

Challenges:

In the 2024-2025 academic year, our department faced several challenges, including the addition of the Instructional Technology (ITEC) program and two new faculty members in the program—one tenure-track and the other clinical—from the Leadership Studies department, the introduction of new visiting clinical instructors, and a shift in leadership.

We made concerted efforts to ensure that the visiting faculty members felt supported and included. We started the year with a mentor-new faculty lunch to foster a sense of community, allowing everyone to get acquainted.

During that leadership shift, Dr. Dailey, the department chair, also served as the Interim Associate Dean. Dr. Freed, the ITEC program coordinator, assumed the role of Assistant Department Chair to alleviate the workload on Dr. Dailey, who was already managing two significant administrative roles.

We also faced challenges due to the high demand from our faculty to teach outside of our department. While their teaching excellence makes them highly sought after, it strains our department's class scheduling.

Another major challenge this year was the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) teacher education review and the Science of Reading (SOR) audit, both of which occurred in mid-February. These reviews require considerable effort from faculty, our Assessment Director, Dr. Wake, and the administrative team, as they prepare documentation, write and submit reports and self-studies, and plan an on-campus visit with evaluators from DESE and Ed TPI, as well as the SOR group. Mid-February also saw an ice storm, which necessitated last-minute changes, ultimately turning the visit into a virtual-only event.

Significant changes at the state level have demanded program adjustments, increasing stress among the teacher preparation faculty as they revise curricula and complete necessary paperwork at the departmental, college, university, and state levels.

Furthermore, recruiting new graduate students has become more difficult. The increase in starting teacher salaries has burdened school districts with the need to provide extra pay for teachers with advanced degrees, reducing the pool of potential recruits. Our ITEC and EDDL programs are experiencing enrollment issues. For ITEC, a state-funded grant known as the Online Teaching Academy recently came to an end. The EDDL Ed.S. program has seen declining enrollment over the past few years. We need to rebuild enrollment in these vital programs.

Opportunities

The state review and the science of reading audit results were positive. The state review came back showing that our programs were granted continued approval by the state department. We received glowing feedback from the reviewers and praise for our undergraduate and graduate programs, particularly regarding our continuous improvement plans, which effectively prepare our candidates to be day one ready in areas such as High Quality Instructional Materials, the Science of Reading, and our field experiences. The Science of Reading Audit's overall findings showed that we were

approaching the Quality of Literacy Instruction, and we met the standards for Quality of Field-Based Experience, Quality of Performance Management, and Continuous Improvement. The feedback we received offers us a chance to improve our efforts in teacher preparation and science of reading instruction. We have some revisions needed for our MAT and Secondary Programs related to SOR, and we are using the feedback and data to implement those changes.

The middle-level and secondary programs have all completed significant program changes, including a year-long residency, and have earned state approval. These changes will be implemented in the 2026-2027 academic year. In the long run, these shifts in teacher education specifically requiring a year-long residency have enhanced our programs. In addition, these changes have also enabled us to collaborate across programs and disciplines on campus to share a common vision for teacher education within the department.

Through the collaboration of three faculty members in the Teaching and Learning Department (Drs. Allison Freed, Jason Trumble, and Jessica Herring-Watson), the ITEC program's curriculum was revised to align with the ISTE standards, becoming an ISTE-recognized program and an ISTE certification provider. Students in the ITEC concentration of Leadership and Technology in Instructional Design will now also have the opportunity to complete ISTE certification using the assignments and projects completed within the program. This has great potential to become a significant recruitment opportunity because of the international recognition of the ISTE.

The graduate programs within the department took advantage of a new scholarship called the Teacher Academy Scholarship for students pursuing teaching and teachers already in the field pursuing an advanced degree related to classroom teaching. The scholarship pays up to \$6,000 per semester and does not need to be repaid if students teach in Arkansas for the number of years they receive the scholarship. It's an incredible opportunity as we continue to focus our efforts on recruiting new students for our undergraduate and graduate programs (MAT and ITEC).

Two faculty members teaching in the Teaching and Learning Department and their students completed two Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) experiences this academic year. One faculty member also completed the Global Learning Institute this May, to facilitate a COIL experience next academic year. This result shows promise in incorporating high-impact practices into our programs and courses to support the development of global competence and the internationalization of the college curriculum.

Summary

The 2024-2025 academic year presented the department with challenges and opportunities. Key challenges included integrating the Instructional Technology (ITEC) program and new faculty, navigating a leadership transition, and managing high demand for faculty to teach outside the department. The extensive state teacher education review and Science of Reading (SOR) audit, complicated by an unexpected ice storm, demanded significant departmental effort. Additionally, recruiting new graduate students, especially for the ITEC and EDDL programs, proved difficult due to shifts in teacher compensation and grant funding.

Despite these hurdles, the department achieved significant successes. The state review and SOR audit yielded positive results, affirming program approval and praising continuous improvement efforts. The SOR feedback, in particular, offered valuable insights for ongoing refinement. Middle-level and secondary programs successfully implemented substantial changes, including a year-long residency, enhancing collaboration within teacher education. Notably, the ITEC program was revised to align with ISTE standards, becoming an ISTE-recognized program and certification provider—a significant recruitment opportunity. Furthermore, the department expanded global learning initiatives through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) experiences, fostering global competence in the curriculum.