

ARABIAN GULF UNIVERSITY
SPHERE OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

EVALUATION REVIEW OF
MENTAL RETARDATION PROGRAM

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TASK

To evaluate the Diploma and Masters degree levels of the Mental Retardation Program aspect of the Special Education Program of Arabian Gulf University, comment on design and integrity as a graduate program in Education, and to take into special consideration possible initiation of a future Doctoral level extension of the Special Education Program.

This evaluation is part of continued strengthening and developing of the current programs of AGU.

CONTEXT OF TASK

The Mental Retardation Program is an established program of AGU's College of Graduate Studies, Sphere of Educational Studies. AGU is a regional, non-political, non-profit institute that aspires to fulfill the developmental needs of the Gulf Region. Established in 1982 by the Arab Gulf States, AGU serves students from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, and also admits candidates from other nations.

The purpose of the Mental Retardation Program, as stated in an opening review of the program by its Director, is "to prepare theoretically and technically qualified teachers to deal effectively with children with mental retardation". Within this general objective are five discrete objectives.

- Maintaining a balance between basic theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed in the field of special education.
- Enabling graduate students to acquire various scientific skills for their specialized careers.
- Updating, expanding, and developing students' aptitudes, skills, and talents for teaching in institutions of special education.

- In-service training of teachers working in the field of special education.
- Preparing highly qualified specialists, at the master level in the field of special education, and training them in research methodology.

The Arabian Gulf University is to be congratulated on addressing unique special educational needs on behalf of the Gulf Region. The splendid and knowledgeable faculty and administrative staff of the program have given the program high quality graduates who have, in a very short time, contributed much to education in the Region. This latest evaluation is but one more example of the determination of AGU to pay constant attention to strengthening and developing the quality of all its programs. Consideration of extension of the Special Education Program to the Doctoral level is evidence of the continued effort of AGU to serve the educational interests of the Gulf Region.

THE FOCUS OF THE EVALUATORS

The Mental Retardation Program evaluation team has undertaken a careful and considered review of the existing program and its structural aspects.

Seminal to this review is the understanding that AGU has a leadership position in education of Gulf Region students with intellectual challenge. The implication of leadership is that, while constant attention must be paid to maintenance of current programs, AGU has the responsibility and mandate to look to the future in program extension, and exploration of new knowledge and exciting concepts and practice in intellectual disability.

Central interest focused on present design of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd semesters in terms of required courses, implications of these courses in terms of program direction within the field of special education, relationship of

course structure to career directions of Diploma and Masters graduates, and contribution of the program, as presently constituted, to any future Doctoral program extension.

Of especial interest to the evaluation team were:

- Educational and psychological nature of courses and resulting effect on nature of the Diploma and Degree, and on possible future expansion to the Doctoral level.
- Courses to be continued in their present form as necessary to the educational study of mental retardation.
- Courses, which might be reconsidered for inclusion in the mental retardation program.
- Courses which might be reconsidered as possibly relevant to all teaching areas of the Special Education Program, and thereby strengthen and further develop the integrated nature of the program.
- Aspects of courses which would benefit from partial re-design to serve as cross-program common course offerings.
- Courses which fit best with alternate career futures of differing streams of candidates.
- The place of concentration on Tests and Measurement, Diagnosis, and Statistics within the Mental Retardation Program.
- Readiness of Program for Extension to the Doctoral Level

Note: Revision of Terminology

Mental retardation is a term that has served as descriptive of the field of Education dealing with people with intellectual concerns. Society in recent years, however, has focused on change to terminology that avoids, as much as possible, terminology that may be seen to denigrate people with disabilities. One such term is mental retardation. In comparison with gifted or learning disability, the term is increasingly viewed as negative in connotation. The evaluation team employs the term “mental retardation” throughout this report, but occasionally terms such as “intellectual challenge” are used as well

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE MENTAL RETARDATION PROGRAM STRUCTURE**Relative Contributions of Education and Psychology**

The evaluation team found the present design of the Mental Retardation Program to reflect study of Psychology more so than study of Education as indicated below.

EDU 562: INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

This course is in keeping with the objectives declared. However, objectives may be seen as narrow due to lack of recognition of recent developments in education for students with mental retardation. In particular, integration, as practiced under the special education model, and inclusive education should be highlighted. Integration and inclusion are major dynamics at the international level.

PSYC 561: PSYCHOLOGY OF MENTAL RETARDATION

This course does not, in fact, deal with psychology of mental retardation. It focuses on topics such as classification systems in mental retardation, causes, characteristics, and family and mental retardation. Recent significant changes in the field of psychology in how students with

mental retardation, such as Gardner's development of the concept of multiple intelligences and his portfolio approach to measurement, are not noted. Further, the term "mental retardation" has fallen out of use in many nations as a limited term of reference to the population in question. Terms such as intellectual challenge and developmental delay are more contemporary.

PSYC 563: PHYSIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR MR

Content of this course may be questioned on the basis of value to candidates intending a career in education. Information on physiology of memory and learning may be appropriate as these areas are of importance to teachers. Other content areas would have little relevance to the day-to-day teaching situation in educational setting for students with intellectual challenge.

PSYC512:EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STATISTICS

Content of this course is appropriate for an introductory level statistics course. However, need for an introductory, two credit hour, statistics course may be questioned for candidates in the Diploma stream aiming at careers in teaching and conducting primarily descriptive research projects. A one credit hour course may well be sufficient to prepare students for the type of research conducted at the Diploma level.

SLM 521: ISLAMIC CULTURE

The evaluation team would not presume to comment on appropriateness of a course dealing with Islamic culture in a program focused on mental retardation. It is noted, however, that the course does not appear to deal with mental retardation. Strengthening the course in this regard may be achieved through orientation toward content on the philosophy embedded in Islamic culture and religion regarding the preferred relationship between Islamic society and its citizens with disabilities.

EDU 565: DIPLOMA PROJECT

Value may be seen in Diploma candidates undertaking a research project within a problem-solving course context. The emphasis noted in the evaluation exercise briefing notes on descriptive studies is appropriate. The evaluation team was uncertain whether an assumption was being made in the course in favor of quantitative study methods. Qualitative approaches, and particularly action research, would complement the student and classroom-centered orientation of candidates intending teaching careers.

FSE 500: ENGLISH FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

Given the composition of the AGU student population, the type of information forming the content of ESP 500 would be valuable. However, the evaluation team is of the opinion that it is not necessary to support a course approach to providing this information. Competency in English, as it is used for research and discussion of exceptionality, may be attained more appropriately were all instructors to make a point of dealing with special English usage in context as examples appeared in class readings and discussion.

PSYC 566: DIAGNOSIS AND ASSESSMENT IN MENTAL RETARDATION

This course could well be of value for those going on to a career as a psychometrician or psychologist. For those planning a teaching or special education teaching consultant career in mental retardation, in-depth investigation of diagnosis and assessment may be questioned. The evaluation team does not believe this course appropriate as a core course for all candidates.

PSYC 567: BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

This course, as described, would provide considerable depth of knowledge in behavior modification. However, most students with

intellectual challenge do not display the level of behavior necessitating resort to intensive behavior modification. Therefore, it would seem that requiring all candidates to undertake such in-depth study would not be warranted. This said, it may be that a course on general behavior management, including attention to behavior modification as one topic among others, would prove to be a valuable course across mental retardation, giftedness, and learning disabilities.

EDU568: TEACHING METHODS FOR MENTALLY RETARDED

Much, if not most, of the content of this course would apply to all students who exhibit differences from the average student population in learning. The evaluation team believes a course in teaching methods for a generalized exceptional student population would play a role of value in the full Special Education Program. Candidates interested in teaching methods as applied to specific populations of exceptional students could be encouraged to focus their course assignments on such populations, and to seek out readings dealing with those populations.

PSYC 569: FAMILY COUNSELING

The value of a family counseling course is undoubted, given an appropriate context. Such a context might be candidates working toward a career in counseling, or other careers requiring expertise in the area. Requiring all candidates in a Diploma/Thesis program to undertake a family counseling course is considered questionable by the evaluation team.

EDU 570: EARLY INTERVENTION

This course would be appropriate for all candidates anticipating working with younger exceptional students. It is noted, however, that early childhood education is not a common feature in the Gulf Region. Further, it is noted that age of entry into the school systems of the Region is 6 to 7

years, and beyond the early childhood period. These ages are rather late for *early* intervention, though appropriate interventions may be of value.

EDU 571: PRACTICUM IN MR

There is considerable value in undertaking a practicum experience for those anticipating a teaching career with exceptional students. Part I of the course is certainly a strong start to a worthwhile practicum experience. The evaluation team is less certain that Part II, as described, would provide as worthwhile or appropriate practicum experience for those candidates anticipating a career in teaching. Those parts of the course dealing with pedagogy certainly would be appropriate. Those parts dealing with administration and interpretation of psychological tests are questionable, if candidates are to be regarded as qualified in test administration and interpretation afterwards.

EDU 610: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES (IN MR AND LD)

This type of course would be of general value across the Special Education Program were giftedness added to MR and LD. There are many issues (such as transitioning from school to post-school, integration, testing, inclusion, and remedial approaches) that would form valuable content. The evaluation team believes such a course, if offered, should be structured as a course across the full Special Education Program. Specific knowledge regarding individual conditions of challenge could be gained through course assignments and selected readings.

PSYC 603: RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

This course would be appropriate for candidates anticipating a career in research. The evaluation team encourages inclusion of qualitative research approaches in such a course.

The full set of courses forming the present Mental Retardation Program is set forth below in Table 1.

Mental Retardation	General Education & Special Ed.	Psychology & Counseling	Statistics & Measurement
Diploma project (2 credit hours)	Intro to Sp. Ed. (2 credit hours)	Psych of MR (2 credit hours)	Implication of Test & Measurement (2 credit hours)
	Islamic Culture (2 credit hours)	Physiological Basis (2 credit hours)	Intro to Ed'al Statistics (1 credit hour)
	English for Special Purposes (1 credit hour)		
Special Teaching Methods (2 credit hours)	Early Intervention (2 credit hours)	Behavior Mod. (2 credit hours)	Diagnosis & Assessment (2 credit hours)
Practicum in MR (2 credit hours)		Family Counseling (2 credit hours)	
Diploma Project (2 credit hours)			
Contemporary Issues in MR (2 credit hours)			Inferential Stats (2 credit hours)
			Research Design & Methods (2 credit hours)
10 credit hours	7 credit hours	8 credit hours	9 credit hours

The table graphically demonstrates the relative contributions of mental retardation, education and special education, psychology and counseling, and statistics and measurement courses to the program.

There are 9 Psychology & Counseling/Statistics and Measurement hours with a total of 17 credit hours. This is compared to 5 courses directly in mental retardation with 10 credit hours, and 4 in general education/special education courses with a total weight of 7 credit hours. Three of the courses under mental retardation are not courses at all, but practicum and diploma projects with credit hour weight. Given this division of prominence in the Mental Retardation Program, the logical conclusion most observers would reach is that the Program is in the field of Psychology, Counseling, Statistics, and Measurement, with substantial support from Mental Retardation and General Education/Special Education. It would not be in the interest of possible future expansion to the Doctoral level to have the Diploma/Masters program viewed as one in Psychology, rather than Education.

With reference to the objectives of the Mental Retardation Program noted on pp. 2-3, the present distribution and weight of course violates balance of the program between theory and practical skills needed in mental retardation, and focuses the program on acquisition of scientific skills and research strength. To the evaluation team, this seems a most questionable situation, particularly if there is intention to build a Doctoral program on the Diploma/Masters program base.

NEED TO REALIGN AS EDUCATION

The above-described situation suggests that the Mental Retardation Program be realigned to be recognized by all observers as one in Education. Extension to a Doctoral program may well be questioned were its base were seen to be largely outside the field of Special Education. Aspects of a possible realignment designed to position the Mental Retardation Program as one easily recognizable by informed observers as a leading contemporary educational program of teacher preparation for

work in a variety of settings with people with intellectual challenge are noted below.

Recasting Selected Courses Toward Education

Realignment may be facilitated if a number of courses are changed slightly and reconstituted as Education courses common across the Special Education Program. Specifically, at present, analysis of Psyc 561 reveals that the majority of its content applies equally to other exceptionalities as well as to mental retardation. Those candidates studying mental retardation in particular, can develop needed specific information through independent readings and turning course assignments toward mental retardation. In similar manner, Psyc 564: Introduction to Educational Statistics may be recast as EDU XXX: Statistics in Education, Psyc 561: Psychology of Mental Retardation as EDU XXX: Psychological Aspects of Exceptionality, Psyc 566: Diagnosis and Assessment of Mental Retardation as EDU XXX: Educational Diagnosis and Assessment of Exceptionality, Psyc 567: Behavior Modification as EDU XXX: Educational Behavior Management Across the Exceptionality Spectrum, and Psyc 570: Early Intervention as EDU XXX: Early Intervention Strategies in Special Education. The new courses would serve as Education courses serving candidates across the full Special Education Program, and go a long way to redressing the balance of the program in favour of Education.

Sharing of common courses has the benefit of emphasizing the Educational nature of the entire program and being efficient and economical, as well as indicating an integrated approach to the study of exceptionality, although with recognition of the specialist nature of study in various areas as required.

- **Recommendation # 1**

The program in mental retardation clearly should be recognizable as a program in Education.

Recasting course titles to reflect an educational orientation rather than suggesting a psychological orientation will more clearly reflect the fact that the program, indeed, is educational in nature.

- **Recommendation # 2**

The three Programs: Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness and Talents should reflect an integrated program approach in Education, through use of common courses in concert with specialist courses as appropriate to each program.

Psyc 561:Psychology of Mental Retardation as EDU XXX:
Psychological Aspects of Exceptionality

Psyc 564:Introduction to Educational Statistics as EDU XXX:
Statistics in Education

Psyc 561:Psychology of Mental Retardation as EDU XXX:
Psychological Aspects of Exceptionality

Psyc 566:Diagnosis and Assessment of Mental Retardation as EDU
XXX: Educational Diagnosis and Assessment of Exceptionality

Psyc 567: Behavior Modification as EDU XXX: Educational
Behavior Management Across the Exceptionality Spectrum

Psyc 570:Early Intervention as EDU XXX: Early Intervention
Strategies in Special Education

Deletion of Psyc 564: Physiological Basis of MR

Members of the evaluation team considered this course to hold minimal relevance as a course for candidates planning a future role within special education, albeit in the area of mental retardation. The detailed physiological content of the course would not serve to increase

significantly the ability of graduates to work effectively in the field as educators.

Deletion of this course would assist in highlighting the nature of the Special Education Program as one within Education. It also would provide opportunity to develop a new course dealing with a contemporary issue, such as integration/inclusion within the program. This major issue is not addressed substantively in the present program, though it is, perhaps, the major issue in education of students with intellectual challenge at the international level. It is, in varying degrees, an issue in the Gulf States.

Introduction of such a course would signal recognition that integration/inclusion, though yet to become a major dynamic in the Gulf Region, is a major dynamic elsewhere in the field of mental retardation.

- **Recommendation # 3**

Remove Psych 564: Physiological Basis of MR from the course list in the interest of aligning the program as much as possible with the career intents of the candidate population, and in the interest of making space in the program for new courses designed to reflect the contemporary nature of the field.

Deletion of FSE 500: English for Special Purposes

As noted earlier, the objective of this course is laudable and the content worthwhile.

However, the evaluation team was not convinced that the objective could not be achieved and the content covered without resort to a special course in an already course intensive program.

It would appear quite possible without a great deal of extra effort, for individual course instructors to ensure in their courses that special English terminology arising during class sessions and in readings, be clarified within the individual course context. Such an approach would

have the advantage of dealing with new terms within the context of relevant study, rather than in a course format divorced from the context of immediate learning.

- **Recommendation # 4**

Remove FSE 500: English for Special Purposes from the course list in the interest of maximizing program efficiency and making space for new courses designed to reflect the contemporary nature of the field.

Develop Instruction Around Early Intervention & Transition Planning

The evaluation team regarded the content of the Early Intervention course as valuable. However, the team was aware that Early Childhood Education, within which context early intervention commonly occurs, is not a strong feature of education in the Gulf Region. In addition, the focus of the present AGU program seems to be the 6 to 16 year age range, a context in which early intervention does not easily fit, though intervention appropriate to early stages of this age range would fit.

The team noted, as well, that no attention seems paid in the Mental Retardation Program to the crucial issue of transition. As students with mental retardation reach the end of their period in school, teachers, parents, and students should be turning their attention to the post-school period. Instruction in teacher education programs has become common, if not required, in other jurisdictions. Working toward employment, independent or supported living, and development of independence as adults is a fundamental need in the lives of adolescents with intellectual challenge.

The tension inherent in offering an early intervention course in a regional climate of minimal existing early childhood education, coupled with the lack of instruction around transition planning, presents an opportunity for

leadership in Education across the Gulf Region by AGU. Development of plans for encouragement through teacher education of early childhood education and transition planning would position AGU as a future-looking institution. The University would be able to affect quality of education at both ends of the present 6 to 16-education system. As noted, other jurisdictions have taken such steps.

- **Recommendation # 5**

Develop a plan in the immediate future to recognize in the mental retardation program the importance of early childhood education and transition planning for post-school life through development of appropriate courses of instruction for relevant groups of candidates.

It is important to recognize that educational services for young people with mental retardation should not exist only for the traditional school years of 6 to 16. Early intervention is fundamental in providing a solid beginning for infants and toddlers and their families. Transition planning recognizes that schools, families, and individuals with mental retardation must plan for life following the school period. Both areas have become common areas of action in international programs in the field.

Review the Nature of the Practicum Experience

The Special Education Program has been wise in its decision to develop a focus on practicum experience. As noted earlier, however, the evaluation team questions the time spent by all candidates on test administration and interpretation. Such activities would seem more appropriate to a sub-set of candidates looking forward to careers in test administration and interpretation, than for candidates looking forward to careers in teaching. In addition, the team sees value in an earlier, less structured, practicum experience as a precursor for later teaching responsibilities during

practicum. To some degree Part I of the present practicum design connects with the evaluation team's argument. The already strong practicum could be enhanced were a half-day of observation and general assistance in classrooms introduced during Semester 1. This move would have the value of immediate contact with students with mental retardation in their daily learning setting, provide for greater emphasis for teacher assessment based on observation, have relatively less pressure on candidates than the more formal practicum, and provide a longer period for candidates to internalize the learning capacities and styles of students challenged by mental retardation. Finally, the changes to course proposed earlier in this document would free up time for this practicum activity.

- **Recommendation # 6**

Recognize through a practicum focused on teaching students with mental retardation that many program candidates will become classroom teachers or consultants to classroom teachers in the area of mental retardation.

- **Recommendation # 7**

Recognize through a practicum focused on test administration and interpretation that some candidates will enter careers where such skills are required, and where teaching is not the primary requirement.

- **Recommendation # 8**

Extend the practicum period by introducing a half-day practicum into the 1st semester.

This practicum should be designed to provide opportunity for observation of students with mental retardation in the learning situation, and opportunity for candidates to become familiar with common teaching techniques by assisting classroom teachers.

Rationalizing the Place of Statistics, Diagnosis, and Research Design

The Mental Retardation Program has an impressive series of offerings focused on research skills and diagnostic skills. The evaluation team spent considerable time reflecting on the need to retain strong attention to Test and Measurement, Statistics, and Research Design within the overall Special Education Knowledge gained from study of such areas is of great value to those candidates wishing to pursue careers with a research focus. However, the team did not see that undertaking extensive study of Test and Measurement, Statistics, and Research Design was appropriate for candidates planning teaching and consulting careers in special education. Though valuable, the team believes courses dealing more directly with teaching relevant topics should take precedence.

Nevertheless, Test and Measurement, Research Design, and Statistics courses are valuable within the field and should be retained in the overall program.

The evaluation team also notes that qualitative approaches to research have become increasingly common and valuable in the field of exceptionality. In particular, action research has value as a research technique that permits teachers to research their teaching environment in problem-solving manner.

Recommendation # 9

- *Focused study of statistics, test administration, diagnosis, and research design should continue to be available for that cohort of candidates intending careers where such knowledge is mandatory.*

Recommendation # 10

Candidates anticipating teaching careers should not be expected to take more than a one credit hour course on descriptive statistics designed to prepare them for the less demanding Diploma project. This course may include study of action research methods.

- **Recommendation # 11**

Present courses on statistics and research design should be strengthened through inclusion of study of qualitative methods.

The Thesis

Information of theses provided in the evaluation team binder (thesis titles and abstracts), were reviewed. Professor Smadi, also, was personally familiar with the sophistication of theses in the Education program of AGU. Comments on theses were obtained during interviews from faculty members and candidates.

Theses emerging from the Special Education Program are impressive in breadth, depth, and volume. One interviewee remarked that a Masters thesis at AGU was closely similar to Doctoral quality. Such results signal dedication of significant amounts of faculty time in guidance of thesis work, particularly given the advanced nature of much of the statistical analysis involved in the typical thesis.

The evaluation team noted that many thesis topics appeared to be drawn from the Psychological side, rather than from the Education side. Most were based on sophisticated statistical analysis and involved administration and interpretation of a number of sophisticated psychological test instruments. Quality was high.

Given this, the evaluation team was concerned that few theses focused on what might be called “educational” issues dealing with teaching, teaching strategies, curriculum development, and teaching practice in general. Additionally, qualitatively oriented research appeared not to be present to any degree. Qualitative approaches, increasingly, are becoming common in education studies in other jurisdictions.

In general, it would appear that Masters graduates of the Special Education Program at AGU would contribute strongly to the psychological literature, but minimally to the educational literature.

- **Recommendation # 12**

For candidates undertaking thesis level work, a shift of emphasis should take place from psychologically oriented research studies to educationally oriented research studies.

It is absolutely necessary that most graduates of a program in education be expected to contribute to research knowledge in the area of education and to publish in that area. Presently, the majority of research studies reflect a psychological orientation and are more suited for publication in the psychological literature

- **Recommendation # 13**

The evaluation team recommends, in addition to emphasis on research in Education, that the Mental Retardation Program undertake research clustering around central issues in education of individuals with mental retardation.

Development of an Education Resource Center

The evaluation team was impressed by the very fine work done to develop a Psychology Laboratory to support the Special Education Program. A solid range of psychological test instruments were among Lab holdings, and a number of traditional psychological apparatus were apparent. Additionally, a rich holding of psychological and educational videos were noted. It would be of value to ensure that all holdings in any area were translated by voice-over or captioned in Arabic.

Finally, the team was shown an impressive teaching resource developed by candidates under the supervision of the Lab director. This resource has been duplicated and is in use in Bahraini schools.

However, the team was somewhat surprised to find a fairly sophisticated Psychology Lab in an environment dedicated to Education, whereas no Education Resource Center has been developed. The education resource viewed indicated considerable and valuable potential for development of

needed education resources. Both evaluation team members are personally familiar with the lack of education resource materials available in the Gulf Region. Resources could well be directed to development of educational resources.

In this regard, thought might be put into approaching an organization such as the World Bank for a grant to develop Arabic educational resources, including translation of educational texts. Such an initiative would benefit the entire Arab world and further demonstrate leadership by AGU.

- **Recommendation # 14**

Available resources should be directed toward development of an Education Resource Center in recognition of the fact that the Mental Retardation Program is a program in Education.

- **Recommendation # 15**

A funding approach should be made to an organization such as the World Bank's Disability Group for funding to support development of educational resource materials in Arabic, and to support translation of appropriate texts in Education into Arabic.

Acquisition of Additional Faculty in Support of Recommended

Changes and a Future Doctoral Level Program

The recommendations of this report require the acquisition of faculty members with expertise in certain areas of education of individuals with mental retardation. Additional faculty members with strong background in special education are required also to develop a base of qualified and recognized faculty to support a successful proposal for a Doctoral program.

Specifically, the areas of need are qualitative and action research, integration, transition planning, early childhood education, and teaching methods in special education.

- **Recommendation # 16**

Two addition faculty members be hired to support the Mental Retardation Program across the areas noted above.

- **Recommendation # 17**

If suitable faculty are not immediately available, as a transition measure, temporary faculty with backgrounds in teaching in special education and an M. A. degree should be sought and employed. These contract faculty members would be assigned practicum supervision under the guidance of a full faculty member, as a measure to relieve workload increases resulting from initiation of the changes recommended.

Extension of Program to the Doctoral Level

The evaluation team believes the Special Education Program would render even greater service to the Gulf Region were a Doctoral level program of study initiated. The team sees a necessary first step to be strengthening of the entire Special Education Program by making apparent that all three streams of study of exceptionality, mental retardation, giftedness, and learning disabilities, are strong education programs. Having any part of the this triad appear to be wanting in its educational strength, as is the present case for the mental retardation program, would weaken arguments for extension to the Doctoral level.

Therefore, AGU would be well-advised to introduce changes, such as those recommended, to strengthen the educational image and nature of the mental retardation program. The evaluation team believes the recommended changes could be incorporated in the Special Education

Program as soon as the 2004-2005 academic year and no later than the 2005-2006 academic year.


- **Recommendation # 18**

AGU should act immediately to initiate the changes to the mental retardation program detailed above in order to strengthen the educational nature and image of the program, and in preparation for extension to a Doctoral level program.

Extension to a Doctoral level program inevitably will involve extensive external reviews. The changes recommended take into consideration the possibility that external reviewers will note that the mental retardation program strongly reflects the study of Psychology rather than Education.

SUMMARY

Taking action on the points raised would serve to position the Graduate Program in Special Education more strongly as a base for extension to a Doctoral program in special education. A major part of the re-design is that any program leading to a Doctoral degree, or, indeed, to a graduate Diploma or Masters degree in Special Education, manifestly should rise from study of Education, and demonstrate leadership in Special Education. Accepting the recommendations around the contributions of Education and Psychology to the overall program would reverse the present dominance of Psychology in an Education Program. The strategies of realignment suggested would also mean that present faculty would continue to teach courses they pioneered, though with revisions to include a range of exceptionalities.


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