

Program Assessment: *Annual Report*

Program(s):	Ph.D. in SPECIAL EDUCATION
Department:	Educational Studies
College/School:	School of Education
Date:	August 1, 2018
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1. Which program student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

The School of Education hosted its first annual *Moving Forward Day* on October 13, 2017. The purpose of *Moving Forward Day* was to begin a regular assessment review and continuous improvement cycle. To date we have had no systematic program assessment procedures in our School or in Educational Studies at the graduate level.

Our PhD program in **Special Education** is currently organized around five program learning outcomes. These outcomes were produced in February 2016 for the initial program assessment plan required by the provost’s office. They were not vetted by faculty. The learning outcomes are as follows:

1. Students will explain special education learning and curriculum theories.
2. Students will research questions in the field of special education.
3. Students will analyze social justice issues in education.
4. Students will explain how special education learning and curriculum theories are used to develop education programs.
5. Students will use oral and written communication.

During this year’s cycle, faculty members reviewed the first learning outcome: ***Students will explain special education learning and curriculum theories.***

2. What data/artifacts of student learning were collected for each assessed outcome? Were Madrid student artifacts included?

Given that this was our first experience with *Moving Forward Day*, and given that faculty members were being introduced to the program assessment cycle for the first time, we had no graduate program data to work with—only our **Special Education Program Assessment Plan** accompanied by a graphic organizer to guide discussion.

The Program Assessment Plan indicates that the following artifacts will be used to assess student learning for this learning outcome: **Comprehensive Exam.**

The plan states that accomplishment of this learning outcome will occur in the context of three courses including *Disability in Higher Education and Society* (EDSP/EDH 6050), *Fundamentals of Neurology* (EDSP 5530), and *Legal Issues in Disability* (EDSP 5010); that assessment will be conducted during the exam through “direct questions about special education learning and curriculum theories” and “indirect questions that require the student to use special education learning and curriculum theories as part of their answer”; and that student learning assessment

data will be discussed in program meetings, yielding annual action plans.

There are no Madrid students enrolled in our program. However, there are students enrolled in a SOE graduate satellite program that operates in Cyprus in cooperation with GCIS, the Global Center of Independent Studies.

3. How did you analyze the assessment data? What was the process? Who was involved?

NOTE: If you used rubrics as part of your analysis, please include them in an appendix.

On *Moving Forward Day* we began a conversation about this student learning outcome as well as the larger design of our graduate program and the larger process of reviewing program data.

The assessment coordinator divided the Educational Studies graduate faculty into **three work groups**—one for each program area in our unit (which includes Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Foundations, and Special Education). Three of 16 faculty members in Educational Studies participated in the **Special Education work group**.

The assessment coordinator charged each faculty work group with filling in a four-column graphic organizer for the learning outcome we selected. The four columns on the chart were as follows:

- What is the **evidence** of student learning?
- What is our **analysis/interpretation** of the evidence?
- What are the **causes/reasons** for these results?
- What **actions** should we take to improve student learning?

4. What did you learn from the data? Summarize the major findings of your analysis for each assessed outcome.

NOTE: If necessary, include any tables, charts, or graphs in an appendix.

Discussion highlighted the need for **major changes in the design of our graduate program**. Faculty identified the following problems:

- Regarding our assessment artifacts, we have **no standardization in the Ph.D. comprehensive exam**. Instead, each student takes an individualized six-question exam designed as follows: 1) exam questions are submitted to the student's academic adviser by the instructor of each course the student has taken; 2) the adviser creates the exam by selecting and grouping the questions in categories that focus on research methods, curriculum and instruction, and the student's specific areas of academic interest; 3) individual instructors are charged with evaluating the student's answers to the questions they provided using a common departmental rubric; 4) the adviser tallies the results of six rubrics, one for each exam question, and reports the results to the student and the program director in the form of "low pass," "average pass," or "high pass."
 - **COMMENT:** Faculty recognize that this design makes assessment of program learning outcomes difficult if not impossible: we cannot write common comprehensive exam questions when students' programs of study are almost entirely individualized.
- Regarding curriculum mapping, we do not have a **fully realized core curriculum** for our 42-hour Ph.D. degree program. Beyond required research classes, advising sheets leave all but three of the content courses in Special Education open. Students are required to take 9 hours of required courses (which include *Foundations of Neurology and Genetics in Disability* (EDSP 5530), *Ethics of Special Education Leadership* (EDSP 6030), and *Legal Issues in Disability* (EDSP 6930), and thus are slightly different from the courses listed

above in question #2) and 9 hours of elective courses chosen in consultation with their adviser. What's more, we don't have a clear sequence for offering these courses, and we now only have two full-time faculty, along with a postdoctoral researcher during the 2018-19 school year, to offer all of them.

- **COMMENT:** *Faculty recognize that this lack of a fully realized core curriculum makes assessment of program learning outcomes difficult if not impossible: we currently have no way to ensure that students are exposed to the same course content and the same learning experiences during the coursework phase of the program.*
- Regarding curriculum, we **don't currently differentiate our Special Education curriculum between the master's and the doctoral levels.** Master's and doctoral students frequently enroll in the same courses and complete the same assignments.
 - **COMMENT:** *Faculty believe that we could begin to differentiate between the two degree levels by requiring all doctoral students to take a proseminar that introduces them to what it means to be a scholar at the doctoral level—including what's involved in being a consumer, producer, and disseminator of research. The proseminar would be the first place where we begin to scaffold student learning for the dissertation.*
- Regarding individual student assessment as well as program assessment, faculty discussed the possibility of instituting a **different set of program milestones** for doctoral candidacy.
 - **COMMENT:** *Instead of comprehensive exams, students could be required to complete a series of high-stakes writing assignments such as a scholarly paper, a theorization of learning paper, and then a dissertation proposal. Such an approach would challenge students to be more intentional about their development as a scholar and the program of research they are pursuing. Our current procedures do not ensure that students learn to think in this intentional way about their scholarly identity and their program of research.*

5. How did your analysis inform meaningful change? How did you use the analyzed data to make or implement recommendations for change in pedagogy, curriculum design, or your assessment plan?

Under the leadership of an interim dean and a new program director in 2017-18, faculty members in Educational Studies spent the year grappling with the need to **reinvent our programs.**

This group recognizes the need to make the following major changes:

- **Revisit and revise our learning outcomes. STEPS TAKEN:** In spring 2018, the program director held individual meetings with each Educational Studies graduate faculty member. The meetings focused on each faculty member's vision for the program going forward along with their ideas about core courses and new program milestones. In fall 2018 we need to produce a set of learning outcomes that reflect faculty collaboration and clearer thinking about the Special Education program's identity and our goals and purposes for students.
- **Map learning outcomes to a core curriculum. STEPS TAKEN:** In spring 2018, the program director engaged faculty members in creating a first version of roadmaps of study for each of our Educational Studies degree programs. In fall 2018 we need to revisit these roadmaps, using them to envision and plan for a clearer sequence of Special Education course offerings from semester to semester and year to year.
- **Create signature assignments for core doctoral courses and new program milestones for doctoral candidacy. STEPS TAKEN:** In summer 2018, a subgroup of the Educational

Studies faculty met approximately five times to discuss student learning outcomes and corresponding signature assignments for the undergraduate teacher education program. Since these same faculty members also serve the graduate program, this architecture of student learning outcomes linked to signature assignments should serve as a model that we can adapt as we retool our graduate programs.

- **Differentiate our Educational Studies graduate programs** (Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Foundations, and Special Education) so that they are organized around distinctly different goals, purposes, outcomes, and curriculum—or else collapse/restructure these programs. **STEPS TAKEN:** In spring 2018, the program director began conversations with the newly-hired permanent dean to address this question of differentiation. That conversation will widen in fall 2018 to include the rest of the Educational Studies graduate faculty, first with an Educational Studies Curriculum Work Group, and then with the graduate faculty as a whole.

Additional context about ongoing change: With a new permanent dean taking over leadership of the School of Education in August 2018, with a reduced number of programs in Educational Studies due to the program disestablishment process overseen by the Provost in 2016-17, and with a shifting set of Educational Studies graduate faculty members (three of whom departed at the end of the 2017-18 school year, at least one of whom will be replaced with a new hire in 2018-19) our School is ripe for change. This group recognizes the need to improve program assessment procedures as this process guides and underscores the process of creating better and stronger programs.

6. Did you follow up (“close the loop”) on past assessment work? If so, what did you learn? (*For example, has that curriculum change you made two years ago manifested in improved student learning today, as evidenced in your recent assessment data and analysis?*)

Moving Forward Day is a new process for the School of Education. We implemented the *Moving Forward Day* procedures during 2017-18 to address the problems we have had closing the loop.

We in Educational Studies look forward to strengthening the graduate program assessment process by forming an Educational Studies Assessment Work Group and creating a timeline for assessment procedures in the coming year as we undergo formal Program Review during the Spring 2019 semester.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any revised/updated assessment plans to the University Assessment Coordinator along with this report.