



# External Reviewer's Report Master of Science in Education and Technology

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## Part 1: Executive Summary of Findings

### **Strategic Focus**

The Master of Science in Education and Technology (MSET) is strategically aligned with Dakota State University's long-standing mission integrating education and technology. University leadership, faculty, and institutional effectiveness staff consistently emphasized that the MSET reflects DSU's historic identity while responding to current workforce and state priorities. The program's focus on instructional technology, cybersecurity, computer science education, and emerging technologies positions it as a mission-critical graduate offering. Recent additions of specializations and increased institutional autonomy have further strengthened its strategic relevance at both the university and state priorities.

### **Learning Outcomes, Curriculum, and Assessment**

The MSET curriculum emphasizes applied, up-to-date learning designed to prepare practicing educators and instructional professionals to integrate technology meaningfully into educational settings. Recent curricular changes, including the introduction of a capstone experience, new specializations, and the promise of embedded assessments aligned with Program Learning Outcomes, have strengthened the program's assessment framework. Interviewees view these transitions as positive and necessary, though these changes are still in development. The program demonstrates strong alignment between learning outcomes, coursework, and applied professional practice.

### **Resource Supports**

The program benefits from strong institutional and state support. Faculty quality, instructional design support, technology infrastructure, and undergraduate alumni pipelines were repeatedly cited as strengths. Grant funding has played a critical role in maintaining program affordability, supporting enrollment, and enabling innovation, with leadership expressing continued commitment to securing future funding in areas such as cyber education, literacy and artificial intelligence.

### **Graduation and Growth**

Graduation rates and student persistence reflect a stable, albeit relatively small, online graduate program serving primarily working professionals. With recent changes, there has been a reduction in enrollment, but both the program report and interviewees see these reductions in enrollment as an artifact of recent changes to the program more than a systemic issue. Leadership anticipates future growth through targeted marketing efforts beyond DSU alumni. Enrollment patterns, particularly within grant-supported specializations, suggest strong demand aligned with state priorities, though sustained recruitment strategies remain essential.

### **Strengths**

Key program strengths include strong institutional mission alignment, high-quality and collaborative faculty, curriculum responsiveness to emerging technologies, robust support structures, and affordable access through grant funding. Interviewees consistently emphasized the program's applied nature and relevance to professional practice.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

Opportunities include more systematic use of advisory board feedback, continued refinement of the capstone assessment model, targeted enrollment growth strategies, and potential retitling of the Literacy Instructional Coaching specialization to more clearly align with the program's technology focus. Feedback from recent graduates suggests opportunities to

broaden curricular attention to social-emotional impacts of technology and greater focus on face-to-face instructional contexts.

### **Overall Summary**

Overall, the MSET program is academically strong, strategically aligned, and positioned for continued relevance and growth. With focused attention on enrollment strategy, assessment systematization, and continued curricular refinement, the program is well situated to remain a valuable component of DSU's graduate portfolio.

## **Part 2: Schedule of Virtual Visits**

### **Wednesday April 1, 2026**

1:00pm – 2:00pm with Jeanette McGreevy, Director of Institutional Effectiveness

2:00pm – 3:00pm with Mark Hawkes, Dean of Graduate Studies

3:00pm – 3:30pm with Taylor Edwards, Recent Program Graduate

4:00pm – 4:30pm with Sylvia Johnson, Recent Program Graduate

### **Tuesday April 7, 2026**

9:00am – 10:00am with Kindra Schneider and Kevin Smith, Current and Former Program Coordinators

11:30am – 12:00pm with Rebecca Hoey and David De Jong, Provost and CEHP Dean

## **Part 3: Program Evaluation**

### **Program Strategic Focus**

The Master of Science in Education and Technology (MSET) demonstrates strong strategic alignment with Dakota State University's historic and contemporary mission integrating education and technology. This is an alignment that reflects the university's distinctive role within the South Dakota Board of Regents system. Dakota State University has long served both as a teacher-preparation institution and a technology-focused university, and interviewees consistently emphasized that the MSET embodies this dual mission in a way that few graduate programs are positioned to do.

Senior leadership, including the Provost and College of Education and Human Performance Dean, affirmed that the MSET is not a peripheral or legacy program, but a mission-critical graduate offering that supports statewide priorities. The program contributes directly to workforce development, educator pipeline sustainability, and statewide technology integration efforts. Its emphasis on instructional technology, computer science education, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies aligns with Regents system priorities around technology-focused academic programs and applied graduate education.

Recent programmatic changes further strengthen this strategic positioning. The transition away from a shared curricular arrangement with the University of South Dakota, the renaming of the program to Education and Technology, and the development of clearly defined specializations represent intentional decisions that increase institutional ownership, clarify program identity, and enhance responsiveness to state and system-level needs. These changes were consistently characterized by leadership and faculty as proactive improvements rather than reactive adjustments.

## **Program Curriculum, Learning Outcomes, and Assessment**

### *Curriculum Design and Alignment*

The MSET curriculum is designed to serve practicing educators and instructional professionals through a fully online, applied, and project-based model. Both faculty and administrators described a coherent curricular sequence that moves students from foundational knowledge in instructional design, visual design, educational research, and programming toward advanced application through leadership, evaluation, and emerging technologies coursework. This progression is documented in the Program Review Report's plans of study and reinforced by the program website's emphasis on flexible, career-relevant learning.

Interviews with faculty and former students highlight the curriculum's emphasis on meaningful application of technology rather than tool-based exposure alone. Graduates consistently noted that the program prepared them not only for technical competencies, including coding and systems thinking, but also for thoughtful and effective instructional use of technology in educational settings. This applied focus supports the expectation that graduate programs provide clear value to professional practice and workforce needs.

### *Program Learning Outcomes and Assessment*

As documented in Section 9 of the Program Review Report, the MSET program has recently revised its approach to assessing Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Historically, assessment relied heavily on overall course grades, which faculty determined did not provide sufficient detail to guide improvement or demonstrate student learning in a meaningful way. During the current review cycle, the program transitioned to an embedded, artifact-based assessment model aligned directly with each PLO.

This shift creates a programmatic expectation for demonstrable student learning outcomes and evidence-based program evaluation. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Assessment and Policy emphasized that DSU is moving toward greater use of root cause analysis across academic programs, and the MSET's revised assessment structure was explicitly identified as consistent with this system-level direction.

Early evidence from the new assessment model indicates that the vast majority of students meet or exceed established proficiency benchmarks across research, instructional design, and leadership outcomes. While longitudinal data under the revised system are still developing, interviewees expressed confidence that the new approach provides a stronger foundation for documenting student achievement and program effectiveness in future Regents reviews.

### *Capstone as Culminating Assessment*

A major curricular and assessment development during the review period is the program's transition from a portfolio-based culminating requirement to a structured capstone experience housed within a designated course. Faculty, program leadership, and graduate studies

administration consistently described this change as an improvement in rigor, consistency, and alignment of learning outcomes.

The capstone model enables clearer demonstration of graduate-level learning by requiring students to synthesize and apply knowledge across the curriculum in a structured, faculty-evaluated context. While interviewees acknowledged that the capstone model is still in transition, there was strong agreement that it represents a more robust and defensible culminating assessment moving forward.

### **Program Resource Supports**

The MSET program benefits from multiple layers of institutional support that align with South Dakota Board of Regents expectations for resource adequacy and program sustainability. Faculty teaching in the program possess strong disciplinary expertise and professional experience, and both leadership and students emphasized that instructional quality is a defining strength of the program.

Institutional supports include graduate student advising through the Office of Graduate Studies, instructional design and pedagogical assistance through the Center for Teaching and Learning, robust library and research services, and university-wide technology infrastructure that supports a fully online delivery. These supports were cited by faculty and students as contributing positively to student learning and persistence.

Grant funding plays a particularly significant role in supporting the MSET program as can be seen in Section 7 of the Program Review Report. This was corroborated by interviews at every level, which emphasized that external funding has been instrumental in maintaining program affordability, expanding access, and supporting innovation in priority areas such as instructional coach literacy, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies. The Provost and College Dean expressed clear intent to continue pursuing grant opportunities, with particular emphasis in areas such as artificial intelligence, to sustain low-cost access and responsiveness to evolving workforce needs. These efforts were framed not as reliance on temporary resources, but as responsible stewardship aligned with priorities around access, innovation, and statewide impact.

### **Program Graduation Rates, Placement, and Growth**

Enrollment, retention, and graduation data reported in Section 5 of the Program Review Report indicate a historically stable graduate program serving primarily working professionals, most of whom are practicing educators. More recent data show a dip in enrollment due to major changes to the program as a result of continuous improvement efforts. Faculty and administrators emphasized that time-to-degree and persistence patterns reflect the realities of part-time online graduate study rather than issues of program design or student preparedness.

Interviews with leadership stressed the importance of evaluating productivity metrics in appropriate context. For specialized online graduate programs such as the MSET, enrollment and completion figures must be considered alongside mission alignment, service to state priorities, and workforce impact. Viewed through this lens, and in consideration of grant-supported specializations, the program's steady enrollments and completions represent appropriate scale and function for Dakota State University.

At the same time, leadership acknowledged that continued attention to enrollment growth is necessary. There is optimism that enrollments will increase beyond DSU undergraduate alumni

as targeted marketing and outreach efforts expand, but interviewees emphasized that such growth will require sustained, intentional effort rather than passive demand.

### **Summary of Strengths**

Multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, program documentation, assessment data, and a website analysis, support the following strengths of the MSET program:

- Strong alignment with Dakota State University's mission and its role within the South Dakota Board of Regents system
- High-quality, collaborative faculty and effective program leadership
- An applied, relevant curriculum that supports professional practice
- Responsiveness to emerging technologies and state workforce needs
- Robust institutional support structures for online graduate education
- Affordability and access supported through strategic grant funding
- Positive student and alumni perceptions of instructional quality and relevance

These strengths were consistently reinforced across interviews with senior leadership, faculty, students, graduate studies administration, and institutional effectiveness leadership.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

While the MSET program demonstrates many strengths, interviewees also identified areas where continued improvement would further strengthen the program.

Targeted enrollment strategies will be essential to sustaining growth and broadening the program's reach beyond internal pipelines. Clear messaging that emphasizes the program's unique intersection of education and technology should support this effort.

Several interviewees noted that the Literacy Instructional Coaching specialization, while mission-critical for enrollment and state partnership, appears less clearly aligned with the technology-focused identity of the degree. There was broad openness to retitling the specialization (e.g., Literacy in the Digital Age) to enhance coherence, while recognizing the need to coordinate with partner institutions and preserve its strong state alignment.

Several interviewees also noted opportunities to use the program's advisory board more systematically to support continuous improvement in areas such as enrollment strategy, curriculum responsiveness, and program mission alignment. Formalizing how advisory input is documented and used would strengthen evidence of data-informed governance.

As the capstone assessment model continues to develop, intentional attention to documentation, faculty calibration, and explicit connections between assessment results and program decisions will further strengthen the program's evaluation framework.

Finally, alumni feedback suggests opportunities to broaden curricular attention to the social-emotional impacts of technology use and to applications of technology in face-to-face and blended instructional environments. Addressing these areas may enhance curriculum relevance without altering the program's core focus.