Department of Special Education and Education Leadership
Special Education Program

Closing the Loop 2014

The faculty members of the department of Special Education and Education Leadership 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

The Special Education Program (SPED) is currently updating its assessment system in order to better align with Washington State’s certification requirements, namely the edTPA. Furthermore, SPED anticipates Woodring College of Education’s participation in the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) as its national accrediting body. For this reason, SPED has suspended the current assessments in order to revise and retool for the purpose of more accurately reflecting program improvement and candidates progress through the program. SPED is designing “Signature Assessments” to meet CAEP requirements. The following are descriptions of the current assessments that have been suspended and/or are in the process of modification. A description of the process for replacement of these assessments is located under the section for program improvement.

- 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 during the second quarter following admission to the special education program. 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 and Internal Assessments

The Special Education Program undertook program alignment in Fall 2012 and completed the task in Spring 2014. NCATE, CEC, and Washington State standards were crosswalked, ensuring that all standards (e.g., state, professional organizations, and accrediting bodies) were addressed throughout the program. In addition, courses were mapped onto the standards, ensuring that all standards were met. Curriculum was added and/or adjusted to ensure complete alignment. In spring 2014, faculty met to begin the process of examining the current assessment system and developing Signature Assessments that more closely represented the program.

Spring 2014 – Faculty examined the current assessment system and found that assessments reflected completion of individual courses instead of the program overall. This limited the opportunity for program improvement and limited the opportunity to adequately address candidates progress overall throughout the program. Faculty then investigated numerous methods to uncouple the assessment system from grades in specific courses to more effectively reflect progress through the program as a whole. While grades may be evidence of adequate progress through programs, grades are also suspect because of tendency toward
grade inflation and the variability of expectations as changes in instructors occur. Therefore, a more comprehensive system of assessment was proposed.

Fall 2014 – Faculty adopted the position similar to the structure of CEC, that standards were divided into at least two categories, content knowledge and skills. Faculty proposed that the SPED signature assessments also reflect that structure, meaning that one signature assessment represent progress in the acquisition of knowledge, and the other signature assessment represent progress in the acquisition of skills. Furthermore, faculty recognized that the signature assessments needed to link to the state certification requirement. Candidates are required to complete two major assessments (e.g., edTPA that demonstrates performance skills and the NES and/or West-E that demonstrates content knowledge). Faculty created two working committees to make recommendations and develop assessments.

Committees recommended two assessments. First, a vocabulary assessment for progress monitoring throughout the program for acquisition of knowledge that is linked to the NES and West-E was proposed. This assessment is based upon research in curriculum-based measurement of Espin and Deno (1993), Espin and Foegen (1996), Espin and Tindal (1998), and Mooney, Benner, Nelson, Lane, and Beckers (2007). The committee began the development of a white paper that describes the research underlying the assessment. In addition, the committee brought forward the concept to the faculty for approval.

Second, the committee for the performance assessment determined that an assessment that represented performance and skills was best linked to the rubrics on the edTPA. The committee, comprised of NTT/TT faculty, including lead instructors of courses and supervisors of practica and student teaching, met to determine which courses best supported various performance rubrics on the edTPA. Practica was determined to be the appropriate courses to monitor progress through the program. An observation tool as a signature assessment was developed. Using the rubrics as a guide, indicators were selected that were common across all practica.

Both signature assessments are expected to be fully implemented at the beginning of Fall Quarter 2015.

The Admission requirements will remain until SPED reexamines the current criteria in light of CAEP standards. This is expected to occur during either Spring 2015 or Fall 2015. Student Teaching remains as described.

The assessment system will no longer be linked to course grades or to individual courses, but rather will be linked to the rubrics consistent with the edTPA and linked to the overall content across the program. The system under development overarches coursework to assess progress in a manner that can lead to program improvement.

External Assessments

The Program examined data from the assessment, identified a variety of resources and began a process to support candidates in AY 2013 – 2014 that continues through AY 2014 – 2015. First, it needs to be noted that a new Special Education Handbook for the edTPA that clarified the rubrics was completed. This along with the efforts of the program led to
improvement in scores overall. The program identified two faculty who participated in the training as scorers for the edTPA, providing much needed expertise for SPED candidates. In addition, one of these faculty was assigned to teach SPED 486 Case Studies in order to more fully infuse the edTPA content into Final Block. Furthermore, student teachers were provided with additional support and direction for completing the edTPA. Specifically, as planned, the program completed the following tasks: (a) meeting with other departments who are further along in the process, (b) infusing multiple courses with specific tasks to be completed in relation to the assessment, (b) identifying one course that can provide further information and additional practice, (c) identify one faculty member in the Special Education Program who can become an expert in the assessment, (d) have multiple faculty attend workshops and trainings to become scorers for the assessment to better understand the assessment and design supports for candidates.

Results of the edTPA showed average scores for candidates for winter and spring 2014 were below a three on twelve out of fifteen of the consequential rubrics. Average scores for Fall 2014 showed an improvement with only two of the consequential rubrics with scores under three. In addition, total average score for winter and spring 2014 across all 15 of the consequential rubrics was 40.54. The average score for fall 2014 was 50.35, an increase of 10 points. Furthermore, 6 out of the 13 candidates scored in the range of 50 and 60 in Fall 2014. This demonstrates an overall improvement.

Data from the West-E show that Candidates are well-prepared for content endorsements. The average scores of candidates in Special Education are above the State average. Results have been shared with the faculty.

Improvement of operations

- Advising

During 2012 - 2013, The Special Education Program participated in the WCE Advising Project. Candidates in the program were surveyed as to their experience with advising. It was found that student satisfaction with the advising process was high. One problem, however, that students did report is the difficulty of accessing classes outside of the Department. A sequence of courses was redesigned to establish more of a cohort model in order to more accurately predict number of candidates who will be enrolling in future courses, especially courses across campus. This process facilitates better communication with other colleges and departments that serve our population and provides more timely and reliable information for the purpose of scheduling.

Building upon this project in 2014, faculty participated in training for Student Success Collaborative. Faculty identified students interested in SPED and contacted them during their freshmen and sophomore years in order to advise on recommended GURs for the program. This provided some initial contact with students who would likely apply to the program and provided guidance in order to further support students interested in special education. Furthermore, faculty
developed a brochure to hand out to clubs/groups with membership from underrepresented populations.

- Program Coherence

In AY 2013 – 2014 faculty examined consistency and coherence of procedures for the program across multiple sites, especially consistency for adjunct and non-tenured track faculty. For example, faculty examined course syllabi and found that grading scales varied for the same courses. They agreed to adopt one grading scale that all faculty follow, thus providing some consistency and continuity for students and oversight by the department to ensure quality of academic experience. Furthermore, faculty identified lead instructors for particular courses. This provided one person who could guide a variety of instructors across multiple sites to ensure consistency of course content, thus preventing drift. In addition, faculty are engaged in a process of developing department bylaws and a manual for operation.