Section V

During the past two years, Niagara University’s program underwent changes that addressed faculty concerns generated from the faculty’s analysis of data and perspectives related to candidate performance. Based on concerns about the lack of a course dedicated to assessment, a new course, EDU 451 Assessment of Learning, became a program requirement for education majors beginning Fall 2006. Fall 2008 was when the first cohort of candidates progressed to the pre-student teaching semester in which the course is offered. Analysis of program data also resulted in a change from portfolio reflections and a culminating portfolio to course embedded assessments that are specifically aligned to the NAEYC standards. These assessments are providing more detailed data that faculty has begun to analyze.

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.

Content Knowledge

Assessments for content knowledge included the Content Specialty Test-Multi Subject (CST) and the Elementary Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written (ATS-W Exam), the Unit Resource Report, Consecutive Lesson Plans, the Measurement Project, Final Student Teaching Report, and the Child Case Study. These assessments are spaced throughout the four year program providing several check points on candidates’ knowledge, understanding, and skill in content knowledge. Candidates demonstrated passing rates for the Exams which provides external validation of candidates’ content knowledge. Faculty noted that candidates’ scored lower on the constructed response portion of the exams. As students progress through the program assignments require less essays and constructed response answers. They noted that the assignments focused on lesson and unit plans. Faculty has begun to revamp their assignments to include more constructed responses in their assignments. Faculty will continue to monitor candidate performance on the above assessments and other indicators of content knowledge.

Course embedded assessments provide another measure of candidates understanding and knowledge of content knowledge. The Unit Resource Report, Consecutive Lesson Plans, the Measurement Project, and the Child Case Study provide evidence of candidates’ ability to use understanding of child development, families, and diverse learners as they plan. A course, EDU 451: Assessment of Learning was added as a program requirement to provide a strong foundation in the purpose and variety of assessments and the use of assessment as a teaching tool.
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. Faculty will continue to monitor all data sources to make informed decisions and adjustments.

**Professional and Pedagogical Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions**

Assessments for professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions, include Unit Resource Plan, Consecutive Lesson Plans, the Measurement Project, the Code of Ethical Conduct assignment, 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 assignments requiring planning (the Unit Resource Report, the Measurement Project, and Consecutive Lesson Plans) and in the application during student teaching.

The Code of Ethical Conduct assignment was designed to have candidates examine, understand and apply NAEYC’s Code. The data indicate candidates identify themselves as members of the early childhood field. They know about the ethical standards and recognize the need to engage in informed advocacy for the profession. Faculty are working towards making ethics and the Code of Ethical Conduct a regular, integral part of courses earlier in the program so candidates are consistently interacting with the Code of Ethical Conduct in the hopes candidates will demonstrate greater awareness of ethical standards in their later courses.

The Student Teaching Final Report changed from a general college wide form to one aligned with NAEPY’s standards in fall 2007. The form is aligned to NAEPY standards. The data from the 2007-08 academic year indicates our candidates demonstrate pedagogical knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions.

Although the faculty is 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 Code of Ethical Conduct assignment. The faculty continues to monitor the “Not Observable” category on the Final Student Teaching Form and investigate ways to provide advocacy and involving families, professionals, and communities into all student teaching placements.

**Student Learning**

Assessments for student learning include the Unit Resource Plan, Consecutive Lesson Plans, Child Case Study, Measurement Project, and the Student Teaching Final Report. Candidates demonstrate strong ability to plan lessons using a variety of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, teach them, and evaluate student learning. This is evident in our course assignments requiring planning (the Unit Resource Report, the Measurement Project, and
Consecutive Lesson Plans) and in those requiring application (the Measurement Project and the Final Student Teaching Report).

Based on concerns about the lack of a course dedicated to assessment and evaluating student learning, a new course, EDU 451 Assessment of Learning, became a program requirement for education majors beginning Fall 2006. Fall 2008 was when the first cohort of candidates progressed to the pre-student teaching semester in which the course is offered. Faculty developed a rubric aligned with NAEYC standards and candidates are now required to do this assignment in a pre-kindergarten to second grade placement. This also allows focus on the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment in early childhood classrooms. Analysis of the course data indicates candidates can successfully plan for student learning.

The Final Student Teaching Report is completed during student teaching provides 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 NAEYC standards. Their efforts have resulted in the data provided in assessments 2, 3, 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 NAEYC standards. Our focus is now on continuously improving the inter-rater reliability using the standardized assessment rubrics.

Conclusions

All program completers have met or exceeded the NAEYC program standards. We are satisfied with our candidate performance on the identified program assessments and the evidence of program quality the assessments provide related to NAEYC standards. We are focused on continuous improvement and will annually examine the assessments themselves, and the information they offer to us regarding our programs and candidates.