Section V: ACEI UnderGRAD

During the past two years, Niagara University’s program underwent changes that addressed faculty concerns shown in candidates’ performance and their analysis of assessment data. The following improvements have been made based on the assessment results within the program.

Content Knowledge

Assessments for content knowledge included the New York State licensure examinations Liberal Arts and Science Test (LAST), the Elementary Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written (ATS-W), and the Content Specialty Test-Multi Subject Exam (CST), the Unit Resource Report, Consecutive Lesson Plans, Literacy Instructional Strategies Unit Plan, and the Final Student Teaching Report. The Unit Resource Report, Consecutive Lesson Plans, and the Literacy Instructional Strategies Unit Plan evaluate candidates understanding, knowledge and skills prior to student teaching while the Final Student Teaching Report provides evidence of candidates’ ability to put their knowledge, understanding, and skills into practice in the classroom.

Candidates demonstrated passing rates for the licensure exams. One hundred percent of the candidates passed the LAST, 100% of candidates passed the ATS-W, and over 87% of the candidates passed the CST. Faculty noted that candidates score lower on the constructed response portion of the CST exam. As students progress through the program, assignments require fewer essays and constructed response answers. Several faculty members have begun to revamp their assignments to include more essays constructed responses in their assignments and throughout the program. The exams provide external evaluation of the candidates’ knowledge and understanding and our candidates do well.

Prior to the 2007-08 academic year candidates submitted portfolio reflections to demonstrate their understanding of content knowledge. In the fall 2007 the Unit Resource Report and the Consecutive Lesson Plans were implemented in methods courses, EDU 529 and EDU 767. Because these assignments are specifically aligned with ACEI standards they provide a more accurate picture of candidates' knowledge.

The Unit Resource Report and Consecutive Lesson Plan assignments were designed to evaluate candidates’ Knowledge of Content and Curriculum and Instruction. These assessments were first implemented in the 2007-08 academic year. The data for these assessments indicate that candidates understand and can successfully plan instruction. Over 92% of the candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of all content areas as indicated by the percentage scoring satisfactory or exceptional on the Unit resource Report. The Consecutive Lesson Plan assessment data indicates that over 92% of the candidates understand and successfully apply instructional strategies such as adapting for diverse learners, plan for the development of problem solving, critical thinking, and actively engaging the learner. Faculty continues to monitor students who do not demonstrate subject matter knowledge through program checkpoints. The College of Education requires candidates to maintain a GPA of 2.5 in their academic concentration and in their educational courses. This requirement is monitored throughout the program through the advisement process.
The Literacy Instructional Strategies Unit Plan assignment has been used in some form for several years. In fall 2007 a rubric specifically aligned with ACEI standards was put into place. The data for this assessment provides evidence that candidates demonstrate knowledge of literacy and English Language Arts. Faculty are pleased with the change from a general portfolio reflection evaluation to a more specific rubric and the candidates’ performance on many elements of this assignment rubric.

Candidates have been successful in their student teaching field experience as evidenced by the results of the Final Student Teaching Report. This provides additional evidence of our candidates’ content knowledge and their ability to apply their understanding and skills to ongoing, actual classroom practice. One concern is the percentage of candidates that are rated “not observable” for “the ability to create instructional opportunities that were adapted to learners from diverse cultural backgrounds.” Candidates have always been advised to participate in a variety of placements. Based on fall 2007 and other data, candidates are now required to complete 30 hours of field experience in a New York State defined high needs school or one of their student teaching placements will occur in this type of school. The faculty wants to insure candidates’ ability to plan for and teach diverse learners. Faculty will continue to monitor all data sources to make informed decisions and adjustments to insure candidates have opportunities to demonstrate understanding of all ACEI standards.

Professional and Pedagogical Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Assessments for professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions, include the Unit Resource Report, the Consecutive Lesson Plans, the Child Case Study, the Measurement Report, and the Student Teaching Final Report. Candidates demonstrate strong ability to plan lessons using a variety of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies and to actually teach them. This is evident in our course assessments requiring planning (the Unit Resource Report, the Measurement Project, and Consecutive Lesson Plans) and in the application during student teaching.

The student teaching Final Report changed from a general college wide form to one aligned with ACEI’s standards in the fall 2007. A weakness of the Report is that it is completed by cooperating teachers and not university supervisors. Data may be skewed by personality differences or cooperating teacher expectations that differ from those of a university supervisor. The final grade is assigned by the Director of Student Teaching based on the final field placement report, the field reports and conferencing with the university supervisor. Based on current data, faculty believe candidates are well prepared for the rigors of student teaching.

Although faculty are pleased with candidates’ overall performance in “becoming a professional,” they are monitoring candidates’ performance throughout the program and in student teaching. Candidates demonstrate their ability to engage in continuous learning and the ability to be reflective in a wide variety of assessments including the Measurement Project, the Unit Resource Report, the Consecutive Lesson Plans, and the Child Case Study.

Student Learning
Assessments for student learning include the Child Case Study Report, Measurement Project, and the Final Student Teaching Report. The Child Case Study Report was developed for fall 2007 to be closely aligned with ACEI Standard 1: Development, Learning, and Motivation, Standard 3: Instruction, and Standard 5: Professionalism. Results indicate candidates are able demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of child development and learning and using appropriate assessment tools and approaches. The candidates know about, understand, and value professional guidelines in their work.

The Measurement Report has been used in some form for a few years. The candidates were evaluated using a general portfolio reflection. For fall 2007 faculty developed a rubric aligned with ACEI standards. Faculty are pleased that candidates are highly successful at demonstrating their understanding of Standards 1, 4, and 5 with this assessment.

The Final Student Teaching Report is completed during student teaching providing evidence of candidates’ ability to apply their knowledge, skills, and understandings and successfully affect student learning. Niagara University has a long history of a Vincentian Mission. The College of Education wants its candidates to be prepared to work with diverse populations. Based on analysis of field placement data, the faculty adopted a policy regarding placements in 2007. Although faculty advised students to choose a variety of diverse placement settings not all candidates did. Candidates are now required to complete 30 hours of field experience in a New York State defined high needs school or one of their student teaching placements will occur in this type of school.

Conclusions

Some of the assessments within the program have been existence in some form for a few years. The scoring rubrics have been in an on-going refinement process of standardization. Faculty has more clearly aligned the sub-elements of the assessments and rubrics to ACEI standards. Their efforts have resulted in the data provided in assessments 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 from fall 2007 to present. Additionally, the generic Final Student Teaching Report has been replaced with a form that is closely aligned to ACEI standards. Our focus is now on continuously improving the inter-rater reliability using the standardized assessment rubrics.