REPORT OF THE WASC VISITING TEAM

CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW

To High Tech High Graduate School of Education

September 18-20 2013

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
INITIAL ACCREDITATION

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution and Visit

The High Tech High Graduate School of Education (HTH GSE) opened in September 2007. Located in San Diego, the GSE is closely connected both physically and pedagogically to High Tech High (HTH), a public charter school management organization, and to HTH Learning, the parent public benefit corporation. The mission of the GSE is to develop reflective practitioner leaders who work effectively with colleagues and communities to create and sustain innovative, authentic, and rigorous learning environments for all students.

The HTH GSE is committed to providing its students with learning experiences that are personalized, authentic, and relevant. This commitment is derived from the theoretical approach to teaching and learning that guides High Tech High K-12 schools, which centers students in the adult world of work and learning through integrated curriculum and heterogeneous grouping practices. Innovative curriculum, a culture of collaboration, and total-immersion learning communities serve as hallmarks for the High Tech High pedagogy that is rooted in authentic experiences.

The HTH GSE offers two Master's of Education (M.Ed.) programs: School Leadership and Teacher Leadership. In 2007, the HTH GSE opened with a cohort of nine HTH teachers enrolled in the Teacher Leadership M.Ed. program. In 2008, the School Leadership program welcomed its first cohort of 6 candidates and the Teacher Leadership program expanded to include external candidates, bringing in a new cohort of 16. Candidates from these original cohorts graduated in 2009 and 2010. Currently, there are 11 candidates in the School Leadership program and 24 candidates in the Teacher Leadership program.

B. Previous Commission Issues

HTH GSE's accreditation history dates back to 2007 when the institution was granted eligibility. The CPR Candidacy visit was scheduled for spring 2009 and the EER candidacy visit was scheduled for spring 2010. A CPR visit for candidacy took place in March 2009. Following the review of the CPR visit, the EER visit for candidacy was moved to spring 2011. The EER visit took place in February 2011. In June 2011, the Commission received the EER report and deferred action on candidacy for one year in order for the institution to demonstrate that it meets the WASC Standards and CFRs at the level required for candidacy.

A Special Visit was scheduled for spring 2012 to review progress on the issues cited by the Commission. The Special Visit focused on four issues as identified by the Commission Action Letter of July 2011: leadership and governance, organizational structure and decision-making processes, educational effectiveness, and graduate culture. The team found progress in all areas cited in the letter and the EER team report, with further development needed in some of those areas. Subsequently, the Commission acted to grant candidacy to the High Tech High Graduate School of Education for four years, through June 2016. In granting candidacy, the Commission highlighted several areas for attention as HTH GSE moves forward towards initial accreditation:

Cultivating a graduate culture. The Commission noted continued concerns about the development of a graduate culture, including support for research, scholarship and creative activity, about the limited scope of the content of the graduate program, and about adequate provision for diversity of viewpoints or multiplicity of perspectives independent of the pedagogy espoused by the High Tech High mission and goals, faculty and staff. The Commission noted its expectation that by the time of the next visit, the HTH GSE will have made significant progress in the area of graduate culture by clarifying workloads and expectations about teaching,

scholarship and research; identifying the level of support it will provide to faculty; and

implementing long-term methods to mentor students in their research. Further, the Commission

expected the HTH GSE faculty to consider broadening the content of its program by enriching it

with multiple perspectives from the literature and research in the field. (CFRs 2.1, 2.2b, 2.8, 2.9,

3.1-3.4)

Strengthening leadership. As noted by the Special Visit team, there remains "a need for

title alignments with actual functional responsibilities that parallel best practices and recognized

nomenclature in higher education ... ," in particular clarifying the respective roles of the dean and

chief academic officer. (CFRs 1.3, 3.1, 3.10)

Developing the governing board. The Special Visit team found that the HTH GSE

governing board was aware of its responsibilities and dedicated to the values and mission of the

HTH GSE. However, having four corporate entities with overlapping memberships raised some

concerns about whether the HTH GSE has a sufficiently independent governing board under

WASC standards and policies. (CFRs 1.3, 1.6, 3.8, 3.9; Policies on Related Entities and

Independent Governing Boards)

Clarifying organizational structure. The Commission remained concerned about the

extra-institutional, dual focus of most of the HTH GSE's personnel. The Commission stated its

expectation that the HTH GSE review the number and time commitment of personnel needed to

successfully operate an independent graduate school of education, including time allotted for

scholarly and creative activities, and to carry out the imminent work that will be needed to move

the institution from meeting all WASC Standards and CFRs at a minimal level to meeting them

at a substantial level for initial accreditation. (CFR 3.1)

Enhancing educational effectiveness. The Special Visit team observed that "it will be

critical for the HTH GSE to implement the Institutional Review Process through a complete cycle and beyond." The Commission concurred with the Team, and noted that full implementation of the GSE institutional review system and process with preliminary findings will be expected by the next review. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.4)

C. Quality of the Capacity Preparatory Report (CPR) and Supporting Evidence

The CPR document (June, 2013) provided evidence of deep consideration of the previous recommendations of the Commission and the issues raised by the previous Special Visit team. Collaborative reflection by the HTH GSE community was clear throughout the document. In its review of the CPR the September, 2013 visiting team was convinced that the institution had taken the Commission's advice and recommendations seriously. The CPR report was well-organized and cross-referenced, making not only each of the reflective essays on each of the standards capable of standing independently, but also ensuring that the CPR was cohesive and served to provide clear narration of the HTH GSE's desire to achieve full WASC accreditation.

Committee members were similarly impressed with the quality of the supporting evidence provided in the HTH GSE CPR. An accessible and well-organized website made supporting materials easy to find. The team found the quality of the documentation around planning and assessment processes in particular to be thorough, and well-developed and reflective of good practice. The evidence included in the materials demonstrates the institution's responsiveness, and willingness to undertake relevant studies and to collect appropriate information. Also noted was the community engagement in reflection, action, and analysis of the effectiveness of changes made towards fulfillment of the WASC standards.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF INSTUTUTIONAL CAPACITY UNDER THE STANDARDS

    A.   **Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives**

Institutional Purposes

       The GSE has a well-articulated mission, which is aligned with their institutional learning outcomes (CFRs 1.1, 1.2): The mission of the GSE is to develop reflective practitioner leaders who work effectively with colleagues and communities to create and sustain innovative, authentic, and rigorous learning environments for all students.

       Five core values are integrated into the GSE: 1) Personalization; 2) Reflective Practice; 3) Dialogue/Collaboration; 4) Integration; and 5) Beautiful Work. The GSE faculty engaged in a conversation at a faculty retreat on these core values and their relationship with institutional learning outcomes and strategic priorities. Staff members have also been involved in this conversation. The core values have been aligned with faculty and staff evaluations helping faculty and staff connect their personal goals to institutional priorities. (CFRs 1.1., 1.8)

       The GSE responded to a suggestion in a recent WASC visit to change their strategic priorities to make them more realistic and measurable. The GSE now has 3 strategic priorities which are aligned with their institutional review process and decision making (CFRs 1.1, 1.2):

- The GSE aims to model and promote thoughtful and forward-thinking teaching and leadership both within and beyond its clinical sites;
- The GSE aims to assist teachers, administrators and policy makers in their efforts to transform teaching and learning locally, nationally, and globally;
- The GSE aims to secure the financial sustainability of our institution, and ensure its future.

       A concern was raised in previous WASC visits regarding the need to cultivate a graduate culture. In response to this, the GSE articulated their vision for scholarly work through a "Statement on Scholarship and Innovation" and hired a Director of Faculty Research. The

"Statement on Scholarship and Innovation" was drafted by a faculty committee and has been made public on the GSE website and in the faculty and student handbooks (CFRs 1.1, 1.7). While some positive steps have been taken, there continue to be concerns about cultivating a graduate culture, which is addressed later in this report.

The GSE has developed clear educational objectives with learning outcomes articulated at the institutional, program, and course level. A thorough assessment system has been developed to measure student achievement and is publicly available on the website. Portfolios of students work are also available on the GSE website (CFR 1.2). The assessment of student achievement is part of a larger Institutional Review Plan which includes an annual assessment of selected program learning outcomes, and each academic program completing a program review every 4 years. Annual reviews are conducted of selected functional areas, with a Functional Area Plan (FAP) Review Report every third year, analyzing data from previous FAP evaluations. All of these assessments result in a Quality Improvement Plan. (CFRs 1.2, 1.8)

The President launched a Leadership Task Force in 2012 to examine staffing and leadership functions. Job descriptions at peer institutions were collected, GSE Functional Area Plan (FAP) reports were reviewed, and a review was conducted of the GSE organizational chart, as well as the evaluation and review processes of the GSE. From this review, it was decided that there was no need for a Provost (the person serving in this role became the Director of Clinical Sites), the Dean was determined to be functioning as the Chief Academic Officer (CAO), and the position of Director of Faculty Research was added. The conclusion of this evaluation was that the leadership system at GSE is marked by high performance, appropriate responsibility and accountability, which was confirmed during the team visit. Position descriptions have been developed and an organizational chart was provided which clarifies the part time nature of some

positions. The GSE Board has been in discussions on leadership succession planning and will

continue this conversation at their upcoming retreat. (CFR 1.3)

Integrity

A statement of academic freedom is posted on the GSE website and faculty members

confirmed that the statement matches practices. Faculty were confident about the GSE's

commitment to academic freedom in both teaching and research. (CFR 1.4)

A focus on equity, social justice, and access is embraced by the GSE, which was evident

in the team visit. It is so embedded in the institution that it seems to be taken for granted in many

documents. Faculty discussed how this is woven through the curriculum, but the focus needs to

be better articulated in course syllabi. (CFR 1.5)

Student diversity at the GSE mirrors the trends of California teachers. There has been a

decrease in diversity of students in the School Leadership program cohorts (from 40% in 2009-

10 to 12% in 2010-11), while there has been an increase in diversity in the Teacher Leadership

program (from 30% in 2008-09 to 43% in 2010-11). Efforts to increase the number of

underrepresented students include personally calling administrators at schools serving

disadvantaged populations, and inviting teachers from schools with diverse populations to attend

GSE events. A Diversity Scholarship providing full tuition remission was implemented in Spring

of 2013. The expectation is to continue to mirror the state's ethnic diversity proportions until the

GSE is regionally accredited. After receiving accreditation and access to federal financial aid, it

is expected that the GSE will appeal to greater numbers of diverse students. (CFR 1.5)

In an effort to strengthen autonomy, a new board chair was appointed and new board

committees were formed. This is an improvement on the previous structure in which one person

chaired both the HTH and the GSE boards (CFRs 1.3, 1.6). Board changes have been made in

many areas including committee structure, policy and procedures for evaluating the President, board membership, board self-assessment, and expanding the number of meetings per year. Four new board committees have been established: Financial Committee; Audit Committee; Governance/Nominating Committee; and Evaluation Committee Charter. The recent changes need to be incorporated into the Board Bylaws and the Board Handbook.

Students and alumni reported that information provided to them from the time of admission through completion of the program was accurate and truthful. Students reported that they are able to complete the programs in a timely manner. A student grievance policy exists and is available in the student handbook and on the website. No grievances have ever been filed. Opportunities are provided for students to give feedback on the program or on individual courses at annual retreats and through "exit cards" at the end of every class meeting. Students and alumni reported that faculty and administrators respond immediately to any suggestions and are very open to feedback and change. The GSE also has grievance procedures for employees outlined in the faculty and staff handbooks, but has never received a grievance. (CFR 1.7)

Since the last WASC visit, the GSE has clarified the organizational structure, developed faculty and staff handbooks, and created a Shared Services Agreement with HTH. This Agreement clarifies the role of GSE support staff members who are shared with the HTH schools. Faculty members are on one-year contracts and are evaluated on an annual basis. Criteria for the faculty evaluation process are included in the faculty handbook. Each faculty member addresses goals for teaching, service, and scholarship in August, and in the spring completes a self-evaluation. In the spring of each year, each faculty member is reviewed by a committee of two peers, and the Dean holds a private meeting with each faculty member to complete the Annual Review. Staff members meets with their supervisor annually to discuss

goals and performance (CFR 1.8).The GSE has been open to feedback and has addressed all

areas of concern from the previous WASC visits. Included in their documents is a table that

outlines the feedback from previous visits and the actions taken to address each issue. A

commitment to WASC is evidenced through their Accreditation Liaison Officer's participation

as a member of the WASC Assessment Leadership Academy in 2012-13. (CFR 1.9)

B. Standard 2: Achieving Educational Effectiveness through Core Functions

<u>Scholarship and Creative Activity</u>

The HTH GSE recently hired a Director of Faculty Research (DFR) whose role is to

provide mentoring and support to faculty engaging in scholarly work. Faculty noted a campus

culture that encourages research and acknowledged the need for mentoring and research support

in the development and selection of the DFR position. It is suggested that the faculty meet

regularly with collaborating partners from other institutions to develop a thematic research

agenda that allows for rich scholarly discourse and discovery. Further it is suggested that the

faculty review assignments and HTH GSE terminology that may upon reflection not appear

scholarly and/or academic, and pragmatically redevelop these materials and assignments.

Since the last visit the campus has developed a "Statement on Scholarly Work and

Innovation". This reflects the institution's commitment to authentic experience in "communities

of practice". (CFRs 2.1, 2.2.b, 2.8, 2.9)

<u>Teaching and Learning:</u>

During the visit, faculty provided access to online forums, additional syllabi, and student

work samples with attached rubrics. The examples demonstrated thoughtful student discussion

and faculty responses. In some cases, students were instructed to respond with links to relevant

literature, however, the forum posts reviewed did not include direct links to the literature.

Intentional requirement and direction to cite and use the literature of the field in developing

position statements and logical arguments is a hallmark of graduate writing. (CRFs 2.6, 2.9)

A review of student work products and rubrics was helpful but raised additional questions. The reviewers noted few instances of intentional engagement in literature related to best practice, pedagogy and/or research. Student work products lacked citations and references in APA or any conventional scholarly professional writing format. Writing assignments appeared to be more narrative, personal reflection-based than scholarly professional-based. The team suggests that the GSE include activities that engage students in writing activities that allow the use of professional voice and other activities that encourage more conventional narrative style and that these tasks be threaded throughout the curriculum. Additionally, the assignments reviewed, while reflective, did not appear to require the level of synthesis and analysis one expects of graduate level course work, or that which is reflective of the nature of action research and evidence-based decision making for improved teaching and learning practice. (CFRs 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6)

The reviewers were confused about class structure and class meetings. A review of the course hour matrix revealed limited face-to-face contact in seminar sessions (3 hours per week for 4-5 weeks) and significant out of class implementation expectations ('put into practice' 6-9 hours per week) but no mention of the hours per week expectation in syllabi. Probing during interviews revealed that this work in the students' classrooms was not directly monitored. This caused the reviewers to question the efficacy of this strategy which appears to fall short of the WASC credit hour requirement (CFRs 2.1, 2.2b, 2.5). It is suggested that intentional observation and monitoring of student work and research in their classrooms be integrated into program requirements and better calculated in credit hour expectations.

Discussions with faculty revealed that students are engaged in a minimum of three

advising sessions per year. These sessions are often conducted at their school sites and may include observations of the students as they are working. The HTH GSE is encouraged to formalize this process and to clarify the connection of the advising sessions and practicum observations with respect to their classes. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6)

All of these issues, coupled with the credit/no credit nature of the program, raise questions about academic rigor and the ongoing issue of developing a graduate school culture.

It was also noted that faculty have many varied responsibilities which would seemingly make conducting research difficult. As a result the institution has initiated a system to monitor time spent in the varied activities of the faculty day/week. Workload data is compiled annually and scheduled for review on a four-year cycle (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.3). It seems that such data should be reviewed more frequently to determine if workload expectations are manageable. Since it is noted that the Faculty Review process occurs annually then perhaps so should the review of workload.

The Program Review Process is clearly developed and operational. Analysis and use of the Program Review data will be detailed in the EER. (CFR 2.10)

Support for Student Learning and Success

Faculty discussed the role of co-curricular activities and student support services, noting the difficulty in meeting these demands with a small population. They are exploring ways to support students through online forums and alumni connections "to keep the conversations about school change going". HTH GSE students are offered many opportunities to participate in professional development forums and often attend conferences with faculty. The HTH GSE faculty collaborate with University of California San Diego (UCSD) School of Education Studies (SOES) on various school change research projects. UCSD SOES has committed to honoring the

GSE Master's degree for GSE alumni who apply to their Doctoral program. (CFRs, 2.11, 2.13)

HTH GSE has initiated the critical friend model for review of work and began working with students to develop action research projects and digital portfolios. The process for development of the student projects and unique learning experiences is clear but there is a need to clarify how students are engaged in pedagogy and literature that is seminal in the field but not directly related to their project (CFR's 2.1, 2.2b, 2.8, 2.9). The institution is commended in its development of an Institutional Review Board and process.

The campus has begun to align the mission and institutional learning outcomes of the campus with program learning outcomes. The faculty is to be commended for the development of program assessment plans to ensure that learning outcomes are aligned. The "Looking at student work" protocol is useful as a discussion rubric, but it is not clear how effectiveness or acceptable work is assessed using this tool. (CFR's 2.1, 2.2)

C. **Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability**

Faculty and Staff

The Team reviewed the progress made by the HTH GSE in meeting the issues raised in the Commission Action Letter with regard to strengthening leadership and clarifying organizational structures. An organization chart was provided, which indicated those staff and administrative members of GSE and the funding source for their positions (HTH or GSE). Detailed position descriptions have been developed for major staff and administrative positions, and in two instances (Director of Facilities and Administrative Dean) these positions include a brief description of how services are provided between HTH and GSE, under the shared services agreement. However, none of the position descriptions included a description of commitment of that position to services for HTH.

Adherence to the WASC Policy on Credit Hour will require adjustments in workload and potentially additional instructors. The Visiting Team suggests that the HTH GSE revisit its faculty workloads in light of the WASC Policy on Credit Hour and make additions to faculty as necessary to adhere to that policy. (CFRs 3.1, 3.8, WASC Policy on Credit Hour)

The reviewers appreciated the detailed analysis contained in the Report of the President's Task Force that described how administrative responsibilities are divided at four peer institutions. From this analysis, the HTH GSE made several conclusions: First, that hiring a CAO, as recommended by the Special Visit Team and by the Commission, was not needed since they deemed that the functionality of this position is addressed through the responsibilities among current personnel. Second, the President's Task Force concluded that a need existed for a Director of Faculty Research to provide leadership, mentorship and enhanced capacity for scholarship at HTH GSE. Third, the Task Force report noted that "most HTH GSE personnel now devote their full energies to their HTH GSE roles." The September 2013 Visiting Team, like the previous Special Visit Team, had a number of concerns about the HTH GSE's capacity to fulfill its necessary administrative and leadership roles under the present structure. While the President's task force chose a set of four institutions for its analysis, only two of the institutions chosen appear to be disciplinary peers, a situation that detracts from the findings. Team members concluded that the institution should seek a broader set of peer institutions for a comparative review of roles and responsibilities to determine the sufficiency of staffing resources. (CFR 3.1)

Reviewers noted that the Report of the President's Task Force compares what are full-time positions at other institutions to what are in many cases partial-time shared service positions at HTH GSE. Thus the peer comparison is not equivalent. The conflict of dual roles/part-time

roles pointed out by the institution itself (CPR June, 2013, p.18) lends further weight to a concern about lack of sufficient administrative resources. The Dean of Faculty, the Director of Clinical Sites, and the Administrative Dean are all still shared with HTH through shared services. While appreciating the symbiotic relationship inherent in embedding the HTH GSE in the HTH, the Team suggests that HTH GSE analyze the shared service relationship in terms of duties fulfilled for each entity and the percentage of time allocated to each entity under the shared services agreement. (CFR 3.1, 3.2, 3.10, WASC Policy on Affiliated Entities)

Team members also reviewed the provision of the Board-adopted Shared Services Agreement through which the HTH GSE has agreed to pay HTH a fee equal to 4 percent of the annual operating expenditures of the HTH GSE as payment in full for all services provided to the HTH GSE in the areas of facilities, budget, financial accounting, risk management, marketing, fund-raising, information technology services, and payroll/benefits administration. Given the existence of HTH GSE as an independent institution within the HTH Learning group, reviewers found the provision of shared services to be entirely appropriate, and applaud the way the institution has provided for high-level financial expertise across all HTH entities through shared services. (CFR 3.1)

The HTH GSE is to be commended for creating and filling the Position of Director of Faculty Research. It is recommended that the Director of Faculty Research be charged with mentoring faculty scholarship and creating a campus culture of research to further the efforts to create a graduate culture. (CFRs 3.1, 3.4)

In terms of its planning for further faculty growth, a clear analysis of likely faculty growth from 2014 onwards is included in the Strategic Plan (p. 21). The GSE provided evidence of its engagement with building the diversity of its student body through appropriate analysis,

reflection, and action steps as described in the Strategic Plan (p. 15-16), and its plan to diversify the faculty through diversity policies and efforts to recruit diverse faculty through position advertisement placement in appropriate professional journals, per the Council of Graduate Schools' *Strategies for Effective Diversity Programs in Graduate Schools*. (CFR 3.2)

Aligned Faculty Workload and Professional Development to Support a Graduate Culture: The GSE has revised its Faculty and Staff Handbook to define faculty and staff recruitment, orientation procedures, workload expectations for teaching, scholarship, and service, and annual workload reporting processes, in alignment with GSE purposes. Faculty evaluation includes self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and annual evaluation by the supervisor. While not required to engage in service to the GSE community, adjunct faculty are expected to participate in faculty evaluation (including self-evaluation), GSE retreats, course planning, and the annual All-Faculty meeting. Academic Sector Plan Reviews include a consideration of balance and appropriateness of the faculty role; however, members of the Visiting Team had concerns about the authority of the faculty over curriculum. (CFR 3.3)

The GSE has recently hired a Director of Faculty Research to provide support and mentorship for faculty scholarly work, a highly positive development for the GSE. As described in the CPR, a number of collaborative, collegial opportunities exist for faculty development within the framework of professional practice. Interviews with faculty revealed that support for external conference attendance and presentations is provided. Staff development is not addressed in the CPR and does not appear as a separately budgeted item in budget projections. Within the scope of its mission and practice, the Team urges the GSE to provide external development opportunities for both its faculty and staff members. (CFR 3.4)

Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources

Fiscal Resources: Team members reviewed financial documents provided as part of the compliance review and as provided by the HTH CFO. As required, the GSE provided a stand-alone audit report of GSE for 2011 as well as a comparative audit report of GSE for 2012 and for 2011. An audit report for 2012-13 is still in preparation and was not provided. The audit reports for HTH Learning and Controlled Affiliates for the year ending June 30, 2012 and for the year ending June 30, 2011 were also provided. Audit reports examined were free of exceptions in all cases. The team was also provided with a breakdown of unaudited actual expenses for 2009-10 through 2012-13 as well as pro forma financial projections through 2016-17. Team members interviewed Dr. Rob Riordan, GSE President; Kay McElrath, CFO for HTH (and GSE under shared services), members of the GSE Board of Trustees, and the Board Chair of HTH Learning, Gary Jacobs, in connection with fiscal resources for the GSE.

From the Team review of documents provided and interviews conducted, a complex and positive financial picture emerged. The GSE has been highly successful in its fundraising endeavors, having secured significant grants from the Hewlett Foundation, the Amar Foundation, the Ronald Simon Family Foundation, and most recently a two-year grant from the Walton Foundation that will provide full scholarships, living expenses, and associated marketing expenses for 24 GSE students during 2014-15 and 2015-16.

In addition to tuition revenue, the GSE has diversified its revenue sources to provide increasing support for its educational mission through its Leading Schools Program, School Visits Program, Institutes and Residencies, and Extended Tours. Interviews with the Board as well as the Chair of the HTH Learning Board, Gary Jacobs, also provided assurance that the GSE is considered a highly valued institution within the overall operation of HTH Learning, and would be subsidized in its operations from the parent corporation as necessary to assure its

financial viability. Even exclusive of the impact of the Walton Foundation grant in 2014 through 2016, financial projections provided to the Team indicated a positive outlook for net revenue through 2014-15 and 2015-16 and minor deficits for 2016-17 (see table below – an overall picture that the Team found to be reflective of the underlying financial viability of GSE). (CFR 3.5)

GSE Revised Budget Projections:

	Actuals 2011-12	Projected Actuals 2012-13	Projected Budget 2013-14	Projected Budget 2014-15	Projected Budget 2015-16	Projected Budget 2016-17
Total Unrestricted Expenditures	$708,381	$1,311,435	$1,462,480	$1,427,914	$1,701,553	$1,126,855
Total Unrestricted Income	$707,945	$1,400,112	$1,462,481	$1,431,806	$1,707,497	$1,092,866
Net Profit/(Loss)	-$436	$88,677	$1	$3,892	$5,944	-$33,989

Library and Information Resources: The team approached the review of the library and learning resources through the lens of graduate education and the formation of graduate culture, with its expectation for graduate-level training in scholarship and research. The document "Library Resources for HTH GSE Students" provides a list of external resources for GSE candidates, including access to EBSCO Host Education Full-Text Database (Wilson Web). Through

interviews with program directors, reviewers also learned that JSTOR is being piloted in October 2013 and will be available to the institution for approximately $3,000 annually. The institution, through a cycle of continued analysis, surveys of its students, reflection, and action has increased student satisfaction with access to scholarly resources upwards by over 20 percentage points from 2010-11 to 2011-12, exceeding the goal it had set. Alumni interviewed were uniformly enthusiastic about the library and learning resources provided, and indicated they had experienced no barriers to securing full-text journal articles and other materials needed as integral to the graduate program. The Team encourages GSE to continue its focus on developing in-house library databases and learning resources appropriate to a graduate institution, providing access to MLS-prepared reference librarian resources, and to developing formal library articulation agreements with other area institutions. (CFR 3.6)

Information Technology: In the Information Technology FAPs for 2010-11 and 2011-12, the GSE describes its technology resources, noting that "Since GSE classes take place as part of HTH, GSE students and faculty have access to Elluminate, Moodle, and the Google suite—all on-line platforms for sharing information, resources, and videos of teaching and learning." Further, the institution provides personnel support and coordination for IT (including an IT director and a web master) that is appropriate to its mission and context. The FAP reports indicate that both GSE programs include technology workshops as a regular part of coursework. The GSE purchased and implemented an online assessment management and tracking system, Nuventive's TracDat, in 2011, although they are now exploring the development of an in-house solution for assessment tracking and management. In the 2011-12 Information Resources FAP, the GSE noted that it fell short of meeting its goals for faculty and student satisfaction, and has articulated strategies for improving overall levels of satisfaction with IT resources provided. The

Team encourages the GSE to continue to develop its IT resources and increase user satisfaction

through the deliberate cycle of review it has established. (CFR 3.7)

Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes

The Visiting Team found a culture of collaboration and consensus-driven decision

making within the GSE. Inclusive decision-focused organizational structures are clearly present

at the GSE; however, the Team was concerned that the President's Council appeared to function

in an ad hoc manner with no clearly articulated structure or systematic and planned agenda. GSE

has institutionalized mission-based planning, reporting, and assessment structures, including the

FAP annual reporting cycle and institutional reviews. The extensive documentation presented

demonstrates that the HTH GSE acts as an inclusive, involved learning community. The faculty

and organizational members are engaged in planning, development and implementation,

assessment and analysis of the effectiveness of its various processes, with the purpose of

sustaining and developing the effectiveness of its academic programs. However, the Visiting

Team noted the absence of faculty governance structures typically found in other institutions,

particularly those that assure faculty authority over the curriculum. The Visiting Team

recommends that HTH GSE review its organizational structures and decision-making bodies.

Faculty governance needs to be formalized so that faculty have authority over the curriculum.

(CFRs 3.8)

Developing the Governing Board – Promoting Greater Board Independence and Oversight

In addition to the CPR Report, team members reviewed the Policy Handbook of the

Board of Directors, dated 4/18/2013; the Amended and Restated Bylaws of HTH GSE, dated

September 9th, 2012; and Appendix B Board Policies, dated April 18th, 2013. Overall, team

members were impressed by the strength and specificity of the documents examined, and felt

that with only relatively minor adjustments the Board policy framework will serve the institution well.

Reviewers noted the election of Dr. Paul Heckman as an independent Chair of the HTH GSE Board, not affiliated with High Tech High. The team also took note of the institution's effort to "minimize the need for HTH GSE board member appointments to be approved by any other body." However, it did not appear to the Visiting Team that the current revision is sufficient to provide Board autonomy under the WASC Policy, in that the Sole Member still reserves the right to approve the majority of appointments to the Board. Provisions for dismissal from the Board were also discussed by reviewers, who noted that the current Bylaws may be in alignment with California nonprofit law but do not yet meet the spirit and normative practice of higher education that conforms to principles of independence -- where removal of a Board member is for cause, and where due process is as a rule provided for in the removal of a Board member rather than simply a majority vote. The Visiting Team recommends revision to the Operating Agreement to permit a majority of Board members to be independently elected. (CFRs 1.6, 3.9)

The plan for Board Development was also reviewed, including provisions for the Board Annual Plan, clearly stated Committee charters and timelines, criteria for Board self-assessment, and guidance and resources for new Board member orientation. However, reviewers also noted that the continued development of the Board as a functioning body *within higher education* had not been addressed, and the Visiting Team urges the HTH GSE Board to address this aspect of its development. (CFR 3.9, Guidelines)

The creation of standing Committees of the Board is a welcome clarification to the governance structure of the HTH GSE. Reviewers noted several needs for further alignment and

growth. First, the *WASC Policy on Independent Governing Boards* clearly articulates a need for

four separate and distinct standing committees of the Board: finances, financial audit, academic

affairs, and nominations. In the current version of the Bylaws, section 5.2, the function of the

Audit Committee is subsumed under the Finance Committee until a certain budget threshold has

been reached. Second, while reviewers noted that each committee was comprised of at least

three members, the criterion for having a majority of independent members on each committee

had not yet been met, and in more than one case the minimum number was met by the inclusion

of GSE staff members. Third, the reviewers noted that under the Bylaws, the Board Chair also

serves as the Chair of the Finance Committee and Chair of the Nominating Committee.   Finally,

recognizing that the Board includes only six members, the Team noted the need to have Board

membership "of sufficient size so that all committees can be adequately populated by qualified

members without concentrating too much control in a small number of people." The Visiting

Team recommends that the HTH GSE expand the current size of the Board to permit sufficient

Committee membership that meets WASC expectations. (CFR 3.9, WASC Policy on

Independent Governing Boards)

The Visiting Team also reviewed the powers vested in the Board with regard to the CEO.

While the current Board documents provide both authority and process for hiring, evaluating,

and retaining the CEO, the Board is not currently vested with the power to dismiss the CEO, a

situation that does not conform to the principles of board independence and responsibilities. This

matter was discussed with the HTH GSE Board, who agreed that power to dismiss the President

should be within the purview of the Board. Policies, procedures, and processes for annual

presidential evaluation by the Board were provided, and an attestation from the Board Chair

provided sufficient evidence of the Board's timetable to begin its evaluation of the president on

an annual basis. The EER team will need to verify that a cycle of presidential evaluation has

begun and that powers vested in the Board include the hiring, evaluation, and dismissal of the

president. (CFR 3.9, WASC Policy on Independent Governing Boards)

Full-time executive leadership of the GSE is provided by its president, Dr. Rob Riordan,

the co-founder of High Tech High. President Riordan splits his time between Massachusetts, his

permanent residence, and California. The GSE Board is aware of the need for the development

of a succession plan to ensure appropriate and ongoing institutional leadership for the institution.

The Chief Financial Officer for HTH and her staff provide a comprehensive array of

financial services to HTH GSE under shared services. Visiting Team members were impressed

with the symbiotic, collaborative shared services arrangement for financial services between

HTH and GSE. The Visiting Team noted that the arrangement provides the expertise of a

seasoned CFO and highly effective financial services to GSE, and provides those services at a

level and depth the GSE could most probably not afford were it to seek such services on the open

market. The Visiting Team commends GSE for successfully implementing a shared services

arrangement between GSE and HTH that provides a superior level of business services and

economies of scale. (CFR 3.10)

Faculty Engagement in Governance

Documented faculty involvement in peer identification and benchmarking, annual

program assessment reports, program assessment plans, functional area plans, and the review of

the Institutional Assessment Reports, together with their involvement in crafting the GSE quality

improvement plan, is highly demonstrative of the GSE faculty's collective academic leadership.

The Faculty Handbook, Section 7, notes that the "GSE is committed to a shared governance

model in which all administrators and faculty have an influential voice," and the Faculty

Handbook clearly describes the role of faculty in the development and oversight of the curriculum, yet specific language detailing shared governance processes by name should be detailed in the Faculty Handbook. The Visiting Team urges GSE to formally clarify the roles, rights and responsibilities of the faculty, especially faculty governance, within the context of the Faculty Handbook. (CFR 3.11)

D. Standard 4: Creating an Organizational Committed to Learning and Improvement

Strategic Thinking and Planning:

The HTH GSE Institutional Review Plan was written in 2010 and revised to integrate recommendations of the WASC Commission Action Letter (2012). The HTH GSE has implemented two cycles of its institutional assessment and operations evaluation (functional area plan evaluation). Baseline data were collected, analyzed, and summarized in two sets of annual reports. To ensure that the review plan was effective in closing the assessment loop, the annual reports all include a section titled, "closing the loop". This enables the HTH GSE to track changes made in that year and prompts measurement of effectiveness. (CPR 4.4)

The process is well developed, aligned with the WASC Resource Guide for 'Good Practices' in Academic Program Review (2009), and appears to be sustainable. Designated timeframes and responsibilities are identified through review process, and demonstrate how academic and administrative plans will be completed annually. The documentation clearly outlines connections between the strategic plan, statement of scholarship and innovation that guides the faculty, and the learning outcomes. A four-year cycle for complete program review was created, with a focus on a subset of institutional learning outcomes every other year. (CPR 4.5)

Commitment to Learning and Improvement:

As noted earlier in this report, the team commends the HTH GSE for its assessment process development. The HTH GSE is well positioned to effectively measure their educational effectiveness through the Annual Program Assessment Report and the Meta-Evaluation. The Annual Program Assessment Report combines the program learning outcomes assessment and analysis, report on faculty evaluation of signature assignments (*Looking at Student Work*), survey results, course evaluations, and proposed action plans. In addition, the Annual Program Assessment Report provides information from ongoing faculty assessment of each program. The faculty regularly and collaboratively review syllabi, course evaluation data, survey data, and project protocol.

The information from the School Leadership Annual Program Assessment Report, and the Teacher Leadership Annual Program Assessment Report, along with the Functional Area Plan are used by the administrative dean for the preparation of the Annual Institutional Assessment Report. This report, in combination with budget information, is used annually in goal setting and strategic planning. (CFR 4.1, 4.2)

Evaluation of the Quality of Teaching and Learning

Discussion with the faculty and administration revealed that both the assessment process and system have evolved to become a valuable resource for the HTH GSE. The creation of the *Assessment and Institutional Research Website* enabled the faculty and administration to actively engage with their data, annual reports, and plans on a regular basis. The GSE faculty and administration report that this organizing tool has facilitated their use of data in decision making for curricular improvements in both formal and informally scheduled meetings. Inclusion of templates, policies, and other relevant documents makes this a valuable tool for facilitating

effectiveness.

The team commends the HTH GSE for the use of multiple formative and summative methods of measuring curriculum effectiveness. Multiple methods and formats are used to gather data: through class based exit cards, semester based learning plans, course evaluations, student products, and surveys. Soliciting feedback, reflecting on the opportunity for improvement, and taking action for positive change is a consistent theme throughout planned points in the year, as well as when opportunities arise. The team encourages the HTH GSE to consider developing additional tracking mechanisms to capture when and where the changes take place and include formative changes in the 'closing the loop' processes. (CFR 4.4)

While the institutional capacity to monitor, collect, and report on effectiveness indicators appears to be working well, the HTH GSE is encouraged to consider carefully the findings from this and previous teams about the level of academic rigor and graduate culture. The faculty are encouraged to compare their assessment materials with other peer reviewed rubrics such as the American Association for University Professors (AAUP) resources and attend workshops about teaching and assessment with other programs that have a strong graduate culture. The comparison and contrast of materials from other graduate institutions may clarify the disconnect between what the curriculum is intending to promote and the levels of learning apparent in the student work. (CFR 4.6)

Student success is documented by student degree completion rates between 92%-96%. In exit interviews program directors identified the primary causes for attrition as personal and family related, not due to academic issues. (CFR 4.4) The admissions' process requires writing samples, letters of reference, and interviews to determine the level of fit between candidates and the program. The program directors attribute selectivity as one factor for their low attrition

levels. Students and alumni interviewed emphasized the level of support received as a key contributor to their satisfaction and success. The regular meetings with faculty, critical friends, and the development and ongoing revision of personal learning plans keep students on track. Students and alumni interviewed also referred to the readings and course content as being highly empowering, enabling the students to take on projects or leadership opportunities that they never would have before. This was supported by the survey and reflective statements in the exhibit documentation. (CFR 4.7)

The faculty invited alumni and advisory board members to evaluate the "looking at student work." Directors in the school context are participants in the digital portfolio evaluation, and researchers from two R1 research universities are actively conducting research with the HTH GSE faculty and students. The HTH GSE created capstone and digital portfolio products to enable students to synthesize learning across courses and apply the information to a problem that is meaningful in each student's context. (CFR 4.4, 4.6)

Assessment elements are in place both weekly and at the end of the first year to measure quality. The faculty use exit cards at the end of every course session to provide student feedback opportunities. The information from the exit cards is shared with students at the beginning of the next class session and teaching is adjusted accordingly. The students follow the program plan to develop a research project across the coursework. At the end of the first year students complete a Presentation of Learning, summarizing how signature assignments, capstone projects, reflective journals, and experiences contribute to the research project. Students must pass this milestone before advancing to their second year. A similar process is in place at the end of year two. (CPR 4.7, 4.8)

SECTION III - PREPARATION FOR EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

Assessment System Developed

The institutional review system is mapped from the course to program and institutional learning outcomes. The system includes academic and operational elements, multiple data sources, and scheduled times for faculty and administrative engagement. The assessment system was piloted and improved. When the programs enroll a greater number of students, the analyses can include disaggregation. The faculty discussed eagerness for developing a research agenda and supporting students in creating publishable work. The HTH GSE is encouraged to model learning assignments and peer review discussions after assignments to build skills required to publish in peer reviewed journals. While many students may not have publishing as a goal, the ability to critically analyze the methodology, analysis strategy, and findings of the work presented by others is invaluable when determining what interventions are valid and under which conditions. This approach could also enable students to gain multiple perspectives and move between the nomenclature of personalized reflective action research (e.g., wonderings, producing beautiful work) and the best practices of a more traditional theory and research-based peer reviewed environment.

The GSE has the opportunity to consider how it might handle workflow if the number of applications increases dramatically upon meeting accreditation requirements, or meeting the needs of a disabled student. Further, HTH GSE has opportunities for expanding co-curricular services that can benefit the school, students, and perhaps partner institutions.

The HTH GSE holds social justice and addressing diversity topics as core values. However, these objectives are not apparent within course materials and syllabi, or rubrics and assessments. If the GSE is providing teachers the tools they need for effective communication,

planning, and engagement in schools located in various contexts across socio-economic status,

then there is an opportunity to conduct pre/post assessments or to find another way to

demonstrate that the GSE is effective in meeting this goal. Another source for rich information

will be surveying alumni at planned intervals to determine the most effective elements of the

program and the impact that the program has over time. The alumni data should be compared

with employer survey data to develop a greater understanding of the satisfaction of constituency

groups as well as return on investment in the program. (CFR's 4.8)

Identification of Opportunities and Improvement Areas

The board and executive leadership discussed during the visit some ideas about planning

that would be topics at the upcoming board meeting. While specifics of learning outcome

measurement were regularly accessed and used in teaching, the elements of the strategic plan

were less familiar. The team encourages the GSE to use the board retreat and subsequent

meetings to transform the strategic plan into a resource document that helps inform decision-

making, resource allocation, and assessment of effectiveness. (CFR 4.3)

The HTH GSE developed rubrics across signature assignments, capstone, and final

projects. However, the levels of Bloom's taxonomy included within the 'exceeds expectations'

do not reflect higher levels of critical thinking and reasoning. The HTH GSE program directors

are encouraged to review these in advance of the EER and consider integrating elements of

synthesis, evaluation, and other characteristics expected of students completing a graduate level

degree. (CFR's 4.4, 4.5)

Communities of practices are an opportunity for developing the HTH GSE's capacity as a

learning organization. Several alumni recently formed a research interest group and the program

directors are actively engaged in a research group with the Director of Research, the Visiting

Scholar, Associate Professor of Educational Studies from UCSD, and a post-doc from UCSD. As the faculty and students develop their research agendas and products, the GSE can begin tracking the citations and identify themes. (CFR 4.6, 2.6, 2.9)

Faculty and Board Retreat and Strategic Planning Scheduled

The HTH GSE has scheduled a strategic planning retreat in October, 2013. The agenda for the day includes revising the strategic plan, review of the president, as well as setting an agenda and priorities for research. While the strategic plan resonated with the themes, ideas, and challenges the visiting team heard in the interviews across board members, administrators, faculty, and students, the leadership acknowledged that it was not a living document. The HTH GSE acknowledged the need to address how to better use the strategic plan to drive decision-making and allocation of resources. (CPR 4.6, 2.9)

SECTION IV - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations

1. The HTH GSE is innovative, flexible, and committed to the mission of the institution. Critical reflection and continuous improvement is embedded in the culture of GSE. (CFR's1.1,1.2,1.7)

2. The CPR report was well written with thorough supporting evidence. The WASC Steering Committee worked well as a team to prepare for the review. All members of the HTH GSE were invested in the team visit. The GSE has embraced assessment and the WASC process. (CFR's,1.7,1.9)

3. The HTH GSE has developed a thorough assessment system to measure student achievement and organizational effectiveness. Staff were positive about the process and

outcomes of the Functional Area Plans. Institutional, program and course learning outcomes are aligned and a program review process has been developed. (CFR 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

4. Changes made to the board structure and bylaws are resulting in a move towards the growth of autonomous leadership (however, these changes need to be included in updated board documents). (CFR 3.9)

5. The HTH GSE is to be commended for creating the position of Director of Faculty Research. (CFR's 2.8, 2.9, 3.4)

6. A shared services arrangement has been successfully implemented between GSE and HTH which provides a superior level of business service and economies of scale. (CFR 1.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4)

7. The visiting team commends HTH GSE for its mission which embraces social justice and access. The team encourages the HTH GSE to explicitly demonstrate how this is threaded throughout the curriculum. (CFR 1.5, 2.6, 2.9)

Recommendations

1. The HTH GSE does not meet the Department of Education credit hour policy and will need to address this prior to the Educational Effectiveness review. (1.2,1.8, 2.1, 2.2b, 2.12)

2. Class assignments should include the level of synthesis and analysis that is expected of graduate level coursework. (CFR's 2.2b, 2.4, 2.5, 2.8, 2.9, 4.6, 4.7)

3. Faculty governance needs to be formalized so that faculty have authority over the curriculum. (1.1,1.3,1.4, 3.8, 3.11)

4. In preparation for the Educational Effectiveness review, the GSE needs to complete a program review for each degree program. (CFR 2.7)

5. The Director of Faculty Research should be charged with mentoring faculty scholarship and creating a campus culture of research to further the efforts to create a graduate culture. (CFR's 2.8, 2.9, 3.4)

6. The strategic plan should become a living document that is regularly reviewed by the board and the leadership team, and that guides institutional decision making and resource allocation. (CFR's 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 2.5, 2.7, 3.8)

7. The current size of the Board needs to expand to permit sufficient committee membership that meets WASC expectations (WASC Policy on Independent Governing Boards). (CFR 3.8)

8. The Operating Agreement should be revised to permit a majority of Board members to be independently elected. (CFRs 1.6, 3.9)

Appendices

STUDENT COMPLAINTS REVIEW

Institution: Graduate School of Education (GSE) at High Tech High (HTH)

Date: September 20, 2013

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)	Verified Yes/No
Policy on student complaints	Does the institution have a policy or formal procedure for student complaints?	Yes
	Is the policy or procedure easily accessible? Where?	Yes
	Comments: The policy is accessible in the student handbook on the website.	
Process(es)/ procedure	Does the institution have a procedure for addressing student complaints? Please describe briefly: The GSE has a thorough grievance process which outlines the process for complaints against a faculty member and complaints against a staff member or administrator.	Yes
	Does the institution adhere to this procedure? No grievances have been filed, so there is no evidence of the institution's adherence to the procedure.	
	Comments: The institution has never received any student complaints. The GSE has multiple opportunities for students to offer suggestions for changes. Students and alumni reported that faculty and staff respond immediately to feedback.	
Records	Does the institution maintain records of student complaints? Where? There have been no student complaints to record.	
	Does the institution have an effective way of tracking and monitoring student complaints over time? Please describe briefly:	

	Comments: The GSE has no tracking because there have been no complaints. The institution has very good processes in place for tracking other data, and the institution is extremely small in size, so it is expected that they would have no problem tracking and monitoring student complaints.	

CREDIT HOUR AND PROGRAM LENGTH REVIEW

Institution: Graduate School of Education (GSE) at High Tech High (HTH)

Date: September 20, 2013

Material Reviewed	Questions/Comments (Please enter findings and recommendations in the comment section of this column as appropriate.)	Verified Yes/No
Policy on credit hour	Is this policy easily accessible? Where? On the Website	Yes
	Where is the policy posted? On the Website	
	Comments:	
Process(es)/ periodic review	Does the institution have a procedure for periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable (for example, through program review, new course approval process, periodic audits)?	No
	Does the institution adhere to this procedure?	
	Comments: This is under development. The institution has developed a program review process, but no programs have yet to be reviewed.	
Schedule of on-ground courses showing when they meet	Does this schedule show that on-ground courses meet for the prescribed number of hours?	No
	Comments: Currently, one credit unit meets 6 face-to-face hours, with 12 out-of-class hours of academic work. To meet the credit hour policy, they should meet 15 hours face-to-face and 30 out-of-class hours per credit unit. Currently, their classes meet 40% of the expected hours. The GSE is counting time that students are putting into practice as teachers or administrators where they work. This time needs to be better defined as to how it connects to the academic work if it is to be counted as part of the credit hour for classes.	
Sample syllabi or equivalent for online and hybrid	What kind of courses (online or hybrid or both)?	N/A
	How many syllabi were reviewed?	
	What degree level(s)?	

courses	What discipline(s)?	
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded?	
	Comments:	
Sample syllabi or equivalent for other kinds of courses that do not meet for the prescribed hours (e.g., internships, labs, clinical, independent study, accelerated)	What kinds of courses? None	
	How many syllabi were reviewed?	
	What degree level(s)?	
	What discipline(s)?	
	Does this material show that students are doing the equivalent amount of work to the prescribed hours to warrant the credit awarded?	
	Comments: The GSE needs to define the "practicum" work that students are completing as part of the program and integrate this into the prescribed credit hours for the program.	
Sample program information (catalog, website, or other program materials)	What kinds of programs? Graduate Education	
	How many programs were reviewed? Two	
	What degree level(s)? Masters	
	What discipline(s)? Education	
	Does this material show that the programs offered at the institution are of a generally acceptable length?	Yes
	Comments: The programs are an acceptable length once the credit hour issue is addressed.	