

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA)

A report of the External Review Team

for the

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA)

School of Education

University of Wisconsin

Madison, Wisconsin

April 24, 2015

External Review Team Members

Gerardo R. López, Chair
Professor, Political Science
Loyola University New Orleans

Rebecca Ropers-Huilman
Professor and Chair, Organizational Leadership and Policy Development
University of Minnesota

Steven E. Tozer
Professor, Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Illinois-Chicago

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction and Overview	4
Purpose of External Review	4
External Review Team	4
Data Collection Process	5
ELPA and the UW School of Education in a Changing Political and Economic Climate	6
Political and Economic Climate in the State of Wisconsin	6
School of Education	6
ELPA	7
Observations and Impressions: Understanding the Structure and Culture of ELPA	8
Structure	10
Culture	18
Opportunities for Exploration and Strategic Action	24

**Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA):
External Review Report, May 2015**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Wisconsin-Madison requires university units to conduct a self-study evaluation every ten years to generate constructive reflection about their strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. In accord with this purpose, the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) at the University of Wisconsin invited three colleagues to participate in their External Review Process. The External Review Team, selected for its diversity of professional expertise and perspectives, was able to reach considerable consensus on a number of key issues that are elaborated in this report.

- ❖ *ELPA is a nationally recognized leader among departments of its kind, supporting academic programs and research productivity that are also nationally recognized for their excellence, housed in a top-tier School of Education.*
- ❖ *We take as a guide to our recommendations ELPA's stated mission, which appears to be authentically endorsed by the faculty and administration:*

“To create, evaluate, exchange, and apply knowledge about leadership, learning, and organizational performance to prepare scholars and scholar practitioners who cultivate equity and educational opportunity in a diverse and changing world.”
- ❖ *We believe that the key concerns raised in the self-study, concerns that we affirm, are located in the Department's authentic striving to make this admirable mission live consistently and optimally in practice.*
- ❖ *ELPA's 2015 Self Study Evaluation Report surfaced, in one way or another, nearly every issue that we identify for attention in this report.*

In addition to confirming the self-study's central findings and concerns, we offer suggestions for steps toward addressing these self-study findings. These specific recommendations are intended to help the faculty as a community a) focus strategically on higher-leverage change initiatives and b) consider ways to build the organizational capacity to pursue those change initiatives effectively, including collectively assessing the effectiveness of the efforts that result.

In this report, we offer recommendations to advance the discussion in the Department. These high-leverage areas – relating to organizational structure, department culture, and identity– cut across the Self Study's separate sections on Programs, Students, Faculty, and Impact, and consequently provide a comprehensive set of lenses through which future department change initiatives might be viewed.

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA):

Introduction and Overview

Purpose of External Review

The University of Wisconsin-Madison requires all university units to conduct a self-study evaluation. The university asks that this self-study be conducted every ten years to provide the unit with constructive feedback about its strengths and challenges, to include suggestions and recommendations for improvement. As stated by the University of Wisconsin's Academic Planning Council:

The purpose of the program review is to examine strengths and challenges, to celebrate accomplishments, and to reflect on, and plan for, the future. Program review is a platform for exploring ways to maintain and enhance the academic quality of a range of academic activities. Program review provides the opportunity to set priorities, to articulate a strong case for those priorities, and to develop strategies for program to stay at or moved to the forefront of its field in any budgetary environment.

Given this purpose, the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) at the University of Wisconsin invited three colleagues to help them with their External Review Process.

External Review Team

The External Review Team was chaired by Gerardo R. López, Professor of Political Science at Loyola University, New Orleans. The remaining members of the committee were Rebecca Ropers-Huilman (Professor and Chair, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, University of Minnesota), and Steven E. Tozer (Professor, Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois-Chicago). Each member of the Review Team brought specific expertise and

proficiency that corresponded with the three different tracks within ELPA: Higher Education Administration, K-12 leadership, and Educational Policy. They also have served, or are currently serving, as tenured faculty in similar departments at other major research institutions.

Data Collection Process

Prior to the campus visit, each member of the Review Team was sent information about the external review process, a copy of the 2005 External Review, and a copy of ELPA's own "Self Study," which responded to the challenges and concerns raised in the 2005 report and, in addition, raised new challenges and concerns. Information about the program's structure, course offerings, faculty biographies, and student enrollment numbers was also sent to the Review Team prior to our visit.

The Review Team conducted a site visit at the UW-Madison campus from March 15-17, 2015. During the site visit, the team met with members of the K-12 track faculty, Policy track faculty, and the Higher Education track faculty. These meetings were held by "track" so that the Review Team could focus on issues and challenges specific to each track in the academic unit. In addition, separate pre- and post-visit meetings were conducted with the Dean of the School of Education (Dr. Julie Underwood) as well as the ELPA Self-Study Coordinators (Drs. Camburn and Rainwater). The Review Team also met separately with graduate students, members of the departmental staff, and individual ELPA faculty members identified by the Review Team. Time was allotted during the site visit to discuss preliminary findings as a Review Team, and to gather both formative and summative insights/impressions about the department and its units. The Review Team

had sufficient access to material and human resources to be able to make the informed judgments required of the review.

ELPA and the UW School of Education in a Changing Political and Economic Climate

Political and Economic Climate in the State of Wisconsin

As is the case with many states across the U.S., Wisconsin is facing severe financial shortfalls and a challenging economic climate. Since the larger recession hit the greater U.S. in 2008, Wisconsin has struggled financially to get its economy back to pre-recession levels. In response to the financial outlook of the state, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker implemented a series of budget cuts—coupled with other aggressive cost-cutting measures—that aimed to set the state on a more fiscally conservative path. In his most recent budget proposal, Governor Walker proposed a \$300 million cut in state support for the University of Wisconsin System. According to UW Chancellor Rebecca Blank, the impact of this proposed legislation to the UW-Madison campus in particular would approximate \$60 million. This cut would be in addition to the \$30 million in state cuts already in effect that were also imposed by Governor Walker.

School of Education

Despite the financial crisis affecting the state as a whole, our impression is that the School of Education is effectively weathering these financial setbacks through strategic planning and action. Dean Underwood informed us that to continue to thrive, the School is learning to be more creative and resourceful. Although recent legislative

changes to teacher and certification requirements have placed enhanced demands on the School of Education—increasing competition within the state and encouraging alternative paths to the teaching profession—our impression is that such changes have not largely affected the School’s reputation as the state’s flagship provider for teacher and/or leadership education. However, these shifts have led to an increasing sense of the need to both market and communicate the excellence of programs in the School to multiple stakeholders, including prospective students.

ELPA

In recent years, the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis has faced increased competition from smaller institutions in the state that have entered the educational leadership preparation market. Educational Leadership programs in institutions such as Viterbo University, Cardinal Stritch University, and Edgewood College, often taught/delivered by former UW graduates from ELPA, have taken a larger percentage of the K-12 leadership market. In a similar fashion, the Higher Education track has also experienced increased competition from smaller institutions in the state, including those on other UW-System campuses (e.g., UW-Milwaukee, UW-Oshkosh, etc.). The increased competition has contributed to reducing the overall student enrollment numbers in the department, particularly in K-12 school leadership.

In response to this increased competition in the state, ELPA began to offer more creative and innovative programs such as the Wisconsin Idea Executive PhD Cohort in the K-12 track, and the Global Higher Education Program in the Higher Education track. These innovative programs responded to increased competition by expanding the

population of potential students and by being more responsive and attentive to the needs of prospective students. For example, the Wisconsin Idea Executive PhD Cohort responds to working professionals by meeting on weekends and delivering content in an alternative format.

Observations and Impressions:

Context, Structure and Culture of ELPA

Despite the various economic and political challenges facing the university as a whole, ELPA continues to be a field leader. It is a heralded Department in a top-tier school of education within a top-tier public university. Fiscal constraints and the challenge of persistent educational inequities statewide notwithstanding, the Department and its programs are nationally ranked near the top of the field and are not at risk of losing that stature in the near future.

At the same time, the state context presents tensions that will require collective faculty decision-making. For example, the competition for student enrollments in the state must be considered—particularly as more leadership preparation programs in less prestigious institutions expand their reach through increased innovation in content delivery (i.e. on-line courses, weekend courses, etc.). Another example is the deep inequalities in student learning outcomes statewide, to which the faculty would like to respond effectively with professional preparation programs. But assessing how best to do so may require shaping a shared theory of action that can stand at odds with a strong tradition of faculty autonomy, a tradition that has arguably contributed to exceptional individual faculty productivity.

For organizations to respond effectively to their contexts requires a decision-making structure capable of implementing change, and ELPA department administrative structures and practices reflect a flat organizational tradition not always conducive to decisive action. This may have growing implications in the future as a result of increased competition that will require a different type of organizational response and a shared identity that is communicated to external audiences effectively.

A noticeable part of the Department's context is its evolving relationship with the Department of Educational Policy Studies, which has priorities and programs that overlap with ELPA. This overlap was also raised in the 2005 report. While ELPA faculty assured us that the two units are now collaborating and working more closely than they have in the past, questions still linger about how the Policy Studies track within ELPA substantively differs from programs offered in the Educational Policy Studies Department. Finally, although ELPA has been fortunate to hire several new faculty in recent years, the prospects for more hires are limited by expected state budget reductions. An anticipated new dean will likely bring new energy and perspectives, but strategies for moving forward as a Department and School will be uncertain until the new Dean's priorities become known.

Such tensions and uncertainties are not uncommon in higher education and present an opportunity for faculty and administrators to think strategically about the kinds of collective responses and working relationships that are most likely to advance the institutional mission and faculty productivity. ELPA, as a department, is graced with unusual talent and accomplishment; it is well positioned to move forward in ways that

sustain its excellence for decades to come. Therefore, we do not see these tensions as being insurmountable, but requiring careful attention and shared consideration.

Structure

Throughout our conversations with students, faculty, and administrators, we became aware of several structural issues that seemed to be related to areas of excellence as well as to areas whose further exploration could lead to a greater fulfillment of ELPA's mission. Rather than proposing specific solutions to address these structural issues, we suggest that these tensions constitute problems worth addressing in a disciplined and organized way.

❖ *The organizational structure of the department may limit ELPA's ability to frame and execute improvement initiatives.*

During our visit, we repeatedly saw examples of how highly the ELPA faculty valued their autonomy. This was also reinforced as a central cultural trait in conversations beyond the faculty. Such autonomy has led to the development of initiatives and individual relationships that have facilitated excellence in research, teaching, and community relations. The flat structure of the Department, in which leadership roles and responsibilities are not clearly articulated, is well designed to support faculty autonomy. However, it may limit the Department's ability to achieve collective goals that they espouse. Two examples here are perhaps most pertinent.

First, while faculty reasserted the separation of ELPA's Policy track from its other two tracks—as well as its distinction from the Department of Educational Policy

Studies—many of the faculty struggled to clearly articulate how the track was distinct from the others, as well as why there was a need to have two policy-focused strands within the School of Education. Moreover, we noticed that some faculty, who were identified as “Policy” track faculty on paper, did not meet with us when we spoke with the Policy track faculty. Instead, they chose to meet with either the K-12 faculty or the Higher Education faculty. While we understand that scheduling conflicts could have played a role, the committee nevertheless wondered about the overall “identity” of the Policy track and its viability as a stand-alone track within the Department and School of Education. Complicating this issue is the fact that the Policy track did not have a clear leader or advocate spearheading its efforts. In short, it is difficult to assert that the Policy track merits its own separate identity when we didn’t see a strong voice leading – or even clearly representing – this track and when faculty struggled to articulate the merits of this track to others.

Second, in several cases, faculty expressed convincingly that the mission related to equity and social justice was at the forefront of ELPA’s research and interactions with students. However, when we met with the students, it became clear that while students saw several individual faculty as national leaders in thinking about social justice leadership, they did not see a programmatic focus on this aspect of the department’s mission. Instead, they expressed surprise when we shared with them how clearly the Department articulated a social justice mission.

- ❖ *The structural separation of the Policy track from the other two tracks, and from the Department of Educational Policy Studies, may be an obstacle to sustaining a cogent policy dialogue about how the School of Education can best support academic programming and research in educational policy.*

The decision to house a Policy track within ELPA has been a significant point of contention for quite some time. The issue was raised in the 2005 report and was apparently raised in the 1995 report as well. Each time, the respective Review Team has found it difficult to discern how the ELPA Policy track substantively differs from the Department of Educational Policy Studies. In effect, for the past 20 years, each external Review Team has raised this issue as an important area to be addressed. Yet, it appears that each time, EPS and/or the Policy track faculty have pushed the issue to the back burner.

Our Review Team has concerns similar to those raised in prior external reports. When we raised our concerns with the Policy track faculty, they assured us that the relationship with EPS was “really good” and that the tensions of the past were related to personalities that had since retired. They highlighted the fact that EPS was now a key partner in both the Executive Ph.D. and Global Higher Education programs, and that they had been working hard to bridge the chasm between the two policy areas.

As a Review Team, we certainly applaud these efforts and encourage the Policy track faculty to continue exploring these and other opportunities for collaboration with EPS. It is unclear to some ELPA faculty and to us, however, what is gained by having a separate Policy track in ELPA when there is simultaneously a department focusing on Educational Policy Studies. If the argument is that students want to focus on policy in

their graduate programs in either K-12 Educational Administration or Higher Education, that does not seem to require a separate track to do so. Instead, students interested in policy could pursue those interests in the other areas of the Department. The sense that the Department of Educational Policy Studies is doing a different kind of foundational/policy work than those in ELPA begs the question why these different approaches to the same topic are not complementary and mutually enforcing (and/or “troubling” in the best possible scholarly sense).

The School and the ELPA leadership could be positioned to take a more central role in initiating a structured dialogue aimed at promoting clarity in these programs and their relationships, seeking a way in which the excellence in both areas can reinforce teaching and research in educational policy studies at the University of Wisconsin. An important benefit of this clarification is that students might more easily benefit from the expertise that currently resides in both units.

❖ *The Higher Education Program area is requesting its own separate degree program. This shift may protect and advance the program, or weaken the department and obscure clearly overlapping interests of departmental faculty.*

The Higher Education track is advocating that it be supported in separating from the Educational Administration Program to form its own Higher Education Program. There is likely no external cost to this decision, though we do not see evidence that there will be an external benefit either. It is unlikely that many will notice this administrative change outside of the state. A benefit internal to the state may be that Higher Education would more clearly stake its claim as the premier higher education program in the state

(although it already holds that distinction). A potential cost would be the signaling to students and others a distinction between the “Leadership” program and “Higher Education” program rather than emphasizing their complementarity. Additionally, in a time of budget concern, one administrative perspective would be to keep programs (and their productivity measures) looking as strong as possible by keeping units together.

The scholars in Higher Education are well recognized as active contributors to the field. Individually, the faculty include highly productive and innovative scholars studying complementary and critical issues in the field. However, if one looks to structures related to the study of higher education in the School of Education, one might be confused. One of the most well-known higher education scholars (Sara Goldrick-Rab) is a member of the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Other visible work is done by the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE). It is not clear how these entities/people use their complementary structures and areas of expertise to strengthen what the Higher Education Program offers to its students, or what the School of Education offers to its publics. This is an area that the Higher Education track should consider taking up in more detail.

Once the relationships are more clearly forged between various higher education-related entities, it would be an opportune time to determine the program’s focus. As it is now, the track’s many foci (i.e., two year colleges, intercollegiate athletics, global higher education, student affairs, and the individualized track) seem to overstate the collective expertise of the faculty to deliver a comprehensive curriculum in each of these areas. A more focused effort would likely draw students who are aligned with the broader/deeper program and could potentially enhance the identity and visibility of the program. Once

the relationships and identities are more clearly determined and articulated, it would be important to invest in marketing efforts to increase the track's visibility to key audiences. These audiences are likely to include leaders in the community, higher education potential students and scholars across the nation, and potential students and partners around the world. Because the collaborative work involved in exploring and executing these initiatives is considerable, the Department needs to examine how it can structurally support such work, as we later elaborate in more detail.

❖ *The Department is committed to working with school leaders, but may lack sufficient bandwidth to focus on the development of both principals and superintendents.*

As was stated in the self-study report, much has occurred in the last 10 years to affect the enrollments of students in the K-12 educational leadership programs. Because we believe the preparation of principals and superintendents is critical to the future of the state and our larger society, we were pleased to hear continued assertions of commitment to these areas. However, we also heard concern about the ability of this track to be as present in local and state matters as it has been in the past. For example, we heard of the need for a more concerted effort to assert ELPA's role in state educational leadership development. To the extent that this can happen as a track, department, and school—and in conjunction with school and community leaders—efforts will need to be robust, useful, and respected. To address the stated need for more connections to practice and increased visibility to attract students, the Department might want to consider providing initiatives in partnership with districts that provide leadership development for educational leaders at various stages of their careers to meet districts' needs. In recent years, for example,

Wallace Foundation and Rainwater Foundation have sponsored research on district-university partnership to prepare and develop next-generation school leaders focused on improving student learning outcomes.

Two positive dimensions of progress in the K-12 track in recent years have been closer connection with professional organizations and the development of the Wisconsin Idea Executive Ph.D. Cohort Program. The enrollments of high quality students in the Ph.D. cohort program appear to be strong, while enrollments in the M.Ed. school leadership program have declined, as explained in the Self Study. Faculty expressed concern about the latter, but it is not clear what solutions are being considered.

In the Review Team's view, the Department is due for a serious and structured discussion of its theory of impact in K-12 schools. The future of the Department's effective commitment to these two programs will require collective, strategic thinking. This thinking can entertain, for example, the reality that having stronger relations with the State's professional organizations does not necessarily challenge inequities at all. In other words, "closer connections with the State's professional organizations" will not support ELPA's equity goals unless those relationships are leveraged in strategic ways to challenge the deep stake that those organizations have in the system's current inequities. But to organize for such strategic leveraging would require new Departmental organizational capacity. According to the Self Study, this is partly a matter of "ownership" of programs, and partly that the Department has not established a "dedicated structure" to ensure the health of this program. It is important to consider the extent to which the Department has the bandwidth to sustain outstanding leadership programs at the district Ph.D. and school building M.Ed. levels.

❖ *The Department's mission is clear and critical to educational practice and scholarship, yet it is not clear how ELPA is collaborating with others to achieve its mission or how it is assessing how the mission is being achieved.*

While we appreciated the mission statement's clarity and commitment, we did not often hear about the ways in which this mission – and the resources employed to meet it – are complementary or mutually enforcing when considered in the context of the School of Education, University, and community. We were left wondering: What unique and critical roles does ELPA play within the SOE? How is ELPA enriched by its community interactions? How does this mission impact and/or drive the everyday functions, interactions, and goals of the department? Faculty could readily identify *individual* faculty accomplishments and programmatic content, but could not detail how the *faculty as a whole* was working collaboratively towards this mission. As a simple illustration: In an institution committed to research and evaluation, what measures are in place to know whether its mission is in fact being achieved?

We observed that in several cases, faculty told us of significant efforts to take the initiative to advance an idea. If the idea was related to a grant, they experienced strong support from the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (WCER). However, resources in other areas were less evident. For example, faculty members were uncertain about the availability of technology personnel they could consult who understood the needs of educators and educational innovation. Resources related to the advancement of diversity and equity goals were also less prevalent, as were any structures to support mentoring and professional development. We also noticed that the Department did not capitalize on university-wide outreach and marketing offices to assist them with these

efforts. Several faculty expressed the need to better communicate with people and organizations external to the School of Education, but did not seem to know what community engagement or marketing resources might be available to help them with that communication.

Culture

In our meetings with ELPA faculty, and school administrators, it became clear that many of the structural issues discussed above were closely related to deeply ingrained values, beliefs, practices, and norms. These norms and principles structure the everyday experiences of everyone within the department, and give meaning to the work that people do within it. They shape the expectations, assumptions, and organizational habits of those in the organization, and are influenced by the leadership of the school at all levels. We elaborate on some of these cultural issues below:

❖ *Culture of excellence*

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is one of the premier institutions of higher learning in the country. Many of its programs are nationally-ranked and the faculty are among the most respected and renowned in the country. The UW School of Education is consistently ranked among the top five in the country in *US News and World Report* and has nine programs that are nationally recognized. ELPA's program in K-12 leadership is ranked second in the country, while the programs in Educational Policy and Higher Education are ranked fourth and eleventh respectively. These accomplishments demonstrate strong traditions of excellence among the faculty.

The faculty members in the department have high expectations, and are aware of their national rankings. When we highlighted the fact that the Higher Education Program is tied with Harvard and that such a designation was noteworthy, the faculty replied that they believed they should be ranked higher -- considering the exceptional level of productivity of their faculty in terms of grant effort, publications, and other measures of success. It is important to note that this was not a self-aggrandizing sentiment, but a genuine reflection of the level of excellence to which faculty hold themselves.

❖ *Culture of autonomy*

Closely related to the culture of excellence is the belief that the best way for people to flourish is to simply get out of their way. Valuing autonomy is not the same as leaving people to their own devices, but rather providing individuals with the necessary support to pursue their passions, interests, and goals, without micromanagement or interference. At the UW School of Education, faculty autonomy is highly valued and praised. Dean Underwood mentioned the importance of faculty and departmental autonomy on several occasions, and made sure that we understood the importance of this cultural norm within the School of Education during our conversations.

This “hands-off” approach to leadership was manifested in other ways as well: faculty were given the freedom/autonomy to research what they valued, to say and/or express what they believed, and to pursue non-traditional, innovative, or controversial topics. Everyone within the organization highly valued such independence and academic freedom as they are, in large part, part of the “formula” that was behind the success of the organization.

The downside of autonomy, however, is that it often comes at the expense of a more collaborative and cooperative ethos. What we observed within ELPA was a set of highly talented scholars whose individual productivity is outstanding. Their research and scholarship is at the cutting edge of innovation within the field. However, we also observed that they sometimes struggled to work together as a comprehensive unit in order to accomplish the broader goals/ideals of the track and/or department.

From our vantage point as “critical friends,” we observe that the strong culture of autonomy may work against the Department’s desire to work together in more collaborative ways. For example, we see the ELPA faculty as having a difficult time working together to fulfill its social justice mission. This is not to suggest that individual faculty members didn’t do excellent work on issues of social justice, but that social justice seemed to be more an individual pursuit as opposed to a more departmental or collective pursuit. We heard this most poignantly from students who were seeking more coherence and commitment to this aspect of the mission in their programs. In a second example, the dissertation load of the ELPA faculty seemed very uneven—with some professors chairing fewer than five dissertations while others were chairing close to 18 dissertations. When we broached this subject with faculty, it was acknowledged that there were inequities, but intimated that these were individuals’ choices, and that very little could be done as a department to remedy the situation. In yet another example, the graduate students in the department (especially those in non-cohort programs) felt they were often “left alone” to figure out which courses to take and felt they were not supported throughout their educational programs beyond the initial student orientation.

❖ *Culture of distinctive identity in a competitive landscape*

Finding a coherent identity as a track within a larger academic unit is a challenge in itself. Yet finding such coherence is not only critical, but essential, in a competitive higher education landscape. The ELPA K-12 Leadership faculty expressed concern about losing market share to smaller educational leadership programs that provide learning opportunities to students in non-traditional formats, particularly via on-line and through “hybrid” delivery models. We encourage the department to explore these opportunities and use its status as a leader in the field to fundamentally shape what “excellence” looks like in terms of on-line instruction. We believe ELPA and UW are uniquely positioned to take a leadership role in what will only be a growing trend in the field.

In a different example, members of the Higher Education track expressed feeling slighted when a top ranking administrator at the University did not know about the existence of the track within the university. This led the Higher Education faculty to have a series of discussions about their visibility both within the University as well as outside of it. This coincided with an aggressive move from other universities within the state to establish their own Higher Education programs and get a piece of the market share within the state. The Higher Education faculty felt that they could not adequately “respond” to this threat, because they were not recognized as a “degree granting” program within the university (but rather were merely a “track” within a larger department). Therefore, they felt that institutional and organizational constraints were not only limiting, but threatened their identity as the flagship Higher Education “program” within the state. These

concerns are valid and important, and are connected-- in important ways-- to broader issues of organizational identity.

In a third example, the Policy track faculty also struggled with their own issues of organizational identity vis-à-vis the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Specifically, they struggled to articulate how their courses/scholarship/research interests/etc. intersected with and/or were distinct from the work done in that Department. The issue of how the Policy track substantively differs from EPS has been raised many times before and is ripe for examination from both a utilitarian angle as well as a substantive one. We also feel that the issue is, in many ways, an issue of identity and therefore warrants serious examination from that perspective as well.

In short, we believe that major areas of the Department are struggling with broader issues of identity in an increasingly competitive education market. This struggle could be healthy and productive-- especially if the faculty members in those programs engage in strategic and concerted discussions about who is in each program/track and what defines them and their work. The Policy track and the Higher Education track can use their significant reputations and scholarly resources to elevate the discussion of their own respective identities to decide how they would like to move forward as a cohesive unit in a productive fashion.

❖ *Variability and uncertainty in student experience*

Students expressed a wide range of experiences in the department. For example, some spoke of their advising relationships with great fondness and appreciation. Yet, even those who were most positive indicated that they didn't know what other people

were experiencing or what else they could have learned from other faculty. Some students said that they had excellent advising relationships with faculty in the Department, but indicated that there was a lack of information on how to navigate courses and programs through graduation. In other words, students not only felt that they had to gather key information from other sources (namely other students), but they also felt there were no structured opportunities available to have their advising questions answered by their faculty advisor. In other words, students believed they were often making decisions about their courses with less information about potential pathways than they would like. They commented that they would like guidance on how to develop a productive relationship with their advisers. They referred to the orientation—and, for doctoral students, the doctoral inquiry course—as the two key “spaces” where they got an overview of the Department and the work they can do within their fields. However, students did not feel that the existing orientation and introductory course were sufficient to support their advising and learning needs throughout their program. Instead, they had a sense that there was information they did not know, particularly about methods courses, debates among significant theories and epistemologies, and ideal course sequencing. Students indicated that they would benefit from a place –whether in paper or on-line – that collects advising knowledge from departmental faculty and makes it widely accessible to all students.

After our conversations with students, it was clear that students from different program tracks had different experiences. Yet, there were important themes that arose from people across multiple programs/tracks about their learning needs:

- ❖ Students expressed a need to have equity and social justice more explicitly articulated and enacted throughout the program. When asked about these concepts as they take shape in ELPA, students first thought of other classes in EPS or in C&I, though there were certainly examples of people and classes they pointed to in ELPA. Students would appreciate that espoused commitments to equity and social justice be present in classes facilitated by faculty members. Several sought deeper attention to this commitment as represented in the curriculum, other course materials, and faculty diversity.
- ❖ Students wanted to develop meaningful relationships with other students and faculty members outside of class. They suggested that informal engagement with both faculty and other students be encouraged. In particular, doctoral students would appreciate an opportunity to develop a doctoral student network across the programs.

Opportunities for exploration and strategic action

In this section, we elaborate on key areas that the Review Team believes are important opportunities for growth within each of ELPA's tracks and the Department as a whole. These opportunities acknowledge the context of ELPA as a nationally recognized leader among departments of its kind, supporting academic programs and research productivity that are also nationally recognized for their excellence, housed in a top-tier School of Education. These specific recommendations are intended to help the faculty as a community a) focus strategically on higher-leverage change initiatives, and b) consider

ways to build the organizational capacity to pursue those change initiatives effectively, including collectively assessing the effectiveness of the efforts that result.

❖ *ELPA's Mission Statement:* The mission statement highlights the multiple functions of the Department, while simultaneously defining the type of activities, mindsets, and impact of its graduates. ELPA aims to prepare “scholars and scholar practitioners” who are not only effective and successful in their work, but who will “cultivate equity and educational opportunity in a diverse and changing world.” This mission suggests that program graduates have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to do this work, but also that they utilize the knowledge gained in the program to promote change within their respective schools/organizations upon graduation. When the Review Team asked the faculty what type of evidence they had to support that their graduates were, indeed, “cultivating equity and educational opportunity” post-commencement, the ELPA faculty struggled to demonstrate how they measured this particular outcome. While this problem of documenting student success is not unique to ELPA, we believe the Department is uniquely situated to take a leadership role in the field by demonstrating its effectiveness and impact on its program graduates.

❖ *Organizational structure:* We recommend organized, shared inquiry into whether the Department is optimally structured to achieve its stated mission. Specifically, we ask:

- Does each curricular track have an identifiable leader who is committed to the conduct and continuous improvement of that track?

- Will the Department’s structural commitment to the school leader certification master’s program and to the new Wisconsin Idea Executive Ph.D. Cohort Program be sufficient to produce the numbers and quality of change-agent school leaders that Wisconsin’s schools need--and that the field needs to see its leading universities produce?
- Can the tensions and apparently overlapping missions between the EPS program and the ELPA Policy track be addressed by structural or cultural changes?
- Should the Higher Education concentration have independent status?
- ❖ *Department culture*: While structural and cultural dimensions are not entirely separable, a focus on shared inquiry into Department culture can help set an agenda for change initiatives to address such questions as:
 - Does the mission statement continue to capture the priorities of the current faculty?
 - Are faculty and students experiencing consistency between the equity aspirations of the mission and what takes place in academic programs, coursework, advising, and recruitment of an outstanding, diverse faculty and student body?
 - Does the Department authentically wish to assess whether it is having an impact that “prepare(s) scholars and scholar practitioners who cultivate equity and educational opportunity in a diverse and changing world,” or will traditional measures such as graduates produced, positions obtained, and journal articles published continue to serve as a proxy for such assessment?

- ❖ *ELPA identity and self-representation:* While there is no reason to doubt that competition from other colleges and universities is having an impact on ELPA enrollments, there is reason to doubt that these other IHEs can compete with ELPA in the areas that make it distinctive. We recommend that ELPA faculty generate clear consensus on the distinctive identity and values of the Department's programs, students, and faculty, and communicate those more effectively to external audiences.