The faculty members of the department of special education continuously review various types of program data to ensure that 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 year including: retreats, faculty meetings, committee meetings, and ad-hoc committee meetings. A brief summary of some of those assessment activities follows.

Section 1: Program Assessment System Transition Point Assessments

Admission: Requirements for admission include a 2.75 GPA, successful WEST-B scores and an application essay. The essay section of the application is evaluated for content and style by members of the department admissions committee. Each potential teacher candidate’s entire application is reviewed by one committee member who then makes a recommendation to the full admissions committee.

First Block: The department has three courses that students take concurrently at the beginning of their course work in the special education department. These three courses have shared assignments, each of which is evaluated independently by the faculty teaching the courses. Performance-based assignments in the two content classes are evaluated using a scoring rubric. The rubric contains items tied specifically to the objectives of each of the two content courses. Ratings on items related to lesson planning and instruction are averaged and reported as a single performance score for SPED 420. Ratings on rubric items measuring classroom management skills are averaged and reported as the performance score for SPED 460. Candidates are observed on at least two formal occasions while teaching in a P-12 practicum setting. Rubric scores across observations are averaged to create the performance score for the practicum SPED 440. All course instructors receive training in use of the rubrics to ensure inter-observer reliability of the ratings.

Reading Block: Reading block consists of a set of two courses, one content course and a P-12 practicum. A rubric specific to reading instruction was developed for the two course reading block. Observations of teaching are videotaped and later scored. Feedback on the observations is given verbally and in writing. A small group of teacher candidates meets with the course instructor to review their videotapes and obtain instructor and peer feedback. The practicum score is calculated by averaging the rubric scores from the video-taped observations. A score summarizing performance on in-class assignments is calculated for the content course.

Final block: Final block includes three courses, two content courses and one P-12 practicum. A single score, based on the rubric for the program’s culminating project, is reported to capture performance in the two content courses. For this project, each teacher candidate selects or is assigned a student in his or her practicum setting in need of academic intervention. The candidate conducts assessments, designs an intervention, and monitors the student’s progress for an academic
quarter. This project is presented to faculty, other teacher candidates, and members of the community. Three faculty members independently evaluate each candidate’s intervention and presentation and assign a score using a rubric. All course instructors have been trained to reliability score performance in the final presentations. The scores of the three evaluators are then averaged to create the final course score.

Student internship: Each teacher candidate is observed weekly by a supervisor and his or her cooperating teacher and is provided with feedback about his or her performance. The supervisor conducts formal evaluations at midterm and at the end of the internship in collaboration with the teacher candidate and cooperating teacher. Both scores are reported for program evaluation.

**Section 2: Use of Data for Improvements of Programs and/or Operations**

**Program Improvement**

- **Review and revision of program and course outcomes**

  The special education major consists of a tightly aligned and sequential set of courses. This year we continued the process of curriculum review by conducting a thorough examination of our program and course outcomes. This process resulted in some revisions to our program outcomes. Program outcomes are now better aligned with Standard 5 language and with the professional standards common core of the Council for Exceptional Children. Review and revision of course outcomes relative to our program outcomes is ongoing.

- **Development of a Masters in Teaching degree program in special education**

  This year we completed the necessary curriculum development and will apply for HEC Board approval to offer this program. It is our hope that we can begin offering this program in the fall of 2013.

**Improvement of operations**

- **Revision of procedures for addressing concerns about candidate performance**

  When a teacher candidate is demonstrating difficulty with course content or behavioral expectations, the department of special education uses a set of procedures for addressing these concerns. It had become apparent that these procedures were not understood or applied in the same way by all members of the faculty. Consequently, members of the department’s assessment and curriculum committee developed an explicit policy regarding a standardized manner in which concerns about candidate performance will be addressed. This policy details steps in a problem solving and/or progressive discipline process in a way that is clear and transparent to both faculty and candidates. The policy was accepted by the faculty and implementation began in fall 2011.

- **Advising**

  Newly admitted teacher candidates are assigned a faculty advisor with whom, up until this year, they were required to meet once per quarter. Scheduling of individual appointments with this degree of frequency proved difficult for both candidates and faculty advisors.
Further, data from faculty on hours spent on different work-related tasks showed that faculty advisors were spending large blocks of time on individual advising but that most advising was related to only a small number of regularly occurring themes. The use of individual appointments for routine program planning and registration questions was an inefficient use of faculty time. To streamline the advising process for these routine issues, group advising sessions were implemented this year. Candidates meet with their individual advisors for more in-depth problem solving and counseling if needed but group sessions have dramatically improved the efficiency of advising.

Improvement to assessment practices

- Inter-observer reliability studies of all practicum observation rubrics

This year the department’s assessment and curriculum committee was charged with assessing the inter-observer agreement on each of the rubrics used to (a) evaluate the development of teaching skills within the practicum classes and (b) score the presentation of the program’s culminating project in final block. Using funds from a series of mini-grants from WCE’s assessment committee, studies of these rubrics were conducted. Although overall scores on all rubrics were quite consistent across observers, there was variability among scores assigned by different observers on individual items. The meaning of each item and level of performance required for each possible score value were discussed and some items were revised to improve their clarity. Data collection on the revised rubrics continues during the 2011-12 academic year.