

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

Introduction

While we only have data from 4 of our 8 key ACEI Assessments at this time, including: 1) Praxis II (Assessment 1 – very limited content-knowledge data); 2) Methods Mathematics Project (Assessment 3 – emphasis on planning and content knowledge); 3) Student Teaching Evaluation form (Assessment 4), and: 4) Methods Science Project (Assessment 5 – pedagogy and content knowledge) – we believe our initial results are promising. These data indicate that our candidates have basic content knowledge in all targeted areas and the professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach children in Kindergarten through Grade 8. 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 the Northeast region and beyond, we have graduates teaching successfully in elementary grades in public and private schools alike. Additionally, many of our graduates go on for advanced degrees after spending time in elementary classrooms.

1. Content Knowledge

For elementary certification, determining candidates' content knowledge is somewhat challenging. Elementary grade teachers are required to teach it all. A strong fund of knowledge in the various content areas is certainly necessary, but it is difficult to measure and/or to ensure. At this point, we are using Praxis II scores to determine content knowledge for certification, but not for graduation. Our initial Praxis II data, although extremely limited at this time, suggest that our students do, in fact, have the necessary content knowledge in the core areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies to be effective elementary grade teachers. Beyond this, we determine candidate content knowledge through our Methods content-specific projects and Teaching Portfolio Artifacts (Assessment 2). In each case, candidates conduct the necessary research, both site-based (in conjunction with their cooperating teachers) and through the college's research facilities, to teach in a current and well-informed manner.

General education course requirements (two math courses, a history and a lab science) also serve as a means of strengthening our candidates' content knowledge. Course grades from general education courses can be subjective, but we believe that passing rates on the Praxis II exam suggest that the combination of required course work and ongoing research essential to teaching at the Methods and student teaching levels does reflect a firm base of content knowledge in our elementary education candidates. It is important to note that we plan to direct more attention to content knowledge acquisition as we re-design our elementary education program in the fall of 2006. Specifically, we will be offering two Methods blocks (8 credits each) – which is 8 credits beyond what is offered presently. Methods will be divided into a literacy/social studies block and a mathematics/science block with twice as much time given to content-specific instruction. We are also in the process of designing a systematic way to collect and analyze Praxis II data in the future so our data will be more in-depth and useful to us in the future.

2. Professional and pedagogical knowledge, skill, and dispositions

Generally our 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.

In most cases and according to data from the Danielson evaluation form and the Methods projects, our candidates' teaching skills develop over time with only a few areas needing additional attention. Presently, we have identified *assessment* (ACEI Standard 4) as an area requiring more direct instruction and practice. We will be revising Methods courses and projects to address this weakness and will introduce assessment earlier in our new program. One plan is to make assessment in the candidates' own coursework more transparent from the outset – to involve them in understanding formative and summative assessment tools and ways to differentiate assessment as they experience it in their education courses. Another plan is to include rubric building as a key element within all education classes.

Assessment of candidates' dispositions for teaching falls within the final category of our Danielson Evaluation form. In general, our candidates fall within the Meets or Exceeds Expectations category in this area. However, we occasionally have students who do not display the dispositions needed to work with elementary students effectively. We work closely with our Teacher Education and Graduate Studies Office to monitor growth (or lack of growth) and counsel candidates out of the major if they are unable to meet expectations for attitude and professionalism. With every candidate who is not meeting expectations in this area, we provide career counseling and additional academic support to help her/him find alternatives that better match his/her interests, commitment, and abilities. We are working with the Keene State College Teacher Education Unit (all certification areas) to develop additional tools to assess dispositions and to provide early feedback on our expectations. We are also working with candidates to consistently meet the professional expectations regarding timeliness, 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. Impact on Student learning

This is another area of concern to us—an area that will be targeting for attention in our new program. We need new data sources to better understand the impact of our candidate's work on student learning. This aligns with our determination to improve candidate understanding of assessment in general; to teach our candidates how to create assessment tools (both formative and summative) that are directly tied to learning objectives and that meet the needs of the unique group of learners in a given setting. We will be strengthening the guidelines and rubrics for the Methods projects to guide candidate reflection regarding the impact of their lessons on student learning and to put more emphasis on both formative and summative assessment techniques. We are also planning to redesign the final portfolio expectations to include more samples of student work that have been assessed with candidate-created rubrics and to require

reflections regarding how assessment tools have been effective and how they could be honed to be more effective.

Summary comments

As we prepare this report, 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, and integrative studies. We see these multiple initiatives as an opportunity to strengthen our elementary education curriculum. Our plans include moving to a two-part Methods course sequence both of which would include clinical field experiences and college class work. As we redesign, we are using both the state and the ACEI standards as our framework for assessing candidate progress. We look forward to this opportunity, and find that the process of self study for this report has helped us focus our efforts in a positive way.