

OFF-CAMPUS GRADUATE PROGRAM VISION & PHILOSOPHY

The Master of Science in Education Off-Campus Program has been designed to meet the professional development needs of educators. The program focuses on educational renewal which begins in the local classroom, school district, and community, and expands from there to encourage involvement with state and national educational institutions and standards. First and foremost, the master's program offered by Southwest Minnesota State University emphasizes educational renewal based upon inquiry, practitioner-sponsored learning, leadership, and critical reflection.

The faculty members of the Off-campus Learning Community Program believe that authentic educational renewal can only be accomplished when individual educators assume ownership of their personal and professional development. Likewise, in order to meet the demanding and ever-changing challenges of educating all students and to promote positive transformation of educational programs, educators must also accept responsibility of personal and group involvement beyond the immediate context of their workplace.

Southwest Minnesota State University's Master of Science Learning Community Master's Program is based on the following ten propositions:

1. The program focuses on transformational professional development.
2. The program is accessible to educators.
3. The program meets the individual needs of all educators.
4. The program models current research on teaching/learning and best practices.
5. The program is developed by practitioners through student-directed learning and continuous student feedback.
6. The program focuses on leadership skills and community involvement which enable the process of true educational renewal.
7. The program is based on an inquiry approach to learning.
8. The program emphasizes professional scholarship as a vehicle for involvement within the larger educational community.
9. The program incorporates local, state and national standards.
10. The program focuses on the retention of currently-practicing educators.

OFF-CAMPUS GRADUATE PROGRAM POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Traditional Learning Communities

Budgets:

The LC faculty have a number of budgets to utilize for site operations and program advancement including the site operating budget, the joint budget, the off-campus graduate budget, and individual learning community budgets. These budgets are monitored by the Off-Campus Graduate Director and reported to the LC faculty at monthly meetings. The intention and use of these budgets is delineated below.

- **Operating Budget:** The operating budget is established by the Chief Financial Officer. This account is tracked with individual learning community site accounts ((#2 account—budget account number starts with a 2) that is subtracted from the single operating budget. This account is used for learning community operating expenses including:
 - Site Rental
 - Facilitator/ Co-Facilitator Mileage
 - Facilitator/ Co-Facilitator Meals
 - Facilitator/ Co-Facilitator Hotel Expenses
 - Facilitator Windshield Time
- **Joint Budget:** The joint budget is funded by a special learning community programmatic tuition. Roughly 25% of each semester's programmatic tuition is placed into this account. The joint account is utilized to fund the learning community conferences as well as other items that benefit the overall off-campus program. The off-campus faculty determine how this fund is utilized. Items that may be purchased with this account include but are not limited to:
 - Equipment (when initially ordering or replacing for all LC faculty)
 - Faculty Traveling Libraries
 - Marketing Materials
 - Supplementing Individual LC Site Budgets
 - Professional Memberships—Off-Campus Faculty
 - Learning Community Conferences
 - Keynote Speaker(s)
 - Food (breakfast, noon, and breaks)
 - Print Supplies
 - Door Prizes
 - Marketing Materials
- **Off-Campus Graduate Budget:** This budget is provided and determined by the dean's office. It was established to cover needed items for the off-campus program including but not limited to:
 - Faculty Books
 - Office Equipment
 - Graduate Assistants
 - Marketing
 - Specialized Conference Attendance
 - Office Supplies (Faculty and/or Off-Campus Graduate Director)
- **Individual LC Budgets:** Every learning community will be provided a site budget (#1 account—budget account number starts with a 1). Roughly 75% of the special learning community programmatic tuition will be fund these accounts. An example would be the 2017 transfer of approximately \$85 per student/per semester. Items ordered for a specific LC site/location should be

billed to this account. The site facilitator is responsible for monitoring the individual LC budget. This is the account that is used for individual learning community site needs including but not limited to:

- Supplies (markers, newsprint, etc.)
- Guest Speakers (roughly \$75-\$100/hr. plus mileage)
- Books
- Food (first weekend only)
- Equipment (must be retained by the university facilitator)
- Student Stipends (marketing, opening building, etc.)
- Individual LC Banquets
- Conference Related Expenses

Co-Facilitator Selection:

A school-based co-facilitator(s) will work with a university-based facilitator. See the job description (Appendix C). Multiple school-based co-facilitators may be utilized in one site for mentoring or other purposes. Preference will be given to those who have learning community experience.

- Option 1: Lead and experienced co-facilitator
- Option 2: Lead and multiple co-facilitators (at least one must have LC experience)

Completing Program:

LC students returning to complete at least a semester of an LC need to audit the new learning community they will join for one semester prior to enrolling in the next semester courses. This audit period will be at no charge to the student. This must be within the 7-year time limit for completion. See graduate policy for additional information.

Individual Learning Community Size:

Once a learning community reaches enrollment of 25, the facilitator has the latitude to cap the site. If a facilitator chooses to keep the site open and it continues to grow, it may be divided into two learning communities. The decision will be made on student, faculty, and program needs.

New LC Faculty Mentoring:

Consistency of instruction and program offerings is supported by appointment of an experienced LC faculty member who co-facilitates and acts as a mentor with any newly hired faculty members during an entire two-year program. The mentor co-teaches, models the constructivist teaching philosophy, and shares resources with the new faculty member. The mentor/mentee program provides orientation to the LC model and to the role of facilitator in off-campus LC programs. After successful completion of the two-year mentoring program, new faculty may serve as lead facilitators.

New Faculty Qualifications:

Faculty who teach in the LC program are hired through a rigorous national search process that includes interviews with the search committee, department members, and students, as well as with the Dean and the Provost. See job description (Appendix C). Required criteria as listed on the most recent job search description for an LC faculty position include but not limited to:

- Ph.D. or Ed.D. in Education or a related field;
- Three years of teaching experience at the K-12 level;
- Strong background in teacher development and leadership theory;
- Demonstrated ability to work with persons of diverse background and support of liberal education;

- Solid understanding of current educational research and theory as applied to instruction and leadership;
- Sound understanding of contemporary research in school renewal and instruction theory
- Experience in LC environments;
- Facilitation of graduate education professional development;
- Skills in collaboration, consensus building, and achieving mutual goals with colleagues; and
- Demonstrated abilities/competence in instructional technology including online instruction

Seniority:

Off-campus learning communities are assigned according to seniority on the TLL roster and additional considerations. These assignments are made in the spring.

Rationale: For the past 20 years learning communities have been assigned in the Education Department, then in the Department of Educator Development and Leadership, then in the learning communities within the restructured Education Department by using only the “official” Southwest Minnesota State University Seniority Roster.

While there is general agreement on the use of the seniority roster for faculty assignment there are at least two issues that have arisen from this practice that are addressed. First, when more senior faculty members of the department have “bumped” less senior members to obtain preferred assignments this has generated a degree of discontent among some faculty members. Second, while the seniority roster does reflect the number of years a faculty member has been at SMSU, it reflects absolutely none of the five criteria used to determine a faculty member’s effort and persistence in their professional development, supporting SMSU, supporting student learning and development, the quality of their professional practice, or the effort they have put into marketing the off-campus learning community programs. Therefore, to address both of these issues I am proposing that the Off-Campus Learning Community Faculty adopt a new policy that integrates all of these items as the official procedure used to determine the faculty member’s *off-campus learning community standing*, and that the *numerical ranking of the faculty member’s standing* be used to determine the order of faculty learning community assignments if a question or concern should arise in the future.

Off-campus learning community faculty standing shall be determined by combining the following four numbers that reflect not only seniority, but the five criteria in the faculty member’s PDP, and their marketing efforts:

- 1) The “official” seniority from the SMSU seniority roster (one point for each year of seniority).
- 2) The number of years as a lead facilitator in the off-campus learning community program with a terminal degree (one point for each year).
- 3) The number of years of service in the off-campus learning community program by their promotional rank: [0.5 x years as instructor; 0.75 x years as assistant professor; 0.85 x years as an associate professor; 1.0 x years as a full professor. These numbers are totaled to determine the faculty member’s score.]
- 4) Marketing the off-campus learning community program. The marketing number is based on the average number of students that have graduated from the lead facilitator’s learning communities.

To Determine the Marketing Number:

To ensure all five full-time faculty members currently teaching in the off-campus learning communities are treated as equally and fairly as possible, I propose using only the number of students graduating from

the learning communities since 2009, the first year the newest member of our faculty, Dr. Dennis Lamb, had students graduating from his learning communities. Further, this would eliminate the disproportionately large numbers of students in some learning communities in the early years of the program that may distort average student numbers in favor of faculty who have been lead facilitators in the program since its inception.

To determine the Marketing Number the average number of students graduating from a lead facilitator's learning communities since 2009 would be divided by 20 (the "ideal" number of students and the number we have traditionally targeted for starting a new community). The result, if greater than 1, would be multiplied by 9 (total number of years included, which changes every year) and added to the faculty member's total score to determine their *off-campus learning community standing*. If less than 1, it would mean the faculty member's average numbers were under 20 and, as a result, no marketing number would be added to the faculty member's total score to determine their *off-campus learning community standing*.

Adding the numerical results of 1 through 4 would then determine each faculty member's *off-campus learning community standing*. Learning communities would be assigned from highest to lowest *numerical standing*. Under most circumstances this has not been, nor will it be necessary.

Why this works: #1 includes the traditional seniority rank, #2, #3, and #4 reflect the faculty member's effort and persistence in developing, marketing, and delivering the off-campus programs, their professional growth and development during their tenure in the off-campus programs at SMSU, and the quality of their professional practice as reported and affirmed within each faculty member's PDP. The PDP, in turn, reflects the professional expectations of faculty members in the off-campus learning community program as well as the expectations of Southwest Minnesota State University.

Finally, this procedure is simple, easy to calculate, equitable and accurately reflects faculty member's service to the off-campus learning community program and to SMSU.

There are also three options that may be considered prior to bumping including the following:

- Two lead facilitators working together
- Sharing 1.5 overload credits per faculty for a one-year special assignment.
- Serve as co-facilitator in two sites.

Site Contracts:

The lead facilitator utilizes a checklist to negotiate a contract. The contract will be forwarded to SMSU's CFO for approval and signature.

Site Selection:

LCs are generally located in public facilities such as schools, community/technical colleges, state universities, or hotel conference centers, where parking is readily available on weekends and where accessibility issues related to ADA are addressed by the facility in advance as required by law. When a facility is selected, issues related to parking are reviewed with the appropriate person at the facility, and students are notified in advance of changes or requests to park in a specified location. Students are responsible for their own transportation. A cancellation procedure and/or a notification system is in place for each individual learning community. It is utilized due to inclement weather or other circumstances. Because there is not time enough for lunch off-site, and on-site lunch facilities are often not available, students provide their own lunch during LC weekends. Snacks and beverages are provided by the facilitators for the first weekend and by rotating advisory teams on other weekends.

Facilities are evaluated throughout the duration of an LC and at the conclusion of a two-year cycle via anecdotal discussions and notes that are recorded for future reference and review. Facilitators discuss among themselves and with the department to be sure that the best-suited facilities are being utilized. If/when a problem arises that cannot be resolved, the Dean is notified, and an unresolved issue may result in relocation of the LC. Relocation during the course of an LC has occurred sometimes when the original choice has proven inadequate.

Site facilities are selected based on the experience of previous learning communities. For instance, feedback has shown that adequate space is important for large group instruction/discussion, warm-ups, and active learning. Multiple semi-private areas are necessary for break-out sessions, small group discussions, and individual conferencing, along with ready access to technology (wireless Internet, computers, and printers) for task completion and efficiency. Sites are located within reasonable driving distance of most of the registered community learners. When a new site is sought, possible facilities are evaluated and ranked from most to least suitable. After a facility is selected and established, close contact is maintained with designated staff/administration from the facility to address issues such as heating, cooling, classroom access, parking, and safety.

Student Assessment:

The learning community faculty/facilitators may develop and utilize assessment procedures and/or instruments including (but not limited to) those identified below. The instruments will be utilized to measure and document the professional development of the learning community students. It is highly recommended that the facilitators involve the students in the development process of the assessment instruments.

- Self-Assessment
- Peer Assessment
- Written Reflection
- Field Study Analysis
- Lesson Plan Integration
- Student Presentations
- Case Studies
- Small Group Discussions
- Large Group Discussions
- Rubrics (presentation, research, portfolio, readings, etc.)
- Site/Graduate Council

The off-campus uses several means of insuring consistency of instruction and program content. An example is completion by students of three surveys at the end of each LC program: Program Environment Survey, Facilitator Survey, and the Professional Development Survey. Data from the surveys are compiled and reviewed by facilitators and the graduate faculty, who identify apparent inconsistencies if/when they arise and take steps to correct any outstanding issues.

The assessment-related segments of the graduate program exemplify the program's commitment to continuous improvement in teaching and learning. The off-campus graduate program is a standards-based program aligned with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Graduate faculty members have added a leadership standard and appropriate sub standards. These standards are stated as student learning outcomes, and faculty have linked each outcome to one or more courses in the graduate program.

Both the off-campus and on-campus programs use a system of four checkpoints to monitor student progress and student learning. For the culminating assignment that demonstrates achievement of learning outcomes and closes the student learning assessment loop, the portfolio students create during the program is evaluated using a form entitled “Assessment of Learning Community Candidate Progress Demonstrated by a Portfolio Review Process”; the form addresses each of the six student learning outcomes or standards.

The following formative and summative assessment methods are used in the off-campus programs:

- Student personal/professional reflections used to monitor, evaluate, and encourage individual growth and development throughout the two-year cycle.
- Successful participation in and completion of course requirements as identified in syllabi adopted by the graduate program. The minimum competency for a graduate course is 73%, with an overall GPA of 3.0 required to graduate from SMSU.
- Successful completion and presentation of a portfolio that demonstrates growth in each of the student learning outcomes throughout the program. Portfolios are evaluated and approved by the facilitator and an LC advisory team. Portfolios that do not successfully address the national standards/learning outcomes are not approved; students are given the opportunity to address weak areas and may resubmit their portfolios. Successful portfolios will be available for review during the site visits.
- Successful completion and presentation of an Action Research project at a conference or professional experience planned for that purpose. Action research studies are evaluated and approved by the facilitator, with those that do not represent quality research returned for revision of the weak or incomplete areas of research. Grades for the final research project in the ED 627 research course are awarded only after the research project is successfully completed.
- Completion of surveys administered at the end of the LC graduate program: Program Environment Survey, Facilitator Survey, and Professional Development Survey. Data have been collected over a five-year period on surveys administered via Survey Monkey using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Almost Never; 2 = Seldom; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Almost Always).

Student Issues:

The facilitators and co-facilitators for the LCs work directly with student reporting and feedback designed to address concerns or problems that may arise within each LC. Some of the larger LCs form a site/graduate council consisting of representatives from members of the LC, while other LCs work with individuals on a private or personal level. The make-up of the LCs creates an environment in which issues can be brought up and dealt with effectively.

A code of ethics designed by each LC governs and guides the process of developing solutions to problems or issues. In addition, a formal reporting process takes place at monthly off-campus graduate faculty meetings where situations and student issues are discussed. Most student complaints or concerns are discussed with the LC facilitator.

If facilitators are unable to assist students with a solution, students are directed to the Graduate Office. Complaint or concerns that cannot be resolved by Graduate Office personnel are brought to the Off-Campus Education Graduate Director who works to resolve the complaint or concern. Students may appeal decisions to the Graduate Council and the Dean, who has the final say.

Transfer Policy:

The transfer credit policy is governed by Section 3 - Transfer Credit/Petitions 3.0 Transfer Credits. The learning communities allow up to 6 credits to be transferred into the program. The credits will be transferred during the 2nd semester and 4th semester. They will be interchanged for ED 633: Current Issues in Education (2nd semester) and ED 626: Democracy, Diversity & Education (4th semester).

Administrative Program

BOSA Information:

The School of Education has a Chair, Graduate Directors and Assessment & Accreditation Director. These offices oversee the operations of all Education programs including the Admin Program. The Assessment & Accreditation Director will work with BOSA to ensure SMSU is in compliance with BOSA rules and regulations. The Chair, Off Campus Grad Director, and program faculty respectively will work to ensure the smooth running of the Admin Program as indicated in their position descriptions.

Transfer Policy:

The transfer credit policy is governed by Section 3 - Transfer Credit/Petitions 3.0 Transfer Credits. The admin program allows up to 6 credits to be transferred into the program.

APPENDIX A

SMSU Director of Education Graduate Off-Campus Programs: Job Description

The SMSU Director of Education Off-Campus Programs is responsible for management and coordination of the Masters in Education Off-campus Learning Community programs, Administrative Licensure programs, and the Adult Education courses. The Director works with the On-campus Director, Education Chair, Graduate Dean, the Director of the Graduate Office, and other directors of graduate programs.

Daily:

- Meets with off-campus students and answers emails and phone calls regarding the graduate program and addresses needs or concerns
- Reviews off-campus petitions and moves petitions through the appropriate channels.
- Serves as off-campus program liaison with administration.
- Reports off-campus functions and activities to the Department Chair monthly.
- Provides updates to the full department on a monthly basis.

Records:

- Maintains and updates off-campus records for the graduate program.
- Coordinates surveys of off-campus programs, alumni, and adjunct professors.
- Maintains and updates off-campus forms used by the graduate program.
- Coordinates off-campus program reviews.
- Coordinates development of off-campus graduate curricular proposals and new program planning.

Marketing

- Coordinates off-campus marketing with the Graduate Office Director. Reviews marketing and news releases.
- Corresponds with potential off-campus students.
- Expands the off-campus offerings to other states including Iowa which requires a detailed application process and building of a trusting relationship with Iowa Board.

Overall Program:

- Coordinates the off-campus graduate course schedules/sites.
- Plans and conducts the off-campus individual monthly meetings. Follows through on the agenda items discussed during the off-campus graduate meetings.
- Monitors the off-campus graduate budget.
- Monitors the LC program joint learning community account and graduate off-campus budget.
- Follows through on implementing the off-campus strategic plan (short-term and long-term goals) for the graduate program.
- Maintains and updates off-campus graduate portion of the website with the graduate assistant.
- Facilitates communication within the University Community on the curricula, course offerings, and student needs of the off-campus graduate programs.
- Works with the other departments to develop, review, and revise program offerings.
- Serves on the SMSU Graduate Council and Graduate Curriculum Committees.
- Assists with coordination of the graduate hooding ceremony and conferences.
- Serves on state graduate committees and attends state and national graduate conferences to assist with the direction of the graduate program.

APPENDIX B
University-Based Facilitator

Roles and Responsibilities

Requested from HR (will fill in).

Preparation, Experience, Skills

- Ph.D. or Ed.D. in Education or a related field;
- Three years of teaching experience at the K – 12 level;
- Strong background in teacher development and leadership theory;
- Demonstrated ability to work with persons of diverse background and support of liberal education;
- Solid understanding of current educational research and theory as applied to instruction and leadership;
- Sound understanding of contemporary research in school renewal and instruction theory
- Experience in LC environments;
- Facilitation of graduate education professional development;
- Skills in collaboration, consensus building, and achieving mutual goals with colleagues; and
- Demonstrated abilities/competence in instructional technology including online instruction

APPENDIX C
School-Based Facilitator
Master of Science in Education

The function of the school-based facilitator is to coordinate a Graduate Learning Community (LC) for a period of two years, in concert with the university facilitator. In general, the facilitator is selected for his/her experience in pre-K-12 school settings, continuous professional development, constructivist philosophy, and the skills needed to be a good communicator and collaborator.

Roles and Responsibilities

- Attend facilitator team planning sessions.
- Attend weekend LC sessions which are scheduled for the LC to:
 - facilitate the agenda
 - support the participants as they work through their learning activities.
 - offer a variety of alternative insights and strategies to be considered by participants when working with or confronting issues/needs.
 - modify the agenda to meet the needs of the participants and the program.
 - prepare the environment to support successful learning.
- Identify, locate and develop both human and other resources for the LC, in collaboration with the university facilitator.
- Follow-up on student questions and concerns.
- Develop objectives for each semester, criteria for evaluation, and a record of progress, in collaboration with the facilitator and participants.
- Be an advocate for the participants.

Preparation, Experience, Skills

- MA, MS, M.Ed. in an education-related field.
- Three (3) years of successful work in pre-K-12 classroom.
- Leadership abilities and a commitment to creating conditions that empower others to grow and develop.
- Experience with action-research, professional inquiry and portfolio development.
- Experience with technology.
- Understanding of school organization, development, and dynamics both within the school and the community.
- Exhibit a capacity to learn and change.
- Effectively communicate and connect with adult learners.
- Commitment to work and plan as a team, share accountability, and work in a collaborative manner.
- Understanding and commitment to standards-based learning and a constructivist approach to problem solving.
- Commitment to assessments that document learning outcomes.
- Respect for the classroom teacher as a professional.
- Demonstrate a willingness to actively participate in facilitator development.
- Experience in a SMSU LC (integrated and inquiry-based) is preferred.