

# **REPORT OF THE WASC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM**

## **First Doctoral Degree Fifth-Year Visit**

To

**California State University, Fresno**

October 8–9, 2012

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The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution according to Commission Standards and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WASC website.

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Special Visit Team Report for  
California State University, Fresno  
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**SECTION I: OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT**

**A. Description of Institution and Visit**

California State University, Fresno (CSU Fresno) is located at the northeast edge of Fresno at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, surrounded by the San Joaquin Valley. CSU Fresno was founded as Fresno State Normal School in 1911, became a teacher's college in 1921, and has offered advanced degrees since 1949. The university's popular nickname is "Fresno State." CSU Fresno is one of the 23 campuses of the California State University system. The university has approximately 21,500 students and offers a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum with nine professional schools and divisions of the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology; Arts and Humanities; Craig School of Business; Kremen School of Education and Human Development; Lyles College of Engineering; Health and Human Services; Science and Mathematics; Social Sciences; Graduate Studies and Continuing and Global Education; and offers graduate degrees at the masters and doctoral (Ed.D.) levels. The faculty includes 1,100 full- and part-time faculty with 96% of the tenured faculty holding doctoral or other terminal degrees.

The purpose of this visit is to focus on the progress of the development of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Fresno State (DPELFS). The Commission granted CSU Fresno authorization to offer the Ed.D. in the fall of 2007 with tracks in K–12 and postsecondary education; its first cohort was admitted at the same time. The program was created as a result of legislative action (SB 724) that allowed the California State University System to offer the doctorate, independent of University of California partners. The mission and goals of the

program have been refined to align with the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) principles and current program practices that were scheduled to be approved in Fall, 2012. Both documents are visible and well known by campus constituents (CFR 1.1, 1.2). In addition, several auxiliary programs were created to help the program meet the goals of preparing professional practitioners.

### **B. The Institution's Special-Visit Report**

The University's Special Report of August 2012 was organized around only four of the five issues raised in the Commission's 2007 Action Letter when the DPELFS was approved. The report documented notable progress in the four areas:

Issue 1—hiring additional faculty to build capacity for the program;

Issue 2—the development of its assessment plan;

Issue 3—rubrics for student qualifying examinations and dissertations developed and refined; and

Issue 4—assessment findings and student learning results became a central focus of the program-review process.

Upon arrival, the team informed the University that Issue 5 raised in the Commission's 2007 Action Letter had not been addressed in the report. Issue 5 stated that graduate faculty need to demonstrate a consistent level of scholarly activity, mentoring, and program-level dialogue about appropriate peer-reviewed journals, and that other support should be available for those who fall below the expected standard. The written response was immediately submitted to the team for review.

The team found it especially helpful that the DPELFS provided all information through the Box.net Internet link and also arranged for hard copies of the report and supporting appendixes to be sent to each team member via U.S. mail. These measures greatly facilitated the team's preparation. It is clear that the institution has conducted impressive work in preparation of this report in quantity and quality. The report was well organized and provided an accurate summary of the institution's efforts to address the issues raised in the action letter.

### **C. Description of the Team's Review Process**

The team began preparation for the October 2012 visit two months before the actual site visit. Team members received from WASC a package of all supporting documents for the special visit. Each team member read all materials and recorded their impressions of the extent to which CSU Fresno had responded to the Commission recommendations in light of relevant Standards. In mid-September, team members participated in a telephone conference to discuss and compare their analyses, to determine whom team members wished to interview, to refine any remaining questions to be asked of the university, and to identify additional materials the team needed to examine. In mid-September, team members also participated in a telephone conference with CSU Fresno personnel to finalize the interview schedule and to request additional materials for review. The team met on the evening of October 7, 2012 to review and confirm the visit schedule.

The site visit occurred on October 8 and 9, 2012. The team conducted interviews with the President, Provost, Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), Program Director, 2 Deans and 2 Associate Deans, 9 Advisory Board Members, 13 Graduate Group Core Faculty, 6 Graduate Group Affiliated Faculty, 2 Adjunct Faculty, 18 Ed.D. alumni, 14 current students, and 4 staff

members, of whom 2 recently retired. The team also read two email messages that had been sent to the team through the confidential email account established for this visit. The team also directly observed classroom activities in two courses. Finally, CSU Fresno provided the team with an extensive collection of documents, files, and evidence in a “Team Room” established for the visit on location in the Kremen School of Education. All requested materials were provided to the team in a timely manner, and all university personnel cooperated openly and candidly during our meetings (CFR 1.9).

## **SECTION II: EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS**

### **A. Issue 1—Hiring of Additional Faculty**

The July 2007 Commission action letter noted that “additional faculty should be hired as a matter of first priority to build capacity for the program, with special emphasis on the qualification and scholarship of the core faculty for the community college track.” As of the October 2012 site visit, the DPELFS has hired two tenure-track postsecondary faculty members and is presently conducting searches for two additional faculty members, one in postsecondary education and one in educational research and statistics. The team verified that a detailed process for faculty hiring does exist and is followed for full-time faculty (CFRs 3.1, 3.2). A review of the job announcements indicated that the qualifications listed include an earned doctorate in higher education administration, community college administration, or leadership (CFR 3.2).

For racial and ethnic diversity of faculty, the Kremen School of Education has been a leader in the University, as 52% of its faculty members are faculty of color. However, only 12.5% of the DPELFS faculty in the Graduate Group are faculty of color (1 Asian and 4 Hispanic members).

## **B. Issue 2—Development of an Assessment Plan**

The second issue the Commission asked DPELFS to address was the following: “The University should further develop its assessment plan, to define research questions, set forth expectations for data collection and analyses, and ensure that data is used to improve student learning.” The DPELFS has taken several steps to address this issue, notably the design and implementation of the “Student Outcomes Assessment Plan” (SOAP). The methods of data collection and analysis are sound, as is the frequency with which data are reviewed. Further, the 360 Pre- and Post-Disposition Survey and the Embedded Fieldwork Assessment are excellent examples of providing students with, as stated in CFR 2.4, “appropriate and ongoing feedback about their performance and how it can be improved.” Data collected to date regarding time to degree-graduation rates (86% of students in the first three cohorts graduated within three years), as well as the research and professional achievements of graduates suggest that the DPELFS is meeting and/or exceeding expectations for the program (CFR 2.6). Finally, there is sound evidence that measures of student learning (assessment) have been included in broader program-review efforts (CFR 2.7), as evidenced throughout Section III.B.1 of the Program Review Self-Study.

Because of its participation and leadership in the CPED, the DPELFS has recently proposed a change to its program mission and goals to better align with CPED principles. These shifts are to be commended and are consistent with WASC expectations (CFR 2.2b).

In keeping with CFR 4.3, program-level planning processes “are informed by appropriately defined and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data, and include consideration of evidence of educational effectiveness, including student learning.” Evidence of this includes data-informed recommendations from the Program Review Self-Study that are organized around

the review’s six evaluation questions, as well as by the enumerated “Closing the Loop Activities.” Self-study recommendations are particularly strong, as they reflect multiple measures of student-learning data organized around the six evaluation questions. The closing the loop activities are sound, though several appear to respond to discrete data points.

The DPELFS used multiple sets of goals, objectives, and evaluation questions to organize discrete data. These included the following:

- Six statements to focus the research and development agendas for the professional doctorate in education (Special Visit Report, p. 1);
- Four program goals for DPELFS students (Special Visit Report, pp. 2–3; DPELFS WASC Report Appendices, pp. 248–249);
- Ten program outcomes for DPELFS students (DPELFS WASC Report Appendices, p. 249);
- Four research questions for SOAP (DPELFS WASC Report Appendices, p. 250); and
- Six evaluation questions for the student-learning assessment (DPELFS WASC Report Appendices, p. 251).

Although the content for each of the frameworks was sound, the connections among these frameworks as well as the connections between the frameworks and School and University planning efforts were not fully evident. This made elements of the reporting confusing or difficult to follow.

### **C. Issue 3—Rubrics**

As an extension of the second issue noted above, the Commission requested that the DPELFS develop and refine rubrics for student qualifying examinations and dissertations. The

DPELFS has responded by (a) developing sound rubrics, (b) using them in the evaluation of qualifying examinations and dissertations, (c) tracking student scores over time to inform educational interventions, and (d) securing external reviews for dissertations in light of the rubrics (CFRs 2.3–2.5). The dissertation rubrics appear to be useful tools for gauging the quality of dissertations that meet or exceed the expectations of the DPELFS. However, some faculty and administrators shared concerns that the rubrics do not sufficiently ensure that all students achieve minimum expectations for the quality of dissertations (CFR 2.5). From the set of 63 dissertations in the evidence room, six were fewer than 60 pages and two were fewer than 40 pages in length (in a cursory review of dissertations from the Ed.D. offered jointly by California State University, Fresno and the University of California, Davis, we found no dissertations shorter than 75 pages in length). Recognizing that the quality of dissertations should not be measured by length, the team read sample sections from a variety of dissertations of varying length, methodology, and topic. The quality for several sections from the shortest dissertations was significantly lower than for similar sections in other dissertations (notably in Chapters 3 and 5), though this was not readily apparent from rubric scores for the dissertations.

#### **D. Issue 4—Program-Review Process**

The Commission noted that “the program review process for the Ed.D. should include assessment findings and student learning results as a central focus of the process” (CFRs 2.1–2.4, 2.6, 2.7). The DPELFS chose to use this special visit as an occasion to complete a program review for both institutional purposes and to address this prior Commission recommendation. At the heart of the review were learning and program outcomes. Assessment of student and program outcomes for the purpose of ongoing program improvement takes place annually. Further, the

DPELFS uses a wide variety of measurement instruments to measure both student outcomes and program outcomes (e.g., 360 Pre- and Post-Disposition Survey, Annual Student Evaluations, Embedded Fieldwork Assessment, Qualifying Examination and Rubric, Dissertation Criteria and Oral and Written Rubric, Graduate Survey and Employer Survey (CFRs 2.1–2.4, 2.6, 2.7).

Based on interviews with the director, faculty groups, administrators, staff, and students, and upon review of documents provided, the program-review process appears to be a sound and meaningful activity for the DPELFS. Faculty interviewed discussed at length how student learning outcome data are at the heart of the program review and how improvements are implemented as a result of this information (CFRs 2.1–2.3). For example, the DPELFS developed several new writing support services for students as a result of findings from assessment and program review efforts. Data collected from the wide range of measurement instruments are analyzed by the Graduate Group faculty at special meetings called specifically to review these data. Where there were policy implications, the Academic Policy and Planning subcommittee has designed new or revised policies and/or procedures to be approved by the full Graduate Group faculty (CFRs 2.2–2.4, 2.6, 2.7). Assessment of program outcomes for the purpose of ongoing program improvement takes place annually.

#### **E. Issue 5—Graduate Faculty**

In response to this issue, the Commission recommended that “the Graduate faculty needed to demonstrate a consistent level of scholarly activity; mentoring, program-level dialogue about appropriate peer-reviewed journals, and other support should be available for those who fall below the expected standard.” The DPELFS is interdisciplinary and the participating faculty

members come from departments within and outside the Kremen School of Education. The Graduate Group is the governance structure instituted by the DPELFS. There are specific guidelines for Appointment and Renewal in the Graduate Group based on scholarship endeavors that Core and Affiliated faculty members must meet for continued membership every 4 years (CFRs 2.1, 3.1). Faculty who did not meet the required publication criteria, were reappointed with stipulations.

The University employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. The DPELFS in the Kremen School of Education and Human Development has 21 tenured or tenure-track faculty members who serve as Core faculty, 15 tenured/tenure-track or full-time faculty who serve as Affiliated faculty members, 3 administrators who serve as Affiliated faculty, and approximately 11 adjunct faculty who are clinical faculty teaching specialization courses. All faculty members in the DPELFS have earned doctorates from accredited universities (CFRs 2.1, 3.1). Faculty members who teach in the doctoral program are given approximately \$2,800 to be used for scholarly professional development and other related expenditures. Additional professional-development funds are awarded for chairing dissertations and for scoring qualifying examinations (CFRs 2.8, 3.4).

According to documents reviewed by the team and interviews with the faculty and administrators, there is a strong, continuous professional record of published research through monographs, refereed journal articles, grants, and presentations at national and international meetings of relevant professional associations (CFR 3.4). The total amount of professional development funds awarded to the DPELFS faculty for scholarly publications during 2011-2012 for participating in the doctoral program was approximately \$92,000 and every Graduate Group faculty member has published in at least one referred journal or made a refereed presentation

(CFR 3.4). Titles of the referred journals include *Applied Developmental Science*, *Educational Leadership Review*, *Critical Pedagogy*, *Evaluation Review*, *Journal of Education and Administration*, *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *Journal of Latinos in Education*, *Journal of School Leadership*, and *Quality in Higher Education* (CFR 3.4). The DPELFS does have practices and processes in place to support the notion that “building and sustaining faculty capacity” is a primary focus of program (CFR 3.8).

In an attempt to mentor faculty members, a school wide publication committee was instituted in the Kremen School of Education to provide some guidelines and standardization for acceptable journal submissions. Emails are sent to faculty regarding upcoming calls for publications and presentations at conferences. To recognize faculty publications, an email is sent to all faculty members and the first page of their publication is posted on the bulletin board outside the doctoral program office. The DPELFS provides generous funding for faculty professional development (CFR 3.4). Additionally, the Center for Research and Publication has just been created as an auxiliary of DPELFS to provide assistance for faculty and students submitting articles for publication in refereed journals (CFR 2.8). A faculty research colloquium is held annually providing an opportunity for the faculty to showcase their research (CFR 3.4).

The university uses faculty evaluations by students, peer observations, administrative evaluations, and program reviews to ensure that qualified faculty are teaching with quality and addressing the appropriate share of student learning outcomes (CFR 3.3). The team’s review of documents and interviews with faculty verified that these processes are in place and practiced consistently in the program. A review of the documents indicated that the DPELFS course evaluations use the IDEA, which compared their faculty course-evaluation constructs with faculty teaching similar courses across the nation (CFR 3.3, 4.6). The DPELFS faculty exceeded

the average scores of other faculty teaching similar courses nationwide in the constructs that are most important in a professional practice doctorate (CFR 3.3, 4.6).

### **SECTION III: COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **A. Commendations**

1. The team commends the director, administrators, faculty, staff, and students for their expressed enthusiasm and pride in the Ed.D. program. The faculty, administrators, alumni, and advisory board members praised the DPELFS for its impact on the culture of the Kremen School of Education, the University, and the Central Valley community. The team was impressed with the consistent loyalty and dedication that the director and faculty have for their students.

Overwhelming, the students interviewed appreciated the rigor of the DPELFS, which provided access to a doctoral program that focuses on professional practice and addressed local needs through partnerships in the community. Students valued the cohort model because it provided them many opportunities to interact with other energetic and like-minded working professionals and gain support from them. Students recognize that they are in a special place and have great appreciation for the faculty and staff that create this learning environment and the close working relationships they have established with students. Students described faculty members as competent, accessible, and caring (CFR 2.3).

2. The team commends the DPELFS for its involvement with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate since its inception. As a result of this involvement, the doctoral program has gained national recognition and become the lead institution representing CSU institutions in this project. Signature pedagogy (e.g., embedded fieldwork) adopted by DPELFS is being looked at by the members of CPED. A team of other CPED participants conducted an external review of

the program in April 2012 and offered a glowing review of the program. Additionally, the DPELFS was the host of a national convening of CPED in June, 2012 (CFR 2.1).

3. The team commends the DPELFS for the vast number of resources supporting the program including the following:

- **Fiscal**. The doctoral program is a self-supporting program. The budget is generous allowing CSU Fresno to build a doctoral culture over the last 5 years (CFR 3.5). The strong verbal support from administrators is matched in funds going directly to the program.
- **Physical**. The DPELFS is located on the third floor of the Kremen School of Education building. The attractive facilities include the program's suite housing the director's office and two staff offices. Faculty offices, a computer lab specifically for doctoral students, and classrooms are all located on the third floor. The faculty and students were extremely satisfied with the resources provided (CFR 3.6).
- **Faculty support**. The DPELFS shares a commitment to scholarly and creative work to enhance instructional effectiveness and encourage faculty scholarly pursuits. The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. Faculty-development funds and faculty technology (e.g., laptop, iPod, and classroom technology) are afforded all full-time faculty (CFR 3.4).
- **Student services**. A comprehensive doctoral-student handbook provides information about admissions, doctoral culture, qualifying examinations, dissertation expectations, and student-support services on campus. Students are given workshops and access to technology (Blackboard, Google hangout, End notes, etc.); each student

is assigned a faculty advisor and a peer mentor from the previous cohort; and each student has access to a computer lab that is only for doctoral students (CFR 2.13).

The staff is to be commended for their dedication and support of the students (CFR 2.14).

4. The team commends the DPELFS for its signature pedagogy—Embedded Fieldwork. The students, faculty, and partners in the community interviewed described the embedded field as the “hallmark of the program” (CFRs 2.3, 2.5).

5. The team commends the DPELFS for its faculty partnership with students. Students and faculty members expressed their support of the efforts by administrators to help students publish their dissertations and other scholarly work as journal articles. With the creation of the Center for Research and Publication, there is an expectancy of a higher publication rate. The faculty have coauthored articles with students with a high acceptance of publications (CFRs 2.8, 3.4).

6. The team commends the DPELFS for its collaboration with schools districts, colleges, and the community. The program has exceptionally close ties with K–12 schools; links that have developed in the course of preparing so many of their teachers and administrators. This collaboration fits well with one of the strategic goals of the University: Engagement with the Region. School districts are pleased that “the program is growing our own” and graduates will “hit the ground running.” Examples of collaboration are the creation of the Central Valley Educational Leadership Institute (CVELI); the Lindsay Unified School District project; and redesigning the Center for Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Dissemination (CFRs 2.9, 4.8).

7. The team commends the DPELFS for the redesign of the Student Outcomes Assessment Plan (SOAP). SOAP is now included as a central component of the 5-year program review process (CFRs 2.10, 4.6).

8. The team commends the DPELFS for their responsiveness to needs that emerge from various assessments. The program has taken the concerns raised by students, faculty, and external partners seriously and has addressed them in a timely manner (CFR 4.8).

## **B. Recommendations**

***1. Assessment and Program Review.*** **The team recommends that the DPELFS build on proposed changes to the mission statement to develop a singular conceptual framework for learning that will guide future assessment efforts (CFRs 2.3, 4.2).** Current assessment efforts (e.g., SOAP) are strong in clearly articulated learning outcomes, sound measurement instruments, and closing the loop examples that use discrete data to inform practice. Further, the DPELFS Program Review Self-Study is a strong example of using multiple measures and data points organized around a framework of six evaluation questions to inform practice. However, as noted on page 8 of this report, multiple sets of goals, objectives, and evaluation questions made for a confusing “framework” around which more discrete findings could be compiled. Building on these practices, the team recommends that the DPELFS design a more permanent conceptual framework or enduring set of program-level learning objectives. The DPELFS could then map course-level objectives, assessment data, and future program evaluation data to this set of 3-6 enduring program objectives, principles, or learning domains (or whatever terminology is preferred by the program) as a means of compiling findings over time. This may serve as a means to further leverage involvement with CPED while minimizing potential confusion related

to multiple frameworks. Additionally, this may serve as a framework of which course objectives may be aligned, thus informing ongoing “gaps and overlaps” analyses regarding the curriculum.

**2. Program Review.** The team recommends that DPELFS afford greater attention to securing external data regarding its influence on regional programs and educational efforts (CFRs 4.3, 4.8). The DPELFS has effectively aligned its work to the Goal 7: Engagement with the Region from the California State University, Fresno Strategic Plan. Further, and as noted in the commendations above, the DPELFS has had a significant positive impact on the region through its embedded fieldwork projects and collaboration with auxiliary partners such as the CVELI. Future program-review efforts should prioritize the collection and analyses of data from these partners to inform the ongoing work of the DPELFS with external regional partners, especially as related to the University Strategic Plan. These data may be especially critical in securing ongoing resource support for the DPELFS, in light of changes in University leadership and broader state-level fiscal challenges.

**3. Capacity.** The team recommends that the DPELFS carefully and systematically monitor its ongoing capacity to deliver a high quality doctoral education to regional students while assuming a leadership role with the development of doctoral programs at California State University, Bakersfield and California State University, Channel Islands (CFRs 31., 3.4). During the interviews with multiple constituent groups, several individuals shared concerns about the capacity of a small group of faculty and leaders to provide leadership and service necessary for the doctoral program provided on campus, while also providing leadership and guidance to two other CSU campuses in the development and launching of their doctoral programs. Several faculty members in multiple interviews shared concerns particularly regarding their capacity to provide this leadership and guidance while designing an online

delivery modality, a system that would be new to many faculty who teach in the DPELFS. These concerns, as well as other capacity-related issues, should be carefully tracked and monitored during the period when the DPELFS extends itself to provide leadership and guidance to other programs.

**4. Range of Quality in Dissertations.** The team recommends that the DPELFS more clearly articulate and abide by its minimum standards for dissertation content and quality (CFRs 2.4–2.6). There is strong evidence that many, if not most of the DPELFS student dissertations are excellent. However, several individuals shared concerns that some dissertations did not meet the expectations of the program, and this was confirmed in our review of a sample of dissertations. The team recommends that further attention be given to the content and application of dissertation rubrics to ensure that minimum expectations for the dissertation are made explicit to all parties and to ensure that all students meet those expectations. Additional evaluation of dissertation advising may also be warranted. Affording some students more than 3 years to complete a quality dissertation should not negatively reflect upon the ability of the DPELFS to achieve its educational objectives. In prioritization, this recommendation should receive immediate, focused attention.

**5. Diversify Core Group Faculty.** We recommend that DPELFS build on current efforts and successes to provide and promote socially just, inclusive, and equitable education, including assertive steps to increase the ethnic and cultural diversity of Graduate Group faculty (CFRs 1.5, 3.2). Evidence from interviews with students suggests they develop solid knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for inclusive, equitable, and socially just educational leadership. Students attributed a significant portion of this learning to *EDL 508: Theories of Cross-Cultural Education* and applications of the content from that class in

embedded fieldwork experiences. The team suggests that students would benefit from efforts to extend this work more systematically across the entire curriculum. The team further suggests that the DPELFS more formally consider learning outcomes related to inclusive, equitable, and socially justice education in its ongoing assessment and program-review efforts.

Additionally, the ethnic composition of the Graduate Group faculty who teach in and assume leadership for the DPELFS is not reflective of the program's students or the Kremen School of Education. Currently, 12.5% of Graduate Group faculty members have identified as persons of color, compared to 52% of faculty in the Kremen School of Education. Whereas the DPELFS draws several members of its Graduate Group faculty from schools and colleges outside the Kremen School of Education, which are not as ethnically diversity, concerted efforts should allow the DPELFS to achieve numbers that approach those of the Kremen School.