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GEORGIA EDUCATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT

UCLA SUMMATIVE REPORT

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Georgia Educational Management Program UCLA Summative Report

In this report we summarize our assessment of four main elements of the M.Ed. Program at Ilia State University (ISU): the program design, faculty, students and leadership. The strengths and challenges, as we perceive them, for each element are identified.

Program Design

Curriculum Concepts and Structure

The curricular structure for a two year Master's of Educational Leadership & Management degree proposed for the first cohort of students was designed to meet content standards similar to those found in leading United States universities and requirements of the Bologna Accord. The conceptual framework consisted of courses allocated into one of four strands in each of the four semesters: (1) practicum/internship, (2) research, (3) social & political context, (4) professional. The practicum/internship courses were developed to provide students opportunities to spend time in a variety of educational institutions learning how to observe educational and leadership practices, learning about organizational structures and specific operations and to acquire specific management skills, and acquiring knowledge of research methodology. The research courses in the research strand were developed to provide students with basic research skills and to prepare them to write a master's thesis.. The social and political context strand included courses such as Structure of the Georgian Educational System, Social Foundations of Education, Education in a Diverse Society and Politics of Education. The professional strand included courses such as Organizational Leadership, Operations Management, Theories of Curriculum and Instruction, Introduction to Management and Organizational Behavior, Legal and Financial Issues in Education, Management of Teaching and Learning.

The original proposal was to have students take all courses together as a cohort. Another important feature was the expectation that the faculty would meet regularly to coordinate content and avoid duplication, share and solve problems together, connect theory with practice and make adjustments to the Program, as deemed necessary.

The basic curricular structure of the Program has been retained for three years with a few modifications such as adjustments to the sequencing of courses, reducing the emphasis of the cohort model by introducing some elective courses in response to student interests and the demands of increased enrollment. Adjustments were also made to align the M.Ed. course structure and offerings with other ISU graduate programs. In addition, as will be discussed later, action research has become an increasingly more important factor in the Program.

Seven University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) academic specialists provided direct support to the Program. Additional assistance was received from support staff in the business office of the Department of Education. Val Rust and Eugene Tucker began work to design the Program beginning in June 2009 and remained involved through the end of the USAID grant in June 2012. Rita Flynn provided assistance in helping to develop the practicum strand. Buzz Wilms, who became involved in year two, played a major role in helping shape the action research component of the research strand as well as assisting in other aspects of the Program in years two and three. Robert Cooper and Carlos Torres visited ISU once to provide assistance in the design of courses. Barbara Knight provided invaluable assistance to ISU faculty, particularly, and to the Program, generally, for three years. She met with faculty members individually and in groups to design and evaluate individual courses, think through many important program elements and to nurture leadership. All UCLA faculty engaged in the work at ISU met several times each year as an advisory council to share information and discuss the Program's progress.

The most distinctive feature of the Program has been the centrality of Action Research (AR). Action Research developed from the work of German Psychologist Kurt Lewin, who in the 1950s demonstrated an innovative way of using abstract ideas (commonly called "theory") to improve the core work of organizations. Central to Lewin's concept was that researchers worked collaboratively with members of host organizations to define a problem, conduct the research and agree on the findings' implications for changes in practice. Lewin's observation that has been confirmed repeatedly over the years was that to understand an organization you had to try to change it. If you worked with employees inside the organization, said Lewin, on solving mutually important problems, employees would be more likely to embrace the changes because they helped create them.

For the Program it meant teaching ISU faculty members the principles of Action Research with examples from other parts of the world and sectors of the economy, providing space for them to adapt it to the local context. After introductory seminars, Wilms began working with Natia Andguladze who took the lead in teaching the rest of the faculty and designing a new course in Action Research for the second year of Cohort I students.

With guidance from Wilms, Andguladze took a central role in diffusing the process to faculty members at Kutaisi and Batumi Universities. Midway in the second year in 2010, Wilms and Nino Chubinadze met at each of the six participating research site schools with students (and when possible with their advisors) to firm up problem identification and to establish worksite research committee and working relationships.

Since then, Andguladze and her colleagues have taken on the role of monitoring and guiding students in the field. At the end of the first year, in June 2011 students gave public presentations about their research and what they learned, and their perceptions of the impact it had on schools. Administrators and teachers at the

school research sites spoke supportively about the students' contributions to their schools, indicating that Action Research had become a key part of the M.Ed. Program

Today, at the end of the three-year start-up effort, student satisfaction with the Program is high. In a survey of Cohort Two students (Appendix One) administered in May 2012, 85% of respondents rated the Quality of Courses as high or very high and 92.5 % were highly or very satisfied with the Program.

Program Design Strengths

- **Centrality of Action Research**
As noted above, student led AR projects in schools and other institutions has become the dominant distinguishing feature of the M.Ed. Program . In addition to the importance of AR in linking theory to practice, it is making an important contribution to connecting ISU to other educational institutions and having some influence on the improvement of practice, though helping the schools to improve is complex and will take time. Over 77% of students in Cohort Two (Appendix One) perceived that their projects had some to a great deal of influence on practice at the schools where they conducted research. A focus group conducted with seven school directors in May 2012 provided some evidence that AR at the schools is a worthwhile endeavor for both the schools and ISU students. See Appendix Two for the focus group findings.
- **Curriculum**
The curriculum as originally developed and subsequently modified is viewed positively by students and faculty. Structured interviews with faculty in May, 2012 (Appendix Three) suggests faculty satisfaction with the quality and sufficiency of courses. However, to the credit of Program, the curriculum has not been static. The administration and faculty have made adjustments and additions to the curriculum based on student and faculty input. Similarly, the faculty expressed high levels of satisfaction with the curriculum but realize that it will need constant revision.
- **Expansion of the Program, M.Ed. Model to Batumi & Kutaisi Universities.**
An unintended but very positive outcome of the success of the ISU M.Ed. program, has been the interest it has generated at both Batumi and Kudasai State Universities. Nino Chubinidze, a consultant on the USAID/Chemonics staff, played a major role in connecting leadership of the two universities to ISU, invited them to events where they learned more about the ISU program and arranged for workshops on action research to be conducted at their universities. A representative from each university also was included on the trip to UCLA in 2010. It appears that Batumi University is committed to begin its Program in the summer of 2012.

- Visit to UCLA—Summer 2010
An unexpected budget surplus at the end of the first year of the Program made it possible to conduct a two-week educational study tour for 10 ISU faculty and administrators, three faculty from other universities, two school directors and two cohort one students. The trip included opportunities to visit schools, interact with UCLA faculty and administrators and to visit UCLA M .Ed. classrooms. The trip helped bond the participants and generate support for the ISU program.

Program Design Challenges

- There is a potential danger of reverting to a loosely coupled, traditional university course structure. A major strength of the ISU M.Ed. program is its significant number of core courses required for all students. Faculty have worked successfully to link the content of the courses to the extent possible and to collectively address issues of common concern such as the summative portfolio, thesis process, writing skills and providing action research support. Weakening the core by reducing the number of required courses and/or allowing the number of elective courses to proliferate will have an adverse impact on the Program’s strength and unique nature.
- Faculty continue to express concern about the paucity of quality educational literature available in the Georgian language. Although significant progress has been made in translating materials for use by students, the need for expanding the number of resources continues. ISU will need to help identify sources of funding both inside and outside the University for translation purposes. A challenge that may be beyond an immediate solution is the difficulty non-English speaking students have in accessing resources for research on the internet where little is available in their native language. Unless competency in the English language become a condition of enrollment, we do not have suggestions for addressing this problem.

Faculty

We consider the across-the-board strength of the faculty to be a significant factor in the success of the M.Ed. program. We interviewed six of the nine faculty members and received a completed questionnaire from one who responded by e-mail.. There was a remarkable degree of agreement on the Program. (See Appendix Three for a summary of findings.)

Leading the list was faculty members’ commitment to the original vision of building leadership in Georgian education. One faculty echoed others when he said, “Our vision is very important. This is ‘our country’ and we’re developing a new kind of

leader and new knowledge to guide them. We're moving toward a knowledge-based society and my belief that we need new kinds of leaders has strengthened."

Faculty members worry about the current recentralization of power in the Ministry because it removes authority from the schoolhouse. One faculty member explained that it has a negative effect on students who want to become school directors but who see firsthand what it is really like at schools. One said, "Students bring back stories of the school director as the most miserable job in education because they are becoming policemen."

Above all, faculty members were unanimous in their appreciation for having such good colleagues with whom to work. When asked what they liked most about teaching in the Program comments such as, "I love the faculty", and "cooperation with the other faculty", and "mutual support", signaled strong bonds that have been created within this faculty

Faculty Strengths

- The professional background, training, and English language skills of the core faculty are significant strengths of the M.Ed. Program. With few exceptions, most faculty members were selected and supported in their pursuit of a master's degree in an education-related field of study at a prestigious American university. As a consequence, most were familiar with the best published literature utilized in educational leadership programs. Prior to the Program, most worked at the Ministry where they developed personal relationships that enhanced their work in the M.Ed. Program. Finally, their excellent English language skills facilitated communications with UCLA advisors and specialists.
- Starting a new university program is difficult work. The conceptual design for the development of the M.Ed. Program was to bring together committed faculty and a strong leader who would work collaboratively to design and implement all aspects of the M.Ed. The work demanded a culture of mutual respect and the willingness to invest the time and effort required which turned out to be beyond what is normally expected of university faculty. Their commitment to the task was evident throughout the first three years of the Program.
- Over the first three years the faculty became a well functioning community of learners. They shared course syllabi, developed Program procedures and student performance norms, made adjustments when evidence suggested they were necessary and vigorously found solutions to contentious issues.

Faculty Challenges

- A recently promulgated policy of the Ministry requires that at least 50% of faculty in master's degree programs be holders of a Ph.D. degree. All of the core Program faculty are working toward the degree with varying levels of success. Faculty report that before advancement to candidacy they must have two articles published in peer reviewed journals. This requirement appears to be the greatest challenge they face. This issue has been discussed with the ISU Rector. The UCLA faculty will continue to explore ways to assist in this matter.
- As the Program continues to mature, staff turnover can be expected. At least one and, perhaps, two current faculty may not return to the Program for the 2012-13 school year. A process for identifying, selecting and socializing new faculty is one of the most critical tasks in the near and long term future. The importance of a strong, respected leader in meeting this challenge cannot be underestimated if the quality of the M.Ed. Program is to be maintained.

Students

For a start-up program, GEM has been successful in identifying, recruiting and retaining students. Even with a very late start and no academic track record, nineteen first cohort students graduated in 2011. Forty-nine second cohort students graduated in June 2012 and sixty-three students were admitted for the third cohort. The success of the Program has attracted an increasingly larger pool of applicants. With more applicants than needed, the administration has implemented more rigorous selection procedures. Recruitment has been facilitated by the scholarship funds provided by USAID/Chemonics. Evidence of student satisfaction with the M.Ed. Program is provided in the questionnaire administered in May 2012. (Appendix One.)

Student Strengths

- Enrollment growth and the increasing diversity of students with each successive cohort provides evidence of the increasing reputation of Program for excellence. There is some recognition that the more rigorous screening of applicants utilized for cohort three has raised the quality of students. It is recommended that in the future the screening process be holistically reviewed and that the faculty consider refining procedures that will assure the admission of the most qualified applicants. Other factors to be considered for admission could be the level of the applicant's commitment to

working in educational institutions and facility in the English language.

- Evidence of improved student academic knowledge and ability from one cohort to the next is still weak. However, the team research project presentations made at the second Annual Conference were clearly superior to those made by cohort one in 2011. Much of the improvement is attributed to the work of faculty in preparing students for the presentations. However, student quality may also have been a factor.
- As previously noted, Cohort Two student satisfaction with GEM is exceptionally high. (Appendix One.) Student satisfaction data for Cohort Three were not received in time to be included with this report.
- The success of a program's graduates in finding jobs is an important factor in the recruitment of students. In the Spring of 2012 Nino Chubinidze interviewed 19 Cohort One graduates. 90% reported that they were employed after graduation and the same percentage believed that the M.Ed. degree was an important factor in their employment.. Further, 95% of the respondents were satisfied with the position they had.

Student Challenges

- Faculty continue to express concern about the weak academic preparation of students, especially their poor writing and computer technology skills. This may be a consequence of the decisions of the academically most highly prepared students to enter other graduate school programs and/or may reflect the failure of undergraduate programs to adequately teach their students the academic skills required to be successful in graduate programs. ISU may want to consider requiring students admitted to the M.Ed. program to take writing and computer skills diagnostic tests after admission and requiring those who do not meet University standards to enroll in remedial courses that would be offered after admission and before their regular courses begin in the second semester. Another option, of course, is to require passing the tests as a condition of admission.
- The lack of adequate financial support for student scholarships will have an adverse impact on the recruitment and retention of students. The amount of Ministry funds available for scholarships is limited and few other sources of tuition support have been identified, to the best of our knowledge. Raising funds to support education students is a difficult

challenge that requires the attention of an individual with demonstrated development skills. We are not aware of how development work in Georgia is approached but believe that it is a task that must be led by the Rector of ISU.

- Opportunities for the employment of future M.Ed. graduates in K-12 public schools are likely to become more limited due to recent actions of the Ministry. The responsibility for the selection of school directors has recently shifted from local school boards to the Ministry. The responsibility of school directors has been limited by the creation of a school security officer position, also appointed by the Ministry. These actions of the Ministry suggest to us that loyalty to the party in power and political connections may become more important factors in selecting school leaders than professional knowledge. Should our assessment be accurate, educational leadership as a career may become less attractive to students in the future.
- The gradual increase of enrollment from cohort one to three has been manageable. However, ISU and the GEM need to be very strategic in determining the size of future cohorts. As the number of students grow, new faculty will have to be identified and employed, the administrative infrastructure will need to be expanded, the connections with schools that will permit student observers and action research teams will have to be made and nurtured. Quality control will become increasingly important. Increased faculty size will weaken faculty cohesion, one of the strengths of the current Program and a concern expressed by some faculty in our interviews. Serious discussions with all stakeholders about the optimum size for the Program needs to take place before considering an increase in enrollment.

Leadership

The importance of a knowledgeable, strong and respected leader cannot be underestimated in the continuing development of the M.Ed. Program. Simon Janashia provided effective leadership during the first three years of the M.Ed. Program. He has the confidence of the Rector and the respect of the faculty. But, before the start of the first semester in 2012-13 academic year Simon will be leaving for up to two years of graduate work at Columbia University in New York City. There is no known succession plan or evidence of a unanimous faculty choice for a leader. The faculty and Simon have discussed this issue at a meeting that included Buzz Wilms and Gene Tucker. Gene and Buzz also discussed the issue with the Rector. Several options were discussed at the faculty meeting including the formation of an Advisory Board that includes faculty, alumni and community members or an Advisory Board of faculty members only with a designated leader or with faculty leadership on a rotating basis. Our experience with organizational leadership suggests that creating an advisory board is good but, in the final analysis, all the

faculty must be involved in making important policy and operational decisions and that one strong leader who has the confidence of the faculty and the Rector be designated to lead for at least the next few years. At the present time we have no evidence that there is an institutional sense of urgency to select soon the right leader to follow Simon.

Strengths of Leadership

- As noted previously, the Rector has demonstrated strong support for the GEM. He selected the right leader to guide the Program during its first three years. Because of his high level of respect and confidence in the leader he selected, Simon was given a great deal of autonomy in shaping the Program with faculty collaboration. Hopefully, an equally qualified and respected leader will be selected to follow Simon Janashia.
- Leadership talent is broadly distributed among the faculty. Many have demonstrated leadership in a variety of ways over the past three years. Most appear comfortable in taking leadership responsibilities when it is called for or, at other times, have shown a willingness to serve as respectful followers. During our discussion of leadership succession, most of the faculty expressed a willingness to accept leadership responsibilities on a rotating basis.

Leadership Challenges

- In our considered opinion, leadership succession is the most critical challenge confronting the Program which has been blessed with strong leadership during its critical first three years. Any change of leadership in a young start-up organization can be threatening. Following a strong leader can be intimidating. Selection of the “right” leader at this critical time in the history of the Program is critical to its continued success.
- One of the most important characteristics of the M.Ed, Program is the cohesion of the faculty and their acceptance of leadership responsibility. A major challenge to any new leader is to nurture and support the culture of collaboration and community that currently exists.

The Changing Political Climate

The changing political climate appears to present one of the major threats to the viability of the Program. As noted previously in this Summative Report, the Ministry appears to be gradually reasserting more control of schools by removing from individual school boards the relative unfettered responsibility for selecting school directors and placing at every school a “security officer” who has the power to usurp the authority of the school director in many instances. Reports from several sources indicate that school directors are now being discouraged from permitting graduate students from observing in or conducting research in schools. Further, should the

centralization continue, seeking leadership positions in schools will become less attractive to potential future M.Ed. students. We recommend strongly that the Rector meet with Ministry officials to discuss the promulgation of policies that will support the development of high quality future leaders of Georgia schools.

Conclusions

The Georgia Educational Management Program (GEM) funded for three years by USAID in June 2009 and managed by Chemonics was designed to achieve several goals including developing a plan for a weighted funding formula for schools, the design of an on-line school management system and the creation of a two-year Master's of Education degree program in school leadership and management at Ilia State University. UCLA was selected by Chemonics to partner with ISU in the development of the M.Ed. program. All the evidence available suggests that the Program was successfully established and that the Program will be sustained after the GEM project is terminated. Further, the success of the Program has been recognized by other Georgia universities and is likely to be emulated by them.

We also recognize that much of the credit for the success of the Programs can be attributed to the support of the GEM staff. Particularly appreciated were the insights and suggestions made by Emet Mohr, Chief of Party for two years and Nino Chubinidze who played an important role in helping to find schools that were open to student action research studies.

The UCLA faculty and specialists who worked with ISU have been pleased with the opportunity we had to work with and learn from committed and talented faculty and administrators in Georgia, generally, and ISU, specifically. We admire and support their vision to improve education in their country and will continue to support their efforts any way that we can.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Cohort Two Student Survey May 2012

	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	Prepared for Graduate Study			10% (4)	70% (28)	20% (8)
2	Satisfaction With Quality of Courses			15% (6)	67 1/2% (27)	17 1/2 (%)
3	Quality of Professors			10% (4)	50% (20)	40% (16)
4	Support From Professors			20% (8)	47 1/2% (19)	32 1/2% (13)
5	Preparation for Action Research		2 1/2 % (1)	15% (6)	55% (22)	27 1/2% (11)
6	Action Research Support From Advisor		5% (2)	25% (10)	32 1/2% (13)	37 1/2 % (15)
7	Support From Advisor for Thesis		5% (2)	22 1/2% (9)	32 1/2% (13)	40% (16)
8	Impact of Action Research on Practice	15% (6)	7 1/2% (6)	32 1/2% (13)	30% (12)	15% (6)
9	Value of Action Research on Your Learning			17 1/2% (7)	37 1/2% (15)	45% (18)
10	Your Confidence as an Educational Leader			12 1/2% (5)	47 1/2% (19)	40% (16)
11	Satisfaction With M.Ed. Program			7 1/25 (3)	40% (16)	52 1/2% (21)

Appendix 2: Summary of School Administrator Focus Group

On May 30, 2012, Wilms and Tucker met with five school administrators (all but one of whom were in public schools) to discuss how action research was working in their schools. Nino Chubinidze and Giorgi Gakheladze facilitated the discussion. The participants were:

Amiran Jamagidze	Tbilisi #1 Gimnazium
Giorgi Momtselidze	Tbilisi #98 Public School
Elza Badashvili	Tbilisi # 136 Public School
Medea Samsonia	Tbilisi #55 Public School
Ana	Private School "Intelecti 21"

After some initial discussion of the politics surrounding education in Georgia, we discussed each school's individual experience with the program. Each of the school administrators reported positive experience with the action research teams that worked on projects as diverse as helping develop a new model of student governance, teacher evaluations, establishing environmental clubs, and student evaluations. Most of the administrators said that their teachers were actively involved with the student teams, and most got something of value for their schools. Only one school administrator reported that her teachers were passive throughout the process. As an indication of the program's current and future value for the schools, each of the school directors reported a desire to continue with new teams in the following year.

Administrators voiced a number of suggestions for improvement. For instance most of the members of the group said they wished for ways that **results from all schools could be shared** among them so they could replicate those that they liked. This conversation led to a recommendation that ISU and the schools establish a

professional network where people could meet one another and share results of the action research. Most administrators wished for a **longer research period** so that students could work on larger and more complex problems.

Appendix 3: Summary of Faculty Focus Group

Wilms and Tucker met with six of the nine faculty members around a focus group guide that inquired as to whether or not their vision of the program was intact, what they liked most and least about teaching in the program, their observations about the curriculum, teaching, advising, and action research, their recommendations for continuing leadership, their own degree progress, and their recommendations for change and any barriers to them. One faculty member replied by questionnaire, and two did not.

Vision: All respondents noted that they remained committed to the original vision of the program to strengthen education as a part of Georgia's knowledge-based economy. Some saw the advances being made by GEM as helping other countries like Ukraine, Armenia and Chechnya avoid making the same mistakes. But, faculty members also noted that with such small student output, the impact will be limited.

Likes: Respondents were uniform in the support for one-another as friends and colleagues. They value the supportive work environment they have created. They report that the action research helps them work together and with students, and though it is a big work load, most say they feel it is well worth the effort. A number of the faculty members said they love seeing the students learning and growing, overcoming their fear.

Dislikes: Faculty members said they wished they had more time to work together, because they like it, and without working together on a regular basis, the program becomes splintered, and divided into only the parts that each faculty member knows. They miss the big picture. They also wish for more research and writing in English could be translated into Georgian. They also report not liking the recentralization of power into the Ministry and the effect it has on the schools who become fearful of working with ISU. Principals are now appointed by the minister, who also says, "we do not need research from you, OECD, or the World Bank."

The Curriculum, teaching, and advising: Faculty members say they wished that these tasks were more evenly distributed as some faculty members do most of the work. They are generally supportive of the curriculum but know they could do better, and wish for some better evaluation tools. Some faculty members worry

about the program getting larger because of the possibility of losing quality that characterized Cohorts I and II. They seem pleased about how students prepare their theses in parts so that it is not so overwhelming.

Action Research: Faculty members acknowledge that action research ties the program together in a coherent whole. One faculty member pointed out proudly how colleagues in Kiev and Glasgow are interested in what is being done with action research at ISU. Faculty members are seeking ways to get school teachers more motivated to really collaborate and agree that it is a slow process. Some of the teachers have the attitude about the ISU students, "Oh here they come again," but note it is a Georgia-wide problem. Many of the faculty can point to changes that have been made in the schools because of the action research: School #1's assessment system between grades 4 and 5. But still many teachers are resistant. One faculty member said she thinks it is because of their overall lack of motivation, but also that it's hard for these old-time teachers to admit they learned anything from these young kids.

Leadership: There was virtual unanimity that Simon has done a good job, and worry about the future when he, and at least one other faculty member leaves. Faculty members discussed the need for a technical person to straighten out the Web pages. As to the larger leadership issue there was consensus that they wanted to keep working collaboratively, but that someone has to be the point person for dealing with the Rector and entities outside of the program.

Degree progress: This is a huge bottleneck because faculty members say they cannot get the advising they need, and because of the university requirement that they publish a paper (apparently) prior to finishing their theses. They say they wish they could work with other professors on their theses, and perhaps have some limited financial support for surveys and test items.

Recommendations: A number of faculty members applauded the idea that the CIS might start a chapter in Georgia, and how a peer-reviewed journal could be an important outlet for their research. They also want more support from the Rector in gaining support from schools and developing closer working relationships with the Ministry.