Department of Special Education
Closing the Assessment Loop 2010

The faculty members of the department of special education continuously review various types of program data to ensure 1) the program continues to meet the educational needs of teacher education candidates, 2) the curriculum is consistent with current research, best practices, and legal/educational policy guidelines, and 3) graduates have developed the skills needed to be exceptional educators. Discussions related to program assessment and improvements are held in different venues throughout the academic years including: retreats, faculty meetings, committee meetings, and ad-hoc committee meetings. A brief summary of some of those assessment activities follows.

Program Assessment System: Transition Point Assessments

Admission: Requirements for admission include a 2.75 GPA, successful WEST-B scores and a writing sample evaluation. This is typically the essay section of the application that is evaluated for content and style by the department admissions committee.

First Block: The department has three courses that students take concurrently at the beginning of their department course work. These three courses have shared assignments, which are typically independently evaluated by the two classroom instructors. An evaluation rubric is used for all performance-based assignments in the college classroom. Rubric items are differentiated for the content of the two classes. Items related to lesson planning and teaching are averaged and reported as the assessment score for SPED 420. Rubric items measuring classroom management are reported at the assessment score for SPED 460. Rubric scores for two formal observations are averaged for the assessment score for the practicum SPED 440.

Reading Block: A specific rubric was designed for the reading block. Observations are videotaped and scored. Feedback on observations is given verbally and in writing. A small group of students meets with the instructor and each student shows his or her videotape for peer and instructor feedback. Peers also fill out scoring rubrics however these rubrics are used for feedback only and are not included in the assessment score for each student. Two scores are calculated for each student, the practicum score is an average of the rubric scores for the videotaped lessons. The course assessment score includes some rubric items from the observations but also includes the scores for in-class assignments such as the unit evaluation and differentiated instructional strategies use with student text and language are lessons.

Final Block: Two scores are reported for the three final block courses. One score is for the writing and math courses and the second score is for the final block practicum. The course score is composed of a rubric for the program’s culminating project. For this project, each student selects or are assigned a student in need of academic intervention. The students assess, design an intervention, and then monitor the student’s progress for the academic quarter. This data from this activity is then reported during our final block presentations. These presentations report the findings of the culminating project. Each student present his or her case to faculty, other students in the special education program and members of the community on their intervention. The final presentation is graded with a rubric. Three faculty independently evaluate each students intervention and presentation during the presentation.

Student Internship: Each student is observed weekly by a supervisor and the cooperating teacher and provided feedback on his or her instruction. A midterm and final evaluation is done by the supervisor in collaboration with the student and the cooperating teacher.
Section 2: Use of Data for Improvements of Programs and/or Operations

Curricular Issues:

The special education major consists of a tightly aligned and sequential course of studies. We are continuing the process of a curriculum review to verify the alignment and address any changes that may have happened since our last curriculum review making significant progress with rubrics, by operationalizing target behaviors, inter-observed reliability, alignment across practica and worked with TEOP faculty and alignment with Standard 5 and aligned course outcomes on syllabi with Standard 5 language.

At each of the blocks or gateway assessments, faculty meet throughout the quarter to discuss individual students’ progress. When a student is struggling with the course content or behavioral expectations in the course and/or application of those skills in the practicum, instructors collaborate with the student’s program advisor and other stakeholders to set up a course conference with the struggling student. These meetings include the particular faculty member with a concern, the student’s advisor, a chair for the meeting (who, when possible, has not had the student in a course), and the student. The collaboration in our blocks creates the opportunity for remediation rather than more punitive or reactive meetings that result from delaying constructive feedback. The case conference process continues to develop as we continue to integrate our department professionalism standards document into our classes and practicum. The program level assessment data collected from the blocks is used for continuous program improvement.

This year the department has created and Assessment and Curriculum committee. Previously these have been two distinct committees, however the department decided that given the assessment data we collect in our blocks that we needed to commit to a curriculum review to tighten the course objectives and more clearly delineate which skills are being primarily taught in each class. This committee has also been charged with assessing reliability and collecting inner observer agreement data on each of the rubrics used in each class. Our initial findings have been that although faculty are quite reliable at the overall point score for each student with our rubrics, there is some observer drift when reliability data is taken on each item on the rubric. Through the inner observer agreement project we have been conducting across the block courses in our department, we are getting even higher reliability with the assessment instruments.

We have recognized a need to review and update our application paperwork requirements. A new Woodring Admissions Committee was formed to analyze the GUR GPA, program GPA, practicum success, and program completion rates of students in our program who may at one point in their time with us fall below the minimum academic requirements. Our hope is information might better inform us as to how we can recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds.

We are currently developing a Masters in Teaching degree program for Special Education. This year we will complete the necessary curriculum development and apply for HEC Board approval to offer this program. Our hope is that with the replacement of the retiring faculty, we can offer this program starting in the Fall of 2012.

Advising:

To assist students plan for their program and try to manage course enrollment, we implemented an online survey to serve as an electronic plan of study. The program is being refined, but the goal is that it will provide information that will allow for better enrollment management. The university stopped support for the electronic plan of study. Therefore, we chose survey monkey to survey the students. It has been a huge success and will be used in schedule development for summer and the upcoming year before Spring registration. This new system helps other departments plan their schedules as well.

Our newly admitted students are assigned an advisor when they are admitted to the program. The advisee stays with his/her advisor throughout their program. The department recently re-assigned advisees for retiring faculty.
Summary:

Tasks that are in process include:
Review of application procedure with input from OFE and essay prompts to continue to increase diversity of students applying for program admission
Review Alignment of practicum performance standards
Assess implementation of the electronic survey monkey procedure and viability as verify reliability as a predictor for course enrollments
Development of the MIT program in Special Education and pursue HEC board approval
Continue consideration of factors to encourage and develop a more diverse student population.