

Submission date: 2/10/20

Program/s in this review: Early Childhood Special Education M.Ed. \_\_\_\_\_

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): Council for Exceptional Children, Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation Programs \_\_\_\_\_

Campuses where the program is delivered: UAA \_\_\_\_\_

Members of the program review committee:

- Hattie Harvey, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, UAA

**1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)**

The Master’s degree in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) prepares early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) personnel working with children birth through age 5 with developmental delays and disabilities and their families who are grounded in evidence-based practices and child development, embrace culturally-sensitive practices, and demonstrate intellectual vitality in their work with Alaska’s learners, families, and communities. This aligns with the University of Alaska Anchorage mission to serve the needs of the state, communities, and diverse peoples and the School of Education’s Core Values of Intellectual Vitality, Collaborative Spirit, Inclusiveness and Equity, and Leadership by preparing high-quality personnel who will be responsive to and inclusive of the diverse needs of Alaska’s learners, families, and communities.

Prior to the loss of the UAA School of Education accreditation for initial licensure in January 2019, the Master’s in ECSE led to a recommendation for either an initial teacher certification or an advanced endorsement in Early Childhood Special Education Birth – Age 5 through the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). The program was nationally recognized in 2015 by the Specialty Program Review (SPA), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The Master’s in ECSE also has admitted non-licensure seeking students who wish to advance their knowledge and expertise in this discipline. The program is delivered via distance delivery in order to be accessible state-wide and classes are offered in the evening to accommodate working students. Historically, approximately 90% of the students retain full-time jobs throughout the program, as many are working toward the degree as part of an employer agreement.

*Workforce Development in “Critical Shortage Area”*

The Master’s degree in ECSE is the only program in the state of Alaska which prepares personnel to fulfill the workforce needs to serve Alaska’s infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities. Under the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), states are required to identify children with disabilities and provide services for those who qualify for either Early Intervention (birth – age 2) or Preschool Special Education services (ages 3 – 5). Per both federal and Alaska state regulations, personnel must meet specific criteria based on a continuum of educational attainment, of which includes teacher licensure in early childhood special education.

Early intervention personnel are identified as a “critical shortage” and the personnel demand exceeds the available supply in Alaska. As one example, in the FY21 proposed budget from the Anchorage School District, an increase in funding for preschool programs and personnel was identified. The Governor’s Council for Early Intervention Committee also identified on their FY21 workplan a need to increase personnel to fulfill state-wide vacancies. The gap in available, trained personnel is widening. Due to this shortage, DEED implemented a waiver in 2014 to allow elementary educators with six credits of ECSE coursework (instead of the 36-credit

endorsement typically required) to teach as a preschool special educator. Additionally, the State Part C Office implemented the ILP Tuition Scholarship in order to support the development of qualified personnel as part of their Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. Since the implementation of the ILP Tuition Scholarship in 2015 (100% tuition reimbursement), 15 students have completed the UAA Master's in ECSE under this scholarship.

#### *Community and Agency Partnerships*

The ECSE program partners with the Anchorage School District Preschool program to provide continuing education courses, offer graduate courses to non-degree seeking students, and coordinate with the GETS (General Education to Special Education) Scholarship program (80% of tuition is reimbursed for enrollment toward special education certification). The ECSE program also partners with the State Part C Office for recruitment using the ILP Tuition Scholarship. Other recent collaborative partnerships in regards to program service, community-engaged research, and personnel development include Cook Inlet Tribal Council, the Alaska Association for Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health, the Governor's Council for Early Intervention Committee, and Thread Alaska, Inc.

#### *Sample Employment Data*

Based on available data from the State of Alaska Part C Office, graduates from this program include 7/16 (44%) State Part C Program Coordinators, 3/3 (100%) Developmental Specialists in Ketchikan, 10/31 (32%) Developmental Specialists in Anchorage, 3/5 (60%) Developmental Specialists in the Matsu region, and 4/7 (57%) Developmental Specialists in Fairbanks.

## **2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)**

When interpreting the data from Institutional Research it is important to note that it is not disaggregated by initial versus advanced license students, nor is it disaggregated solely between Special Education K-12 programs (M.Ed & Grad Cert) and early childhood special education. Institutional Research (IR) and the UAA Banner system do not have a code to differentiate the initial versus advanced licensure students within the M.Ed. ECSE program (this is addressed in the recommendations section) and until Fall 2019, 80% of the M.Ed. ECSE courses were shared with the K-12 Special Education program (thus those EPR data should also be interpreted cautiously as those data would include ECSE students in many cases).

**Degrees awarded.** Between 2013 – 2019 IR data shows a total of 28 degrees awarded. The data reported here are from October 2019 and do not reflect the additional three degrees awarded in December 2019, resulting in a total of seven degrees awarded in 2019 ( $n = 7$ ) and total of 31 degrees awarded over the past 7-years.

**Credits per degree awarded.** The ECSE program degree requires a total of 30 credits. Some years in which a smaller number of credits were awarded for the degree (e.g., in 2018 the average credits per degree were 28) can be attributed to classes taken prior to degree enrollment, or waiving credits due to catalog changes.

**Seven-year majors or program trend.** The majors per academic year between 2013 – 2019 ranged between 8 – 17, with 2015 as the highest ( $n = 17$ ). One possible contributing factor for the decline in active enrollment from 2015 is a lack of faculty specifically in the ECSE program for AY16 and AY17 (100% of the courses were taught by adjunct faculty). In fall 2018, one tenure-track faculty was assigned 100% time to this program, which influenced recruitment and enrollment.

**Course pass rates.** During the last seven years, the course pass rate ranged between 91.5% - 89.9%.

**Internal demand.** Internal demand shows that approximately 1/3 of the students taking ECSE courses are “out-of-major”. For example, five of the ECSE courses are elective courses in the UAA Graduate Certificate in

Children's Mental Health, and a number of courses are utilized as electives by other programs including the Masters of Social Work (2017 SCH=3) Special Education Graduate Certificate (2017 SCH=9), Master's in Teaching and Learning (2017 SCH=4), and Pre-Major Nursing Science (2017 SCH=3).

**Seven-year student credit hour production trend.** Between 2013 – 2019 the credit hour production ranged between 154 – 237 credit hours. The highest credit hour production was in 2015 ( $n = 237$ ), which correlates with the highest number of degrees awarded as well as enrollment in 2015. The average SCH w Audit between 2013 and 2019 was 197.

**SCH/FTEF.** The data show that the SCH per FTEF was 200 credit hours in 2019, with a dip in the ratio between the years of 2016 – 2018, correlating to lower enrollment.

**Enrollment/FTEF.** The data show the enrollment to FTEF ratio between 2013 – 2019 ranged between 53.2 and 80, with the highest in 2014 at 80.

**FTES/FTEF.** The range of FTES/FTEF is between 8.3 – 11.5, with the lowest ratio in 2017 and the highest ration in 2013. This indicates that on average, the ratio is 11 students per one full-time faculty equivalent. It should be considered again that only adjunct faculty taught classes between the years of 2016 – 2018 for the ECSE program.

**Class size.** Based on the IR data the average class size between 2013 – 2019 was approximately nine ( $n = 9.1$ ). To interpret the percent of class utilization it is important to consider that the School of Education automatically caps course enrollment at 25, thus a class size of 12 results in a class utilization of 49%. It would be improbable to require a 100% utilization of 25 given the total enrollment, and may be that course caps should be adjusted for smaller enrolled programs.

**Cost/SCH.** The cost/student credit hour between 2015 – 2019 averaged \$376.34, with the lowest cost in 2018 ( $n = 148.8$ ) and highest cost in 2019 ( $n = 476.6$ ).

**Tuition Revenue/SCH.** The IR data show that other than in 2016, the tuition revenue each year slightly exceed the total cost/SCH.

**External demand.** There are no "Post UAA Award NSC Data" for this program.

### 3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

#### *Curriculum Revision*

The Master's in ECSE program underwent a substantial curriculum revision in 2018, and implementation of the revised curriculum began in Fall 2018. The curriculum revision was in response to stakeholder feedback and the identified need for updates to key assessments to aligned with the revised Professional Standards from the Council for Exceptional Children Early Childhood Special Education Initial and Advanced Set, the Alaska Infant Mental Health Competencies, and CAEP accreditation requirements. The curriculum revision included substantial updates to **three** existing ECSE courses and the development of **four** new courses to focus specifically on the infant/toddler population. It should be noted that this curriculum revision was initiated by Dr. Harvey, who was a newly assigned faculty member in Fall 2018 to the ECSE program coming from the Early Childhood Education program. The curriculum revision would not have occurred without faculty in the program.

#### *Student Engagement in High-Impact Practices*

Students in the Master's in ECSE engage with a variety of high-impact practices throughout the program. As examples, they complete two collaborative group projects (e.g., Case Study in EDSE 622Y: Infant/Toddler

Interventions and EDSE 623Y: Preschool Interventions), complete a capstone electronic portfolio evidencing a culmination of their work to meet the Program Learning Outcomes, and a culminating 500-hour clinical internship experience. Students also have the opportunity to work on community-based service and research projects (i.e., with Anchorage School District preschool programs, Cook Inlet Native Head Start) and present at local and national conferences (i.e., Anchorage Association for the Education of Young Children, Division for Early Childhood International Conference).

#### *Program Student Learning Outcomes*

The Academic Assessment Plan for the M.Ed. in ECSE was substantially revised in January 2019 and the implementation of new/revised assessments began in Summer 2019. It is important to note that the Assessment Plan revision approved through the Academic Assessment Committee included plans for initial and advanced licensure tracks, as the work was completed prior to the loss of accreditation for initial licensure programs.

As noted previously, the revision occurred in response to the need to align with revised Professional Standards (Council for Exceptional Children/Division for Early Childhood) and the Alaska's Infant Mental Health Competencies; increase the rigor of assignments and rubrics to demonstrate candidate progress and more sensitivity to differentiating between does not meet, meets, and exceeds expectations; and to meet the CAEP accreditation requirements. The process of constructing the assessments followed recommended practices for obtaining validity by ensuring face and construct validity through stakeholder and key expert review (one reviewer from a CAEP accredited ECSE program supported the validation process as a content expert), and for obtaining reliability by ensuring at least 90% inter-rater agreement on the scoring of assessments. Although key assessment data continues to be collected for the remaining ECSE Advanced Licensure students, all work on Program Student Learning Outcomes was halted since the suspension of the program in Fall 2019 and no remaining faculty member.

#### *Program Work Toward Quality Matters Standards/High-Quality Online Delivery*

During the summer 2018 the ECSE faculty member and three adjunct faculty completed the Quality Matters *Improving Your Online Course*, with funds from the Faculty Development Fund. The one ECSE faculty, Dr. Harvey, was selected as a UAA Technology Fellow during AY18, resulting in the transformation of two courses to meet full accessibility standards with the plan to submit for a Quality Matters External Review. It was anticipated that all ECSE courses would meet accessibility standards and subsequently submit for external Quality Matters Reviews as funding allowed. Additionally, in April 2019 the program faculty member, Dr. Harvey, was awarded \$29,000 from the Faculty Initiative Fund which included funds for online course development/submission to Quality Matters External Review for ECSE courses.

#### *Student Support*

The ECSE faculty member provided academic advising to each Master's student and currently continues to provide advising for the teach-out plans (which includes many petitions since ECSE courses are no longer offered), tracks their progress toward graduation, and communicates on a regular basis (minimum 2x per semester) with each enrolled student. Although the faculty member, Dr. Harvey, is no longer in the ECSE program and is now a faculty member in the Psychology Department, she continues to serve as the student advisor for the remaining ECSE students.

#### *Student Accomplishments*

Since AY15, all graduates have obtained a passing score on the Praxis II: Special Education – Early Childhood/Preschool nationally normed test. This evidences their mastery of content knowledge in this discipline. Since 2015, 100 percent of graduates from this program were hired either by a Part C Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program or a school district preschool program and most (~90%) currently remain in those positions based on available data. In 2019, three ECSE students presented at a state conference, the Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children, and in 2020 three additional students will co-present

with Dr. Harvey at this conference. A number of students have also held Community-Engaged Student Assistant positions working with community agencies (2018,  $n = 3$ ; 2019  $n = 2$ ).

#### 4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

The M.Ed. in ECSE is the only degree program in the State of Alaska that prepares personnel to work with infant, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families, and prior to Summer 2019 resulted in an either an initial licensure or an advanced endorsement in early childhood special education birth – age 5 through the Alaska State Department of Education and Early Development. UAF offers one Early Childhood Special Education course in the Special Education program, and UAS offers two ECSE courses in their Special Education program. These courses are offered to elementary special education students seeking to add their preschool special education endorsement to their teaching licensure, but do not comprehensively cover the discipline in early intervention/early childhood special education birth – age five.

It is also critical to recognize that the ECSE program up until Spring 2019 used to offer the only minor in ECSE in the state, which led to an endorsement in ECSE Birth – Age 5 with the completion of an initial teaching certification program. For example, in 2019 of the ten baccalaureate degrees awarded in Early Childhood Education (ECE), five of the students completed a minor in ECSE resulting in an initial teaching license in Birth – Age 8 and an special education endorsement in Birth – Age 5. This was a unique offering which helped to fulfill the workforce development need for early intervention and preschool special educators. It is no longer offered due to the loss of initial licensure programs at UAA School of Education.

#### 5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)

In the following section the program strengths are addressed, followed by considerations and recommendations. The M.Ed. Early Childhood Special Education program has a number of strengths to consider. *First and foremost*, is the only degree program in the State of Alaska to specifically prepare personnel to work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities, which also offered the only minor in ECSE the state. *Second*, the program is nationally recognized by the Council for Exceptional Children, the Specialized Professional Association (SPA), indicating it meets high-quality standards for the discipline. However, since it's suspension in Fall 2019 the program has not continued with the CAEP accreditation process that the UAA SOE is undergoing for advanced programs. It could however, continue in the process if reinstated. *Third*, this program includes a current, revised curriculum reflective of the discipline and needs of Alaska's population (including trauma-informed care, infant mental health). *Finally*, the program faculty are well connected with key stakeholders (i.e., State of Alaska Part C Office, Thread Alaska Inc, Anchorage School District Preschool, Programs for Infants and Children [PIC]), which speaks to the program's viability and visibility in our state.

Although the M.Ed. in ECSE program has been suspended due to loss of program faculty, a rationale for discontinuation based on faculty attrition disregards the evidence for the personal workforce development need in Alaska. Data show that student enrollment over the past 8-years is on average less than 10 student per year, however there is a clear demand across the state for this personnel need. With focused attention and support there is a strong potential for increasing enrollment, particularly with the continuation of state and community partnerships that Dr. Harvey has developed and maintained.

In moving forward, I propose four possible (not exhaustive) recommendations to consider:

1. Reinstate the M.Ed. in Early Childhood Special Education at UAA and allocate appropriate resources within the School of Education, with at minimum a commitment to a full-time faculty appointment with expertise in this discipline. This will only address advanced licensure unless the SOE pursues reinstatement of initial licensure programs.
2. UAA (or another UA MAU) could consider linking with an outside university to offer an ECSE program, such as done with the Speech-Language Pathology program or the Occupational Therapy

- Program, etc. However, this again would require the commitment of a faculty appointment to help with coordination and program development.
3. UAS or UAF could add an M.Ed. in Early Childhood Special Education with both initial and advanced licensure options and allocate appropriate resources with at minimum a full-time faculty appointment with expertise in this discipline. Consider consultation with Dr. Harvey to share newly revised curriculum, key assessments in order to integrate into the CAEP accreditation processes underway.
  4. UAS or UAF could consider adding an early childhood special education minor to an existing BA in Elementary Special Education degree to meet workforce needs without an advanced degree.