

Report of the Ad Hoc Review Committee
Department of Educational Methodology, Policy and Leadership (EMPL)
September 2021

I.

The ad hoc review committee understands that EMPL's future has been a contentious topic within the COE for some years and a source of concern for faculty across the college. Several things are clear to the committee:

- There has been a notable decline in the number of TTFs in the past few years due to retirements and departures, including those of senior faculty with formidable records of grant success and considerable professional stature. This churn took a toll. As a result, in spite of hiring three outstanding pre-tenure faculty in recent years, attrition has harmed the reputation of the department, limited its capacity to deliver programs and increased its reliance on pro tem faculty, and (we suspect) skewed its operational metrics, thus placing the department in an unflattering light. Exigency rather than drive appears to have determined the development of courses and programs.
- With regard to two principal operational metrics, student credit hours generated and number of courses taught per TTF, EMPL appears to underperform relative to other COE departments. This lag, however, could be explained by multiple factors, which are largely beyond our committee's purview. For example, there have been disputes over how credit hours have been accounted for: were student credit hours earned through the administrator licensure counted accurately since they were earned via Academic Extension (now UO Continuing and Professional Education)? Were EDUC courses credited to EMPL faculty? Three of the five TTF in the department were pre-tenure as late as AY20-21, which may have resulted in reduced teaching loads. We conjecture that grant buyouts, fellowships, start-up packages, and teaching in the LEADs minor may also have impacted SCH and average teaching loads.
- While more granular personnel data might shed light on these matters, the more important questions in our view concern EMPL's intellectual coherence and its long-term viability. We were impressed with the high quality of the EMPL faculty and their distinguished contributions to their respective fields, taking into account their diverse career stages. Given the range of their research expertise, we found their sense of a common enterprise and shared conviction that methodology, policy, and leadership were mutually-enriching fields to be unexpectedly persuasive. Indeed, more than one EMPL faculty averred that the most exciting, cutting-edge, and original research and teaching occurred at the intersection of these three domains. We could see a compelling argument that current and future leaders of complex social systems need rigorous training in quantitative methods to make evidence-based/data-driven policy decisions.

- Nevertheless, EMPL faces challenges that must be addressed immediately. One problem with churn, and the precipitous decline in TTF FTE, is that existing programs (most of which were designed by a radically different constellation of faculty) have become unsustainable. There has not been an extensive (re-en)visioning process to plot the department's future direction. The modest level of research collaboration among EMPL faculty at present, the existence of programs lacking robust tenure-line faculty support and heavily reliant on contingent faculty, the vast scope of fields embraced by EMPL, and the small size of the department make it incumbent on the department, with the assistance of COE leadership, to undertake a planning process that takes resource constraints into account. In other sections of this report, we recommend some steps that might be taken to address these concerns. While expanding the size of the EMPL faculty and allocating more resources would undoubtedly ameliorate the situation, we feel strongly that resources are only one aspect of the challenge. The formulation and articulation of a vision that is linked to programs can and should be done regardless of the extent of new resources provided.

II.

EMPL offers multiple graduate degree programs, yet lacks the capacity (i.e., FTE) to support them adequately. Furthermore, tenure-line faculty do not view the two largest, practitioner-oriented programs as priorities, begging the question of the long-term viability of these programs. Tenure-line faculty are involved only slightly, if at all, in the delivery of these EMPL programs and, for the most part, do not feel compelled to deepen their involvement. It is the committee's view that COE should sunset or reboot the following programs:

1. [Administrator Licensure Program](#): This program has been rendered basically obsolete due to changes in state policy/requirements. While a number of interviewees stated that this program historically has played an important role in disseminating UO-based educational practice and impacting schools in the region, one which many would like to see continue, it seems doing so under the new conditions would require a total reconstruction that is beyond the review committee's scope to address.
2. [DEd Program](#): Notwithstanding its strong reputation and venerable history, this program is largely taught by pro tem faculty and recently has lost market share as practitioners have gravitated toward similar programs at competitor institutions. We understand that this shift may have contributed to decreased selectivity in admissions, with unfortunate consequences for national rankings and associated metrics. Dr. Julie Alonzo has been instrumental in revitalizing this program and continues to do very strong work, but it should be noted that this position carries a high workload. Furthermore, when TTFs used to advise DEd students, it was not perceived to produce a useful return on investment for the amount of effort required.
3. [LEADS Minor](#): The LEADS minor has undeniable merits, but it harmfully diverts faculty effort from EMPL's core mission and is unsustainable barring a significant expansion of the department's size. Most of the faculty who originally conceived of and created the minor are no longer at UO, which begs the question of EMPL's collective commitment to its long-term success. Furthermore, and more importantly, the vast majority of the

students in the LEADS minor are not COE students. COE would be better served were EMPL faculty to teach a greater number of EDUC courses instead of courses for the LEADS minor. If it were transformed into a major, LEADS potentially could be worth keeping, but as a minor its institutional value is minimal, particularly to COE.

EMPL's future hinges on the success of two fairly new graduate programs: the [PhD in Quantitative Research Methods](#), which welcomed its first cohort of doctoral students in 2019-20, and a soon-to-be-launched MA in Educational Policy and Leadership. The PhD program has yet to attract a large number of applicants, but it appears that the quality of the matriculants is quite high. EMPL and COE now must redouble their efforts to recruit students into the program and to ensure that the strengths of the EMPL faculty are utilized in the program. We recommend that COE provide more substantive and intentional support for recruitment to EMPL programs (and to graduate programs across all of its departments). Communications and advertising are critical to the success of EMPL's programs and aligned with a broader need for strategic re-visioning of public-facing materials. The committee is concerned that a robust doctoral program cannot be offered by a small department unless it is the focus of faculty effort and teaching contributions are calibrated accordingly.

The new MA program is promising, but its success will depend on devising and implementing an active recruitment strategy. There is undoubtedly a significant pool of prospective applicants seeking training in advanced statistics to measure the effectiveness of leadership and policy interventions, but this is a competitive marketplace, one in which the EMPL program must distinguish itself. In order to maximize enrollment, it may be necessary to consider, *inter alia*, remote course delivery, evening/weekend offerings, periodic and intensive residencies, and Portland-based options.

III.

In addition to restructuring within EMPL and making strategic investments to the department as discussed above, our program review revealed insights about how EMPL is situated within the College of Education that are important to outline here. One clear major tension is that the EMPL faculty are dramatically outnumbered by faculty in other COE departments (5 TTF in EMPL vs. 10 in EDST, 19 in SPECS and 15 in CPHS). This has several concomitants. First, service demands at the college level become unreasonable for EMPL faculty, simply by having too few faculty across whom these obligations can be distributed. Second, being significantly outnumbered makes any change that favors EMPL difficult to work towards - particularly if it comes at any perceived or actual cost to other units, whether these units are departments or institutes. The lack of parity allows stagnation in suboptimal or outright deleterious conditions. Third, the seeding of other COE departments with methodologists creates a scenario in which existing EMPL faculty are at risk of being drained out of the department. Given the high levels of service and difficulty of enacting change, it is reasonable to expect that methodologists with connections outside EMPL may be enticed to reduce FTE in EMPL for more favorable working conditions in other departments. Such a pattern has already been established in recent years. Relatedly, faculty in other COE departments who are quantitative methodologists and could connect to EMPL are disincentivized from joining EMPL.

Taken together, these structural inequalities suggest the value of considering a restructuring at the COE level. In particular, we believe that an optimal solution would be to eliminate departments. If this proves untenable, perhaps due to anticipated negative impact on national rankings, then we recommend considering increasing the number of faculty in EMPL through a combination of new hires *and* transferring quantitative methodologists situated elsewhere to EMPL.

We recognize that this is an audacious suggestion, and also that the COE has engaged in ongoing discussions and surveys about this topic, which have not found broad support for ideas like eliminating departments. It is important for us to note that eliminating departments did not seem like an unpalatable option to EMPL faculty, further illustrating the second problem with the imbalance in department size listed above. However, we are not persuaded that a restructuring of this nature is unachievable, if COE addresses the other conditions which diminish enthusiasm for EMPL outside the department. Our recommendations above for restructuring within EMPL, particularly shedding programs that are high cost and low benefit such as the DEd or administrative licensure program; and for increasing the number of faculty within EMPL, may make the department more appealing. We also underscore a key theme revealed in our interviews: within COE, faculty research connections are found within institutes rather than necessarily within one's department. Thus, switching departments should not create problems in maintaining excellent research connections through institutes. As noted above, the programs that create strain for EMPL (administrative licensure, DEd, and LEADS minor) should be carefully evaluated and the COE may need to consider adopting responsibility for administering them at the college, and not the department, level.

IV.

One common approach to rejuvenating a department is to seek new department leadership from outside of the current department members. Besides looking for candidates who have experience as effective change agents in prior leadership posts, one can focus on candidates who bring needed research expertise as part of the rejuvenation.

As we have described in section III above, we are recommending that COE consolidate all quantitative methodological faculty in the rejuvenated EMPL, and that this be one of the two primary pedagogical foci of the department. The other primary focus of the department is with regards to effective programs in Leadership/Policy. This focus needs an infusion of TTF with expertise in these areas, and as such, appointing a new head of department with research expertise in these areas would be preferable to appointing a candidate bringing further expertise primarily in quantitative methodological research.

We hasten to add that this recommendation should not be taken as a criticism of the current department head's performance. Since the focus of EMPL will change significantly if our recommendation in section III above is implemented, it may be easier for everyone concerned if a new head is appointed.

Appointment of a new head will require at least two years to complete: the first year to secure its approval through the IHP process, and the second year to conduct the search for an excellent candidate to fill the post. As a result, the current department head, or another individual in the department if the current head's term expires during that time, will be tasked with getting the rejuvenated department off the ground.

V.

While the committee hopes that some of its recommendations are taken up by COE, we strongly encourage EMPL, in its current form, to develop a new vision for itself and its programs in the short-term. The success of the still-nascent PhD program and the soon-to-be-launched MA program is imperiled without a strategic vision embraced by EMPL's faculty and communicated to COE, the UO, and external constituencies. Recent departures and retirements of senior faculty, together with the recent promotions of two previously pre-tenure faculty, make this a propitious moment. At present, it is nearly impossible to find EMPL on the COE website, though one can locate individual faculty and encounter degree programs. We feel that this situation is emblematic of EMPL's broader challenge: how to take a small department with remarkably accomplished individual faculty and promising programs and transform it into something greater than the sum of its parts.

VI.

The review committee believes that EMPL's current state demands immediate action. While the committee naturally concludes that its recommendations are worthy of serious consideration, it is cognizant of the inherent limitations of external review committees, even those granted wide access to data, key personnel, and other sensitive materials. For example, as the committee was completing its work, the founding of the quite exciting and promising HEDCO Institute was announced, an initiative with which many EMPL faculty are already affiliated. The positive ramifications for EMPL are, potentially, significant.

The committee is alert to the dangers of inaction. Were EMPL to wither on the vine, the closure of programs and failure to retain world-class faculty are likely consequences. Similarly, the dissolution of EMPL and the redistribution of its faculty to other COE departments would decenter and potentially undermine COE's strength in training in quantitative methods, precisely when both COE and the UO are reinforcing those emphases elsewhere. While perhaps justifiable for a range of short-term, and irrefutably real, administrative reasons, such a step would have deleterious effects in the long run.

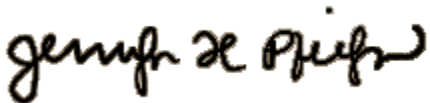
VII.

The ad hoc program review committee was formed by Dean Randy Kamphaus in May 2021 to review the Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership (EMPL) Department in COE. The committee began its work by interviewing the following TTF in June: David Liebowitz,

Kathleen Scalise, Ilana Umansky, Cengiz Zopluoglu, and Keith Zvoch; the committee also interviewed Julie Alonzo, a full-time Career Faculty member. Each interview was one hour in length and was semi-structured, with pre-circulated questions (see Appendix A). In addition to these faculty members, in July-August the review committee interviewed Assistant Research Professor Daniel Anderson, Associate Professor Gina Biancarosa, Dean Kamphaus, and the Dean's leadership team without Dean Kamphaus present (Associate Deans Lillian Durán, John Seeley and Chris Krabel; and Assistant Dean Julie Wren). We also met a second time with Kathleen Scalise, who served until June as an Associate Dean. The COE Dean's Office furnished the committee with operational metrics and responded promptly to our requests for additional data and information during the course of the review. Our committee is grateful to EMPL faculty and COE leadership for their collegiality, patience, and helpfulness as our committee undertook its work. Given the sensitive nature of the topics broached in the interviews and of the documents we consulted, we have avoided direct quotations, citations and attributions, focusing instead on our impressions, reactions, and analysis.



Gabriel Paquette
Professor, History
Vice Provost, Academic Affairs



Jennifer Pfeifer
Professor, Psychology
Associate Science Director, Center for Translational Neuroscience



Joseph Sventek
Professor, Computer and Information Science
Director, Data Science Program