



## Response to Outstanding Institutional Recommendations

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July 31, 2015

*3. 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.”*

At Relay, all assessments of graduate student learning are designed to mirror, to the greatest extent possible, the kinds of tasks that effective teachers perform as a part of their daily work. These assignments are intended to help graduate students meaningfully improve their practice and lead their students to measurable academic growth. By regularly assessing graduate students’ learning via performance-based assessments, Relay is also able to evaluate its curriculum design, and, subsequently, its effect on student achievement in urban public schools.

***Use of Rubrics in Performance-Based Assessment***

Performance-based assessment refers to the fact that all Relay assignments require graduate students to demonstrate their ability to apply the knowledge that they have learned to date and perform the skills and techniques that have been associated with effective teaching.

Modules have at least one associated performance-based summative assessment. Rubrics (scored on a 5-point scale) offer graduate students detailed guidance and feedback on the various skills that are being assessed in a given assignment (represented by individual “strands” of the rubric). Each graduate student is scored on each strand of the rubric, and is also scored on a final, holistic row, which describes their overall performance on the graded assessment for that module. When a graduate student passes a module, this represents that they have acquired knowledge and skills, that when implemented in the classroom, have been associated with increased student achievement.

In addition to quantitative scores, professors also provide graduate students with qualitative feedback on all formal learning assessments. In addition to providing feedback that targets a specific skill or area under development, professors identify one overall area of strength and one overall area for growth. This helps professors focus a graduate student’s attention on a promising lever for improvement.

***Use of Rubrics in Classroom Observations***

Classroom observations assess a graduate student’s success on specific, high-leverage components of Relay’s curriculum. Professors conduct at least four observations over the course of a graduate student’s enrollment at Relay. When conducting observations, professors look for student engagement, use of time toward teaching objective, classroom management, lesson alignment, checking for understanding, and questioning. There is a five-point rubric associated with each observable behavior. At the end of a formal observation, an average score is compiled from each of the individual scores. Professors meet with each graduate student within a few days of the formal observation, administering meaningful quantitative and qualitative feedback that can affect teacher performance. A sample observation rubric can be found in the *Relay GSE Formal Observation 1 Rubric* PDF file.

***Measuring Student Growth and Achievement***

Relay asks teachers to demonstrate that their students have learned in meaningful and measurable ways during their time in the classroom. The Student Growth and Achievement (SGA) process is the way that graduate students demonstrate that they can set defensible learning goals for their students and

help them meet or exceed them. Through the SGA module sequence, graduate students learn, practice, and perform critical data literacy skills. The SGA process is an opportunity for graduate students to learn how to use data to inform instruction. This includes setting goals, tracking progress, responding to interim results, and verifying outcomes at the end of the year. It teaches and enforces the mindset of intentionality to promote outcome-driven, backwards planning.

The inclusion of SGA in the Relay program symbolizes an important institutional belief that teachers are essential to their students' success and that student learning data are valuable descriptors of their critical role. Relay coursework culminates with the Master's Defense where graduate students present evidence of student learning and their ability to measure it. This includes their assessment approach, method of data collection, the impact of interim data on their teaching practices, and student outcomes.

Graduate students collect and report data that directly align to the academic goals that they set for their students. Our SGA data provide evidence that our graduate students can effectively measure progress to these academic goals. On average, the students of Relay teachers demonstrate [REDACTED] years of reading growth in a single year. [REDACTED] percent of New York's MAT CO'14 met or exceeded their Proficient Goal in at least one subject. The Proficient Goal represents basic levels of student achievement (e.g., 1 year of reading growth in a single year). Teachers also drive toward, and invest their students in, an Ambitious Goal—an advanced level of student achievement (e.g., 1.5 years of reading growth in a single year). [REDACTED] percent of New York's MAT CO'14 met their Ambitious Goal in at least one subject.

*4. 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.*

### **Relay GSE Library Origin and Rationale for Digital Platform**

The structure and approach for Relay GSE’s Library was developed in 2010 through a consultative assessment with [REDACTED], a mature library professional services firm. [REDACTED] – with over 20 years of professional experience in higher education libraries – led this consultation and delivered the design for Relay GSE’s Library. [REDACTED] received her Bachelor of Science in Education and Library Science from

Mississippi University for Women in 1984 and her Master of Library Science from University of Southern Mississippi in 1986. [REDACTED] has since worked in and advised a variety of small college libraries both in full-time and consulting capacities.

With an understanding that its graduate students are full-time teachers located across multiple zip codes – both in New York and with future campuses in mind – Relay GSE’s library was created on a digital platform to ensure maximum student accessibility. For example, Relay GSE graduate students teach and live in multiple New York City boroughs. It was determined that student travel times to and from Relay GSE’s Manhattan campus to access an exclusively physical library would be prohibitive to using library resources. A fully online library resolved these concerns.

Relay GSE’s Library is now curated and managed by [REDACTED]. As well as being an experienced technologist and classroom teacher, [REDACTED] now serves as the full-time Relay GSE Librarian. [REDACTED] received her Master of Library and Information Science from San Jose State University in 2014 and also holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from Baylor University.

***Relay GSE Library Item Availability and Interlibrary Loan Data***

[REDACTED] routinely reviews the reading lists for student courses to allow for student accessibility to any and all necessary reading material. She ensures that any required book is available online and often in print, as well. Driven by Data by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo and Teach Like a Champion by Doug Lemov are two examples of frequently used texts available online and in print. With regards to required articles, such readings are consistently provided to students either through the library, through a link to an open version on the web (delivered via Relay’s Course Platform), or through paying copyright fees on students’ behalf. In summary, any and all required reading for Relay GSE coursework is made available to students with ease.

Relay GSE had 40 Interlibrary Loan requests during the 2014-2015 academic year. Thirty-six of these were filled. The remaining four requests were unfilled, but this is because Relay GSE purchased the texts to add to the library collection. It’s very rare that an Interlibrary Loan request go unfilled. For the filled requests over the last year, the average turnaround time was 6.2 days, plus any shipping time, (which has typically been one to three days). Average turnaround time for the unfilled requests that led to a Relay GSE purchase was 5.8 days.

Relay’s current campuses, approved to operate in their respective states and approved by Middle States Commission on Higher Education, have reliable and accessible library resources. Any and all required readings are made available to students. Additional student or faculty requests are handled with urgency and are consistently filled.

[REDACTED] has expressed her willingness to answer any further questions regarding the Relay GSE library. She is best reached via email at [REDACTED]. Additionally, she notes that there have never been any requests for the 10 outstanding books that the evaluation team researched, but that if a student were to

request said books, the texts would be made available to him or her. She is looking into adding these to the collection.

*6. Relay GSE has indicated that it plans to use [REDACTED] 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.*

Relay GSE understands the evaluation team's concerns for ensuring students' degree completion in the case of program termination. While we recognize that Relay is a young institution, we do not anticipate the closure of any Relay campuses, particularly in the middle of a course of study. As an unauthorized institution of higher education in Colorado, we are unable to provide verification from other institutions indicating that they would accept program credit. Relay GSE will continue to engage with local institutions leading up to and upon program launch and will include this topic in these discussions. Program closure has never been an issue at any Relay GSE site, nor do we anticipate this issue.

In the unlikely event of program suspension, Relay GSE is committed to ensuring a seamless transition for graduate students and faculty. As such, Relay GSE administrators would act in accordance with Middle States Commission on Higher Education policy and submit a comprehensive teach-out plan to MSCHE no later than six months prior to the planned closing date.

As a part of the teach-out plan, Relay GSE Denver academic advisors would facilitate individual meetings with each graduate student to create differentiated strategies to ensure enrollment and transfer of credit at other regionally-accredited institutions. Such strategies would be based off of, but not limited to, the following:

- The student's geographical location
- The student's credit count
- The student's fit with various regionally-accredited institutions
- The institution's course offerings
- The institution's transfer of credit policy
- The institution's enrollment policies

During the teach-out, Relay GSE administrators would aim to have operations cease at the end of the academic year, thus minimally affecting graduating students. In addition, the Relay GSE Denver Dean and Director of Operations would engage in partnership work with local regionally-accredited institutions in order to facilitate credit transfer for students.