

PROGRAM ASSESSMENTS IN THE UNIT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Program standards written by the specialized professional organizations (SPAs) are a significant part of the NCATE accreditation system. Over 20 sets of NCATE program standards exist. These include standards for the preparation of secondary and middle level math, science, English, and social studies teachers, as well as standards for school administrators, school librarians, psychologists, and other school professionals. It also includes standards for areas that span ages and grades such as early childhood education, elementary education, special education, and physical education. Institutions with programs covered by the program standards must demonstrate, through the program review process that their candidates have the content knowledge and professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills outlined in the program standards. The program review process, which is based on assessment data, is conducted by either NCATE or the state, depending upon the state partnership agreement. When NCATE conducts the review, institutions submit their program reports electronically one year before the visit.¹ States conduct program reviews differently; in some instances, states conduct program reviews during the BOE visit.

The NCATE program review process underwent dramatic revision during the 2004-2005 academic year. Institutions are now asked to submit the results of 6-8 key comprehensive assessments which are aligned with the program standards in the given program areas. Two of the assessments must address content knowledge as measured by tests and other assessments; two of the assessments must address the application of professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills as shown in assessments of planning and practice; and one of the assessments must address candidate effects on student learning. The other one to three assessments are determined at the discretion of the institution or the specialized professional association. (This information is provided on the templates for institutional submissions.²) Institutions are also asked to submit the scoring guides used to determine levels of proficiencies and the aggregated data from the 6-8 assessments as evidence that candidates have mastered the proficiencies in the standards.

Experts in the specialty fields use this information to review the quality of programs. Reviewers evaluate the quality of the assessments, particularly the alignment between the submitted assessments and the program standards. They then review the data to determine if candidates have mastered the proficiencies and write reports, called National Recognition Reports (NRRs), communicating their findings. The findings indicate whether the professional standards are met and whether the programs are nationally recognized, conditionally recognized, or denied recognition.³ The NRRs also summarize the evidence based on the elements of unit Standard 1 on candidates' content knowledge, professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills, and student learning.

¹ Program reports must be submitted on either February 1 or September 15 approximately one year before the visit.

² These templates are available on NCATE's website at <http://www.ncate.org/institutions/programStandards.asp?ch=90>.

³ Programs that are conditionally recognized or denied recognition can resubmit within 18 months for another review.

This new alignment makes the linkages between the program review process and the unit review process more explicit. Most institutions identify the same 6-8 key assessments used in the program review process as key assessments of their unit assessment system. These assessments include tests and assessments of content knowledge, planning, student teaching/internships, and student learning. Institutions should present the National Recognition Reports and any updated data from the 6-8 key assessments as evidence for meeting the elements of Standard 1 at the unit level. Elements of Standard 1 that may not be covered in the program review process include general pedagogical and professional education and professional dispositions. Because the outcomes related to institutional standards identified in the unit's conceptual framework may not be covered in program standards, the results of those assessments should be presented in Standard 1 as well.

NCATE neither requires nor discourages the use of generic or unit-wide assessments across programs. However, in the program review process, generic assessments should be refined to clearly indicate that specific professional standards are being addressed. Program-specific items may be added to generic instruments to ensure that proficiencies related to NCATE's program standards are assessed.

The program review process generates program level data. Some of these data can be summarized across programs to create unit level data for Standard 1. In some instances, units have a uniform set of assessments across programs and sometimes common scoring guides. This approach makes summarizing data very straight forward. In some instances, however, units will not have a uniform set of assessments across programs. For example, some programs may use case studies to evaluate student learning, some may use teacher work sample methodology to evaluate student learning, and some may use another method. In this instance, the assessments are different and there are no similar scoring guides; therefore, the data cannot be aggregated across programs. In order to report unit level data, the unit summarizes the student learning data for each program. This second approach is similar to an executive summary. Both approaches are acceptable. Some units will want to provide a mix of the two.

The National Recognition Reports (NRR) include a section directed to BOE members that identifies issues that may require further investigation during the on-site visit. These may include faculty qualifications, diversity, or student teaching. Most significantly, the reports indicate whether the programs have been granted national recognition. BOE members are asked to read each of the program reports. National recognition is a strong indication that candidates have attained the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the professional and state standards included in most elements of Standard 1. If an institution has programs that have been recognized with conditions, NCATE considers the program as recognized. To maintain national recognition, however, the condition must be removed within 18 months. Areas for improvement may be in order if the NRR and other evidence suggest that the elements of Standard 1 are not being adequately addressed. If an institution has a program that is not recognized, then the BOE should review other data that the institution may provide, but must cite an area for improvement indicating that the program is not nationally recognized. In many cases, institutions will have programs that were recognized, programs that received conditions and perhaps programs that were not recognized. The BOE team weighs the size of the unit, the size of the programs, and other data presented to make a holistic judgment about whether Standard 1 is met.

Units are responsible for managing their assessment system. Although many, or all, assessments are developed and conducted at the program level, the unit's system should clearly articulate the key assessments used by programs. The unit's system should also ensure that data are being collected, aggregated, analyzed, and used. The system should ensure a centralized set of data that are available to unit administrators and faculty for the management of the unit, its programs, and candidates.

March 17, 2006