



27 May 2010

TO: Dr. Rita Irwin, Associate Dean and Chair
CREATE Program Development Committee

RE: Concerns with CREATE's Current Direction

Dear CREATE Committee,

Please accept this in a spirit of formal engagement with the various CREATE committees, and as catalytic to furthering discussion on the future of the Faculty's teacher education program. We note that within CREATE is a call for "Educational Alternatives" and offer the following as a sound alternative for reconsidering current directions. We risk failure in meeting contemporary demands of faculty and students in a research university with premature closure on conversation or consultation by profiling the CREATE proposal as the surest alternative and conclusion of a long process. One shortcoming of the process is that we have not had alternatives from which to choose or against which to weigh the CREATE proposal.¹

The current teacher education program was inaugurated in 1987, generally marking the end of a twenty-year debate in the Faculty over concurrent versus consecutive programs. The 1987 reform created a consecutive, post-baccalaureate program, compressing two years of coursework into one (60 credit B.Ed. program).² For various reasons (e.g., too many courses, too little time, too few electives), which remain unresolved, reform of the teacher education program was again begun in earnest in the late 1990s, rejuvenating excitement for renewal. Plans were nevertheless stalled when the BC College of Teachers (BCCT) commented negatively the Faculty's proposal in 2000. A process of reviews and recommended revisions led to a series of cases in the Supreme Court of BC in 2001 and the Court of Appeal in 2002 (Bauman, 2001; Southin, 2002). The legal case between the Faculty and BCCT reduced to the right to determine the curriculum of teacher education. The Supreme Court found that the issue was not justiciable, leaving universities in general and the Faculty in particular with substantial freedom to determine the curriculum.³

Although there is much to be recommended in CREATE's proposal for a new teacher education program, there is also much left to be desired.⁴ Recommended, for example, is attention to quality induction experiences of the practicum. The one-size-fits-all approach, high volume of courses, low credit hour allocations to many courses, and insufficient electives leave a more informed alternative to be desired.

Alternatively, our recommendation in response to CREATE's proposal is simple: Plan for 50% fewer students, 50% fewer courses, increased (100%+) credit value in a number of courses, and sufficient (15%+ of total credits) course electives for choice and innovation. Fewer courses and increased credit value per course facilitate sustainable opportunities for extended, in-depth study.

We encourage the CREATE Planning Committee to invite and publicly engage with various formal critiques of the proposed program, beginning with the “ECPS Task Force on Undergraduate Programs Report” and this letter and recommendation.

CREATE’s proposal is designed to accommodate the current number of teacher candidates (e.g., 700+), while we ought to be planning for a much smaller program than the current. The size of the teacher education program has had no substantive discussion and, despite concerns over the financial viability of the Faculty, CREATE has offered no position papers to facilitate weighing program sizes against budgetary constraints. There are resource limits to simply replicating a cohort model (e.g., 35 students x 20 cohorts versus 35 students x 10 cohorts). Contradicting one-size-fits-all approaches, scholars of teacher education reiterate time and time again that the quality of experiences for faculty and students are dependent on quantitative variables such as class sizes and total enrollment. As we write, the Vancouver Board of Education (2010) and others across the Province are anguishing over serious budget shortfalls leading to layoffs and school closures in a context of declining enrollments and empty seats. To date, there has not been a single discussion of the size of the future program or a round figure attached to the CREATE proposal, leading one to conclude that the current numbers will arbitrarily prevail.

The high volume of courses in the CREATE proposal (e.g., 25 courses plus practicum in the elementary program), similar to the current program, and low credit value for many courses (7 x 1 cr, 14 x 2 credit, etc.) mitigate against sustainable in-depth engagement with “substantive subject knowledge, syntactic subject knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners, [and] knowledge of educational contexts” (Gambhir, Broad, Evans & Gaskell, 2008, p. 15). Given the volume of courses in the current program, the Faculty too easily risks developing students—overwhelmed or exhausted from the first term onward—who are increasingly indifferent to courses, describe them as so many ‘hoops to jump through’, or limit concerns to whether the final grades are pass-fail. We risk communicating, explicitly or implicitly, that courses are merely instrumental to certification. In the CREATE proposal, with a high volume of 1 credit and 2 credit courses, might this be reinforced with a message of superficiality? Teacher education is a continuum over a career, and it is tempting in the initial B.Ed. programmatic experience to offer a survey of many courses and topics (Bowman, 1990, pp. 24-28). The better alternative is to be somewhat modest and in this initial program offer about 50% fewer courses that are immersive and extended over longer periods of time (e.g., 6 credits or 78 hours). Teaching for depth in teacher education requires time and a community of practice can accomplish much more in depth within 78 hours of class time than in a series of brief surveys (Rolheiser & Evans, 2006).

Few would disagree that “teaching is becoming increasingly complex and that highly competent teachers apply a range of practices for varying purposes, incorporate and integrate different kinds of knowledge, build up a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire, and adapt to learner diversity and shifting contextual forces” (Gambhir, Broad, Evans & Gaskell, 2008, p. 3). Certainly, as in the CREATE proposal, one is tempted to meet this complexity with many courses addressing many topics. An alternative is instead to plan for fewer courses and extended, immersive study. Although short-term intensive courses are potentially productive *if* high quality and *if* the topic is manageable (Scott, 2003), those proposed by CREATE far exceed what is viable within a 1 credit (8-10 hr after introduction & evaluation, etc.) course. For example, “Learning and Instruction,” “Education and Media,” “Education, Knowledge and Curriculum,” and “Development and Culture” far exceed what is comprehensible within a 1 credit course. The

reality can only be a snippet or superficial version of “Learning and Instruction,” “Education and Media,” “Development and Culture,” etc. The scope of these aside, the volume proposed by CREATE means that it is very unlikely that any of the 1 credit courses can be compressed into a high quality short course over a two day period. In a post-baccalaureate program, the type of high-intensity clinical experiences of practicum ought to be matched with in-depth, sustained, immersive course experiences structured over an extended period of time (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Similarly, students could be well served with an adequate number of electives that meet the expectation of choice in adult, professional education and inspire innovation across the Faculty. The lack of electives in CREATE’s proposal for the teacher education program (0 for elementary and 1 for secondary students) problematically overlooks a core component of choice in post-baccalaureate education and necessity of introducing novel, innovative courses to respond to changing times and emphases.

Certainly, teacher education programs can provide shallow or deep experiences in the BCCT’s five basic realms of knowledge: (a) human development and learning; (b) education foundations (history, philosophy, sociology); (c) curriculum and instruction; (d) diagnosing and providing for the educational needs of individual students; and (e) evaluation and testing (Phillips, 2002, p. 39). An alternative to CREATE’s proposal would be to provide for deep, extensive courses in each along with about 3 electives to complement the core and encourage innovation. As opposed to a brief tour, C&I emphases in the elementary program, for example, could provide depth in literacy and numeracy (see Gambhir, Broad, Evans & Gaskell, 2008, p. 16). This could be readily done with commitment to the themes (e.g., cultivating inquiry) and strands (e.g., diversity and social justice) proposed in CREATE.

Again, if a teacher’s role is “more complex today than ever before, requiring an unprecedented range of knowledge, skills and experiences” (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008, p. 19), then a program with fewer students, fewer courses, and sufficient electives will go a long way toward meeting new demands. With this in mind, please provide an alternative program from which to choose or against which to weigh the current CREATE proposal. Quality (e.g., curriculum) needs to be discussed openly in relation to quantity (e.g., enrollments and resources). The mantra needs to shift from breadth to depth.

Thank you. We look forward to due consideration, and request a written response and circulation of these concerns with CREATE’s current direction among Dean’s Advisory Committee members.

Signed,

Lee Gunderson (LLED)
Stephen Petrina (EDCP)
Linda Siegel (ECPS)

cc. Jon Shapiro, Dean pro tem
Deborah Butler, Senior Associate Dean

Notes

¹ CREATE was established in November 2005 as a “Community,” which, while inclusive, remains without terms of reference for a charge of restructuring the teacher education program. From a retreat in December 2005 a speaker’s series was launched and numerous committees spun out of CREATE, including the Associate Dean’s Advisory on Teacher Education (ADATE), Planning and Development Committee, Program Development Committee, and Curriculum Development Committee. The amorphous nature of CREATE adds to confusion about how and when to formally respond or to what one should respond. To this moment, only one formal, substantive critique of CREATE’s direction for UBC’s teacher education program was submitted (i.e., “ECPS Task Force on Undergraduate Programs Report,” February 2009) and this has yet to be formally introduced into CREATE’s public proceedings or made available to the entire Faculty for consideration and discussion. Indeed, CREATE has proceeded without formal mechanisms for soliciting and discussing *substantive* feedback and critique. CREATE documents were circulated for Faculty meetings in November 2007 (“The Call for Renewal: Teacher Education in a Research University”) and September 2009 (“Special Faculty Meeting: CREATE”), with motions to approve in principle, but again were not accompanied by any formal, substantive written critique. Both received a lukewarm reception at the Faculty meetings as colleagues voiced serious concerns.

² Our 12 month elementary B.Ed. program was actually introduced in 1991.

³ It is noteworthy that reform of the Faculty’s teacher education program has been traditionally, or responsibly, submitted to *substantive* critique and debate. In the late 1960s, the Commission On the Future of the Faculty of Education (COFFE) oversaw a formal process of well-documented proposals and task forces charged with written responses offered for critique and circulated in formal channels such as the *COFFE Report*. Similarly, in 1983, the Committee for Undergraduate Program Review (CUPR) was established and solicited numerous formal critiques and responses to the structure of the program through the end of 1986. In 2000, the BCCT provided an extensive, formal review in a document circulated within the entire Faculty. Uniquely, the current process under the Community to Re-Imagine Educational Alternatives for Teacher Education (CREATE) has been much more informal than in the past.

⁴ Perhaps substantive critique would resolve various contradictions at the core of the CREATE proposal. “The Call for Renewal” and “Special Faculty Meeting: CREATE” documents seem ahistorical in that they do not engage with either the current program or insights into reform articulated in the *COFFE Report*, CUPR documents, and the *BCCT Report and Recommendations*. Neither the “The Call for Renewal” or “Special Faculty Meeting: CREATE” documents clearly identify major problems with the current program, some of which are associated with too many courses, too little time, redundancy, and insufficient course electives. These problems are unresolved in the CREATE proposal. There are impressive conceptual aspects of “The Call for Renewal” and “Special Faculty Meeting: CREATE” documents, but the conceptual is contradictory. For example, the curriculum and instruction (C&I) suite of courses in the elementary program simply reproduces course for course the curriculum of 1987 or 1969 or 1959; this has not at all been theorized or reconceptualized. Engagement with the BCCT’s formal, extensive review and critique of the Faculty’s reforms in 2000 would have identified this contradiction (see pp. 30-31, 63). Among the “major changes” in the late 1990s proposed reform, with which the BCCT (2000) agreed, was “the reduction of courses required of students and increase in the number of courses the students can select” (pp. 5, 62-63).

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