Department of Special Education

Assessment Plan and Outcomes Assessment Feedback

The Department has different learning outcomes for each of its degree programs. These can be found at <http://learningoutcomes.utah.edu/department-program/17>. The expected learning outcomes are written at a global level, because they are designed to apply to multiple programs within the Department offering the same degree.

In addition to the Learning Outcomes and Outcomes Assessment described in the following sections, the University of Utah’s teacher licensure program (which includes Special Education) received national accreditation approval through the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and the BCBA coursework sequence received approval from the National Behavior Analysis Certification Board (BACB). These accreditations/approvals provide further assurance of high quality programs.

**Learning outcomes assessment procedures**

The Department collects and analyzes a variety of data at different stages to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Specific learning outcome assessment procedures are in place for each of the degrees offered by the department. Table 1 identifies the learning outcomes and measures for (a) Bachelor’s degree with license, (b) Master’s degree with or without license, and (c) Doctoral degree. Each assessment, as well as implementation procedures, are described below.

Table 1

*Learning Outcomes and Measures for Degrees in Special Education*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Degree** | **Learning Outcome** | **Measures** |
| B.S. | Demonstrate knowledge of current practices as specified by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) | -PRAXIS II  -Student Teaching Evaluation  -Course Grades |
|  | Develop and implement appropriate instructional programming using empirically validated strategies | -Work Artifact - Instructional Plan  -Student Teaching Evaluation |
|  | Collect data on student performance and make data-based decisions about instructional modifications | -Work Artifact - Instructional Plan  -Student Teaching Evaluation |
|  | Conduct appropriate assessments and determine student learning needs | -Work Artifact - Individualized Education Plan  -Work Artifact - Behavior Support Plan  -Student Teaching Evaluation |
|  | Communicate and collaborate effectively with professional colleagues, parents, and family members | -Student Teaching Evaluation |
|  | | |
| M.Ed. | Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization | -Qualifying Exam  -Comprehensive Exam  -Course Grades |
| Communicate effectively and professionally through written and spoken modes of communication | -Qualifying Exam  -Comprehensive Exam |
| *NOTE: Students seeking an M.Ed. with Licensure/Endorsement in Special Education must also achieve the Learning Outcomes identified for the B.S.* | |
|  | | |
| M.S. | Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization | -Qualifying Exam  -Course Grades |
| Communicate effectively and professionally through written and spoken modes of communication | -Qualifying Exam  -Thesis |
| Conduct supervised research | -Thesis |
| *NOTE: Students seeking an M.S. with Licensure/Endorsement in Special Education must also achieve the Learning Outcomes identified for the B.S.* | |
|  | | |
| Ph.D. | Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization | -Core Competencies Evaluation Form  -Course Grades |
| Apply knowledge of special education to research, teaching in higher education, and service | -Core Competencies Evaluation Form |
| Synthesize knowledge in the student’s programmatic area | -Qualifying Exam |
| Conduct research using rigorous methods | -Dissertation |
| Communicate effectively and professionally through written and spoken modes of communication | -Qualifying Exam  -Dissertation |

Course grades

At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, course grades measure a comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization. Students admitted to the undergraduate or graduate programs must maintain a 3.0 cumulative grade point average in the course work approved and counted toward the undergraduate major or the graduate degree to be retained in the program. A student receiving a grade of 1) C- or lower, or 2) no credit in any Department course or field studies/student teaching must repeat the course. If the course is a prerequisite to another course(s) within the teacher education or graduate sequence, it must be repeated prior to continuing the program sequence. A student receiving a grade of 1) C- or lower, or 2) no credit in any Department course or field studies/student teaching taken for a second time will be terminated from the program as per established Departmental policy. Students are made aware of the program’s course requirements through the student handbooks and advisors. Students are directed to read the student handbook during the initial advising meeting and are required to sign-off on the fact that they have been advised to do so. Performance is tracked by advisors who check student performance after each semester to ensure students are meeting course grade requirements and progressing through the program.

Praxis II

At both the undergraduate and graduate level, Praxis II Content tests for students pursuing a special education teaching license measure students’ knowledge of current practices as specified by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Praxis II Content tests are standardized tests of knowledge in the subject matter that they will be teaching within K-12 classrooms. Praxis II Content tests are designed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and are required by the Utah State Board of Education for licensure. As a result, test scores are available for every teacher candidate who is recommended for licensure. The ETS indicates the passing score for each content area according to state requirements <http://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/passing_scores.pdf>. Praxis II Content Test scores are used by faculty in the Department of Special Education for assessing course requirements, course content, and how well students are prepared for the Praxis II tests.

Student teaching evaluation

Student teaching evaluations for students pursuing a special education teaching license/endorsement at either the undergraduate or graduate level are measures that assess the learning outcomes of (a) demonstrating knowledge of current practices as specified by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), (b) developing and implementing appropriate instructional programming using empirically validated strategies, (c) collecting data on student performance and making data-based decisions about instructional modifications, (d) conducting appropriate assessments and determining student learning needs, and (e) communicating and collaborating effectively with professional colleagues, parents, and family members. The student teaching evaluation reflects clearly articulated qualities of teaching using broad-based domains related to content, learners, environments for learning, lesson delivery, assessment, knowledge of content and pedagogy, and professional responsibilities. Using the student teaching evaluation form, students are rated by university supervisors and cooperating teachers several times during field studies and student teaching. Raters/observers use these forms to capture areas of achievement as well as opportunities for improvement. The Final Student Teaching form is a summative assessment. Students must achieve competency in the domains listed above in order to be recommended for license/endorsement. A copy of the student teaching evaluation can be found at <http://education.utah.edu/accreditation/_documents/appendix/Final-Student-Teaching-Evaluation-Special-Ed-S14-unlocked.pdf>.

Work artifacts (Instructional Plan, Individualized Education Plan, and Behavior Support Plan) Work artifacts for students pursuing a special education teaching license/endorsement at either the undergraduate or graduate levels are measures that assess the learning outcomes of (a) developing and implementing appropriate instructional programming using empirically validated strategies, (b) collecting data on student performance and making data-based decisions about instructional modifications, and (c) conducting appropriate assessments and determining student learning needs. Assessment rubrics for work artifacts are created by Department faculty who first identify critical skills necessary for special education teachers regardless of the area of specialization. These skills include developing and implementing instructional plans, creating individualized education plans (Individualized Education Plans/Individualized Family Service Plans), and developing behavior support plans. Once these skills are identified, the faculty create common rubrics that are used to evaluate work artifacts completed in the context of courses within specialization areas. The courses within each specialization area where work artifacts are obtained are identified in Table 2.

Table 2

*Courses from Which Work Artifacts are Obtained*

*Across Program Areas*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Specialization Area** | **Instructional Plan** | **Behavior Support Plan** | **Individualized Education Plan** |
| **Mild/Moderate** | SPED 5122/6122 | SPED 5110/6110 | SPED 5200/6200 |
| **Severe** | SPED 5221/6221, and  SPED 5222/6222 | SPED 5230/6230 | SPED 5222/6222 |
| **Early Childhood** | SPED 5320/6320 | SPED 5360/6360 | SPED 5310/6310 |
| **Deaf & Hard of Hearing** | SPED 5560/6560, or  SPED 5600/6600, or  SPED 5800/6800 | SPED 5550/6550, or  SPED 5600/6600, or  SPED 5800/6800 | SPED 5560/6560 |
| **Visual Impairments** | SPED 5441/6441, and  SPED 5470/6470 | SPED 5470/6470 | SPED 5441/6441, and  SPED 5470/6470 |
| **Deafblind** | SPED 5455/6455 | SPED 5450/6450 | Completed in Licensure Program |

In addition to providing students with feedback based on the common rubrics, faculty use the rubrics for program improvement. Specifically, faculty within each specialization area randomly select a minimum of 30% of work artifacts from the students in their class and then have a second rater (a tenure-track or career-line faculty member in the program area) use the rubric to evaluate the artifact. Once completed, program area discussions take place where inter-observer agreement is examined and modifications to courses/programs are made as needed.

M.S. & M.Ed. qualifying examination

The Qualifying Examination for students pursuing a M.S. or M.Ed. measures a student’s comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization, and the ability to communicate effectively and professionally in writing and verbally.

M.Ed. comprehensive examination

The Comprehensive Examination for students pursuing a M.Ed. measures a student’s comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization, and the ability to communicate effectively and professionally in writing and verbally .

MS. thesis

The M.S. Thesis for students pursing a M.S. degree measures a student’s ability to conduct supervised research, and communicate effectively and professionally in writing and verbally.

Ph.D. core competencies evaluation form

The Ph.D. Core Competencies Evaluation Form for doctoral students measures several competency areas including, (a) demonstrating comprehensive knowledge of special education within the student’s area of specialization, and (b) application of knowledge of special education through research, teaching in higher education, and service. Every spring semester, tenure-track faculty meet to conduct a review of each doctoral student's annual progress. In advance of the meeting, doctoral students (a) provide all tenure-track faculty with an updated curriculum vita and Doctoral Program Checklist (which lists the program coursework and other required tasks and presents information on progress in completing them), and (b) complete a self-assessment of progress using the Core Competencies Evaluation form. Once the student self-assessment is received, the faculty complete their assessment of student progress using the Core Competencies Evaluation form. The Core Competency Evaluation Form is designed to measure progress across time. The faculty have identified annual benchmarks to provide students with additional feedback regarding their progress. Specifically, (a) at the end of the second year of the program students should attain a ranking of “Acceptable” on at least 30% of required competencies, (b) at the end of their third year of the program students should attain a ranking of “Acceptable” on at least 60% of required competencies, and (c) at the end of their program students should attain a ranking of “Acceptable” on at least 90% of required competencies.

Following the review of documents, the faculty discuss each student's progress, areas of strength, and areas in need of additional work/improvement. The student's advisor then writes the student a letter (a copy of which goes in the student's file) detailing the faculty's feedback, praising positive performance and delineating areas of needed improvement.

Ph.D. qualifying exam

The Ph.D. Qualifying Exam assesses a student’s abilities to synthesize knowledge in the student’s programmatic area, and communicate effectively and professionally in writing and verbally. The doctoral qualifying examination requires the student to complete a defensible manuscript of what will become the first chapter of the final dissertation (i.e., background, in-depth literature review, and culminating research questions), as well as present and defend the manuscript to the dissertation committee.

Ph.D. dissertation

The Ph.D. Dissertation measures a student’s ability to conduct independent research, and communicate effectively and professionally through writing and verbally.

**Outcomes assessment feedback**

The Department analyzes data collected for each of the learning outcome measures in order to improve teaching and learning. The following are examples of changes made as a result of assessment feedback:

1. Because it is a requirement of the Utah State Board of Education that students must pass the Praxis II Content Test to receive a license in special education, the pass rate for students who take the exam is 100%. Average student scores are 10-30 points above the required passing score established by the Utah State Board of Education. Although the outcome data are very strong, students in the program reported feeling stressed and anxious about taking the exam. As a result, the Department’s Academic Advisor now provides students who will be taking the exam with information regarding resources for preparing for the exam.

2. As discussed previously, students must achieve competency on all areas of the Student Teaching Evaluation form in order to be recommended for special education license/endorsement. Because the Student Teaching Evaluation form is administered multiple times in the context of field studies and student teaching, the data provide students with multiple data points related to their strengths and areas in need of improvement. These data also provide supervisors with opportunities to provide additional support and/or accommodations (including extended student teaching placements and/or contracts for performance improvement). Table 3 provides a summary of accommodations and outcomes related to the final Student Teaching Evaluation form data since 2012 (the year that department programs began systematically collecting these data).

Table 3

*Summary of Accommodations and Outcomes Related*

*to the Final Student Teaching Evaluation*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of Students** | **2012/2013** | **2013/2014** | **2014/2015** | **2015/2016** | **2016/2017** |
| **Dismissed Prior to Student Teaching** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Received Extended Student Teaching Placement** | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Received Contract for Performance Improvement** | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| **Percent Passed Student Teaching** | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

3. Faculty have used the rubrics established for work artifacts (Instructional Plans, Behavior Plans, Individualized Educational Plans) for program improvement by examining the individual faculty rating for artifacts and then making modifications to courses/programs as needed. The Department initiated use of the rubrics in 2013. Since that time, with only two exceptions, all specialization areas exceeded 80% interobserver agreement on the rubrics.

4. The qualifying exam process for master’s degree students and pass rates are examined annually in order to ascertain if excessive numbers of students are failing the exam and/or if the exam process is functioning as intended. Table 4 provides summary data related to the number of students who passed or failed the qualifying exam since 2010. Since 2010, the qualifying exam was administered a total of 201 times. Twenty-seven of those administrations were given a rating of “fail” by the review team. As mentioned previously, students have two opportunities to pass the qualifying exam. Since 2010, five students have failed the qualifying exam two times. In accordance with Department policy, those students were able to continue in their licensure/endorsement program but were not able to advance to candidacy for their master’s degree. In the context of a review of data in Fall of 2016, department faculty deemed student pass rates to be acceptable. However, the faculty did have concerns when reviewing the qualifying exam process. Based upon this review, the Department modified the qualifying exam process in order to (a) provide more flexibility with regard to when the exam could be taken (e.g., the exam could be taken/retaken at any time, rather than only one time per semester), (b) allow more flexibility with regard to the exam question (e.g., the question could be tailored to the student’s specialization area rather than a general question for all master’s students), (c) provide students with opportunities to engage with their advisors and supervisory committee earlier in their program of study, (d) create a revise/resubmit process that allows for one opportunity for feedback from the committee chair, and (e) relate the content of the qualifying exam to the content of the comprehensive exam.

Table 4

*Department of Special Education*

*Qualifying Exam Summary Data*

*2010/2011 to 2016/2017*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **2010** | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** |
| **Number Pass** | 25 | 20 | 24 | 26 | 15 | 22 | 42 |
| **Number Fail** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 8 |

5. Based upon a review of data related to market demand as well as faculty expertise, the Department added the Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) as an emphasis at the graduate level. Enrollment numbers in this program have been very high since its inception, therefore, the Department is currently forced to deny admission to strong applicants due to resource limitations (particularly as it relates to field supervision).

6. The Department examined the number of applicants at the undergraduate level and discussed the potential impact of the admissions requirements on undergraduate applications. As a result of this discussion, the Department modified the admissions requirements by decreasing the number of credit hours of university coursework needed prior to admission from 40 semester credits to 24 semester credits, and eliminating the requirement that SPED 3010 – *Human Exceptionality* be completed prior to admission

7. Based upon a review of qualifying exams completed by graduate students, the content of SPED 5054/6054 – *Professional Writing in Education* was modified to provide additional opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback on (a) writing mechanics, and (b) organization of content within and across paragraphs.