department faculty member for delivery to students in several states.
- All master’s level courses include some online learning components.
- A variety of advanced technologies were implemented into course instruction - “bud in the ear” novice teacher coaching, videoconferencing for field supervision, content-enriched podcasts. The SOE TEACHLIVE Virtual Learning Lab was created in collaboration with the University of Central Florida utilizing avatars to replicate classrooms and other settings for live virtual teaching and research opportunities.
- Special Education developed a more consolidated admissions process for doctoral students that is user-friendly and simplifies the process to help attract students to coming to KU.
- A doctoral studies coordinator was appointed to focus attention on recruiting, retaining and supporting doctoral students throughout their KU experience.
- The department carefully tracks placement of doctoral graduates and allows for follow-up regarding program strengths and weaknesses.

Plans/Concerns for Future –

- The faculty hiring plan must be implemented over the next several years to fill anticipated faculty openings due to retirements. The plan established the specific areas to target for new hires, and is closely related to the KU Strategic Initiative around Community Development and Equity. Some bridge funding from central administration may be needed to support hiring new
faculty members pending retirements, but given the productivity and strong rankings of the department, aggressively implementing the plan is required to maintain the department’s status and levels of performance.

- Special Education implemented the first wholly on-line master’s degree in the SOE in fall, 2011. Other opportunities for on-line programming and professional development programs for current P-12 teachers should be considered for implementation to support enrollment growth and exposure of the KU brand name in the field.

- Special Education will need to identify the comparative metrics it will use through Academic Analytics and other variables to gauge effectiveness and program outcomes in the future.

- Measurable program outcomes should be established especially for those programs not associated with professional accreditation.

- The leadership of the Center for Research on Learning will likely change during the next review cycle. Special Education must be closely involved in the decision-making about that designated center as it is so closely associated with the department.

- Greater support for doctoral students must be sought through external funding, endowments and other means.
Department of Special Education

Academic Program Review Report

June 2011

Chriss Walther-Thomas, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair

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Appendices

Appendix A: Department Planning Documents (Vision, Mission, Strategic Plan)
Appendix B: Special Education Faculty Vitae
Appendix C: OIRP Sponsored Project Expenditures per Tenure Track Faculty FY 2004-2008
Appendix D: OIRP AIMS Department of Special Education Data Summary: SCH, Budgeted Faculty, Instructor Workload, Research Activity and Graduate Support, Financial Aid, Majors/Degree Counts, Admissions Yield, and Student Satisfaction
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Department of Special Education Degree Program Overview

The mission of the School of the Education (SOE) and the University of Kansas (KU) is to provide high-quality degree programs and professional education, engaged field research, and knowledgeable and dedicated professional service to Kansas, the nation, and the world. The Department of Special Education (Department) advances all three aspects of this overarching mission. The Department own mission, values, and vision statements, strategic planning documents, and faculty work align closely with fundamental KU precepts to provide quality of individual and department-wide research, teaching, and professional service (See Appendix A: Department Planning Documents). Faculty are committed to (1) research-based professional preparation to ensure effective special educators across the career spectrum—from beginning teachers to doctoral-level researchers, teacher educators, and administrators; (2) field-engaged research designed to address unique needs of children and adults with disabilities, their families, and the professionals who serve them; and (3) dedicated professional leadership, service, and advocacy. As this report demonstrates, this is a highly-productivity Department that has a long tradition of academic excellence and field leadership that continues today.

In terms of academic excellence and field leadership, the Department has long been recognized as one of KU’s top-ranked departments. For many years, the Department has been nationally-ranked as one of the leading graduate programs in this field through the popular press and empirical research.

- Since 1997, when the first annual *US News & World Report Graduate Program Survey* (*USN&WR*) was published, KU has retained its top position. During a 14-year period, KU Special Education has been named as the top overall graduate program (i.e., public and private) eight years; Vanderbilt has received this honor six times. Every empirical study reported in the literature since 1978 has named KU as the top program based on research productivity, doctoral student quality, graduate outcomes, and overall faculty and program reputation.
- In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) conducted a 10-year review of the Department’s funded research, demonstration, and personnel preparation projects; KU was rated as “exemplary” in all review areas including integration of teaching and research.
- In previous KU and Kansas Board of Regents’ Academic Program Reviews (e.g., 1992, 1997-2002), Department programs were deemed as “Essential” to the University’s central mission and both the master’s and doctoral degree programs received “Exceptional” ratings.
Faculty Strengths, Productivity, and Qualifications

Department faculty are highly dedicated and knowledgeable teachers, prolific researchers, and highly-respected field leaders. Department research and development projects span a broad array of critical issues related to individuals with disabilities, families, and professionals. This work reflects both the breadth and depth of faculty expertise and the Department’s longstanding commitment to funded research (See Appendix B – Faculty Vitae).

- According to the Department’s annual reports, since 2002 Department faculty have published more than 500 refereed publications, 35 books, and 250 other scholarly products. They have made more than 1,500 refereed presentations at state, national, and international meetings and have held key leadership roles in professional associations, on national advisory boards, and as appointees to presidential, federal, and state committees. As this work reflects, there is a well-established tradition of active student engagement in these endeavors. Faculty involve students in all dimensions of their work—though field research, conference presentations, scholarly writing, and grant development. Ongoing graduate student engagement facilitates knowledge and skills development and application, career advancement, and academic life socialization.

- Since 2002 faculty have submitted more than 300 grant proposals to external funding agencies. In 2010, Department faculty and staff managed more than 60 funded grants and contracts totaling more than $14,230,000. The five-year sponsored project expenditure average for tenure track faculty (18.05 FTE average during FY 04-08) was $700,270. This represents the second highest average across all KU academic departments except Medicinal Chemistry (See Appendix C OIRP Sponsored Project Expenditures per Tenure Track Faculty FY 2004-2008).

- The Department’s professional reputation, community values, and dedicated work ethic has facilitated recruitment, development, and retention of top scholars over time. Many current faculty have been at KU for more than 30 years. As of July 1, 2011 the median faculty age is 64. To ensure continued productivity and maintain the Department’s well-established reputation for field leadership, institutional support will be needed to recruit top scholars.

Other Metrics Used to Evaluate Department Performance

- Department faculty members have received numerous awards and honors for their professional contributions. For example, J.E. Wallace Wallin Lifetime Achievement Award is arguably the field’s highest recognition for professional service. Over 45 years, a small handful of leaders have received this honor including three KU faculty: Dr. Nancy Peterson (1993), Dr. Don Deshler
(1997), and Mr. H.R. (Rud) Turnbull in 2011. A review of Wallin awardees shows no other special education department has had three faculty, past or present, so honored.

- In the last five years, three Department faculty have received KU Distinguished Professorships. Beach Center on Disability co-directors, Dr. Ann Turnbull and Mr. Rud Turnbull, share the first Ross and Marianna Beach Distinguished Professorship. Dr. Don Deshler is the inaugural Williamson Family Distinguished Professor of Special Education. All three are internationally-recognized scholars and field leaders.

**Master’s Degree Program Summary**

The Department's master's degree program is highly respected across Kansas, the region, and nationally. According to KSDE figures, approximately 25% of all Kansas special educators are KU graduates. Currently, Kansas special educators must complete elementary or secondary teaching licensures before fulfilling those associated with special education endorsement. Given this KSDE requirement and the SOE Department of Curriculum and Teaching (C&T) elementary and secondary program structure, Department students are currently prepared for entry-level special education careers. Most master’s degree students complete KSDE endorsements requirements in one or more areas for which the Department holds KSDE program approval: Adaptive Special Education (i.e., K-12 high-incidence disabilities generally viewed as mild to moderate), (2) K-12 Functional Special Education (i.e., low-incidence disabilities generally considered more significant) and (3) Early Childhood Special Education-Unified (i.e., birth through age eight early childhood and early childhood special education). It should also be noted that the Department has KSDE approval for Deaf Education (DE); however, no new DE master’s students have been admitted since 2006 due to low student enrollment and insufficient faculty with expertise in this area. The Department also provides masters specialization in two high-demand areas for which KSDE does not offer current endorsement: autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and transition education for secondary students. In 2007, the Department had successful NACTE/KSDE program review. Special Education was commended for enhanced student recruitment, better advising tools, refinement of orientation sessions and group planning meetings for new and continuing students, identification of critical elements in the Department’s culture to support quality teacher education.

**Student Profile, Needs, and Market Demands for Program Graduates**

According to 2012 OIRP data, 162 master’s degree students are currently enrolled in the Department’s master’s degree program (See Appendix D: OIRP AIMS Department of Special Education
Data Summary). There is a high demand for special education teachers in Kansas and across the country. Numerous state and federal reports describe a chronic and persistent shortage of highly-qualified special education teachers over a 30-year period. Annual reports to Congress detail a persistent nationwide shortage, including a disproportionate number of new special educators teachers needed of emotional and behavioral disorders, autism, and low-incidence disabilities. Schools districts, especially in rural and urban areas, are unable to fill vacant positions with licensed special educators. Given these market conditions, master’s program graduates remain highly employable in Kansas and across the country (USDOE Office of Postsecondary Education, March 2011).

Master’s Program Productivity

Master’s student credit hour (SCH) production has been relatively consistent over time given faculty capacity, program design, and chronic personnel shortages in key areas over the past eight years (i.e., autism, behavior/disorders, low-incidence disabilities, early childhood) (See Appendix D). SCH production is very appropriate given’s the size of the program, and other faculty teaching, research, and professional leadership responsibilities. Some SCH fluctuation and slight decline is attributable to changes in OSEP personnel preparation support; fewer resources are available to support professional education. In 2006 OSEP changed its personnel focus and eliminated direct support for pre-service teachers preparing to teach in high-incidence disabilities (mild-moderate areas). Given fewer resources coupled with an increasing shortage of qualified special educators in Kansas and Missouri, many students now elect to complete degrees at a somewhat slower pace while working in the field as temporarily-approved teachers (i.e., “provisional” teachers in training).

Master’s Program Changes Since the Last Review

Changes have been made in compliance with new state and federal policies, teacher education research and innovation, student and field input, and instructional technology developments. Other curricular changes reflect ongoing collaboration with the SOE Department of Curriculum and Teaching required in C&T teacher preparation programs. A few examples are highlighted below:

- Early Childhood Special Education faculty, Dr. Eva Horn and Dr. Barbara Thompson, led efforts to gain state approval for a new Unified Early Childhood (UEC) program housed within C&T. They provide ongoing UEC program leadership. In the program, undergraduates complete degree and Kansas licensure requirements as they prepare to work with all children birth through age 8. Horn and Thompson also received state approval for the new Early Childhood Unified (ECU)
master’s level program in which special education and C&T early childhood education are combined in a comprehensive graduate degree program.

- Since the 2002 review, instructional technology has become a key component in faculty teaching and research. All master’s level courses now include online learning components; many faculty use a hybrid content delivery approach (i.e., combined face-to-face and online). Some courses are fully online to meet the needs of part-time graduate students who are also full-time teachers.

- Dr. Mary Morningstar led development efforts to provide the Department’s first fully-online master’s degree program with an emphasis in Transition Education; students from more than 15 states are currently enrolled. This work grew out of Dr. Morningstar’s federally-funded personnel preparation and model demonstration projects.

- Most faculty use innovative technology applications (e.g., “bug-in-the-ear” novice teacher coaching, videoconferencing to enhance field supervision, content-enrichment podcasts) in their work. Through direct instruction, field-based research, doctoral mini-courses, or instructional modeling in class, master’s and doctoral students learn how to use technology to enhance educational opportunities for students with disabilities and the professionals who serve them.

- The new SOE KU-TEACHME Virtual Learning Lab will open Fall 2011 under the direction of Dr. Earle Knowlton with support from Mr. Frank Carey (SOE technology specialist). This teaching and research project is a collaborative undertaking between the KU-SOE and the University of Central Florida where the TEACHME virtual learning technology was developed. TEACHME is designed as a mixed reality learning environment in which early-career professionals’ (e.g., teachers, counselors, psychologists, and administrators) develop, improve, and enhance new professional skills via simulation activities, guided practice, student review and reflection, and feedback. As the lab is fully implemented during the coming academic year, it is anticipated many SOE faculty and students will use the lab to enhance learning.

**Doctoral Program Review Summary**

The Department’s doctoral program is highly regarded based reputational rankings and empirical research. Most domestic students receive multi-year fellowships; many international students receive home country support. Over the past decade, the Department has maintained a 90%+ graduation rate for admitted doctoral students. In 2010, the median time-to-degree was 5.1 years. In 2005 and 2009 Graduate Student Survey results, doctoral students reported financial constraints and/or family considerations as the primary obstacles to timely degree completion. Less than 15% of the respondents noted obstacles related to faculty availability, course scheduling and rotation, and/or program advising.
In 2010, 12 new doctoral students were admitted. Most were female (84%), single, and had moved to the area to attend KU; 20% were international. The average combined GRE score was 1124.5. Overall, these figures are typical of the Department’s doctoral admission/enrollment pattern over the past 10 years. Graduates are employed at many AAU institutions and other highly-regarded universities.

**Doctoral Student Profile, Field Needs, and Employability**

Similar to chronic special education teacher shortages reported earlier, recent special education faculty needs research shows a persistent shortage of qualified higher education faculty due to expanded roles of special education faculty (i.e., more special education coursework included in general education teacher preparation programs), new IHE program development to meet field needs, and significant retirement of IHE faculty who entered the professoriate in the 1970s as federally-mandated special education services were implemented (Montrosse et al., 2011).

According to OIRP data, since 2004 annual new doctoral student enrollment has ranged from 3 to 15 per year yielding an average of 10.7 per year (See Appendix D). Annual variation is influenced by the availability of KU SOE and OSEP leadership grant funding. Increased admissions competitiveness is evident in the relationship of the trends in the applied to admitted yield with the admitted-to-enrolled yield. Since 2004 the percent of applications to admission has decreased while the number of those admitted who enroll has increased. A more coordinated admissions review process has positively influenced this trend. The majority of students enter with at least three years of experience in the area of disability. To ensure an increased alignment with expectations for university faculty positions, the admission criteria of at least three years of experience has become a more prominent factor in the program’s admissions decisions. Students who do not have sufficient practical experience are required to gain that experience prior to completion of the degree. This requirement may lengthen time to degree for a small number of students (See Appendix D).

The program provides financial support for most domestic doctoral students through graduate teaching assistantships (GTA), graduate research assistantships, KU SOE scholarships, and federal leadership grants. The primary student funding source remains the USDOE OSEP leadership preparation program. According to published OSEP data, the Department has been the most successful university in securing these funds over the past decade. Between 2003-2009, the Department held six four-year OSEP leadership preparation grants. The total value of these awards was approximately $6,000,000 and represented 10-12% of all OSEP funding available at the time for special education doctoral education. The faculty’s high level of grant production has been a consistent resource for funding students while also providing unique research, teaching, and professional development opportunities that enhance the overall
doctoral experience. Other student funding is provided through the Center for Research in Learning (CRL) Department and Life Span Institute (LSI) programs (e.g., the Beach Center on Disability and Juniper Gardens Children’s Project) and through SOE scholarships (See Appendix D). The program attracts a significant number of top international students based to the faculty’s scholarship and international reputation, U.S. News & World Report rankings, and ongoing professional and institutional collaborations with international colleagues. Many of these scholars receive home country support and work as part-time GTAs or GRAs in the Department. Over the past 25 years, the Department has prepared faculty for many international universities. The Department is currently preparing second- and third-generation doctoral students based on recommendations from Korean and Taiwanese program alumni. 2004-11 data show international students represent approximately 23% of newly-enrolled doctoral students and 20% of doctoral degrees awarded.

Adequate doctoral student support is a continuing priority and challenge to ensure the program remains nationally competitive. The importance of this issue was underscored in responses by students to the 2009 Graduate Student Survey Summary (See Appendix E). Seventy-three percent rated the amount of financial support as excellent/very good; unevenness of support based on advisor’s resources was noted across the open-ended responses. Comparison of Spring 2005 and Fall 2009 surveys shows a significant increase in the degree to which work and financial commitments became major obstacles to academic progress. Variability of federal funding and increased competitiveness make this a tenuous source of student support. Availability and early commitment of multi-year funding is critical to ensure continued competitiveness against other AAU universities.

Program Productivity

SCH production is consistent with the capacity and design of doctoral education (See Appendix D). Primary coursework emphasizes small seminars with active engagement of students. SCH data does not accurately reflect the time investment of faculty in doctoral student development. The Department frames the program as a comprehensive “doctoral education experience” including ongoing involvement in faculty research and other projects, informal college teaching and field supervision, and increased attention and feedback on academic writing skills across the curriculum and preparation for academic life. Beyond advisement and mentoring characteristic of doctoral education, faculty actively engage with students through emphasis-area study groups, as respondents and reviewers for student presentations, and by encouraging doctoral student participation on Department governance committees. Since the 2004 establishment of the Kansas Professional for Disabilities (KUPD), the Department’s doctoral student
organization, faculty and alumni have worked closely with student leaders to provide scholarly conversations and related professional development through fireside chats, brown bag seminars, study groups, and an annual student research conference.

According to Montrosse and colleagues (2011) and NSF (2010) the average number of years for special education doctoral students to complete their degree is 5 years. The program’s mean number of years to degree completion for the 10-year period 2001-2010 ranges from 5.3 to 7.1 years. There is little variability between the mean and median years to completion. Personal factors (e.g., pregnancy, illness, family responsibilities) account for most of the variability between five and seven years for completion. The level and consistency of funding impacts the student’s persistence toward the degree and is noted major obstacles to academic progress.

Program Outcomes

The program offers two degree options, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), a research-focused degree and the Doctor of Education (EdD), with a stronger focus on research to practice. Between 2000 and 2010, a total of 131 doctorates were awarded. Ninety-five percent of these degrees were PhDs. The number of degrees awarded ranged from 7 to 16 per year. Appendix F, Initial Permanent Doctoral Graduate Employment, summarizes initial employment of graduates for the period 2000-2010. Approximately 50% of doctoral program graduates take tenure-track positions. Other top placements include IHE researchers or demonstration project directors/staff (22%), LEA administrators or professional development coordinators (14%). Other employment includes federal and state education agency administrators and project directors (9%) and the remainder are employed as consultants, part-time researchers or instructors, or post-docs. Tenure-track employment decisions are made based on a number of factors in addition to professional knowledge and expertise. Most Department students are women in their early 30s and personal considerations impact employment decisions (e.g., marriage, two-career families, pregnancy, young children, and other family responsibilities).

Department students and recent graduates have received numerous national and international awards for their work (See Appendix G: Recent KU Special Education Doctoral Student and Program Graduate Honors and Awards). Many are employed as faculty at leading U.S. universities (e.g., Connecticut, Illinois-Urbana, Oregon, Texas-Austin, Virginia) and at top international universities (e.g., Beijing Normal University, Ewha Women’s University, King Saud University, National Taiwan Normal University). Many are faculty at other Kansas universities (e.g., Emporia State, Kansas State, Pittsburg State, Wichita State) and at Midwestern institutions (e.g., Missouri-Columbia, Nebraska, New Mexico).
Many pursue careers as professional developers, disability researchers, and local, state, and national administrators. Two graduates are university presidents (i.e., West Chester University, National Technical Institute for the Deaf).

Over the past 10 years, 140 students have graduated from the Department’s programs; 68 graduate accepted initial employment at the following institutional types based on Carnegie Basic Classification: Research University/Very High Research Activity (18%), Research University/High Activity (18%), Doctoral/ Research Universities (12%), Master’s Colleges and Universities (33%), Baccalaureate College-Diverse Fields (1%), and Special Focus Institution (3%); approximately 15% work at international universities. This pattern reflects the Department’s commitment to comprehensive preparation of researchers, teacher educators, and program administrators.

Doctoral Program Changes Since Last Academic Review

Traditionally, senior faculty members have assumed primary doctoral program leadership. Given the mean age of the Department’s full professors (65) and the depth and breadth of faculty expertise across faculty ranks, intentional efforts are underway to implement an enhanced model that involving all faculty in doctoral program review and enhancement, and team teaching of new and established courses (especially during senior faculty phased retirement). New mini-courses around current issues and trends (e.g., academic life preparation, instructional and assistive technology, teacher education research) are also facilitating this process without significant credit hour increases. The changes should ensure faculty expertise is used more effectively, and engage faculty in doctoral education earlier in their KU careers.

In 2008, the faculty position of Doctoral Studies Coordinator (DSC) was created and Dr. Sandra Gautt (.5FTE) serves in this role providing area leadership and coordination (Leadership Studies Committee chair; doctoral recruitment, admissions, program planning, and student progress to degree coordination and monitoring; KUPD advisor, associate department chair). This structural shift has facilitated a more focused view of doctoral studies strengthening an already strong program and preparing for senior faculty retirement (e.g., streamlining admission, enhancing recruitment strategies and materials, developing tools to enhance doctoral advising, providing a more comprehensive new student orientation).

One of the most significant doctoral program changes impacting the future has been ongoing discussion of the program’s alignment with recent changes in doctoral education as articulated in the Carnegie Foundation’s Formation of Scholars, and within the field of practice. This work serves as a foundation ongoing curriculum review and evaluation based on the articulated competencies, habits of mind, and graduate outcomes faculty aim to achieve. While remaining philosophically grounded in the Department’s overarching conceptual framework (e.g., civic professionalism and reciprocal research to
practice), the faculty have more intentionally embraced the Carnegie concept of stewardship of the discipline/field as an integral part of the doctoral program conceptual framework.

**Summary and Recommendations for Program Improvement and Enhancement**

The Department faculty and staff are highly-productive teachers, researchers, scholars, and field leaders who take great pride and satisfaction from their work and the Department’s national reputation for excellence. In this report, formal and informal data have been summarized to illustrate the Department’s effectiveness across key metrics of academic success (See Appendices A-H). Faculty use a variety of formal and informal self-study mechanisms to facilitate continuous graduate program improvement and enhancement. These efforts are furthered by active faculty participation in both graduate-level teacher preparation and doctoral education, ongoing dialogue and reflection, research and innovation, and internal challenges to improve our own performance. Department stakeholders take enormous pride in KU’s longstanding reputation for excellence and ongoing contributions to the field of special education.

While the overall performance of the Department remains outstanding, Special Education faces two significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure continued productivity and to maintain KU’s national reputation. First, given the mean faculty age (65), considerable institutional support will be needed over the next 5-7 years to ensure smooth and effective faculty transition, faculty replacement, and new faculty induction and mentoring. Focused funding and new distinguished professorships are needed to successfully recruit and retain a strong mix of rising academic stars and nationally-known mid- to senior-level scholars and leaders to carry on the Department’s traditions and commitment to excellence. During this period the leadership in the KU Center for Research in Learning (CRL Director Don Deshler) and in the Beach Center on Disability (Center Co-Directors Ann and Rud Turnbull) is likely to change due to anticipated faculty retirement. In these centers, 2-3 years of overlap between new leadership appointments and Deshler, A. Turnbull, and R. Turnbull retirements to ensure seamless transition and no loss in productivity or national reputation. Faculty retirements are also anticipated in other critical areas (e.g., emotional and behavioral disorders, academic faculty development, unified early childhood, special education policy and law, instructional technology, teacher education). Second, graduate student funding, especially at the doctoral level, remains a significant concern among faculty and students. A select set of AAU institutions including Vanderbilt University, Oregon, Wisconsin-Madison, and Texas-Austin are the program’s strongest competitors for top students. The faculty’s commitment to fund graduate education remains strong but to attract the best and the brightest, additional institutional resources are needed to supplement externally-generated resources.
References


Department Assessment

Based on ongoing work in the Department of Special Education and information summarized in this report, the master’s and doctoral levels programs remain essential to the University’s mission and exceptional in quality of faculty teaching, research, and service to the field.

University of Kansas – Lawrence Campus

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Since 1957 the Department of Special Education has prepared effective teachers and school administrators to work with children and youth with disabilities and their families. Doctoral preparation began in the mid-1960s. Throughout its history, the Department has been ranked among the best in the country through independent research and peer rankings based on various factors including faculty publications, external funding awards, and student outcomes. This academic review highlights some of the current work of a highly-productive faculty across all dimensions of academic life—teaching, research, and professional service. Most Special Education faculty have been recognized nationally for their work through prestigious honors and awards, elected professional leadership positions, and key national board appointments. The Department’s international reputation for leadership, research innovation, and comprehensive graduate education attracts strong students from Kansas, the U.S., and many international countries. To date, thousands of special education teachers and more than 400 doctoral students have graduated from Department programs. At all levels, Special Education graduates are highly employable in top programs; many are highly-respected state and national leaders in the field. Research-based graduate education, effective student research mentoring, and relevant and field-engaged professional development serve as the cornerstones for all faculty research, teaching, and service.