Evaluation of Key Stakeholders' Roles in Assessment Practices
The University of West Georgia College of Education

In preparation for its April 2013 NCATE visit, The University of West Georgia College of Education (COE) wants to evaluate how effectively it adheres to Standard Two.

Standard Two: The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the performance of candidates, the unit, and its programs. The NCATE standard explicitly states that *"Assessment systems usually have the following features: Unit faculty collaborate with members of the professional communicate to implement and evaluate the system."*

To date, COE has not systematically solicited feedback from key stakeholders (i.e., cooperating teachers, faculty in partner colleges, current students) to assess the effectiveness of its assessment system. To address this deficiency, COE partnered with Eduventures to evaluate its assessment system by gathering feedback from cooperating teachers, faculty in partner colleges who work with the Educator Preparation programs, and current COE students. The goal of this evaluation is to understand each constituent's perspective on the assessment process and their level of awareness of the process. COE also sought to learn how to best share information with them about its assessment system and solicit feedback.

Methodology

Eduventures analysts collaborated with administrators at The University of West Georgia College of Education (COE) to design an interview guide that would collect the desired information. COE provided contact information for potential interviewees, and Eduventures analysts invited these individuals to participate in a telephone interview via multiple rounds of email. Eduventures analysts conducted telephone interviews in October 2012 with all individuals who responded to Eduventures' outreach. Interviewees included: two current graduate students, two cooperating teachers who have mentored COE students in the last academic year, and two University of West Georgia faculty members in partner colleges who work with educator preparation candidates.

Executive Summary

Familiarity and Involvement

Interviewees all articulated a basic familiarity with COE's current assessment system; their knowledge and perspective directly stems from their relationship with COE.

- All interviewees learned, generally, about COE's assessment practices from a COE faculty member or administrator.
- All interviewees had specific questions about their role in the assessment process that were not answered by initial, basic communications from COE faculty and administrators.
  - Some questions have been answered subsequently, while some questions have not been answered.
- All interviewees expressed satisfaction with their level of involvement in the assessment process. They also took responsibility for their level of involvement (e.g., people who are less involved are less involved by their own prerogative).
- Interviewees possess a range of knowledge about NCATE: some were only familiar with the acronym, while one had been interviewed by NCATE about COE.
- Current students know about an online portfolio system COE uses for assessment and understand that their contributions to that online system are important to COE.
- Cooperating teachers know about and use an online system to evaluate student interns (i.e., student teachers) against rubrics.
  - They understand how COE developed these rubrics and why COE gathers this information.
- Faculty members at other colleges within the University know that COE manages its own unique assessment process that involves collecting data about educator preparation candidates. They understand that COE must do this for accreditation.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Interviewees all think COE has streamlined its online assessment system, and has taken deliberate, appropriate steps to communicate high-level (e.g., basic requirements for participation) information with key stakeholders. Interviewees cited weaknesses with COE's communication about *why* this assessment process is so important, as well as more detailed communication (e.g., strategic initiatives at COE, COE program development, reminders about how to meet licensure requirements) between key stakeholders involved in educator preparation and COE.

- Several interviewees described the new online assessment system as "easy" to use and an improvement over previous systems.
- Faculty members at other colleges cited a "gulf" between COE and other units; they also noted that COE is proactively seeking to remedy this "gulf" through more regular face-to-face meetings and partnering with other colleges to create courses and programs.
- All interviewees expressed a desire for more (i.e., more detailed) communication from COE that specifically addresses concerns specific to their relationship with COE (i.e., student, cooperating teacher, faculty in another unit).

Feedback and Recommendations

The most prominent critique surfaced in the interviews was COE's "breakdown of communication," which informs almost all of the recommendations for improvement that the interviewees shared.

- Current students felt it would be valuable for COE to educate them about assessment processes *throughout* their time as students. One interviewee recalled learning about assessment practices only once, during orientation, which was not helpful.
- Cooperating teachers suggested increasing the frequency of evaluations. While the mid-term and final evaluations are still important, it seems interns and cooperating teachers could benefit from "real time" data snapshots that could function like formative assessment.
- Cooperating teachers also emphasized the need for COE to better educate all key stakeholders about what assessment is, why it is important and what the benefits of thorough assessment are for a college of education.
- University faculty encouraged COE to schedule regular—even if it is just once a semester—in-person meetings to brief one another on significant developments or changes in their specific unit's work.

Bottom line: The University of West Georgia College of Education has made notable progress with its new assessment system. Key stakeholders use the current system with ease and facility, and credit the College of Education with taking deliberate steps to make the system more user-friendly than it once was. However, although the College of Education has communicated basic information about assessment to key stakeholders, all interviewees would like more detailed, regular communication from the College of Education. Specifically, current students want reminders about assessment requirements and more access to resources related to what the College of Education requires of them to pursue licensure and complete programs. Cooperating teachers seek access to more data about the College of Education's student teachers and opportunities to participate in a dialogue with supervising faculty members. Cooperating teachers would also value the College of Education taking more initiative to educate current students and cooperating teachers about *why* assessment processes are so important. Finally, faculty members at partner colleges credit the College of Education with recently creating opportunities for richer partnerships between the colleges, and want these interactions to continue. These faculty members would still value more precise information about the College of Education's revision of its assessment process, as well as its academic expectations for students. Moving forward, the College of Education can proactively communicate in these capacities—perhaps simply with renewed vigor—and look for more opportunities to build reciprocal partnerships with key stakeholders.

Findings

Familiarity and Understanding

Current Students

- Across the key stakeholders interviewed, current students were the least informed—or most confused—about COE's assessment processes.
  - One current student said "if I wasn't a graduate research assistant, I probably wouldn't have any involvement" in COE's assessment process. (N.B.: this

interviewee is enrolled in COE's School Counseling M.Ed. program and, ostensibly, is not held to the same standards and processes as educator preparation candidates.)
- o The other interviewee did understand that COE's assessment includes the work uploaded to TK20.
- Both interviewees learned about COE's assessment practices early on in their academic careers from faculty members.
- Although both interviewees are aware that COE is NCATE accredited—and understand that accreditation is an asset—neither knew what NCATE accreditation actually is or how a school earns it.
- One interviewee explained that they are only "semi-satisfied" with their level of involvement and the other is content with their current level of involvement, which is "in the middle."
  - o Both interviewees take responsibility for their level of involvement. They attributed their level of involvement to causes such as disinterest or being a commuter-student, as opposed to anything COE did or did not do.

Cooperating Teachers

- Cooperating teachers learned about COE's assessment processes from COE supervising faculty members and their school principal.
  - o First the principal would "send an email" letting the cooperating teacher know about their assigned intern, then the "supervising professor…[would] spend an hour with the cooperating teacher..and tells [them] this is what's expected of your student intern and of you for the semester."
- One cooperating teacher described "blocks" of standards that are used to evaluate student interns. The other cooperating teacher described a using "rubric of criteria…like 'dispositions,' 'knowledge,' 'collegiality,' 'collaborating.'" Evaluations are conducted "at the midterm and at end [of the semester]."
- Both cooperating teachers felt the process effectively captures student outcomes/reflects Georgia teacher assessment criteria. One cooperating teacher noted that although "the questions are very relevant…it falls upon the [cooperating] teacher to give honest feedback to make those assessments relevant."
- One cooperating teacher is entirely satisfied with their level of involvement: "I think that what I do, I'm supposed to do. I wouldn't think that I need to do more or less."
- The other cooperating teacher is satisfied with their level of involvement, but expressed a desire to have access to more data, saying it would be "wonderful" to be able to make longitudinal or cross-section comparisons among student interns.

University Faculty Members

- Both faculty members learned a tremendous amount about the College of Education's assessment practices from current students, possibly because the College of Education "may have assumed that [faculty in other colleges] know more than we do" about the College of Education's assessment practices.

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- While one faculty member cited students as their primary source of information about the College of Education, the other faculty member's department "had a couple of meetings with Dr. Judy Butler..to talk about teacher education issues." Through those meetings, the faculty member "learned a little more about their assessment…and that they failed one aspect of their [NCATE] assessment recently."
- Both faculty members are aware of NCATE and understand that this is the body that accredits the College of Education.
- Both faculty members described inconsistencies in expectations between their specific college and COE. For example, one interviewee said that for students who major at one college, the students' experiences at COE seem to be "frustrating" because these students have spent three years excelling in a discipline and learning how to write for that discipline. The other interviewee echoed this observation, explaining that there is "not a history of close consultation" between COE and "departments that are training the teachers." Thus, students seem to struggle with different academic expectations, styles and requirements.
- Both faculty members noted that communication between their respective colleges and COE is improving.
  - One faculty member said that their department and the College of Education are beginning to "meet more often" in an effort to "develop a closer relationship" and design undergraduate and graduate coursework intended to bridge the gap between content-focused courses and pedagogy-focused courses.
  - One faculty member cited the success of the U-Teach program in facilitating inter-unit communication. Specifically, the U-Teach program has allowed faculty from the College of Science and Math to meet with faculty from the College of Education "in a more organized manner…[and] these group meetings…[are] really productive." In fact, the interviewee is "looking forward" to upcoming meetings as opportunities to forge a stronger connection with COE.
- Faculty members had no comments about how effectively the College of Education's assessments align to Georgia teacher assessment criteria.
- Faculty members were satisfied with their current level of involvement in COE assessment processes. One faculty member explained that they would not "be able to contribute much" to COE's assessment processes because their expertise is in a content area—not pedagogy. The other faculty member does not perceive the College of Education's assessment as "something [our unit] should be involved with."

Strengths and Weaknesses

Current Students

- One interviewee said COE does a "very good job" of aligning its assessments to Georgia teacher assessment criteria.
- One interviewee highlighted COE's implementation of TK20 as a strength because it bridges a gap that previously existed between students, faculty and schools that host interns. The interviewee said that TK20 is also "easier" to use than previous systems, and values having all data in one place.

- A weakness with TK20 is simply the "basic difficulties" that ensued from implementing a new system.
- Interviewees think COE's communication is an area for improvement. Specifically, interviewees cited a need for better communication between departments/programs within COE.
- Interviewees also think COE could improve its communication with students: "information [about licensure, assessment or graduation requirements] isn't very readily available…you have to go searching for it."

Cooperating Teachers

- Cooperating teachers find COE's assessment system "very easy to use" and like it "better" than previous assessment systems.
- One cooperating teacher explicitly cited value in TK20 for undergraduate students as they pursue "long term goals" like finding their first job.
- In terms of communication with key stakeholders, one cooperating teacher said that COE "did what needed to be done" but "a lot of students don't [understand] assessment." Thus, while communication was sufficient, this cooperating teacher recommends that COE proactively seek to educate its students about why assessment is so important and what goals TK20 helps COE and students achieve.
- One cooperating teacher explained that one weakness is the discourse—or lack thereof— between cooperating teachers and supervising faculty members from COE. In particular, this cooperating teacher would like to receive "more feedback from supervising teachers on what we submit." In addition, it "would be nice" to be asked for feedback or follow-up on anything they have submitted about a student teacher. This has not yet happened.
- Another potential weakness might be that COE's assessment system does not allow for interim, formative-type assessments of interns. One cooperating teacher said it could be helpful to have "biweekly evaluations…to [develop] a snapshot of how things are going." At this point, it is not a requirement, "and if it's not required, most people won't do it."

University Faculty Members

- Despite students' initial complaints about the College of Education's new online assessment system, one faculty member says that the College of Education does a "fantastic job" with online activity and programming. In fact, "they pretty much lead our online courses at University of West Georgia." Additionally, "in the last couple of years, [the interviewee] really [hasn't] heard that much complaint" about the College of Education's requirements and assessment procedures.
- Another strength is that COE makes a deliberate effort to "assess different stages" of their students' work at "multiple points" throughout their program.
  - Specifically, it seems that COE has thought through what their assessment system ought to be and "are developing a pretty thorough assessment system."
- As mentioned in the previous section, faculty members cited weaknesses in separate college's standards of preparation. One faculty member said that "some graduate students from [COE] don't understand what our [academic] expectations seem to be…[or] how

much reading they need to do" (i.e., students from COE have difficulties adapting to and excelling in different colleges at The University of West Georgia).

Feedback and Recommendations

Current Students

- Current students recognize that they and their peers juggle many responsibilities—and many are commuter students. Thus, in-person or face-to-face trainings and communication are not practical.
  - Although webinars or online tutorials theoretically make sense for this population, one interviewee rarely watches them due to a dearth of time.
- Email is the most desirable form of communication for current students.
- Additionally, interviewees explained that hearing assessment requirements once at a program orientation was not sufficient. (N.B.: This is the interviewee's perception of what happened.) Rather, COE ought to provide multiple opportunities for current students to understand what is and will be required of them in order to earn licensure and graduate via email or by facilitating conversations with professors.

Cooperating Teachers

- One interviewee suggests that some cooperating teachers might benefit from and appreciate more comprehensive access to assessment data. In particular, this interviewee would appreciate comparative data (e.g., interns' improvement, how interns compare from year to year, differences in subject area or school placements).
- One interviewee emphasized the importance of COE proactively educating cooperating teachers and student interns about TK20's capabilities and functions. This interviewee specifically suggested an "online tutorial" that people could view at their convenience.
- One interviewee explained that many teachers are "always at the computer," so email and electronic communications are preferable.

University Faculty Members

- Faculty members encouraged the College of Education to be more forthcoming with details about their programs and assessments, as well as any changes: "there's a fine line between being inundated with information…and being notified about pertinent things like an assessment plan." Accordingly, it seems that faculty in other units—especially those who work with educator preparation candidates would value more insight into COE practices and changes.
- Faculty members cited weakness in communication, specifically requesting more "face-to-face meetings…[although] once a semester would be good enough" to ensure that essential information is shared between units.

Appendix

This is the document that potential interviewees received with Eduventures' email inviting them to participate in a conversation, as well as the guide Eduventures analysts used during the telephone interviews.

<u>Interview Guide: Assessment System Evaluations</u>

University of West Georgia's (COE) College of Education has recently made significant changes to its process for assessment of educator preparation candidates. The College of Education is eager to collect feedback about how the revised process works and your level of involvement.

Overview
- Name
- Professional role
- Relationship to University of West Georgia's College of Education

Context
- In what capacity are you familiar with assessment processes that support program evaluation and/or evaluation of educator preparation candidates?
- To what degree are you familiar with NCATE accreditation?
- In what capacity—if at all—are you familiar with University of West Georgia College of Education's assessment process?
- What opportunities have you had to be involved in University of West Georgia College of Education's assessment process?
    - What has your level of involvement been in this assessment process?
    - How satisfied are you with your level of involvement? Would you prefer more or less involvement?

If interviewee is familiar with University of West Georgia College of Education's process:
- How did you learn about the College of Education's assessment process?
- How effectively do you think this new process captures student outcomes and/or Georgia teacher assessment criteria?
- What is your understanding of how this assessment process has evolved?

If interviewee is unfamiliar with University of West Georgia College of Education's process
- With what other university assessment processes are you familiar? What are your general perceptions of those processes?

Strengths and Weaknesses
(N.B.: If interviewee is familiar with University of West Georgia College of Education's assessment process, these questions should address the process specifically; if the interviewee is unfamiliar with University of West Georgia College of Education's assessment process, these questions should be asked generally.)
- What do you perceive to be strengths or weaknesses of this/any assessment process?

- Specifically, how well does this assessment system gauge educator preparation candidates' skills and dispositions?
- Please share any recommendations for edits and/or amendments to this process, so that it might measure educator preparation candidates' skills and dispositions more thoroughly.

Sharing Information and Opportunities for Involvement
- What would you consider an ideal way to be in involved with University of West Georgia College of Education's assessment process?
- How would you like to receive information about University of West Georgia College of Education's assessment processes/systems? (e.g., email, in-person professional development, online tutorial)
  - Does this preference differ based for different phases of involvement?