

Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education

Strategic Planning Update

In view of your unit's history and the evolving nature of your work, what different directions (mixes of themes) are you considering for your future? For each possible direction you identify, please indicate the reasons and your sense of opportunities and challenges.

The mission of the Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education (EPCSE) is to generate and apply interdisciplinary research, theory, and practice to improve individual, school, and community outcomes, and to reduce disparities among diverse populations across the Commonwealth of PA, the nation, and globally. We strive to maximize learner success and human potential across the lifespan, particularly for those who face adverse conditions. We are committed to providing high quality education programs; conducting high impact, interdisciplinary research; serving as a source of methodological and statistical expertise for the College; and fostering a departmental climate that is welcoming and inclusive of diverse individuals.

EPCSE has identified three themes (i.e., Pursuing Excellence in Prevention and Intervention Sciences, Furthering Learning Sciences, and Enhancing Teaching for the 21st Century) that cut across programs that comprise EPCSE. Though each is described separately, there is considerable overlap among the themes. A brief rationale for each theme is provided as an example of opportunities and challenges.

THEME 1: Pursuing Excellence in Prevention and Intervention Sciences

EPCSE is committed to the reduction of disparities that exist among diverse populations across the lifespan. We are committed to preventing situations that can occur (e.g., bullying) as well as intervening with people who face challenges (e.g., addressing mental health concerns, providing learning and/or behavior supports). We value interdisciplinary, collaborative, and evidence-based approaches and our focus includes mental health, school climate, rehabilitation issues, as well as instruction that maximizes an individual's opportunity to learn. Although the scope of our efforts is broad, a particular area of expertise within EPCSE centers on people with or at risk for a disability, broadly defined. Faculty members in our department are deeply engaged in generating and disseminating knowledge about disabilities both in and out of classrooms, and across the lifespan.

Possible opportunities:

1. **Establish partnerships with school and communities.** We are strongly considering restructuring the CEDAR Clinic to further our ability to establish school-community partnerships and maximize school-community engagement opportunities that produce grants, contracts, and/or endowments to support such efforts. School Psychology (SPSY) has established important school-community connections and Counselor Education (CNED) is also seeking to foster such partnerships.

2. **Contribute to university-wide efforts to protect children and enhance well-being.** Penn State has recently established the Network for Child Protection and Well-being and our department is well-positioned to partner and serve as a bridge between the Network and the College of Education. We are in the process of interviewing candidates for a co-funded position with the Network that will examine the intersection of child maltreatment and children with disabilities. In addition, two faculty members in the department (i.e., Kathy Bieschke and JoLynn Carney) are part of a committee that is developing a university-wide minor in child protection and well-being, and are active in determining how the College of Education (and EPCSE) might contribute to such an effort. EPCSE is also poised to engage in interdisciplinary research designed to inform how we can best protect our children from maltreatment both in schools and the community at large, particularly for those children who have or are at risk for a disability.
3. **Create and foster departmental structures to foster interdisciplinary research initiatives.** We are engaged in determining how we can provide more support and mentorship for those interested in grant-funded interdisciplinary research.

Challenges:

1. One challenge we face is the structure of CNED clinic current leadership. The current model for CNED is to provide a tenure-track faculty member with one course release to manage the Clinic during the academic year. We seek to explore whether the model in SPSY (multi-year, fixed term faculty member) might be a better model for the CNED program as we pursue school and community partnerships.
2. Interdisciplinary efforts, while rewarding, also require considerable time and effort to build partnerships with productive outcomes. Within the College, our challenge will be to discern how best to interweave an emphasis on child protection and well-being into a curriculum that is already quite full due to certification requirements for students.

THEME 2: Promoting and Furthering Learning Sciences

Given that by necessity, Learning Sciences is an interdisciplinary domain integrating fields like education, psychology, computer science, artificial intelligence, and instructional systems, such an emphasis is an obvious fit for both the department and the college. Here we are using the phrase Learning Science as an umbrella term, including both empirical research initiatives but also those who apply such research to classroom instruction. Learning Sciences initiatives includes faculty from EDPSY, SPLED, and SPSY.

Possible opportunities:

1. **Investigate the potential for an Integrated Undergraduate Graduate degree.** Faculty in EDPSY and SPSY have discussed the potential for an IUG in EDPSY, where education majors would be in a five year program and graduate with a BS in an education field and an MS in EDPSY. We believe we can offer an IUG program within the current structure of our MS program, using existing courses and requirements.

2. **Involvement in General Education initiatives.** The University is involved in discussions about redefining the nature of General Education and courses that comprise that requirement. It appears that there will be a broader, more thematic approach to what is required in General Education. We, and in particular EDPSY faculty, are interested in remaining an important part of General Education at Penn State perhaps by contributing to one of the themes identified.
3. **Create and foster departmental structures to foster interdisciplinary research initiatives.** As mentioned previously, we are engaged in determining how we can provide more support and mentorship for those who are interested in grant-funded interdisciplinary research.

Challenges:

1. Each of these three endeavors require a time commitment from faculty as well as collaboration across programs.
2. Discussions about changes to General Education at Penn State are currently in progress. EPCSE faculty participation in this effort is essential if we want to participate in the delivery of general education.
3. As mentioned previously, interdisciplinary efforts require time and effort; departmental structures that are developed must be sensitive to this challenge.

THEME 3: Enhancing Learning and Instruction for the 21st Century

Our department possesses many strengths. All of our programs are well-regarded as evidenced by national rankings. Our enrollments are strong and we believe that the potential exists for enrollment growth in our undergraduate RHS program and in several of our graduate programs (SPLED, CNED) at University Park with the possibility of expanding to several Commonwealth Campuses. Our department has successfully offered programs (ABA, Autism, Special Education Supervision) and courses (EDPSY) via the World Campus, and potential exists to expand those efforts. We are committed to continuing to provide quality instruction in all our courses and programs.

Possible opportunities:

1. **Explore options for maintaining currency and high program quality in undergraduate education to ensure stable undergraduate enrollments.** Possible ideas include exploring RHS program accreditation, offering RHS and SPLED undergraduates the option of pursuing credentialing as a Child Life Specialist, engaging in surveys of undergraduates to assess program outcomes and influence possible program revisions, and providing undergraduate students with an opportunity to develop a global perspective on disability issues and cultural aspects of disability.

2. **Explore options for maintain currency and high program quality in graduate education.** Possible ideas here include an in-depth review of each of our doctoral programs, with an eye to making changes where necessary to ensure quality education and program relevance, and exploring how to regularly offer higher level statistics courses (e.g., HLM, SEM) to graduate students in the college and across the university.
3. **Expand World Campus offerings.**
 - a. **SPLED World Campus M.Ed. program.** The Special Education program is moving forward with a distance M.Ed. program. This program will meet the needs of teachers and other service providers by providing flexibility of content (e.g., Applied Behavior Analysis, Autism, Academic and Behavioral Supports) within the context of a high quality Penn State degree offered at a distance to busy professionals.
 - b. **RHS Undergraduate major.** As noted by the ratification of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2013 by the United Nations and the recent meeting by the General Assembly in September 2013 (UN Enable), the international community perceives “disability as a cross-cutting issue in the global development agenda” (UN General Assembly, 2013, p. 5) and, as such, we believe that training persons throughout the world represents a largely untapped initiative that might be addressed through offering an on-line undergraduate RHS program.
 - c. **Investigate offering our General Education courses via the World Campus.**

Challenges:

1. Offering programs via the World Campus represents a large undertaking. In regard to the SPLED M.Ed., a complete restructuring of the SPLED M.Ed. program is necessary to both accommodate a desire to provide an effective route to dual certification for teaching candidates at University Park, while also providing M.Ed. options for the students in our distance education programs. Similarly, developing and implementing the RHS undergraduate program via the World Campus requires faculty capacity that we do not currently possess.

What is your preferred direction for the future and why?

Given the size of our department and the breadth of programs, we believe that we are in a position to pursue all three of these themes. These cross-cutting themes build upon existing strengths and maximize collaboration between all of our programs.

To what degree does consensus exist around the pursuit of this preferred direction within your unit? If there are “minority positions” within your department or unit, what are they and how are you addressing the differences of opinions?

We engaged in a prolonged strategic planning process, including program, program coordinator, and department meetings devoted to the topic of strategic planning. Care was taken to identify

themes that cut across multiple programs. Determining which opportunities to pursue and prioritize within each theme represents our next step in the strategic planning process. Having stated that, there are some opportunities to which we have already committed, including the SPLED World Campus M.Ed. degree and the co-funded hire with the Network for Child Well-being and Protection.

What are the concrete next steps you wish to take? Short term (next two years); Longer term (>2 years)

Short term

1. Within each theme, determine which opportunities to pursue and prioritize. Due date: May, 2014.
 - a. Engage program coordinators in a discussion about how to best foster collaboration between faculty members, many of whom are just starting to get to know one another.
 - b. Engage department faculty in ongoing strategic planning discussions about each cross-cutting theme. Goals for these discussions include prioritizing opportunities within each theme, generating action plans, and identifying indicators of success for each opportunity.
2. Maintain ongoing contact with SPLED faculty members involved with the development of the SPLED M.Ed. program offered via the World Campus, particularly in regard to how to best foster program implementation.
3. Successful completion of the Network for Child Protection and Well-being co-funded search. Due date: April 2014.

Long term

1. To be determined, pending outcome of ongoing strategic plan discussions.

What are the budget implications?

1. Pursuing a different model of clinic coordination for CNED will likely require an investment of resources. The SPSY model of clinic coordination, which has been highly successful, might be a useful one to apply here.
2. Relative to the World Campus, in regard to the SPLED M.Ed. significant resources will be needed for the planning, delivery, and organization of this coursework. The structure of the new M.Ed. (as well as multiple new courses) will require Graduate School approval, and we will also need to deal with the instructional challenge of the anticipate growth. At a minimum, there will be a need for additional faculty to teach, and manage the program, and there are also significant issues in course preparation and maintenance (for distance education offerings) that must be addressed. We will face similar budgetary issues should we decide to pursue offering the RHS undergraduate major via the World Campus.

3. As we move forward in our strategic planning efforts and prioritize which opportunities we wish to pursue and when, additional budget implications will likely be identified.

What does your unit wish to be known for in the future?

Department faculty worked collaboratively to create the mission statement presented at the beginning of this document and it serves as an accurate representation of how we would like to be perceived by the college and university communities.