

## **REVIEW OF THE MARY AND JEAN BORG CENTER FOR READING AND LITERACY**

Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) Code: 90.1313  
Research and Service Center: Teacher Education and Professional Development, Specific Subject Areas

### **OVERVIEW**

The Center for Reading and Literacy at Illinois State University was approved by the Illinois Board of Higher Education as a state-recognized research and service center on October 2, 2001. In 2008 Jean Borg endowed the center, which was subsequently renamed the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy in honor of Jean Borg's mother and Jean Borg's gifts to the Illinois State University Foundation. Jean Borg graduated from Illinois State Normal University in 1950 and subsequently taught junior high school science, served as a school counselor, and served as a faculty member in curriculum and instruction at the University of South Florida. The Borg Center is housed in the School of Teaching and Learning within the College of Education. This is the fourth review of the center.

The Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy (hereinafter "the "Borg Center") has four primary objectives or goals: to provide services to policymakers in the areas of reading and literacy, to provide services to the state of Illinois in the areas of reading and literacy, to provide services to professional educators in the areas of reading and literacy, and to support research among university faculty, university students, and members of the wider research community to broaden the understanding of reading, literacy, and literacy education. These objectives align with the mission of Illinois State in that they provide opportunities to serve university students, children in central Illinois who struggle with reading, and educators who desire to improve their instruction in reading and literacy.

There are two other IBHE recognized research and service centers concerned with literacy and/or reading in the state of Illinois; the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While the Borg Center is not identical to the Center for Literacy or the Center for the Study of Reading in its mission, goals, and objectives, a review of each of these enduring centers revealed projects and processes to which the Borg Center can aspire. For example, the Center for Literacy at UIC thrives through its community, state, and national partnerships and the Center for the Study of Reading demonstrates success through external funding for research. These are two major long-term goals for the Borg Center moving forward.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT**

#### **Introduction and overview**

The self-study process was a comprehensive undertaking that involved a multi-faceted review and analysis. It encompassed an examination of existing documents and processes, including the initial unit request, endowment details, administrative and budgetary structures, current programs and initiatives, and an assessment of the Center's website. Additionally, it entailed a review of communication channels between the Center, the School of Teaching and Learning, the College of Education, and Illinois State University. Research activities were scrutinized, covering projects, protocols, participant and data management, student involvement, grant activities, and research publicity. Furthermore, the process included an analysis of data related to ongoing projects, such as community services, resource circulation, feedback from professional learning activities, faculty involvement, and website analytics. Finally, it involved an evaluation of the progress made toward the recommendations from the previous self-study report and the strategic plan goals, ensuring alignment with long-term objectives and continuous improvement.

The Director of the Borg Center, Dr. Deborah MacPhee, is an associate professor in the School of Teaching and Learning with expertise in research and teaching in the fields of reading and literacy education. She served as interim director for two years before being named permanent director in May 2019. Faculty colleagues are School of Teaching and Learning faculty who engage in the work of the Borg Center. Faculty contribute to the center in various ways: providing professional learning opportunities, working on grant projects, and conducting research

that reflects the goals and objectives of the center. The Borg Center supports the work of faculty colleagues with additional compensation, reassigned time, resources and materials, and research and writing groups. Major initiatives, past and present, undertaken by center faculty and faculty associates are briefly described below.

### **Accomplishments since the prior program review**

A focus of the new leadership has been to establish/re-establish programs/initiatives in the Borg Center that reflect the four primary goals of the research and service unit. Following is a list of Borg Center Accomplishments since summer 2021.

#### **Community Services.**

The Center offers low-cost tutoring and literacy assessments to community members year-round. Families can optionally participate in research and authorize student data for teaching purposes, though not required for services. Authorized data is organized for faculty teaching access. The director manages these services, which continued online during COVID with reduced demand. As demand increased, trained student workers were hired as tutors, enhancing their learning and providing relevant experience. Service revenue pays student workers and purchases assessment/tutoring materials for the resource library.

The Center's resource library continues expanding, with over \$4,000 raised through a Hatch project to add diverse literature. Faculty and teacher candidates utilize these resources for instruction and clinical experiences. New resources are barcoded and cataloged in Libib for easy checkout. Course instructors are informed about the space as a resource and invited for class orientations, informing university students about available resources and the Center's work. During fall and spring, a graduate assistant manages resources and assists patrons with self-checkout.

#### **Professional Learning.**

**Redbird Educator Series.** During COVID, the Center partnered with the College of Education to offer the Redbird Educator Series - one-hour virtual professional development webinars by faculty for preK-12 educators on literacy topics. Live sessions were recorded and posted on the Center website. The webinars, detailed in the chart with titles, facilitators, attendees, and video views, reached over 2,000 educators regionally and beyond.

**Illinois Tutoring Initiative Tutor Training Modules.** The Center collaborated with the Illinois Tutoring Initiative (ITI) to develop core and content training modules for Illinois tutors. Working with ITI teams, the Center director assembled a leadership team to create the core modules and identify content experts from relevant departments to develop subject-specific modules. The leadership team provided a template, reviewed all modules before publication, and ensured each module contained key components like an introduction, glossary, research overview, evidence-based techniques, summary, references, and assessment. Relevant resource packets were also included. Around 1,000 tutors have completed these modules before tutoring children in Illinois. The chart outlines module titles, video links, and creators.

**America Reads partnership.** The Center collaborates with the America Reads, providing literacy education professional learning to university students serving as tutors in local schools and organizations. Each semester, tutors attend mandatory workshops conducted by Center faculty in small groups. The Center offers new literacy content based on the America Reads Director's feedback. These America Reads tutors support K-12 students.

**Non-tenure track faculty workshops.** The Center partners with the School of Teaching and Learning to provide professional learning sequences for non-tenure track (NTT) faculty. Developed collaboratively based on effective professional learning research, the sequences include a pre-semester 3-hour workshop and three follow-up conversations during the semester. Anonymous feedback informs NTT faculty's professional development needs. School faculty are surveyed periodically to identify expertise and interest in facilitating NTT sequences. The chart shows data on NTT professional development since the last self-study.

**Policy Connections.** The Borg Center is becoming more involved with policy as it relates to literacy teaching and learning in Illinois.

**Illinois Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (IACTE).** The Center's director serves on a IACTE committee of higher education literacy faculty. The committee discusses proposed reading/literacy policies, attends stakeholder meetings, and provides a collective higher ed voice to policymakers and agencies like the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Recently, committee members participated as experts in ISBE's 2022 Illinois Literacy Summit, engaging in discussions that contributed to passing a policy requiring ISBE to develop a comprehensive state literacy plan. The committee is now contributing to writing and reviewing this plan.

**Policy liaison.** The Borg Center director serves as a policy liaison to the School of Teaching and Learning and College of Education by keeping relevant stakeholders informed of policy proposals that have the potential to impact literacy teacher education and/or preK-12 literacy education.

Special Projects. On occasion, the Borg Center committee recognizes a need or sees an opportunity to initiate work that is not part of the annual plan. These opportunities are designated as special projects. Recent projects include:

- Kids are always learning infographic - Created by Center faculty during COVID, highlighting home learning activities aligned with state standards and providing related resources. Available on the Center website with nearly 5,000 views.
- Guest speaker - Virtual event in November 2022 featuring author Cornelius Minor on the topic "What School Is and What We Can Make It," with around 150 participants from the university community.
- Foundational reading video series - Five short videos produced by University Marketing and Communications featuring literacy faculty addressing questions on literacy topics like foundational reading skills, writing support, and diverse texts, made public on the Center website.
- Student projects - The Center now provides opportunities for teacher candidates to create resources like videos and other materials that are shared through the Center, providing authentic audiences and motivating student learning.

#### Research and Grant Writing Activities.

One priority of the Borg Center is to seek funding to support its current projects and programs and to initiate new projects. With goals of supporting existing projects and initiating new projects, the director of the Center has focused on research grant opportunities and partnering with faculty colleagues and other research institutions to develop proposals that reflect the mission and goals of the Center.

#### Cross Disciplinary Work.

The Center's director serves as a literacy expert on the Multidisciplinary Psychoeducational Assessment Service (MPAS) committee. MPAS is offered through the Psychology Department's Psychological Services Center, providing diagnostic assessments for children and adolescents with multiple functional concerns. The multidisciplinary committee includes experts from various fields who collaborate to support school psychology doctoral students managing client cases. They discuss interdisciplinary assessment results and develop recommendations collaboratively.

#### Student Learning.

The Center's initiatives offer multifaceted support for university students. The resource library provides teacher candidates and tutors with materials to plan and implement literacy instruction for coursework, clinical experiences, and tutoring sessions. Research projects present opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to observe, participate in, and contribute to research teams. Data from service programs is accessible to instructors, enriching student learning in literacy courses within the School of Teaching and Learning. Student workers gain valuable experience as hired and trained tutors, applying evidence-based instructional practices. Furthermore, the Center provides professional learning for America Reads tutors, who are university students from various departments across campus.

#### Assessment

##### *Assessment Strategies and Methods*

Since the last self-study report, the process for assessing the work of the Center has continued to evolve. A School of Teaching and Learning service committee was established to advise and support the work of Borg Center. The

committee meets 2-4 times per year to review data from Center programs and activities and provide feedback on the efficiency and impact of the work. The committee supports the planning and implementation of special projects that align with the strategic plan of the Center and respond to the needs of the community. The process involves accessing data from programs and initiatives and feedback from stakeholders to identify specific yearly assessment targets that move the Center toward achieving the long-term goals and objectives set forth in its strategic plan

#### *Assessment Targets*

- Targets set to assess the Borg Center's success include the following:
- Increase student involvement in research and service in the Center.
- Continue to expand the work of the Borg Center as a professional learning resource for schools and districts throughout Illinois.
- Engage literacy faculty from across the state in collaboratively producing research-based resources that address issues of literacy teaching and learning in Illinois.
- Develop research projects/partnerships that result in peer-reviewed publications that have a national impact on the field of literacy education.
- Continue to pursue external funding to support research and service projects in the Borg Center with the goal of becoming a self-sustaining unit.

#### **Resources**

The School of Teaching and Learning provides support to the Borg Center, including a reduced teaching load and summer salary for the Director, and a graduate assistant managing resources. The Director oversees an operational budget funded by services revenue, covering day-to-day operations like tutoring, assessment, student workers' wages, and supplies. Service programs have grown since the last review. The Center also has an endowment budget recently moved from the College to the School for streamlined management. This centralized budgeting approach has improved expenditure processes. The endowment funds support impactful projects like additional graduate assistants, technology acquisitions for tutoring/assessment, collaboration tools, and special initiatives like videos and guest speakers since the previous self-study.

#### **Response to previous program review recommendations**

To address the academic planning committee's recommendations from of the 2019-2020 program review, the Borg Center has continued to contribute to the academic mission of the University by involving Illinois State University students in center programs and projects, including hiring undergraduate student workers as tutors, involving graduate students in research and publications, and including students in the development of resources. Since the last program review and as a response to COVID circumstances, the Borg Center initiated the Redbird Educator Series to provide professional development webinars to Illinois State students and Illinois educators. As part of the current self-study, the director of the Center reviewed three national literacy centers for comparison and aspiration. As a result of this review, the Director concluded that the Center could improve by implementing new collaborations with community agencies, offering tutoring scholarships, and promoting community services with patron testimonials.

The Borg Center has continued to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity by assembling a diverse faculty advisory committee, creating multimedia resources that are accessible to more people, and bringing in a guest speaker to educate faculty, students, and mentor teachers on ways to make pre-K-12 schools more equitable spaces. The assessment plan for the Borg Center has been refined to improve communication among leadership and to review planning and assessment documents more regularly in a cycle of continuous improvement. Since the last program review, the focus toward self-sustainability for the Center has been on the development of fee-for-service programs and contracting with the Illinois Tutoring Initiative to develop tutor training modules.

#### **Major findings of this self-study**

The major findings of the self-study are:

The Borg Center has continued to offer tutoring and assessment services to the community and involved more ISU students in these programs as service providers and researchers.

- The Borg Center has increased its outreach to families, educators, and policymakers through the development of multimedia resources that are accessible on the website.
- Faculty involvement in the work of the Center has increased. Faculty colleagues have been hired by the Center to provide professional learning in K-12 schools and on campus to non-tenured faculty and America Reads tutors, and to develop resources to address current policy initiatives surrounding literacy education.
- Faculty colleagues have initiated and sustained a school-university research partnership,
- A refined assessment plan to improve communication and consistency in the planning and assessments cycle for continuous improvement.
- The Center can do more to advertise programs and promote and celebrate projects and initiatives.
- Increased efforts and resources into securing external funding to support current programs and initiate new work.

### **Initiatives for the next program review cycle**

Based on the findings from this self-study, the Borg Center will focus on the following initiatives over the next four years:

Continue to support Illinois State student learning through research and service opportunities and resource development.

- Identify external funding sources and develop and submit grant proposals to support projects that reflect the mission and goals of the Borg Center.
- Continue to initiate and foster research and service partnerships with schools and community organizations.
- Continue to refine the Center's website to increase the visibility of the Center on campus and in the community.
- Organize and/or sponsor/co-sponsor at least one public event per year to address literacy policy issues in the state of Illinois.

## **PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**Review Outcome.** The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy program for their efforts in completing a comprehensive self-study report. The self-study is thorough with insightful evidence provided throughout the report. The committee notes the center's establishment of an ad hoc committee to support the development of the self-study report. Data was reviewed from various stakeholder groups, including secondary sources, feedback from professional learning activities, college faculty, website analytics, and reviews of previous self-study recommendations. The committee also commends the center's quality review of the communication structures and research activities associated with the program.

The committee notes the center's well-developed organizational structure that is clearly outlined by the organizational chart. No changes to the organizational structure were noted since the last program review. Housed within the College of Education's School of Teaching and Learning, the center was established in 2001 and endowed in 2008. The committee applauds the center's EDI efforts, including specific goals and strategies aimed at supporting faculty and students from historically underrepresented groups. The committee also notes the clear tracking and reporting of the center's outcomes and their connections to specific goals and strategies.

The committee recognizes the direct alignment between the center's mission and vision and the university's *Educate-Connect-Elevate* Strategic Plan. Evidence of the center's focus on the university's goals of enhancing strength and stability, fostering innovation, nurturing diversity and inclusion, and enriching engagement were also recognized by the committee. The center's foundational emphasis on student learning is also noteworthy with initiatives focusing on tutoring, supporting student research projects, and professional learning for America Reads tutors who are students from departments across campus.

Since the last program review, the center established a School of Teaching and Learning service committee to provide additional support and advisement to the center. The service committee meets a few times each year to review center data and provide feedback on the center's overall efficiency and progress on various initiatives. The committee applauds the center's establishment of this committee to support its operations. The committee also notes the center's five assessment targets. Each target is clear, aligned with the center's strategic plan, and measurable.

The committee congratulates the center for a successful Hatch Fundraising Project that raised over \$4,000 and resulted in an increase in the number of diverse texts. The committee also noted the establishment of a faculty advisory committee and the securement of a university grant to support a research partnership with a rural school district. Efforts to continue providing these services through COVID was also recognized by the committee. The Redbird Educator Series was also developed during COVID and involved a series of learning webinars and videos on the current state of literacy education. The committee also congratulates the center on the steady growth in tutoring services during the past five years, increasing from 28 students/families in 2019-20 to 58 students/families in 2022-23. Literacy assessment services offered by the center have also increased during this time period. The center's hiring and training of student workers to support this growth was also acknowledged by the committee. The committee praises the center for its partnership with the Illinois Tutoring Initiative in the provision of training and support for Illinois tutors that has directly impacted more than 1,000 tutors.

The committee recognizes the center's work in completing a financial risk assessment survey in 2022. The committee also noted one of the outcomes of this assessment was the movement of the center's endowment budget from the College of Education to the School of Teaching and Learning. This move appears to have improved the center's management of these financial resources and the committee encourages the center to continue monitoring the impact of this new system. The hiring of an additional graduate assistant to support the center's projects was also recognized by the committee. The committee appreciates the center's work in addressing each of the recommendations from the previous program review. The committee encourages the center continues their work in these areas while also drawing from the study's major findings and developed initiatives.

### **Recommendations.**

The Academic Planning Committee appreciates the work of the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy staff in developing this self-study report. Overall, the report was well-written, thorough, and provided insightful information about the center's current initiatives and future plans. The committee congratulates the Mary and Jean Borg Center for Reading and Literacy on a successful eight years.

In addition to the center's noteworthy efforts and accomplishments, the Academic Planning Committee provided recommendations for consideration. The committee's recommendations outlined below are to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. Details describing the actions and outcomes associated with each of the committee's recommendations should be included in the next program review self-study report that is tentatively due October 1, 2028.

**Continued review of strategic plan.** The committee noted the center's strategic plan was developed in 2001. The committee recommends the center continue reviewing their planning documents and possibly consider updating their strategic plan every five to 10 years.

**Further stakeholder engagement in center planning.** The committee congratulates the center on its planning efforts and recommends the center consider further engaging stakeholders in the planning processes. While the center has demonstrated inclusivity in various aspects, involving additional stakeholders throughout the assessment and planning phases could further promote a participatory culture while also garnering valuable insights and perspectives that may not otherwise be considered. Possible strategies include bringing more faculty and students into the planning and self-study processes, engaging with campus partners, and obtaining input from educators in the field.

**Continue implementing and refining the center's assessment plan.** The committee applauds the center's assessment targets. Building upon these targets, the committee encourages the center to take the next step and begin tracking the actual outcomes of these targets. Tracking of these outcomes could provide additional planning information for the center and might also provide insight or support for additional funding opportunities.

**Establish targeted growth.** The center has experienced an increased demand for its services. The committee recommends the center consider establishing capacity levels or targeted growth goals to allow for more efficient and effective resource planning. The center may wish to develop a marketing plan once targeted goals for growth are established.

**Continue seeking funding opportunities.** The committee recommends the center consider additional internal and external funding opportunities to support the continued growth of its services. The committee suggests the center seek additional feedback from various sources when submitting or receiving feedback from their smaller grant applications. The feedback could be used to strengthen future applications. Working with Research and Sponsored Programs is also encouraged.