

**Texas Education Agency Division of Educator Standards
Post Approval Site Visit
University of Texas – Pan American
Edinburg, Texas
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This post-approval site visit was conducted by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Team in compliance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.10 – Approval Process.

General Information

The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) has gone through six name changes since it was founded in 1927 as Edinburg College, a two-year community college. In 1933, it became Edinburg Junior College. Moving from the original 4-acre site to the present 186-acre site in 1948, it was named Edinburg Regional College. According to the UTPA website, in 1952 it transformed from a junior college to a four-year institution. It was named Pan American College to reflect the university's desire to bridge the cultures of North and South America and to reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student population. Reaching university status in 1971, it was named Pan American University. Established in 1989 after the successful and historic merger of Pan American University with the University of Texas (UT) System, it was given its present name, the University of Texas-Pan American. Today UTPA is one of the fastest growing universities in the UT System with a current enrollment of 17,500 students. It is the 10th largest university in the state and the fifth largest in the UT system. One of the Points of Pride facts stated that according to the *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, UTPA was listed as one of the 100 best United States colleges for Hispanics.

The mission of the UTPA College of Education (COE) is “to continually improve the educational process in the College and the community through teaching, research, and service. The College values the rich cultural and linguistic history of the international border area and directs its program and course offerings toward the preparation of professionals for an increasingly diverse population of learners.”

Utilizing three portable buildings and a computer lab on the South Texas College Starr County Campus, the UTPA COE established the Starr County Upper-Level Center (SCULC) as an additional teaching site. Offering mainly those courses required for a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies with specialization in bilingual education, the center, with its governance at the main campus, has impacted the graduation of 230 students thus far. Through special line item funding from the legislature, a new building for the SCULC will be completed by 2010.

Prior to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) visit, the UTPA COE submitted a self-report which addressed all five components. The program also ensured that the documents for the required document review were in order.

Attendance at the opening session of the post-approval visit, which focused on the traditional undergraduate program, included 23 participants. Evidence of administrative support for the teacher education program was demonstrated by the attendance of representatives from the President's Office: Dr. Ana Maria Rodriguez, Senior Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Academic Assessment & Retention, and Eloy Alaniz, Director of Internal Audits. Dr. Salvador Hector Ochoa, Dean of the COE, and other staff members presented an overview of the five components covered in the self-report. The educator candidate's electronic portfolio was also featured at this time.

It was brought out that because of Dr. Ana Maria Rodriguez's leadership the entire university is responsible for teacher education. This mandate has promoted communication and collaboration amongst the colleges within the university. Thus, content area professors are aware of standards and curriculum requirements and have worked closely with the COE on curriculum alignment. Dr. Ochoa's leadership in coordinating the curriculum alignment was also noted.

The number and roles of people interviewed by the Texas Education Agency representatives during this post-approval site visit included the following 44 participants: 5 Advisory Council members, 10 Cooperating Teachers, 7 Directors/Deans/Faculty, 3 Field Supervisors, 5 Principals/Administrators, 4 Program Staff, and 10 Student Teachers.

I. Entity Commitment and Collaboration

Two advisory groups actively participate in advising the COE leadership regarding the educator preparation program at UTPA. The UTPA Teacher Education Committee (TEC) is an internal committee comprised of two voting members from each of the six academic colleges, the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies, and the COE Dean. The TEC follows established university protocol in meeting and the areas and topics it takes under its consideration. The UTPA COE Advisory Committee, which was formed in compliance with TAC) §228.20, is an external group of eight members that includes representatives from the following categories: school districts, the Education Service Center Region One, business, community, and the university. Dr. Ochoa chairs the committee as the ninth member.

Findings

During the document review process, there was evidence through agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets that the UTPA COE Advisory Committee has held one formal meeting during fall 2008. The calendar reflects that the next formal meeting is scheduled for April 21, 2009. The committee also meets at other times as needed.

Interviews revealed that members of the COE Advisory Committee felt that the university listened to their suggestions and implemented them, as appropriate. Advisory committee members felt that this collaboration impacted the positive direction the university was taking in regards to serving special populations, enhancing early field experiences, and working toward a seamless transition from the university to the classroom.

Interviews indicated that the university was addressing critical areas, promoting reading within the content areas, and supporting a collaborative atmosphere within the university departments as well as with the surrounding school districts. The advisory was asked to consider the adoption of the Fitness to Teach policy which addresses student dispositions. It recommended the university move forward with the policy. The policy was also presented to the TEC, which gave its strong approval as well.

Areas that advisory committee members indicated still need to be reviewed or addressed included recruitment of mathematics education faculty and the implementation of mentoring professional development and training.

The University of Texas – Pan American is in compliance with the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.20 – Governance of Educator Preparation Programs.

Commendations

No commendations were noted at this time.

II. Admission Criteria

All undergraduate students must be admitted to the College of Education prior to taking education courses. Students seeking admission to the College of Education contact the College of Education Office of Student Services to begin the process of admission and advisement.

.Findings

Admission requirements include minimum score requirements on the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA), the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) exam, or the ACCUPLACER, minimum credit hour requirements, a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA), and specific grade requirements for entrance into the program as follows:

- THEA/TASP: Reading 240, Math 230, Writing 240, or ACCUPLACER: Reading 82, Math 82, Writing 80 with 5 or any score with 6

- Must be core complete
- 2.5 Core GPA on degree plan
- 2.5 overall GPA on degree plan
- Must complete 60 hours on degree plan
- Completion of a C or better in specified English and Math courses
- Activate UTPA email address (or personal email)
- Submit Criminal Background check (to begin in Fall 2009)

In spring 2009, the Fitness to Teach policy, which addresses student dispositions, was implemented. It consists of two parts: a screening checkpoint through a criminal background check on all students during the COE admission process and continuous assessment of students at the department level by examining their professional dispositions. The second component is based on the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE's) Teacher Dispositions Standards. The policy also addresses the needs indicated by surrounding district Human Resources Departments and the COE Advisory Committee.

The COE is currently developing a policy for entering students in order to comply with TAC §227.10. The proposed policy addresses the assessment of each teacher education candidate's oral communication skills and the candidate's appropriateness for the teaching profession. The English Oral Communications Skills Rating Form will be used to assess the candidate's oral communication skills. In order to assess each candidate's appropriateness for the teacher certification being sought, the interviewer uses stems and questions to which the candidate is asked to respond. The candidate is evaluated using a rubric indicating understanding and appropriateness.

Completed applications are submitted to the Office of Teacher Certification and Admission Services. Each submitted application goes through a three-step review process. It was reported that 25% of the applicants do not meet entrance requirements. There is an appeal process for students who are not accepted. Because of the careful screening, the retention rate is at 98.5%.

The self-report indicated that degree plans with 43 hour core will require 54 completed hours to begin the Teacher Education program. An oral interview with designated program faculty will be implemented during summer 2009.

Admission files are stored in locked file cabinets. The file cabinets are housed in a workroom inside the Office of Teacher Certification and Admission Services. Admission files that are stored in this office include records for students currently going through the admission process as well as those who have been denied. Admission files are sorted and color-coded by cohort and filed alphabetically. Files of students that have been accepted into the program are logged out and forwarded to the Office of Field Experience. In this office, students' files are securely stored in two different locations: the workroom and the Coordinator's office. Certification files are sorted by probationary and standard certification and are filed alphabetically in locked cabinets. Test registration information is kept in three ring binders, filed in alphabetical order, and

locked inside a cabinet. The workroom as well as file cabinets are locked and secured daily. Interviews indicated that the university complies with the five-year retention policy.

Student files contained the signed application with a degree plan, a transcript with test scores & GPAs, fee receipts, and program correspondence. BANNER, UTPA's electronic database for record storage, holds students' current schedules and other pertinent student information.

Multiple recruitment strategies include television commercials, flyers, billboards, website entries, and BRONC Notes. The COE also sends representatives to orientation fairs, including the Freshman Orientation, Transfer Orientation, and Career and College Days. Organizational promotions, such as those in which the Bilingual Education Student Organization (BESO) participates, are also activities utilized to recruit candidates.

The University of Texas – Pan American is in compliance with the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §227.10 – Admission Criteria.

Commendations

UTPA COE is commended for its organization of student records and its use of a color-code system. It is also in the process of finalizing a checklist that will be added to each candidate's folder.

UTPA COE is commended for its Fitness to Teach policy with its focus on student dispositions. Its two components provide a screening checkpoint and a provision for continuous assessment of students.

III. Curriculum

The Document Review indicated that UTPA COE is authorized to offer 37 certification fields. The COE is looking to expand certification offerings to meet the needs of the community.

There has been a concerted effort to align the Texas SBEC Knowledge & Skills Standards with the courses. While this correlation has been done through the matrices, there needs to be an intentional transfer of this information into the actual course syllabi and into the instructional environment.

According to discussions and interviews with administration and faculty, there are plans to incorporate the 17 subject matter topics listed in TAC §228.30 (b) in order to further align the curriculum. It is suggested that the COE follow the same process and format used for the standards alignment.

Findings

Review of Faculty vitas indicated that there are 55 fulltime faculty with 44 Texas certified and 8 certified from other states. There are 29 part-time faculty members. Eight part-time faculty members teach at the Starr County site. There are 15 Field Supervisors who are all Texas certified, with one operating on a waiver.

Curriculum is enhanced through the educational technology resource center (ETRC) and the Curriculum Resource Center (CRC). The plans are to fuse the two resource centers together in the near future.

The mission of the ETRC is “to support all College of Education departments, professors, and students in the use of technology for teaching, learning, and research.” The center is setup with a multitude of equipment, such as laptops, video cameras, digital cameras, scanners, DVD Production/Duplication equipment, printers, and LCD projectors, mobile wireless carts, and computers on wheels (COWS). It provides assistance and support with student webpage construction and the individual candidate’s electronic portfolio. It contains software and other technology literature resources. The center is staffed with a director, a systems analyst, a network specialist and an administrative associate. These staff members provide staff and students with assistance in incorporating technology. Facilities are available for extended hours.

The Curriculum Resource Center offers a variety of resources for faculty/staff and students, especially prospective classroom teachers. The CRC has approximately 13,000 current curriculum book guides and other educational materials. There is an array of items to choose from, including various Texas State Adopted Bilingual Curriculum series for elementary to high school levels, such as teacher editions, student texts, and supplemental reading books. The CRC has a copier available for student use, a laminator, a binding machine, and an ACCU-die cut machine. The center also offers extended hours to facilitate the candidate’s production of materials which are to be utilized in the classroom for instruction or enhancement of the learning environment.

In addition, the Science Lab provides students a hands-on-approach to science instruction. The lab includes a variety of standard lab equipment and materials that can be utilized in lesson planning and special projects. It also contains a station for appropriate lab safety training.

The curriculum is delivered through blocks (semester) of coursework. The elementary day program has a four-block system with students organized into cohort groups. Field experiences are embedded in the first three blocks, moving from one day per week, to two days per week, and then to full-week experiences. Block 4 is Internship II, the Student Teaching component. Students are required to develop their portfolio through the blocks. The elementary evening program has five blocks. The all levels, middle, and secondary programs have three blocks. The Kinesiology Department has four blocks. Instructional technology is also embedded in all block courses to model and

promote integration of technology. The culminating block for all areas is the Student Teaching component.

Review of course documents indicated various formats and requirements, but, in general, course syllabi provided course descriptions, course objectives and requirements, materials, policies regarding attendance, grading and assessment, and a weekly schedule of assignments and expectations. Not always included, however, were intentional statements of objectives, standards alignment, learning theories presented & modeled, and specific instructional strategies. It is suggested that these are incorporated into course syllabi after alignment of the 17 topics in TAC §228.30(b).

As per the Self-Report, importance is placed on assuring students engage in early and on-going school-based opportunities in which they may observe, assist, tutor, or instruct prior to student teaching or an internship. Interviews of both cooperating teachers and student teachers indicated that the major emphasis on this component provided opportunities that increased the candidates' effectiveness and confidence in the classrooms when they participated in the student teaching semester.

The University of Texas – Pan American is in compliance with the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.30 – Educator Preparation Curriculum.

Commendations

The UTPA COE is commended for requiring that the curriculum and related field experiences focus on enhancing students' understanding of and ability to address the needs of diverse student populations.

The UTPA COE is commended for embedding technology into the entire teacher preparation curriculum.

The COE is commended for its creation of the CRC and ETRC to provide support and opportunity to enhance student teachers' lesson plans and instruction.

The COE is commended for implementing a system to explore curriculum & correlate it to the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) Knowledge and Skills Standards.

IV. Program Delivery and Evaluation

The educator preparation curriculum is delivered by content and educator preparation faculty. Interviews and documents indicated that there are currently two online courses and a number of reduced-seating (hybrid) courses. Programs are also offered during the day and evening hours at the university site.

Findings

The Office of Field Experiences coordinates the field-based component with the school districts. This component allows pre-service teachers to observe and interact with Mentor and/or Master Teachers and students in academic settings. These field-based experiences, which range from 48 to 140 hours depending on the certification block of enrollment, are structured to provide reflection, discussion, and understanding of the teaching profession. Field-based assignments and activities are defined in course syllabi. A field-based evaluation survey is completed by students anonymously at the end of each semester.

Student teaching, a full-time practicum supervised by a cooperating teacher and a university field supervisor is the final semester of coursework. Field supervisors provide extensive and consistent supervision, providing opportunities for direct feedback to both student teachers and cooperating teachers that promote effective teaching practices.

Student teaching can range from 15 to 17 weeks depending on the length of the semester. The Student Teaching component begins with the first day of public school and ends with the last day of university classes. During this semester, students will be assigned to one classroom. Assignment(s) will be in student's area(s) of certification. Students will teach full-time for a minimum of four weeks.

The initial contact by the field supervisors is a three-way conference to orient both the students and the cooperating teacher about the required procedures for the student teaching experience. The field supervisor conducts one walk-through and two formal observations during the Student Teaching block. The cooperating teacher conducts one formal observation using the observation form provided by the university. Interviews indicated that informal and verbal feedback was provided throughout the semester. During this final block, the student teachers attend monthly seminars at the university site.

In interviews with the field supervisors it was revealed that the field supervisor/student ratio was often as high as 1 to 26, especially at the elementary level. Further interviews indicated that the ratio was much lower. Review of this situation is recommended because of the quality versus quantity issue.

Interviews and the document review indicated that cooperating teachers received a handbook during the initial three-way conference. Review of the contents by the field supervisor promoted their understanding of the roles and responsibilities and clearly outlined the program's expectations and utilization of observation and feedback forms.

It was noted that supervisors met with university educator preparation leaders to review the required process, policies, and procedures but that they did not receive specific coaching or mentoring training during this process. Interviews indicated that blackboard training was provided in an informal session. However, scientifically research-based training for field supervisors, with current techniques should be provided.

Formative evaluation of education students is conducted through course performance assignments, field benchmarks, electronic portfolio, weekly logs, and final grades. Program evaluation is conducted through course evaluations, field experience evaluation surveys, graduating student surveys, department annual assessment report, annual student learning outcomes assessment, and report and academic program review.

The University of Texas – Pan American is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.35 (a) & (d) – Preparation Program Coursework and/or Training and with TAC §228.40 – Assessment and Evaluation of Candidates for Certification and Program Improvement.

Commendations

The UTPA COE is commended for its concerted effort to provide structured and relevant field experiences with supervision from the professors.

The UTPA COE is commended for the hours of the early field experience required over and beyond the 30-clock hours mandated in TAC §228.30(a)(3)(A) and for its assignment of 15-17 weeks of Student Teaching.

V. On-Going Support

Ongoing support for the student teachers is provided through the cooperating teachers and field supervisors. A guidebook was developed specifically to target the student teaching experience. The book includes topics ranging from culturally relevant instructional practices to classroom management, along with tips for preparing for the profession.

Findings

Student teachers attend monthly seminars and receive ongoing support from faculty and COE administration. Since the students are grouped as cohorts, the faculty becomes very familiar with each student and is able to identify early on students who might be struggling in the program. Remediation and intervention are offered immediately in the form of advising, one-to-one tutoring, remedial group sessions, and through the two professional guidance counselors provided to the COE. In some cases, a growth intervention plan is developed and implemented.

Additional support is provided through the COE's advisement system. It provides mandatory advisement each semester to ensure correct course enrollment and to allow for review of the candidates' progress in a timely manner.

Through the interview process, it was noted that additional support was needed in some areas. Both cooperating teachers and student teachers acknowledged a need for

additional instruction regarding classroom management. Interviews revealed that two of ten educator candidates expressed concern about appropriate or preferred grade level placement during their student teaching semester. One was still concerned, but the other candidate now loved the grade level placement in which he was placed.

Additional support is available to students through Blackboard Access, which can be accessed from any computer with Internet capabilities. Student Teaching materials and communication features are integrated in the programs, allowing candidates to access Student Teaching forms, view announcements and due dates, and communicate with faculty and peers.

The COE has hired a TExES Coordinator to monitor and provide information on the TExES testing guidelines. The Coordinator provides support in the way of one-to-one counseling and tutoring. Representative examinations are available, administered, and analyzed. The TExES Coordinator is also charged with the delivery and coordination of the required six hours of test preparation as per TAC §228.35 (a)(3)(C). Because this is a new position to the COE, it is currently undergoing extensive development.

Field supervisors are supported by the director of Field Experiences. Periodic meetings are held to discuss the progress of the student teachers and share ideas and practices.

The cooperating teachers are provided support from the university field supervisor and through training received from their school district or UTPA. Documentation of the district training would allow the COE to determine specific training needed by cooperating teachers.

The University of Texas – Pan American is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.35 (a) & (d) – Preparation Program Coursework and/or Training but needs to enhance compliance with TAC §228.35 (f), which describes the required training for field supervisors.

Commendations

The UTPA administration is commended for providing two professional guidance counselors to the COE.

The UTPA COE is commended for the addition of the TExES Coordinator to provide guidance in the area of test preparation.

Program Recommendations

- Continue to refine and define the parameters of the English Oral Communication Skills process.

- Revisit Student Teacher placement to promote alignment with certification field sought by the educator candidate.
- Seek creative ways to adjust the field supervisor to student ratio, especially at the elementary level.
- Utilize the curriculum alignment accomplished through the matrices to implement an intentional transfer of this information into the actual course syllabi and classroom instruction.
- Continue the refinement of courses in light of 17 curriculum topics included in Texas Administrative Code §228.30(b).
- Ensure the vertical and horizontal alignment of the 17 curriculum topics in all blocks of instruction
- Design intentional coaching and mentoring training for field supervisors that relies on scientifically-based research.
- Add training requirement as an item to the cooperating teacher contract.