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## Under Scrutiny

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# Under Scrutiny: Assessment Considerations in Advanced Level Programs

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The National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) requires advanced programs in schools of education to develop and implement high quality unit assessment systems reflecting their conceptual framework and incorporating candidate proficiencies outlined in professional, state, and institutional standards. This is difficult for advanced level programs that are structured differently, award many types of degrees, and prepare candidates for various teaching and non-teaching roles. Faculty buy-in to unit-level assessment is challenging, as well, and the ways advanced programs choose to implement a unit assessment system are not always psychometrically sound. This article describes the process of revising a unit's advanced programs assessment system in a way that yields meaningful unit level data, allows for the generation of aggregated data inclusive of all programs, and ultimately provides noteworthy conclusions about the caliber of the unit's graduates. Throughout this article, the authors explore contextual information surrounding unit level assessment at the advanced level. The process and decisions made by this school of education will be useful to other institutions in similar circumstances.

The National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) is an accrediting body for schools, colleges, and departments of education recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education Accreditation. The NCATE accreditation process has two primary components: the unit review and the program review. The unit is the school, college, or department of education, plus any other entities on campus that prepare personnel to work in school—the organization with the responsibility for managing or coordinating all programs offered for the initial and continuing preparation of teachers and other school personnel, regardless of where these programs are administratively housed. A program is a discipline-

specific component within a unit that provides a planned sequence of courses and experiences for preparing P–12 teachers and other professional school personnel (e.g. social studies educators, school psychologists, etc.). Program reviews are a required component of the NCATE accreditation review (NCATE, 2009).

While most states accept national accreditation and program recognition as the basis for decisions regarding state certification of graduates, some programs in nationally accredited units with national recognition from their Specialized Professional Associations (SPAs) must also undergo program approval processes in their own states. As these states

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do not recognize national accreditation or national program recognition, they require programs to participate in a process of state program approval. The purpose of this often duplicative process is for the state to approve educator certification programs within the unit such that graduates of state approved programs are eligible for certification as educators in that particular state. Such is the case for schools, colleges, and departments of education in a state in the Northeast, who undergo the following levels of review shown in Table 1.

### **Assessment Requirements in Accreditation, Program Recognition, and State Program Approval**

Among other requirements, NCATE requires that schools of education (i.e., “units”) seeking accreditation develop a conceptual framework articulating a shared vision for a unit’s efforts in preparing educators to work effectively in P–12 schools. The conceptual framework is intended to provide direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability.

NCATE further stipulates that unit assessment systems:

- Reflect the unit’s conceptual framework and incorporate candidate proficiencies outlined in professional, state, and institutional standards;
- Include measures that are of sufficient quality to inform the important aspects of faculty, curriculum, instruction, and candidate performance; and
- Regularly and systematically collect, compile, aggregate, summarize, and analyze candidate assessment data to improve candidate performance, program quality, and unit operations (NCATE, 2008).

NCATE also requires that the unit assessment system (a) include both program and unit data; (b) evolve from the unit’s conceptual framework and program goals; and (c) be based on the assessments that are the foundation for NCATE’s program review process. The five assessments that form the foundation for NCATE’s program review process include:

1. A state licensure exam for program area (if available—otherwise another content based assessment);
2. A content assessment;
3. An assessment of the candidate’s ability to plan;

4. A student teaching or internship assessment; and
5. An assessment of the candidate’s impact on student learning or providing a supporting learning environment.

The national program review system is centrally managed by NCATE, although the development/revision of program standards and the review of programs are conducted by the SPAs. Institutions must submit program reports for programs that align with program standards that have been adopted by NCATE. Each SPA has customized the requirements for six to eight assessments to conform to the standards and assessments unique to each discipline. All SPAs, however, include the five types of assessments described above: a state licensure examinations of content knowledge; at least one additional assessment of content knowledge; an assessment of candidate ability to plan instruction, or (for non-teaching fields) to fulfill identified professional responsibilities; the evaluation of clinical practice; and an assessment that demonstrates candidate effect on student learning, or (for non-teaching fields) the ability to create supportive learning environments.

According to the State Program Approval process in this Northeast state, programs are required to implement assessment systems that include assessment at admission, prior to student teaching/internship, and prior to recommendation for certification. Furthermore, programs must align the assessment system to national professional standards and (state professional standards, where applicable) and assure the assessment of all key professional standards within the system.

### **Assessment in Advanced Programs**

NCATE defines “advanced programs” as

programs at the post-baccalaureate levels for (1) the continuing education of teachers who have previously completed initial preparation, or (2) the preparation of other professional school personnel for work in P-12 school settings...including master’s, specialists, and doctoral degree programs, as well as non-degree licensure programs (Mitchell, 2009).

Due to the specificity of SPA program standards and the types of assessments to be included in national and state program review, advanced programs generally have clear guidelines related to the nature and design of assessments for program level assessment. The development of *unit* assessment systems at the advan-

**Table 1**  
**Levels of Unit and Program Review**

Components	Unit		Program
Standards	NCATE	SPA	State
Reviewed by	Board of Examiners	Program Reviewers	Program Reviewers
Process	On-site	Electronic	On-site
Decision	Accreditation	Recognition	Program Approval
Final Decision-Maker	Unit Accreditation Board	National Program Reviewers	State Reviewers

Note: In this context, it is possible for nationally recognized programs to be denied state program approval (and vice versa).

ced level can be more complicated. As previously stated, the unit assessment system is supposed to reflect the unit's conceptual framework articulating a shared vision for a unit's efforts in preparing advanced education practitioners. While the conceptual framework is related to programs' SPA standards, it is necessarily more broad and designed to encompass competencies that are not specific to any particular advanced program. Rather the conceptual framework reflects what is common or shared among rather disparate advanced programs that award graduate level endorsements, MA, MS, MEd, CAGS, and PhD degrees and prepare candidates for a variety of roles, including teacher, school principal, school psychologist, reading specialist, school counselor, and researcher/higher education faculty.

Design of an advanced unit assessment system is further complicated by the presence or absence of unique education program characteristics such as adherence to NCATE or a SPA, the inclusion of a field component, or state approval. Further, an education unit must decide whether the conceptual framework should be broad enough to include programs in the unit that logically fall within its mission but do not prepare candidates for roles in education, are not nationally recognized, and do not fall under state program approval, such as mental health and agency counseling. Additionally, advanced program faculty recognize the structural and substantive differences among their programs and often voice the concern that it is not possible or meaningful to design a conceptual framework or a unit assessment system that is broad enough to encompass all advanced programs. Furthermore there is little guidance from NCATE

recommending approaches to capture strands of similarity across advanced programs.

## One Unit's Response

The remainder of this paper will describe one unit's initial efforts to draft meaningful competencies at the advanced level and design a unit assessment system at the advanced level, the lessons it has learned regarding the quality and utility of that unit assessment system, and the process it is undertaking to begin revising unit assessment at the advanced level to become more collaborative and meaningful.

Like many schools of education responding to NCATE's requirement for a unit assessment system at the advanced level, the School of Education (i.e., the "unit") which is the focus of this paper developed a set of Advanced Competencies parallel to its Conceptual Framework for initial teacher preparation programs. These Advanced Competencies were defined as Knowledge, Practice, Diversity, and Professionalism. Each contained the following descriptors, as well:

### Knowledge

- *General knowledge*: candidate formulates meaningful questions, conducts knowledge searches pertaining to questions posed, and accurately interprets and transfers knowledge gathered.
- *Domain-specific knowledge*: candidate demonstrates conceptual mastery of one's chosen field of professional practice through understanding of subject matter, literature, theory, and methods.

- *Technology knowledge*: candidate demonstrates understanding of the features of a variety of hardware, software, and assistive technology devices and their capacity to facilitate knowledge acquisition and transfer.

### Practice

- *Communication and expression*: candidate interprets, organizes, and communicates knowledge effectively and articulately, both orally and in writing.
- *Reflective problem-solving*: candidate defines a problem clearly, identifies alternative solutions, determines a course of action that leads to effective problem resolution, and reflects on the efficacy of chosen course of action.
- *Professional practice*: candidate uses or applies knowledge within chosen field to advance the well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities. Additionally, candidate is a critical consumer of research and demonstrates an understanding of the essential role of assessment in reflective evidence-based practice.
- *Technology use*: candidate uses information technology to transfer existing knowledge effectively, to develop new applications of knowledge within chosen field, or to create new knowledge.

### Diversity

- *Systems view of human development*: candidate uses a systems-based approach (e.g., biological, psychological, social, or cultural) to understand child cognition, learning, and behavior.
- *Family centeredness and engagement*: candidate demonstrates an understanding of various styles of family decision-making and functioning, and facilitates family engagement in educational decision-making for their children.
- *Individual differences and cultural diversity*: candidate demonstrates responsiveness to factors that comprise child and family diversity, and reflects on own personal and professional attitudes/beliefs and their influence on one's practice.

### Professionalism

- *Professional ethics*: candidate behaves according to the valued standards of one's chosen profession (e.g., respect, confidentiality, caring).
- *Collaboration*: candidate works cooperatively, respectfully, and productively with other professionals and stakeholders, and engages others in reflective conversation and problem-solving.
- *Leadership*: candidate communicates a professional vision, influences others' behaviors/beliefs

toward shared goals in a way that respects their individual rights, and leads by example.

- *Professional development*: candidate reflects on own emerging, developing or acquired professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will result in competent practice and creates plan to further one's own professional growth.

The subsequent plan for assessing the achievement of the Advanced Competencies included assessments at formative and summative transition points. The summative transition point was the point immediately prior to graduation from an advanced program. Programs were free to define their formative transition points as they saw fit. Faculty and self-evaluations were used to assess Diversity and Professionalism and grade point averages and comprehensive exam scores were used to evaluate Knowledge. These assessments were conducted at formative and summative transition points in each program.

Assessment of the Advanced Competency labeled "Practice" was also conducted at the formative and summative transition points. To achieve this purpose, programs were asked to identify program or classroom assessments at these two time periods that reflected the Advanced Competency of Practice. For unit-level assessment purposes, the summative assessment was called a Capstone, while the formative assessment was called a Work Sample<sup>1</sup>. The types of assessments utilized by programs at these two points varied widely, with no collective agreement across programs about similar activities or performance expectations. For example, the Work Samples used at the formative point included reflection papers, research projects, complete practicum portfolios, unit plans, and other assessments.

Additionally, some programs evaluated multiple assessments as candidates' Work Sample, while others relied on a single piece of candidate work. Under this design, program-level assessments effectively become "unit" assessments that were re-evaluated using a broad, unit level rubric aligned with the Advanced Competencies.

In the first stage of implementation in 2004, the unit level "rubric" used to assess Practice was basically a shell of a four-point rubric organized by the four traits of the Advanced Competency of Practice plus the Advanced Competency of Diversity (see Figure 1 ). The "rubric" did not contain unit-level descriptors for each trait (Communication and Expression, Reflective Problem-Solving, Professional Practice, Individual Differences and Cultural Diversity, and Technology Use) at each level of performance. Rather, programs were instructed to add descriptors to each of the perfor-

**Figure 1**  
**Formative/Summative Rubric for the Assessment of Practice (Version 1)**

<p><b>COMMUNICATION AND EXPRESSION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of thought and ideas</li> <li>• Expression and voice</li> <li>• Use of the English language</li> </ul>	<b>ADVANCED 4</b>	<b>ADEQUATE 3</b>	<b>IMPROVING 2</b>	<b>WEAK 1</b>
<p><b>REFLECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective problem-solving strategies</li> <li>• Monitoring and reflection of outcomes</li> </ul>	<b>ADVANCED 4</b>	<b>ADEQUATE 3</b>	<b>IMPROVING 2</b>	<b>WEAK 1</b>
<p><b>PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of research use</li> <li>• Evidence-based practice</li> <li>• Evidence of knowledge of professional ethics or code of conduct</li> </ul>	<b>ADVANCED 4</b>	<b>ADEQUATE 3</b>	<b>IMPROVING 2</b>	<b>WEAK 1</b>
<p><b>INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers factors affecting learning due to individual differences</li> <li>• Considers factors affecting learning due to cultural differences</li> </ul>	<b>ADVANCED 4</b>	<b>ADEQUATE 3</b>	<b>IMPROVING 2</b>	<b>WEAK 1</b>
<p><b>TECHNOLOGY USE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of information technology use to develop new knowledge applications, to transfer existing knowledge, or to create new knowledge</li> </ul>	<b>ADVANCED 4</b>	<b>ADEQUATE 3</b>	<b>IMPROVING 2</b>	<b>WEAK 1</b>

formance levels that fit the expectations of their program and use the rubric with their own descriptors for unit assessment purposes.

What resulted was essentially a different rubric for each program. Nevertheless, data yielded through application of these diverse rubrics were subsequently compiled, aggregated, analyzed, and reported on at the unit level. At this time, concerns were raised about the psychometric soundness of aggregating data from several disparate rubrics and making conclusions regarding the performance of advanced candidates and the unit in general. Additionally, the inclusion of the Advanced Competency of Diversity in a rubric meant

to assess the Advanced Competency of Practice was questioned, raising questions about the construct that was actually being measured.

Adjustments were made to the rubrics in 2006-2007, with the aim of drafting a single, unit-level rubric for the assessment of Practice at the formative and summative stages. An assessment committee representing each department was successful at designing a rubric (with descriptors) that was subsequently used for unit assessment of Practice. The Diversity trait was excluded from the revised rubric based on analyses of assessment data showing almost no correlation between candidates' scores on the

Practice dimensions and their scores on Diversity. The revised rubric is displayed in Figure 2. While a welcome improvement, challenges remained with regard to assessment at the unit level.

## Challenges

One of the most serious challenges associated with the advanced unit assessment system described in this paper is that of faculty buy-in. First, advanced program faculty did not feel that they had been involved in the development of the Advanced Competencies. Consequently, they saw little utility in assessing them. Second, the unit level rubric to assess Practice was “superimposed” on an assessment already evaluated with a program’s rubric at the program level; consequently, many faculty evaluators did not value the broader unit level rubric designed to collect unit assessment data. While assessment at the unit level is necessarily “coarser” than that underlying assessments in programs, the conceptual base for unit assessment must be a broader version of one that makes sense at the finer-grained level (Mislevy, as cited in Pellegrino, Chudowsky, and Glaser, 2001). Unfortunately, this was not the case. Faculty did not agree with the content of unit assessment, and the data yielded from unit assessment did not tell them anything they did not already know about their candidates. Even with the revised, common unit-level rubric to assess Practice, there was little evidence that the information was useful to programs and there was no apparent connection to potential improvements developed on the program level. While this process allowed for unit level aggregation, it can best be described as a compliance process organized on the unit level to fulfill assessment requirements for NCATE.

From a psychometric perspective, there were several problems with the advanced assessment strategy described above. The first has to do with NCATE’s call for units to develop assessment *systems*. Noting that “...a collection of assessments does not entail a system any more than a pile of bricks constitutes a house,” Colardarci (2002, p. 773) and others argue that a collection of assessments such as this differs greatly from a *system* of assessments in that the inclusion of program assessments in a *coherent* unit wide assessment system is deliberate and coordinated. The assessments selected in an assessment system make up a coordinated, comprehensive set of assessments (Roeber, 1997). Furthermore, advanced assessment systems that include assessments at will result in “hodgepodge or haphazard evidence... [that]

makes meeting psychometric requirements virtually impossible” (Lang & Wilkerson, 2007, p. 15).

A related psychometric concern has to do with comparability. Except for the unit requirement that the program assessments used for unit level assessment be administered at a certain transition point and align with the unit level Advanced Competency entitled “Practice,” programs were free to include virtually any assessment or task in the advanced programs unit assessment system. This resulted in the aggregation of data from a very diverse collection of assessments that seemed to differ in important ways. In fact, the unit did not make any efforts to ensure that the assessments were similar, aside from requiring them to assess “Practice.”

In the assessment context previously described, little, if any, consideration is given to the comparability of these program level assessments that were aggregated at the unit level in terms of cognitive complexity, content quality, content coverage, or any other features. This called into the question the meaningfulness and validity of the aggregation of data from often disparate performance assessments (Dietel, 1993). Valid comparisons of these assessments by way of external validation checks or a review process would have been a helpful step toward ensuring the comparability of program assessments used for unit level purposes (Neill & Wood, 2007).

Further, differing program assessments, the results of which are aggregated at the unit level, require a level of validity and reliability that will ensure confidence in the resulting judgments made from the unit data that is collected (Vermont Department of Education, 2006). In this case, a sufficient level of validity and reliability of program assessments was not required. Nor were the validity and reliability of program assessments included in the unit assessment system investigated. Addressing the challenges of consensus building and psychometric soundness became a major focus of the unit’s work the following year.

## Revision of Advanced Competencies

This section describes the revision of the Advanced Competencies of a School of Education’s advanced programs during 2007/08. It focuses on the challenges the unit faces in tailoring competencies that represent common candidate proficiencies for a broad spectrum of graduate level teaching and non-teaching programs. After the unsuccessful attempt to improve the assessment system by revising rubrics, faculty and administrators accepted that simply addressing the way

**Figure 2**  
**Formative/Summative Rubric for the Assessment of Practice (Version 2)**

	<b>EXEMPLARY 4</b>	<b>ACCEPTABLE 3</b>	<b>DEVELOPING 2</b>	<b>UNACCEPTABLE 1</b>
<b>COMMUNICATION AND EXPRESSION</b>	The candidate consistently presents clear, organized and comprehensive knowledge, thoughts and ideas relevant to the field. The candidate's oral communication is consistently articulate and effective in conveying relevant information to intended audience(s). The candidate's written communication skills are consistently free of errors of language, focused and effective in conveying information to intended audience(s).	The candidate presents appropriate knowledge, thoughts and ideas relevant to the field. The candidate's oral communication is effective in conveying relevant information to intended audience(s). The candidate's written communication skills displays minor errors of language, but are able to effectively convey information to intended audience(s).	The candidate's presentation of knowledge, thoughts and ideas is disorganized or incomplete. The candidate's oral communication skills are ineffective in presenting relevant information to intended audience(s). The candidate's written communication shows errors of language that detract from comprehension of the information or the candidate's written communication does not effectively convey information to intended audience(s).	The candidate consistently presents unclear, faulty or incomplete knowledge, thoughts and ideas relevant to the field. The candidate's oral communication skills are inarticulate and ineffective in conveying information to the intended audience(s). The candidate's written communication skills show significant errors of language, lack of focus and are ineffective in conveying information to intended audience(s).
<b>REFLECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING</b>	The candidate identifies the problem in an accurate and comprehensive way, clearly defines course of action and presents a detailed and useful plan to evaluate efficacy of results. The candidate critically reflects on problem-solving techniques, strategies, and results. Offers clear insights regarding self-knowledge.	The candidate accurately identifies problem, defines a course of action and outlines a plan to evaluate efficacy of results. The candidate identifies problem solving techniques that are most helpful. Offers initial insights regarding self-knowledge.	The candidate identifies part of the problem, defines a limited course of action and demonstrates preliminary knowledge of need to evaluate efficacy of results. The candidate summarizes process with no or little critical reflection. Offers limited awareness about own learning.	The candidate identifies problem inaccurately, defines an inadequate course of action with no viable plan to evaluate efficacy of results. The candidate does not show evidence of an attempt to reflect on problem-solving or own learning.
<b>PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE</b>	Performance demonstrates: Thorough and theoretically coherent application of significant research in specified, practice-related settings; Use of multiple and varied data to plan and/or implement practices that advance the practices, skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions of diverse children, family systems, school systems, or communities	Performance demonstrates: Theoretically coherent application of significant research in specified, practice related settings; Beginning use of multiple and varied data based sources to plan and/or implement practices that advance the practices, skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions of diverse children, family systems, school systems, or communities	Performance demonstrates: Application of research that reflects limited understanding of theoretical connections to practice. Limited use of data to plan and/or implement practices that advance the practices, skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions of diverse children, family systems, school systems, or communities.	Performance demonstrates: Little evidence that practice is theoretically driven or relevant to specified settings; Little evidence of data based planning or practice; and/or planning, practice does not advance the practices, skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions of diverse children, family systems, school systems, or communities
<b>TECHNOLOGY USE</b>	Performance demonstrates strong and widespread application of technology to effectively develop, transfer, or expand knowledge	Performance demonstrates technology application to develop, transfer, or expand knowledge in a focused area of learning	Performance demonstrates an emerging application of technology to support learning.	Performance demonstrates limited or no application of technology.

the unit collects data is futile if the construct being measured is not considered. Thus began a year-long process to review the foundation of the current assessment system, the Advanced Competencies, in order to make graduate level assessment more meaningful for unit level use.

As described earlier, the Advanced Competencies that guided the assessment system of the graduate programs at this institution were written into the School of Education's Conceptual Framework. The four major headings, Knowledge, Diversity, Practice and Professionalism, had a total of 14 descriptors that gave



more specific detail for the expectations the institution has of its candidates. With this existing framework in 2004, there was no apparent accounting for the specificity of the descriptors in the institutional report or in the program level materials. In a somewhat piecemeal fashion, portions of each heading were assessed and reported on the unit level leaving many of the subcategories unmentioned. Additionally, any reviewer of the unit during the visit would have had difficulty finding faculty members who could speak to the presence of the subcategories or where and how they were measured within their programs. The lack of attention to these descriptors suggested a gap between what the institution stated it valued in its candidates and what it actually assessed in their abilities. The descriptors ultimately served as ideals without any direct connection to the School's program management or unit assessment system.

Several major assumptions guided this revision process. They evolved as fundamental understandings and served as a reference point to move past many of the challenging decisions that program coordinators and administrators needed to make. First, involvement from all coordinators in all advanced programs was integral as many felt the previous version of the Advanced Competencies had been handed to them with little opportunity for input. The progress was often tedious and it was important to focus on buy-in and consensus building along the way.

Second, despite individual program differences, all programs belonging to the School of Education must have some common core expectations of its candidates. Stated simply if a program is part of unit, there must be commonalities; the candidates from various programs must have a common core of traits or skills that are valued and can be observed.

Third, this exercise in revision was necessary to make meaningful conclusions from the collection of unit data. Up to this point, all of those involved were aware of the amount of time and effort that went into creating a semblance of unit assessment, and yet there was little useful information that resulted from those efforts. Revamping the core Advanced Competencies was at the root of developing this meaningful assessment system.

Fourth and finally, unit level information gathering can and should differ from program level assessment needs with the latter being much more specific to the particular discipline.

One important factor in all of these decisions appeared to be the type of program and the challenges in defining competencies that applied to all of them.

Within the unit, there are teaching and non-teaching programs that result in advanced education practitioner standing or initial non-teaching certification. Confusion also arose over factors related to the often competing standards of external reviews. Considering two distinct areas, SPA standards, and state approval criteria, as they were understood within NCATE standards, emerged as an important element in establishing unit level competencies that respect program level expectations. Table 2 illustrates the complex considerations that were taken into account in the approval of new Advanced Competencies.

Varying program structures within the School of Education, some of which result in a second initial state certification for teachers already holding an initial teaching certificate, some of which focus on advanced teaching development, and some of which relate to non-teaching fields, muddled the discussion about core competencies. Layering all of these considerations within one unit level assessment system posed challenges. Understanding or at least accepting these complexities became an important step in agreeing on unit level Advanced Competencies that were the least common denominator across all programs.

Program coordinators were concerned about the methods proposed to gather information on these Advanced Competencies and spoke adamantly about not wanting a more complicated assessment system. They requested that previously mentioned factors of program and state approval processes not be complicated by separate unit expectations. Agreeing on the phraseology of the descriptors became an exercise in simplifying language in which each program could see a reflection of their candidates.

The revision process remained open-ended, constrained only by the auspices of the Conceptual Framework of the institution. No preconceived notion was imposed on the length or content of the new Advanced Competencies. What began as a review and update of language in each of the 14 descriptors ended with a complete restructuring of categories. When wondering if more is better and striving for the least common denominator, redundant language was cut and categories were compressed.

Ultimately the editing process resulted in narrowing several categories, adding clearer language consisting of demonstrable verbs, and reconfiguring the topical headings from four to two. Knowledge and Practice are the larger headings with Diversity and Professionalism infused throughout them, the idea being that what any candidate knows (Knowledge) and can do (Practice) must be in the context of Diversity and Profes-

sionalism. Careful attention was paid to how each program could operationalize these concepts and the ways in which the Advanced Competencies would be seen in each program. Table 3 shows the most updated version of the unit's Advanced Competencies tentatively approved as the final draft in April 2008 until the assessment process was formally approved.

As program coordinators began discussing the details of the Advanced Competencies, it quickly became evident that there were many disagreements around the fit of these descriptors to all programs' expectations. Key differences in programs prompted lengthy discussions of entire subcategories. For example, under the heading of Professionalism, one subcategory read "*Leadership*: candidate communicates a professional vision, influences others' behaviors/beliefs toward shared goals in a way that respects and individual rights, and leads by example." Programs such as Educational Leadership and School Psychology readily embraced this descriptor as an integral goal for their candidates to be change agents and leaders in their profession. Programs focused more on advanced teaching such as Secondary Education and Early Childhood Education, were less convinced this was an appropriate Advanced Competency for their candidates. The result of these discussions was an acceptance that, while all of the existing descriptors were conceptually sound, their use as a unit level expectation was not a good fit. Much to some programs' dismay, the entire subcategory of Leadership was removed as a unit level expectation.

Further disagreement revolved around smaller but equally important word choices. With the descriptor, "*Professional Practice*: candidate uses or applies knowledge within chosen field to advance the well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities", there was lengthy discussion of the scope of influence various programs envisioned for their candidates. This was combined with a discussion about the extent to which it is realistic to anticipate real change in any constituency (student, client, school) that is initiated by a pre-service professional. The final wording for this revised section involved many and/or statements to encompass these concerns. This descriptor is now within Evidence-Based Decision Making and reads "...incorporates consideration of other professionals and/or stakeholders while determining a plan of action that: a) contributes to school improvement and/or renewal; and/or b) promotes the well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities." With this wording, every program coordinator agreed they could see ways

their candidates had an impact on their intended audience. The newest draft of the School of Education's Advanced Competencies appears in Table 3. In contrast to the previous version, program coordinators were pleased with the concise language that represents demonstrable candidate skills as unit level expectations inclusive of all program level considerations. From an administrative perspective, this revision seemed more manageable in its organization as the institution turned to the next step of revising the assessment system with these revised Advanced Competencies at its core.

### Assessment Revision Process

In September 2008, with the draft of the revised Advanced Competencies in place, a sub-committee of advanced program coordinators, representing varied departments within the School of Education, plus the Directors of Assessment and Graduate Studies, met to begin the task of modifying unit assessment practices for advanced candidates. Although this work is not yet complete, this part of the paper aims to unpack the process by which the sub-committee came to create a unit-level assessment instrument which will be piloted in Fall 2009 to meet the diverse needs of 19 advanced programs.

In order to embark on this endeavor, there were a series of steps that the sub-committee determined necessary. First, it was agreed that NCATE's assessment #5, namely providing evidence of how candidates impact student (or client) learning/development represented a common theme to all of our advanced program-level work regardless of the varied constituencies served. This was a new imperative for *all* advanced programs to and could naturally lead to a meaningful and relevant unit-level assessment.

Despite this commonality, there was a critical need for faculty buy-in especially in light of the numerous related SPA requirements at the individual program level. The sub-committee members did not want to create a unit-level assessment that conflicted with program requirements or was duplicative of the programmatic efforts already in place. The members also anticipated numerous questions that would inevitably arise about how this would be done and who would be responsible for data collection and analyses for the unit and at the program levels. Thus, it was surmised that if the design of a unit-level assessment could also meet program level needs, then faculty buy-in would be higher.

**Table 2**  
**Unit and Program Review: Considerations of Program Type, SPA, and State Approval.**

Program -- degree	Teaching certification required	SPA approval	State program approval required	Work setting P-12
Secondary Education – MEd	Yes	No	No	Yes
Agency Counseling – MA	No	No	No	No
School Counseling – MA	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Chemical Dependency Counseling –MA	No	No	No	No
Mental Health Counseling –CAGS	No	No	No	No
Early Childhood Education - MEd	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Educational Leadership - MEd	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Health Education - MEd	Yes	No	No	Possibly
PhD in Education	Yes	No	No	Possibly
Physical Education - Certificate in Graduate Studies	Yes	No	No	Yes
Special Education -- MEd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood</li> <li>• Exceptional Learning Needs</li> <li>• Initial Certification</li> <li>• Urban Multicultural</li> </ul>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Reading – MEd	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School Psychology – MA/CAGS	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages – MEd	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Technology Education – MEd	Yes	No	No	Yes

Second, the utility of the current assessment practices already being used at both the initial teacher preparation and advanced program levels needed to be clarified for the unit's purposes. For instance, there was a significant effort to assess candidates with respect to NCATE assessment #5 at the initial teacher preparation level. In fact, a unit exit assessment called the Teacher Candidate Work Sample<sup>2</sup> that reflected the need to

understand the impact of our undergraduate candidates' work with their students was being piloted at the initial level.

Conversely, many of the advanced programs had also created an assessment that responded to both NCATE assessment #5 and their respective SPA requirements. Initial thinking centered on whether one of these assessments that currently measured candidate

impact could be amended to also focus on unit-level interests. This arose from the fact that similar advanced program assessments in Special Education (Instructional Planning & Monitoring) and School Psychology (Academic Intervention) were already being administered as a means for measuring candidate effect on their populations.

Hence, a subsequent document review of assessment materials from nine advanced programs within the School of Education was conducted. The goal of content analyses was to determine whether candidate impact was critical in these assessments. There was also an effort to see if these advanced level assessments aligned with the initial programs' unit-level Teacher Candidate Work Sample components. Considerations of these components were deemed important as the sub-committee thought about adapting this assessment for advanced program candidates. The Teacher Candidate Work Sample components (e.g. Contextual Factors, Learning Goals, Assessment Plan, Design for Instruction, Instructional Decision-Making, Analyses of Student Learning, and Reflection/Self-Evaluation) were viewed as positive indicators for measuring candidate impact.

Thus, it was then agreed that adapting some of the language of the Teacher Candidate Work Sample could be explored to be more fitting with the 19 diverse advanced programs program interests. For example, some of the language that focused on 'students' as recipients of candidate impact, could be more inclusive if a generic term such as 'constituent' were used. It was thought that this would ultimately satisfy the varied programs that did not focus on student groups but instead focused on clients, teachers, or administrators. Subsequently, Teacher Candidate Work Sample terms, such as students, learners or learning, instruction, and academics, were changed from the original work sample to more general terms such as constituent, meaningful experiences, intervention, impact, and effectiveness.

Although many components of the Teacher Candidate Work Sample seemed appropriate for advanced programs, a change in name was necessary. Therefore, an amended version called a Case Study was created. This resulted from the document review that suggested that several advanced programs had something akin to a Case Study for measuring candidate effect. In fact, two of the advanced programs (Reading, TESOL) had a critical advanced program assessment that was called a Case Study. Two other programs (School Psychology and the two Special Education certification programs) had comparable case-

like assessments that could be easily called a *Case Study* as well. Table 4 indicates the name of the specific program within the School of Education, and the assessment already used by that program to assess impact on constituents. Although all advanced program coordinators were asked for assessment instruments, many advanced programs either did not have just one assessment that measured candidate impact or were in the process of creating one which had not yet been utilized.

Numerous discussions then took place about the definition of a *case*, and it was assumed that a case could be a child, school, or system, as this is well documented in the literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995). There were, however, issues in naming this unit-level assessment a *Case Study*, as the sub-committee considered the literature. A case study often does not imply that a candidate impacts the child, school, system, but rather, studies and analyzes a case of interest in some way. Historically, a case study does not focus on change or involve intervention, but considers observation, analyses, and summary as paramount. Thus, several questions were entertained about this potential unit-level assessment, such as:

1. Is it possible to have an Advanced Program Assessment Case Study (that includes actual case analyses and eventual product—a report of some kind) that is done with the intent to create effect?
2. Do we want/need more of a research-focused (e.g. literature review, research question, method, etc.) assessment for our Advanced Candidates?
3. Does this Case Study actually mimic an action research project for our Advanced Candidates (with potentially questionable empirical issues)?
4. Should it be called the Advanced Programs Candidate Work Sample instead?

The term *case study* was then reviewed and amended by the sub-committee due to the need for advanced program candidates to effect change on their constituents as indicated by NCATE assessment #5 and their respective SPA assessment practices. Thus, the term Case Study was changed to Professional Intervention Project.

The final step the sub-committee took in this process involved revising the language of the Professio-

**Table 3**  
**Revised Unit Advanced Competencies.**

<p>Knowledge influenced by diversity and professionalism</p> <p>Advanced candidates demonstrate the requisite knowledge of content and practice to prepare them to be experts of the diverse fields of their disciplines.</p>	<p>Practice informed by diversity and professionalism</p> <p>Advanced candidates incorporate their domain-specific knowledge into performance with attention to diversity and the standards of their profession.</p>
<p>Knowledge 1. Domain-Specific Knowledge: candidate demonstrates conceptual mastery of subject matter, literature, theory, and methods in one’s chosen field of professional practice.</p>	<p>Practice 1. Evidence-based Decision Making: candidate defines a problem clearly; collects/analyzes data; uses data to inform decision-making; addresses target population dynamics; and incorporates considerations of other professionals and/or stakeholders while determining a plan of action that: a) contributes to school improvement and/or renewal; and/or b) promotes the well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities.</p>
<p>Knowledge 2. Information Literacy: candidate recognizes when information is needed and has the ability to locate, interpret, and evaluate relevant information.</p>	<p>Practice 2. Technology Use: candidate selects and uses technology effectively in: a) presentation of information, b) collaborative work environments, c) information collection analysis and management, and d) research based activities</p>
<p>Knowledge 3. Contextual Perspective: candidate demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of diversity as it relates to field specific content.</p>	<p>Practice 3. Diversity of Practice: candidate uses knowledge of diversity about self and others to design effective practice.</p>
<p>Knowledge 4. Professional Awareness: candidate exhibits an understanding of the standards of one’s chosen profession, (e.g., confidentiality, ethics)</p>	<p>Practice 4. Professional Identity Development: candidate examines own emerging, developing or acquired professional knowledge, skills, communication, and dispositions that will result in competent practice, and creates plan to further one’s own professional growth.</p>

nal Intervention Project to reflect the language of the Advanced Competencies in light of outcomes for the Advanced Competency of Practice. In particular, the Practice language about Evidence-Based Decision Making seemed most aligned with the NCATE assessment #5 and the need for measuring candidate effect, which states:

Practice 1) Evidence-based Decision Making:

candidate defines a problem clearly; collects/analyzes data; uses data to inform decision-making; addresses target population dynamics; and incorporates considerations of other professionals and/or stakeholders while determining a plan of action that: a) contributes to school improvement and/or renewal; and/or b) promotes the well-being of children, family systems, school systems, or communities.

It was assumed that the Professional Intervention Project would allow advanced program candidates from various programs the opportunity to analyze a particular problem and develop an intervention that was more scholarly in nature than what the Teacher Candidate Work Sample project implied. The subcommittee also decided that the terms under the Evidence-based Decision Making of the Advanced Competencies would be used as descriptors in the Professional Intervention Project. Primarily, these are: Defining a problem; Data collection & analyses; Uses data to inform decision-making; and Contributes to improvement/Promotes well-being.

The need to more aptly define the term “evidence-based decision making” was then seen as necessary during this process. Thus, a brief internet search for the origin of the phrase and the general meaning agreed upon in education and other-related fields was conducted. Little information was found from this search. It appeared though that the phrase originated from the medical profession as a means for making clinical decisions based on evidence of patient symptoms and evidence of effectiveness for ameliorating them. One web-based graphic found from the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, however, provided an overview of the “phases” involved in making evidence-based decisions. This graphic seemed helpful in thinking through the aspects of the Professional Intervention Project. Hence, it was adapted into a table as a way to show the possible chronology of the overall Professional Intervention Project.

This was done in an effort to condense the overall project components to make it a few pages in length, as opposed to 12 as indicated on the Teacher Candidate Work Sample currently. It was thought that suggesting that such a large unit-level assessment instrument be implemented by the advanced program coordinators would not be viewed positively, especially in light of other NCATE and specific SPA requirements. Furthermore, when considering the Advanced Competencies and aligning the language of the Professional Intervention Project, it seemed necessary to think of it in a few phases or parts to be indicative of evidence-based decision making processes. Essentially, the new draft version of what is now named the Professional Intervention Project has five elements aligned with the Advanced Competencies, as shown in Table 5. Also included is a list of guiding questions that reflect the need for candidates to define their

intervention in five phases. These phases are somewhat reflective of the respective assessments currently used in some of the Advanced Programs and the Advanced Competencies. The five phases are:

- 1) Identify & Define a Problem
- 2) Develop a Plan of Action
- 3) Implement Intervention
- 4) Evaluate
- 5) Reflect

A final version has not yet been created, but a draft version is still undergoing review. Numerous considerations such as the need for triangulation, data collection that is most meaningful to individual programs and at the unit-level, and logistical questions about when such an assessment could/should be administered during candidates experiences in their programs abound. Additional questions reflect some of the issues the unit will face in terms of adoption of the assessment, the importance of professional reflection, and the outcome value of this process for candidates, programs, and the unit at large. These include but are not limited to:

1. If a pilot-test of the Professional Intervention Project is conducted in Fall 2009, what is the minimum number of advanced program candidates that should be considered as part of this pool?
2. What role does self-reflection/evaluation play in a unit assessment at the advanced level?
3. How will the unit use information from the Professional Intervention Project to make a powerful statement about the impact advanced program graduates can have on constituents in their fields?

As the unit ponders these questions, it is also planning next steps in the process of revising the advanced programs unit assessment system, which includes piloting the Professional Intervention Project in Fall 2009, gathering feedback about its use, revising it as necessary, and aiming for full implementation in Spring 2010. At the same time, discussions are taking place about the need to introduce all faculty to the Professional Intervention Project and train faculty in the scoring of the assessment. Finally, the Professional Intervention Project is just one component of the advanced programs assessment system, and much work

**Table 4**  
**Existing Advanced Programs Assessments of Candidate's Effect on Student or Client Learning/Development.**

Advanced Program	Name of Assessment
Early Childhood	Observation and Research Paper
Educational Leadership	Internship Evaluation
Ph.D.	Community Service Learning Unit
Reading	Case Study
School Psychology	Academic Intervention
Special Education Certification	Instructional Planning & Monitoring
Special Education Severe/Profound Certification	Instructional Planning & Monitoring
Special Education-Early Childhood	Applied Learning Project: Assessment Battery
Special Education-Urban/Multicultural	Reading Lesson Plans
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	Assessment Case Study

considerations such as the need for triangulation, data collection that is most meaningful to individual programs and at the unit-level, and logistical questions about when such an assessment could/should be administered during candidates experiences in their programs abound. Additional questions reflect some of the issues the unit will face in terms of adoption of the assessment, the importance of professional reflection, and the outcome value of this process for candidates, programs, and the unit at large. These include but are not limited to:

4. If a pilot-test of the *Professional Intervention Project* is conducted in Fall 2009, what is the minimum number of advanced program candidates that should be considered as part of this pool?
5. What role does self-reflection/evaluation play in a unit assessment at the advanced level?

6. How will the unit use information from the *Professional Intervention Project* to make a powerful statement about the impact advanced program graduates can have on constituents in their fields?

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**Table 5**  
**Outline of Professional Intervention Project.**

Phase	Evidence-Based Decision Making	Questions to Consider
<b>I</b> <b>Identify &amp; Define a Problem</b>	Candidate reviews relevant literature, contextual factors, and views of constituents to define a problem to investigate.	<p>What has caused the candidate to focus on this particular problem?</p> <p>What research or literature informs the problem?</p> <p>What data sources in the setting support that this is a problem in the particular context?</p> <p>Does the candidate consider the views of constituents when defining the problem?</p> <p>What implications do the context, literature, and data have for evidence-based planning and assessment?</p>
<b>II</b> <b>Develop a Plan of Action</b>	The candidate uses information from the contextual factors, literature, and data that impact constituents to set goals, plan to intervene, and assess impact. The candidate sets significant, challenging, varied, and appropriate goals designed to positively affect constituents in some way. The candidate considers multiple assessment modes and approaches aligned with relevant goals to assess impact on constituents before, during, and after intervention.	<p>What is the intervention?</p> <p>What factors were used to select or design the intervention?</p> <p>Has the candidate developed an adequate intervention (e.g. relevant goals, objectives) that directly reflects understanding of the problem?</p> <p>Does the intervention include valid and reliable measures of assessing impact of the intervention?</p> <p>Does the intervention protocol make sense (e.g. reflect sampling and other research protocol) and show understanding of constituents needs/viewpoints?</p>
<b>III</b> <b>Implement Intervention</b>	The candidate implements the intervention aligned with specific goals and constituent characteristics and needs and with strong consideration of contextual factors.	<p>Is the intervention implemented with fidelity?</p> <p>Is the intervention implemented within adequate timelines with respect to constituents' needs/viewpoints?</p> <p>Is adequate data collected in a systematic way?</p> <p>Is data analysis complete and accurate?</p> <p>Is data analysis appropriate to address the questions asked or the problem investigated?</p>
<b>IV</b> <b>Evaluate</b>	The candidate uses assessment data to evaluate impact on constituents regarding progress and achievement. The candidate also evaluates the intervention's overall effectiveness on constituents in order to improve his/her own practice long-term.	<p>Does the candidate's intervention contribute to improving the problem in a significant way?</p> <p>What is the evidence that determines the effectiveness of the intervention?</p> <p>What were the unintended consequences of the intervention?</p>
<b>V</b> <b>Reflect</b>	The candidate reflects on the process of completing the Professional Intervention Project. The candidate discusses emerging professionalism as it can be seen in the four phases of the project: identification & definition of the problem, developing a plan of action, intervention & implementation, and evaluation. The candidate conducts self-evaluation to describe current skills and necessary areas for development.	<p>How has the intervention project revealed your knowledge about your profession?</p> <p>What skills, communication &amp; dispositions have you demonstrated that result in competent practice?</p> <p>Discuss plans to further your professional growth.</p>



remains to be done to review and revise the entire assessment system.

## Conclusions

This paper has illustrated the process that advanced programs at a School of Education has initiated to shift toward a more meaningful, shared vision of unit assessment. Over the course of two years, the unit made significant progress from conducting perfunctory unit assessment of competencies do not reflect faculty input to: 1) achieving consensus on a revised set of advanced competencies; 2) beginning an ongoing discussion of what is important to assess at a unit level; and 3) designing an advanced assessment that evaluates candidates' impact on their constituents.

It is expected that the process and decisions made by this School of Education will be useful to other institutions in similar circumstances as they unpack advanced program unit-level assessment systems. There are several lessons learned about this process worth mentioning here. First, faculty input and buy-in are critical to the establishment and sustainability of an assessment effort. The input and buy-in of faculty are crucial not just at the stage in which assessments are being designed but also in earlier stages when unit-wide expectations are being drafted. It can be challenging to arrive at a place where diverse advanced programs are able to articulate their commonalities, but this paves the way toward the design of meaningful assessment. In the unit described in this paper, many human hours were successfully spent adapting advanced competencies, making it possible to create a new unit assessment that will be piloted in Fall 2009.

Second, a primary focus on the collection of significant, meaningful data should be paramount for units as they adapt and/or redesign assessment practices and procedures. While an existing assessment system may satisfy NCATE, SPA, and state program approval requirements at a surface level, it has no real value if it is seen as a compliance exercise and fails to produce information that faculty members value and can use. As arduous as the process of revising the assessment system is, it is better than continuing with something that is not working and that is increasing faculty cynicism about the worth of assessment.

Finally, a helpful step toward the development of a meaningful advanced programs assessment system involves suspending, at least for a time, concerns about what accreditation bodies, specialized professional associations, and state departments of education say

about how advanced programs should operate. A constant focus on the requirements and expectations of external entities can be stressful and suggest to faculty that assessment is simply an obligation to meet. An overemphasis on accreditation and approval can also be divisive, as advanced programs may distinguish and differentiate themselves according to who they report to and who approves them, if anyone at all. Rather, it is useful for advanced programs to "step back" and reflect on what they value and what unites them, regardless of accreditation, specialized professional association, or state affiliation. From this vantage point, it is possible to lay the foundation of a meaningful advanced programs assessment system, one that is organized around valued constructs, measures key outcomes, and yields data that can be used to understand and improve units and programs.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with the Teacher Work Sample.

<sup>2</sup> The Teacher Candidate Work Sample being piloted at the initial level was based on the Teacher Work Sample model developed by the Renaissance Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality (2002).