How does the Unit use its assessment system to improve candidate performance, program quality and program operations?

Overview
One of the most exciting changes in the Berea College Teacher Education Programs over the last four years has been the reconstruction of the assessment system and the resulting program improvements. Although we are committed to on-going evaluation and improvement, our work on Standard 2 has led us to near target levels on 2a, 2b, and 2c. At the time of the last accreditation visit, our assessment system met NCATE standards. Over time, NCATE has continued to refine and define expectations for assessment systems and changes in the professional understanding of assessment and accountability have provided new approaches to and purposes for assessment. These changes, taken together with a large number of new faculty hired in Education Studies and various departments across the Unit, led to a completely redesigned assessment system.

Although we initially expected to simply revise and strengthen our CAS, we found that pulling at one thread caused others to unravel, as well. Thus far, this work has been a four-year process including a complete evaluation of our conceptual framework, Programs Goals, and existing assessment system including its technology and data analysis processes. Getting to where we are today has been a long and rigorous process, and one that we have relished for its obvious contributions to our ability to assess candidates’ knowledge and understandings, as well as their ability to meet all appropriate standards. Although we are excited about the changes and resulting improvements, the process has not been without its bumps, challenges, and frustrations. And we have chosen to focus on reaching target level in every component of Standard 2 because we believe the stronger our assessment system is, the better we can prepare our candidates.

For an overview of our Key Assessment system see Continuous Assessment System

Reconstructing the Assessment System
With such a large number of new faculty, we began the process of reconstructing the assessment system with a careful study of the existing system. This led us to recognize certain weaknesses in the system and we set out to make changes that would be meaningful to candidates and effective in telling us what we want to know about their progress toward meeting state, professional, and institutional standards. As we proceeded, we came to see that the existing system was not effectively tied to our programs goals. This realization led us to a deep exploration of the goals themselves. And as we explored the programs goals, we found them to be written in an academic language inaccessible to both Unit faculty not in Education Studies and to candidates. Moreover, they were insufficiently measurable. This, in turn, led us to assess the conceptual framework. Working closely with stakeholders, the development of Programs Goals aligned to the conceptual framework took two years of intensive work.
Once we had accessible and measurable goals clearly tied to the conceptual framework, we were able to begin thinking about constructing an assessment system that would provide the rich and meaningful data necessary to assess candidate progress and to drive program changes. Over the next two years, two new assessments were developed and the remaining four (excluding the Key Assessment 5: Praxis) were revised, tested, and refined.

A major change in assessment was the addition of formalized emphasis on dispositions. Although our program had always had a strong belief that dispositions were at the core of successful teaching and learning, we had not had a formalized assessment system. This led to confusion among candidates and faculty. Our commitment to dispositions was evident in the new Programs Goals which are clearly focused on dispositions. In order to support the goals, a dispositions assessment was developed and aligned with the goals. Assessment of dispositions became an on-going process with two Key Assessments largely focused on them (Key Assessment 1 and Key Assessment 3).

In order to prepare candidates, the concept of dispositions and the dispositions assessment are introduced in the first professional education course. Through a series of carefully-designed experiences, candidates explore the impact of dispositions on teaching and learning and how their own dispositions support or do not support their vision for their teaching practice. Also in this class, candidates explore the Teacher Education Programs Goals. Because the goals are specifically designed to be open to interpretation and to grow in depth and breadth as candidates progress through the program, class experiences are designed to provide opportunities for reflection and building connections between goals, dispositions, and their teaching philosophies.

Within the first three weeks after the completion of this course, candidates complete Key Assessment 1: Goals and Dispositions. This assessment is designed to provide a base-line understanding of the meanings candidates make of the goals and dispositions in order to continually monitor progress throughout the program. The professional development plan developed as part of this individual assessment is used by candidates and Unit faculty to guide course selection, field experiences, and enrichment opportunities. In order to continue to monitor dispositions, each professional education class includes an end-of-semester disposition assessment completed by the course instructor. Key Assessment 3: Dispositions occurs in the second semester of candidates’ junior year. This conference with the candidate’s advisor provides a formal opportunity to assess growth and to set new goals for the pre-student teaching year.

The Key Assessment data is also used to improve candidate performance, program quality and program operations in annual program assessments and data study. For example, a 2011 study of Praxis scores indicated the possibility of certain weaknesses in content preparation. Although
there is not yet enough data to confidently identify the cause, meetings with Unit faculty in music education and the Teacher Education Programs Chair are set for September 2011. In these meetings, the areas of concern on Praxis tests will be assessed and strategies to address these will be developed. These strategies will be tested and data will be monitored to allow for deeper understanding of the challenges and to assess the strategies’ effectiveness.

Another example lies in challenge areas identified through the dispositions assessments. Again, because our program is small, the data pool is too small to say with any certainty that the emerging trends will hold over time. Still, we wanted to focus on these trends. Toward this end, we posed them as questions to be asked and considered during meetings and retreats over the coming year. For example, existing dispositions data seem to indicate that candidates in the secondary and middle school mathematics certification programs are uncomfortable with reflection. So we ask, are these candidates, in fact, less comfortable using reflection as a tool in their teaching and, if so, what programmatic changes can be made to strengthen their ability to use reflection in their daily practice and as a self-assessment tool. Over the next year, we will also gather various data to help us answer these questions and to help us develop strategies to support mathematics candidates in the development of a disposition to understand the importance of reflection and to use it effectively.

We use data to improve program quality in a variety of ways. Among these is the use of Key Assessment data to drive program alignment and content. For example, the P-5 certification program, and secondary, middle school, art, and technology programs were almost completely revised based on Key Assessment data. When candidates’ scores on the unit plan section of Key Assessment 4 indicated that writing unit plans was a weakness, we assessed our program delivery in these areas and found that P-5 candidates were not receiving appropriate instruction and practice early enough in their program. As a result, the three integrated curriculum courses (EDS 335, 435, 440) were aligned to provide developmental experiences in planning, assessment, and differentiated instruction. The sequence of these courses was adjusted in order for candidates to encounter them earlier in their preparation. The P-5 faculty who teach Curriculum I, II, and III met to set the series course content and to revise embedded assessment tools. This change was implemented in the 2010-11 academic year and its impact is currently being studied.

Candidates in the secondary, middle school, art, and technology programs also demonstrated weakness in preparation for developing effective units. Because these candidates were receiving content methods instruction in their content areas and from instructors with limited classroom experience, we realized their preparation was fragmented and varied greatly depending on instructor. To address this concern, we developed an approach we call the Community of Teachers. Working closely with school faculty in the content areas and at the grade levels for which candidates are being prepared, a series of classroom-based experiences were developed to provide both instruction and experience in content-specific methods and a new course, EDS 325:
General Teaching Methods, was added. Two additional courses (EDS 385 and 485) were developed and added to the required coursework. These focus on content teaching methods and provide multiple experiences with practicing teachers in the field and at the grade level candidates are preparing to teach. In this way, candidates across programs receive aligned experiences and instruction.

Describe work undertaken to move to the Target Level
The increased emphasis on collecting and using data to form programs and policy decisions and to most appropriately assess candidate performance and ability to meet state, national, and institutional standards has had a significant impact. It has actually changed the way the Unit operates and the ways the faculty think about our work. As a result, we have reached target on several components of Standard 2. We have reached target in these standard components as an outcome of the four-year emphasis on assessment undertaken by the Unit and supported by the College.

One example of changes made through this work may be illustrated by considering the metamorphosis of the Key Assessment 1. Beginning as a very basic utilitarian assessment, the Unit’s on-going evaluation of the process and outcomes led to the development of an integrated process leading to the creation of a Personal and Professional Development Plan and post-assessment support.

The Key 1 began as an assessment of goals developed after the goals were aligned with the conceptual framework. This assessment, completed during the first three weeks of the following semester, included written explanations of candidates’ interpretations of the goals and an individual conference with the EDS 150 instructor. In this process, EDS 150: Introduction to Education (taken by all candidates in all programs) was revised to emphasize the goals and Key Assessment 1: Goals was used to assess candidates’ understandings at the completion of this course. Based on the pilot data, the faculty re-assessed EDS 150, reorganized the course content to place additional focus on the goals, and set expectations for candidates’ progress at this point in the programs. With these changes in place, candidates’ performance on the Key 1 improved.

With the development of the dispositions, faculty began to think that a similar process would be important for their introduction and assessment. It seemed appropriate to merge their assessment with the goals at the end of EDS 150. Again, the content of EDS 150 was collaboratively altered to provide appropriate learning experiences to enhance candidate understanding and development of dispositions. And again, the assessment was changed in order to gather more and richer data.

When Key 1 data were discussed at the fall 2010 Unit retreat, faculty decided it should be altered again. This time, we saw the opportunity to use the Key 1 to guide candidate support during the following school year. Again, the Key 1 was redesigned to add a professional development plan
to be collaboratively developed by the EDS 150 instructor and each candidate during the Key 1 conference. The professional development plan includes the identification both of specific Teacher Education Programs Goals and dispositions areas to be strengthened. In addition, areas of general and content knowledge to be strengthened are identified (for example, additional writing or public speaking courses for candidates in need of support in these areas). These plans are provided to course instructors and advisors who provide support for candidates’ work toward these goals in the classes that follow EDS 150.

These and other changes in EDS 150 have increased the class’ impact and better prepared candidates for next steps in their development. Additionally, content in the courses that follow EDS 150 was changed to create stronger alignment, to provide candidates’ with more developmental experiences, and to ensure continuous progress through the early stages of the programs.

These examples are typical of the steps we take to ensure our assessment data impacts our programs, policy and candidate learning and performance. They also illustrate our focus on aligning Key Assessments and course work. This process of on-going assessment of the Key Assessments allow us to maximize the richness of the data and to capitalize on opportunities provided to gather data that will help us better support candidates and make changes in programs and policy that increase program efficacy.

**Discuss plans for continuing to improve**

We are going to focus on bringing three areas of Standard 2 to the target level. These include the validity/fairness of assessments (2a), assessments extending into candidates’ first years of teaching (2b), and making data public and engaging in reflective public conversations with candidates regarding the meaning and implications of aggregated and disaggregated data (2c).

*Validity/fairness* of assessments is an on-going concern for the Unit. We have a diverse population—and are working hard to bring even more diversity to our college and Unit enrollment—and we know that bias and validity challenges can be—and often are—deeply embedded in tests, assessments, and evaluations. This is as true for programs with all the best intentions, like ours, as it is for large testing companies. So we take this very seriously. Although all procedures are transparent and candidates are encouraged to view their advisors as their advocates, we need processes beyond these to ensure candidates are evaluated in a fair, accurate and consistent manner free of bias. We have taken several steps in this direction, as described below,

1. We formed a six-person *Assessment Committee* charged with overseeing CAS implementation, data analysis, to report findings to appropriate stakeholders, and to develop, in collaboration with other stakeholders, programmatic responses to analysis. While the committee ensures that data is reported to the appropriate constituencies in a timely fashion, that policies, procedures, and practices are rigorously followed,
monitored, and evaluated, and that the processes and procedures are fairly and equitably implemented, we have taken additional steps to strengthen our ability to ensure fairness.

2. Establishment of a *Fairness Committee*. Beginning in fall 2011, this committee will meet annually and as needed to evaluate Key Assessment requirements, expectations, scoring, and recommendations. They will also assess the effectiveness of feed-back loops and candidate complaints and use of the Advocacy Policy. In this process, they will review rubrics, discuss outcomes and review how data is collected, stored and used. They will also have access to minutes from meetings related to complaints and the advocacy process.

In addition to the Teacher Education Programs Chair, the committee includes: division chair Linda Leek, tenured faculty in Gender and Women’s Studies and African/African-American Studies; Dreama Gentry, attorney and Title VII/Title IX Coordinator at Berea; and Judith Weckman, Director of the Office of Institutional Research. Results of this evaluation will be reported to the TEC and changes will be made based on Committee recommendations. Their names, roles, and contact information will be provided to all candidates and stakeholders.

3. *Thoughtful preparation* of candidates is a second new aspect of the fairness procedures. Currently fully implemented, we are collecting data to evaluate its effectiveness. Preparation begins in the first professional education course, EDS 150. This course content provides an introduction to the Teacher Education Programs. In this class, students are introduced to the Teacher Education Programs Goals, dispositions, Kentucky Teacher Standards, the Key Assessments, and the theories underlying content teaching methods. At the completion of this course, students who wish to continue toward certification are assigned a Program advisor. These advisors become candidate advocates throughout their preparation experiences. Candidates have been prepared for the *Key 1 Assessment: Goals and Dispositions* through learning experiences in EDS 150.

Candidates are prepared for additional Key Assessments in their coursework and are encouraged to meet with their advisors and other faculty in the process of developing submission materials.

A minimum of two workshops are provided in the semester before the Key Assessments 2 and 4 are scheduled. These workshops provide information regarding the assessments included, but not limited to, rubrics, guidelines, and calendars, in addition to various support materials. In addition, the Student Advisory Council conducts TEP Workshops (Assessment 2) and separate Student Teaching Workshops (Assessment 4) in the month before the assessment materials are due.

Faculty are prepared for the assessment process at an annual retreat. At this time, rubrics and processes are discussed, common areas of disagreement are explored, and sample assessments are scored and results compared. In these discussions, we work toward common understandings of rubric interpretations. Faculty are also taught to use the online data as needed for each assessment.
4. Ensuring *fair and bias-free assessments* requires careful attention to detail. Currently, we use processes that bring more perspectives to these assessments. All written assessments are scored by more than one faculty member. When readers score candidates differently, readers meet to discuss their findings and reach consensus. When agreement cannot be reached, additional faculty serve as readers. In the case of student teaching (Key Assessment 6) at midterm, the Cooperating Teacher, the candidate and the Supervising Faculty assess candidates’ performance in the classroom using an assessment that aligns the Kentucky Teacher Standards and the Teacher Education Programs Goals. Goals are set for strengthening practice and individual meetings are conducted to support candidates’ growth toward their goals. The final assessment is completed by the Cooperating Teacher and the Faculty Supervisor. In addition, an evaluation of Key Assessments revealed that while multiple means of assessing were being used, no Key Assessment used a performance assessment. We restructured Key Assessment 6 to make it performance based.

5. *Making dispositions assessments fair* was the biggest faculty concern about dispositions assessments. For that reason, it was designed to include many assessments, thus making none of them singularly high stakes. As a result, faculty complete dispositions assessments for each candidate enrolled in professional education classes at the end of the semester. This provides many perspectives on candidate dispositions and, therefore, gives us confidence that no one faculty member’s assessment will be unfairly high stakes. In addition, working collaboratively with the EDS 150 faculty member, candidates assess their dispositions in *Key Assessment 1: Goals and Dispositions*. They also identify dispositions they want to improve as part of their Professional Growth and Development Plan. All data is entered into the database and is available to advisors for Key Assessment 3, or other uses as needed.

In addition to enhancing the fairness of the disposition assessment, the data provides data that can be aggregated and disaggregated to provide insight into faculty and program scoring trends.

6. The *Advocacy Policy*, adopted by the TEC in spring 2010, provides a detailed, step-by-step design to reflect the policies used in many school districts to address grievances and ensure due process. The candidates’ advisor serves as an advocate supporting the candidate through the entire process. We consider this an important step in mentoring new teachers to understand how to advocate for themselves and ensure that their due process rights are observed.

7. The *Student Advisory Council (SAC)* was founded in 2009 specifically to ensure that candidates have a voice in the policies and procedures that affect them. One of their responsibilities is to meet with faculty in focus groups to assess Key Assessments including their fairness, the level of preparation and support, and the interpretation of results.
While some of these changes have been piloted and are implemented, we are still studying their effectiveness and expect to make changes in order to enrich and refine them in the next two years. Other strategies are yet to be tested sufficiently to give us confidence in their efficacy, and some are just being finalized for implementation. This is a very high priority for us and for this reason we will continue to focus on developing processes and assessments that we can rely on to ensure validity and fairness.

Assessments extending into first years of teaching (2b)
Although data on candidates’ effectiveness in the first years of teaching indicate that they perform well, we are not satisfied with the richness of the data. The percentage of assessments returned by principals does not allow for the depth of understanding we require to make real meaning of these assessments. We are currently in the process of exploring ways to compile more rich and meaningful data. Currently under consideration are new delivery systems such as Facebook. In addition, focus groups are conducted during Homecoming Weekend. In these meeting we ask alumni to assess their preparation and provide suggestions about ways to increase participation of principals in the first-year assessments. This is early in our process (see schedule below).

Sharing and Reflecting on Data with Candidates (2c)
An Open House is held at the end of each term to celebrate work well done across education classes. Because these events are so well attended, beginning in December 2011, the Open House will include a public display of aggregated and disaggregated assessment data (with the exception of data that would identify candidates due to program size). In addition, meetings will be hosted by the Student Advisory Council during which data will be discussed and candidate questions, recommendations, and evaluation will be sought.

Our timeline for making changes necessary to bring these components to target is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Revise</th>
<th>Full Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Fairness</td>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments into First Years of Teaching</td>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>Summer 2012</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Summer 2013</td>
<td>Summer 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Data with Candidates</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>2011-2012 Academic Year</td>
<td>Summer 2012</td>
<td>Summer 2012</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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