

The Schools of Education Learning Collaborative Helps Old Dominion University Increase the Impact of its Child Development Center

Challenge:

After the director of its Child Development Center stepped down, Old Dominion University was looking to increase the impact of the center by better integrating it into the School of Education.

Solution:

The Schools of Education Learning Collaborative (SOE-LC) research team conducted interviews with five other universities to benchmark their early childhood center operations. Among the areas examined were:

- Mission of the center
- Organizational structure, staffing and funding
- Role of research at the center

Results:

Old Dominion was able to use the research to successfully lobby for funding for a new Director position to oversee the day-to-day management of the center and in addition re-structured its operations based on the insight gained from the study.

About Old Dominion University:

Location: Norfolk, VA

Carnegie Classification: Doctoral

Ownership: Public Institution

Size: 18,569 Undergraduate Students (2007)

About the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative:

(SOE-LC) helps deans and leaders within schools of education by providing data and insight to assist them in improving operational efficiencies, demonstrating accountability in a difficult policy environment, and developing and improving programs to meet the needs and interests of their current and potential students.

An Opportunity for Change

In the Spring of 2008, Dr. Sharon Judge, the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Assessment at the School of Education at Old Dominion University (ODU), was facing a new challenge. The former Director of ODU's Child Development Center had recently stepped down and Dr. Judge had been asked to serve as interim director given her background in early childhood education. Having worked at other institutions with strong childhood education centers, Dr. Judge knew that ODU's center was not strongly connected to the school of education and this was a lost opportunity to inform practices in the field.

Realizing this appointment was a chance to look more critically and systematically at the center, Dr. Judge wanted to examine possible changes that might improve its operations and increase its impact. Previously the role of Director had not been a fulltime position and had been handled by a faculty member, but Dr. Judge soon suspected the role needed a dedicated individual. She felt that due to the lack of a fulltime Director the center was missing opportunities to not only serve its children but also serve as a training ground for students in the school of education. However, before she could advocate for the funding for a fulltime Director she knew she would first need to better understand how other institutions were structuring their childhood education centers. Having had previous experience with Eduventures and its research capabilities, Dr. Judge decided to turn to the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative (SOE-LC) for assistance.

Benchmarking Operations

Working with Dr. Judge, the SOE-LC research team first identified five universities with strong early childhood centers that were perceived as well-integrated into their respective schools of education to serve as a benchmark for Old Dominion. Interviews were then conducted with the Directors at each center.

Among the issues examined were the mission for each center, enrollment, staffing and funding levels, and finally the ways in which the centers were used to generate knowledge for the field of early childhood education.

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Associate Dean of Graduate Studies
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School of Education
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Turning Insight into Action

One of the most significant findings from the study was that all of the centers profiled were overseen by an Executive Director or Director who were assisted by either a Director or Assistant Director responsible for the day-to-day management of the center. This allowed the senior manager to focus on facilitating the research activities of the center and therefore the center was able to play a role in research across the university. According to Dr. Judge, “The data from the study allowed us to see what other centers were doing in regards to research and helped affirm for us that this was a direction we wanted to move in.”

The study also determined that while the funding level for the center was in the mid-range of all the schools profiled, the fees being charged by Old Dominion were much lower once cost of living was taken into account.

Securing Funding for a Fulltime Director

After receiving the final report, Dr. Judge shared it with the Provost and the teachers in the program and as a result several changes were made. First, the center has started the process of receiving university approval to raise the associated fees for the center. Said Judge, “Now that we have data from other centers with similar programs it is much easier for us to demonstrate to the university leadership that our fees are not comparable and make a compelling argument why they need to be increased.”

More importantly however, based on the research the Provost approved the hiring of a fulltime Director to manage the day to day operations of the center. To assist ODU in filling this position, the SOE-LC research team conducted a brief follow-up study to identify salary ranges of Associate Directors at some of the early childhood centers included in the original study. With this information in hand, advertising for the position will soon be started and Old Dominion hopes to have someone in place to start by early next summer.

Following a practice identified in the study, Dr. Judge also hopes to start better capturing the research, training and outreach being conducted by the center to better illustrate to the university how the center is being used and demonstrate its impact.

According to Dr. Judge, the ability of the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative to serve as a neutral third party in conducting the research was an important factor in helping to secure the funding for the position. She added that the addition of this fulltime Director will have a big impact on the center and should increase the amount of research being conducted there. As a result it will reaffirm the primary mission of the center to serve as a practicum for students interested in early childhood education or elementary education.

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