

**Department of Higher Education  
State of Colorado  
Institutional Review**

**CONSULTANTS RESPONSE**

**Relay Graduate School of Education**

**July 6, 2015**

**INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations are binding items in the Consultants' Report. During the program review process, the review team members noted changes that they believe are necessary to bring the institution into compliance with the CCHE Degree Authorization Act. A written response to each of the recommendations is required.

1. Provide a detailed financial plan, including associated costs and anticipated income for the first three to five years and a budget for library support, to support its operations at the Denver site.

*We understand that Relay GSE's work structure is across three domains, which accounts for a reasonable sharing of expenses. The team's charge is to ensure that the Denver campus is appropriately supported from start-up to the point that it can achieve appropriate financial independence.*

*Without asking for a salary breakdown and additional information, it is impossible to decide whether onsite professors are sufficiently compensated and engaged in faculty roles. We note that the average salaries (when salaries are divided by number of employees) is relatively high (e.g. \$101,877 in 2016) in relation to, for example, the Denver Public Schools salary schedule, but we do not know the implications for the part-time faculty members.*

*We do not know the costs per student, but it appears by dividing the anticipated total tuition and fees by the anticipated number of students that the annual cost per student is expected to be \$8,750. We do not know if our assumptions are accurate nor, if they are, how competitive the tuition and fees are with existing programs in the area.*

*We note a consistent rise in costs for course materials and T&L consultants, accompanied by a sharp decline in administrative expenses. We are unclear as to the rationale for this. Finally, we note that by 2021, the Denver site appears to be entirely self-supporting without philanthropic revenue, and we are assuming that philanthropic funding sources have made this commitment.*

***With these cautions, the consultants accept the response to this recommendation.***

2. Describe anticipated needs for physical facilities that include administrative space, faculty space, classroom space, record maintenance facilities, and library facilities at the Denver site.

*Relay GSE should provide regularly-scheduled reports to the Colorado Department of Higher Education as to the acquisition of physical facilities, including any MOUs as to use of classroom space.*

*Relay GSE should report to the Colorado Department of Higher Education before the start of any classes as to progress made in joining Colorado-based library consortia.*

*Relay GSE should define what is meant by “banner texts.”*

***With an appropriate response to these recommendations the response is acceptable.***

3. Specify what direct, short-term measurable goals have been developed to assess the effectiveness of the program and provide the associated metrics.

*While the team observes that students report high levels of satisfaction with the Relay GSE program, a personal evaluation of the experience does not equate to mastery of learning and “demonstrably effective teachers” (cited in the mission statements). In addition, Relay GSE states K-12 students are expected to make “annual achievement gains,” and are evaluated on specifically designed rubrics.*

***The response to this recommendation is inadequate.*** *Relay GSE should provide examples of measurements of learning that it has used in other state applications, clarification of the rubrics used, and provide evidence of how the measurements demonstrated achievement of the goals of Relay GSE, such as “demonstrably effective teachers,” and student “annual achievement gains.”*

4. Provide evidence of the philosophical underpinning, teaching theories, and supportive research and assessment to support at the graduate level the methods Relay GSE uses.

*The response is acceptable*

5. Provide evidence regarding the appropriate use of relevant library resources and services at the graduate level and their availability “to students on a regular, dependable basis.”

*There are several elements of the response that need clarification. For example, what does “a substantial vetting of the library sciences field” mean? And how did that lead to “Relay determined that a fully digital library is most appropriate for a graduate student body that is enrolled part-time, has substantial professional obligations in addition to their academic obligations, and is geographically distributed”?*

*There are ways to check the adequacy of library services, and usually it is a combination of several avenues. For example, one can do satisfaction surveys of users and faculty members, check library holdings against standard bibliographies, such as ACRL’s **Resources for College Libraries and Choice**, and check the bibliographies of papers written. As a variation of the latter, the team checked the books cited in the response to our recommendation: “4. Provide evidence of the philosophical underpinning, teaching theories, and supportive research and assessment to support at the graduate level the methods Relay GSE uses.”*

*From the approximately 30 books cited, we found 10 (33%) **were not in the Relay GSE library nor available online**. If these are considered core books in supporting the philosophical underpinnings, teaching theories, and supportive research and assessment to support at the graduate level the methods Relay GSE uses, **then the library is inadequate in providing resources to its graduate students even to research Relay GSE’s course purposes**. We could not check the availability of the journal articles without access to the Relay GSE databases, but we assume most of the journal articles are available online. Nevertheless, based on these findings we recommend that Relay GSE demonstrate that it is making available in a timely manner to its students and faculty members relevant monographs that are available only in print.*

*Relay GSE has stated it would use interlibrary loan to make available library resources, which may include those relevant monographs only available in print. We request that Relay GSE provide data as to interlibrary loan requests by its students at other sites during the past year and the turnaround time in filling those requests. This is to determine if adequate print materials are made available to Relay GSE students and faculty members in a timely manner.*

*Relay GSE should report to the Colorado Department of Higher Education before the start of any classes as to progress made in joining Colorado-based library consortia.*

*In summary, the Colorado Department of Higher Education has an expectation that graduate students will use the library resources and that institution will make adequate provision for them. **The Relay GSE response to the recommendation is inadequate.***

6. Provide a plan for accommodating students if the program is suspended for any reason, including readily accessible avenues of completion of the degree through other regionally-accredited institutions and transfer of credits earned to other regionally-accredited institutions.

*Relay GSE has indicated that it plans to use the University of Denver and the University of Colorado — Denver as two possible institutions that might accept credits from Relay GSE. Relay GSE should provide verification from these institutions that they will accept credits from Relay GSE, particularly given the grading protocol used by Relay. More information is requested. **The Relay GSE response to the recommendation is inadequate.***

7. Describe the factors involved in determining how “partner needs, Relay GSE abilities, and enrollment numbers” will influence course offerings, and how and when those decisions are made.

***The response is acceptable***

8. Provide evidence of sufficient student support services onsite, including academic advising by faculty members and other student counseling needs beyond academic counseling.

*“Relay GSE does everything possible to support graduate students.” This is an unfortunate hyperbole since it is both inaccurate and calls into question the veracity of other statements made. However, that being said, **the response is acceptable.***

## INSTITUTIONAL SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions are non-binding items in the Consultants' Report. During the program review process, the review team members noted changes that they believe would enhance or improve the institution or the program. The team's suggestions are presented below. Although these suggested changes are not necessary to bring the program into compliance with the CCHE Degree Authorization Act, the institution is encouraged to discuss the suggestions with relevant stakeholders and implement them where appropriate. A written response to the suggestions is not required.

1. Provide a position roster that identifies the anticipated faculty members qualifications and workload associated with the Denver site, including each professors overall teaching schedule for a given time-frame, with identification of those courses that will be taught as part of the Denver program. Of concern is whether faculty members will have sufficient qualifications and time commitments to teach in the program's areas at the master's level and whether the institution is overly relying on part-time faculty members.

*The response is incomplete but probably cannot be finalized at this point. Relay GSE should provide to the Colorado Department of Higher Education regularly-scheduled reports as to the qualifications and time-commitments of both adjunct and full-time faculty members.*

2. Provide evidence of how Relay GSE has begun and will continue to engage with local institutions of higher education in Colorado.

*The response is acceptable with the following proviso. Relay GSE should provide the Colorado Department of Higher Education reports for years one and two that demonstrate Relay GSE engages local institutions of higher education in Colorado.*

3. Provide information as to the adequacy of the number of Board of Trustees to oversee adequately Relay GSE programs at multiple geographical sites.

*No response provided*

4. Provide information as to the role of local faculty members in influencing the curriculum to meet local needs.

*No response provided.*

5. Provide information that describes the responsibilities of the administrative team and their qualifications to fulfill those responsibilities.

*The response is acceptable, although the years of experience qualification remains unclear.*

6. Provide information as to how Relay GSE meets the Association College and Research Libraries “Standards for Distance Learning Library Services.”

*Relay GSE should provide regularly-scheduled reports to the Colorado Department of Higher Education as to progress towards how Relay GSE is meeting the Association College and Research Libraries “Standards for Distance Learning Library Services.”*

7. Provide evidence that the degree level and experience level of the proposed dean is sufficient to fulfill her responsibilities.

*No response provided. This remains a concern of the team.*

8. Describe what is meant by a “holistic admissions review” by the Director of Enrollment services, the Dean, the Director of Financial Aid, and faculty members, and if this will be conducted on site for the Denver program.

*No response provided.*

9. Provide assessments used at other sites and how the metrics used will be extrapolated to determine the success and continuation of the program at the Denver site.

*No response provided, but this may be adequately covered in our response to Recommendation #3.*

### ***Summary of Response to “Suggestions.”***

***The team identified several concerns in the “Suggestions” that, while not requiring a response, they informed Relay GSE as to our concerns and gave Relay GSE an opportunity to address these concerns. Relay GSE did not give any response to five of the nine “suggestions.” We find this surprising since we thought in some cases, clarifications easily could be provided. This may prompt the Colorado Department of Higher Education to scrutinize the application in more detail and request additional information.***

Consultants

Larry L. Hardesty, Ph.D.

Sarah M. Thorburn, Ph.D.

