Section V:

During the past two years, Niagara University’s program underwent changes that addressed faculty concerns shown in candidates’ performance based on 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 Content Specialty Test-Multi Subject (CST) and the Elementary Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written) ATS-W Exams, the Unit Resource Report, the Consecutive Lesson Plans, the Literacy Instruction Strategies Unit Plan, and Final Student Teaching Report. The exams provide external validation to our program. The Unit Resource Report and Consecutive Lesson Plans 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.

Candidates demonstrated passing rates for the Exams. Over 80% of the candidates passed the CST and 100% of candidates passed the ATS-W. Faculty noted that candidates score lower on the constructed response portion of the exams. As students progress through the program, assignments require less essays and constructed response writing. They noted that the assignments focused on lesson and unit plans and did not require essays. Several faculty members have revamped their assignments to include more constructed responses. Faculty will continue to analyze candidates’ performance on the above assessments and other indicators of content knowledge to evaluate the candidates’ performance and make necessary assignment, course and program changes.

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. Because these assignments are specifically aligned with NAEYC standards they provide a more accurate picture of candidates’ knowledge.

The faculty are pleased at the candidates’ performance on many elements of these assignment rubrics. However, faculty are concerned about the high percentage of candidates performing unsatisfactorily in core content areas such as science, social studies, and mathematics. Candidates in this program have completed an undergraduate degree and are required to fulfill content requirements prior to beginning this program. Because many undergraduate courses can fulfill the entrance content requirements, faculty have no control over students’ prior content knowledge. Faculty are reviewing the program to analyze this requirement and how the program can support the candidates’ need for greater understanding of the content areas, including adjusting current course content and delivery.

The Literacy Instructional Strategies Unit Plan assignment has been used in some form for several years. In fall 2007 a rubric specifically aligned with NAEYC standards was put into place. The data for this assessment provides evidence that candidates demonstrate knowledge of literacy and
English Language Arts. The faculty are pleased with the change from a general portfolio reflection evaluation to a more specific rubric and the data it provides.

Prior to 2007-08 a general student teaching form was used for all candidates in the College of Education. Student teaching reports were analyzed, changed, and implemented in the Fall 2007. Candidates in Birth-Grade 2 placements are supervised and evaluated based upon criteria that are specifically aligned to NAEYC Standards. 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 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 assignments requiring planning (the Unit Resource Report, the Measurement Project, and Consecutive Lesson Plans) and in application of these during student teaching.

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

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 Child Case Study Report, the Measurement Project, and the Unit Resource Report. Faculty continue to monitor the “Not Observable” category on the Final Student Teaching Form. There were a number of instances where cooperating teachers could not rate a candidate’s performance on involving children’s families, other professionals, or the community in planning or assessment practices, or their ability to engage in informed advocacy. The Field Report forms which university supervisors complete while doing observations has been revised to include specific examples that candidates might engage in during student teaching. The supervisors are sharing these with the candidates and the cooperating teachers. Instructors of methods courses are revising course assignments to try to include advocacy and collaborative relationship elements as applicable to assignments.

**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 NAEYC Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning, Standard 2:
Building Family and Community Relationships, and Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families. 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 family and community relationships and uphold ethical and 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 NAEYC standards. Additionally, candidates are now required to do this assignment in a pre-kindergarten to second grade placement to ensure a significant number of early childhood placements. This also allows focus on the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment in early childhood classrooms. Faculty is pleased that candidates are highly successful at demonstrating their understanding of Standards 1, 2, 3, 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 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.