

SECTION V—USE OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO IMPROVE CANDIDATE AND PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Introduction

Overall we are pleased with the data we have collected from our eight assessments. The data indicate that our graduates have the content knowledge; the professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach children from Birth to age 8; and that they have a positive impact on children's learning. The unit-sponsored employment survey of recent graduates also supports this conclusion, as our graduates are being hired and are becoming successful in the profession. In our state and region we have graduates teaching in the primary grades in public and private schools, working in both center-based and family child care programs, being hired to develop new child care programs, directing employee sponsored and private child care centers, serving on the board of NHAEYC, teaching in demonstration schools at various colleges, and teaching early childhood in the high school career programs and in the community technical college system. Other graduates find success in these roles in other parts of the country as well. Many enroll in advanced degree programs after spending time in the field.

1. Content Knowledge

We find this area to be strong, based on the child study and curriculum unit assessments. We are pleased with this result, especially since the Early Childhood Methods course is the first “early childhood only” course that our candidates take; other foundational courses include elementary and special education candidates (e.g. literacy, curriculum development, child development, etc.). We believe that our demonstration site (the KSC Child Development Center) plays a crucial role as the supervising teachers all hold Master's degrees in Early Childhood or related fields and have many years of experience both teaching children and supervising pre-service teachers. There is also excellent communication between program faculty and the teachers in the demonstration site. While we have worked closely with the K-3 teachers who supervise our candidates in their methods and student teaching placements, evaluating early childhood content knowledge within the public school system is sometimes a challenge. This is an area for continued growth and attention. We will be continuing our work to build these relationships through our work to establish true Professional Development Schools in addition to our early learning demonstrate site (Birth to age 5). The student teaching supervisor for early childhood will begin to evaluate student teaching units from the K-3 placements this fall semester, in order to better assess this component of content knowledge.

2. Professional and pedagogical knowledge, skill, and dispositions

Candidate's pedagogical knowledge is strong, as seen in the data gathered from our assessments; their pedagogical skill develops steadily through their clinical experiences. Program completers must Meet Expectations in this area, and they do. We have identified the area of assessment (NAEYC Standard III) as a weakness, based on our data, and have revised the methods course, including adding a new text, to address this weakness. Next year's data will give us more information and allow us to evaluate whether these changes are working. We work closely with unit leadership through the Teacher Education Graduate Studies Office to counsel candidates out

of the major if they are unable to meet standards for knowledge, skills, or dispositions. Sometimes a candidate who has the content knowledge and skill level, but does not meet our expectations for attitude and professionalism has withdrawn from the program. With every candidate who is not meeting expectations in this area, we provide career counseling and additional academic support to help her/him find other alternatives that better match his/her interests, commitment, and abilities. We are working with the unit to develop additional tools to assess dispositions and to provide early feedback on our expectations. We are also working with candidates to meet the professional expectations of meeting deadlines, excellent written communication skills, professional dress, etc. As we work to improve our assessment data, we are improving our data collection approach to link each component of the assignments to the appropriate standards. This will allow us to provide more focused feedback to candidates, and to better identify areas for continual improvement.

3. Student learning

This area is one where we feel that we need additional data in order to better understand our candidates' impact on student learning and their ability to create successful learning environments for children. While our observation of candidates during their clinical experiences provides evidence of their ability to have a positive impact on student learning, we need to strengthen our procedures and systems to document and assess this aspect of candidate performance. We have strengthened the guidelines and rubric for the student teaching unit reflection (assessment #5) in order to guide candidate reflection to address the standards. We are also planning to redesign the final portfolio expectations to include more samples of student work, and may use this as an alternate assessment in the future.

Summary comments

At the time of this report preparation the entire college is undergoing curriculum revision to address a shift in curriculum structure from the basic course being worth 3 credits (with 3 contact hours) to the basic course being worth 4 credits (with 4 contact hours). In addition the college is in the process of implementing a new general education curriculum that will feature a focus on thinking and writing, quantitative skills, disciplinary perspectives, and interdisciplinary coursework. The campus is also studying the need for an electronic portfolio system that could enhance our ability to collect assessment data.

We see these multiple initiatives as an opportunity to strengthen our early childhood curriculum. Our plans include moving to a methods experience for Birth to age 5 and a methods experience for primary grades (K-3), both of which will include clinical field experiences and college class work. Currently candidates accomplish both of these within a 12 credit block; the new program will provide us with two 8 credit blocks, for a total of 16 credits. As we redesign we are using both the state and the NAEYC standards as our framework for assessing candidate progress.

The college formed a Teacher Education Council last spring which will provide improved oversight of unit-wide assessments and curriculum decisions. The co-authors of this report are both members of the Council. This allows us to both benefit from and have input to the work of

the Council. We expect the strengthened unit assessment strategies will improve our ability to collect appropriate assessment data on our candidates.

We have used authentic assessments here, meaning that these assessments are projects we have used for many years, not ones designed specifically for this self study and reporting process. The co-authors of the report find that the process of developing the report has helped us to be even more explicit about the importance of NAEYC standards in our work with Early Childhood teacher candidates. As we move ahead, we will rework our data collection procedures to allow us to evaluate student progress against each standard. We look forward to the opportunity to strengthen the Early Childhood curriculum based on the self study, the SPA report, and the feedback we receive from this work. Our efforts will be on-going, and we are proud to be part of NAEYC.