

**Texas Education Agency Division of Educator Standards
Post Approval Site Visit
University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC)
Brownsville, Texas
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Background Information

In 1992 a partnership with The University of Texas System was created between the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and Texas Southmost College (TSC), Brownsville's community college. Enrolling freshman in education, engineering technology, business, and music programs, UT-Brownsville became a four-year university in the fall of 1998. By the fall of 2007, enrollment included 17,215 students in the university with 2,197 candidates in the School of Education.

Serving as President of UTB/TSC since 1991 is Dr. Juliet V. Garcia. The new Dean of the School of Education is Dr. Miguel Angel Escotet. Dr. Gayle L. Brogdon is the Associate Dean of the School of Education, who also serves as the Certification Officer. Working closely with Dr. Brogdon are Dr. Reynaldo Ramirez, Department Chair of Curriculum & Instruction, and Monica Pena, the Field Experiences Director. According to the University's website, the Office of Field Experiences facilitates students' admission into the Teacher Education program, determines eligibility to enroll in student teaching, and coordinates field placements of students in classrooms working with cooperating teachers in area public school campuses.

The number and roles of people interviewed by the Texas Education Agency representatives during the UTB/TSC post-approval site visit included the following forty-three (43) participants: six (6) Advisory Committee members, ten (10) cooperating teachers, four (4) directors/deans/faculty, five (5) field supervisors, four (4) principals/administrators, three (3) program staff, and eleven (11) student teachers. It should be noted that this spring semester post-approval visit was conducted during the third week of the student teaching experience and, thus, many of the student teachers and cooperating teachers were still in discovery of their new roles.

Component I. Entity Commitment and Collaboration

The opening session of the site visit was held in the International Technology Education and Commerce Center (ITECC) facility on January 28, 2009. Twenty-four (24) individuals participated, representing both advisory committee members and university personnel.

The initial Advisory Committee was created in the 1980's and has evolved from the School of Education Advisory Board to the present Lower Rio Grande Teacher Advisory Board. This UTB/TSC Advisory Committee is comprised of thirteen (13) school district members and five (5) UTB/TSC staff personnel.

Findings

The committee composition does not indicate membership from the regional education service center nor business and community interests. Committee documents include minutes, agendas, and sign-in sheets, indicating regularly scheduled meetings held approximately once every two months and other meetings held as needed. Interviews of Advisory Committee members revealed that, in addition to committee meetings, there is also communication through emails and phone calls.

Interviews indicated that the committee members played an integral part in advising the university about program design and delivery. Agendas and minutes included discussions and presentations regarding design and implementation of the program. Advisory committee members also provided pertinent information through presentations to educator candidates regarding topics and issues relevant to those seeking initial certification. Collaborative efforts with board members and partnering school districts in organizing job fairs also strengthened employment opportunities of UTB/TSC candidates upon graduation. Interviews revealed that members were cognizant of the required commitment to their individual roles and responsibilities in serving on the Advisory Committee.

According to the document review, UTB/TSC operates one site, which is located at 80 Fort Brown Street, Brownsville, Texas. No other teaching sites or expansion locations exist for the traditional undergraduate program.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College is in compliance with the Texas Administrative Code Rule §228.20 – Governance of Educator Preparation Programs.

Commendation

UTB/TSC's Lower Rio Grande Teacher Advisory Board is commended for its commitment to meet on an average of once every two months, thus, exceeding the minimum requirement of two meetings per year. Interviews also revealed that communication among advisory committee members and UTB/TSC staff is frequent and informative.

Component II. Admission Criteria

According to the self-report, candidates wishing to enter the Teacher Education Program must adhere to the requirements listed below:

- An official application for admission to Teacher Education Program, which includes the standard demographic information as well as a checklist of required items
- Junior classification with a minimum of 2.50 grade point average (GPA) overall
- Criminal History Check (conducted by the Office of Field Experiences)
- \$50 Application fee
- Completion of specified general education courses with a minimum 2.50 GPA, including EDUC-U 1301 Introduction to the Teaching Profession and EDUC-U 2301 Introduction of Special Programs
- Completion of Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Test with a minimum score of 40

- The Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) with scores of at least Reading 260, Writing 220 and Math 230 or the Compass with scores of at least Reading 81, Writing 59, Math 39
- For foreign students, a minimum score of 500 on the paper-based, 173 on the computer-based or 61 on the internet-based for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

The admission criteria are based on university and state guidelines that were developed by the School of Education. Academic criteria for admission are published and applied consistently to all educator preparation candidates.

Findings

The Student Teaching Handbook is comprehensive, including discussion of numerous topics that promote educator preparation. These include instructional strategies, lesson design, and questioning techniques. Providing the goals of student teaching, the handbook informs the candidates being admitted into the teaching student component about requirements and expectations.

Flexibility for students not meeting designated criteria has been implemented in specific areas. Applicants who do not successfully complete the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Test after two attempts may submit an appeal letter to the Curriculum & Instruction Department Chair. Student teacher candidates who are lacking prerequisite courses for student teaching may submit an appeal letter to the Appeals Committee.

Student folders were well-ordered and comprehensive, including signed applications, program correspondence, degree plans, course enrollment information, transcripts, test scores, student teacher observations, and student teacher placement information. All folders included an organizational checklist indicating the order in which documents should be filed and were stored in lockable cabinets in a secured room. The University's policy of retaining students' documents for a period of five years after program completion is in compliance with TAC Rule §228.40(d).

The student's estimated completion date is calculated by the program's academic advisor and stored on an electronic spreadsheet. Upon the candidate's graduation, a form indicating the certification area as well as the completion date is filed in the student folder. Fee receipts information is electronically filed by the UTB/TSC business office.

Interviews of student teachers revealed that the advising component lacked the personnel to respond in a timely manner to the number of student requests. The availability of the academic advisor was not sufficient to meet the student demand. Although walk-ins were allowed on Fridays, opportunities were limited to see the advisor. In addition, when students were having specific difficulties that would be best handled by a face to face conference, appointments were not readily available during a reasonable timeframe.

UTB/TSC uses a variety of recruiting strategies to encourage students to enter the program. These include website, pre-education course presentations, freshman orientation, career days at high school campuses, job fairs, and printed literature. The official communication method for the students is email in that students are issued a UTB/TSC email address upon admission. In reality, it must be noted that a paper-based storage system exists and conventional methods of communication are still essential.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code Rule §227.10 – Admission Criteria.

Commendations

UTB/TSC is commended for its collaborative spirit in working with an increased group of partnership school districts. Interviews revealed that the School of Education has opened up its service area and increased placement of educator candidates beyond the Brownsville Independent School District. Of the 160 student teachers enrolled during spring 2009, student teaching placements were as follows:

- 110 – Brownsville Independent School District
- 14 – Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District
- 2 – IDEA Public Schools
- 15 – Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District
- 5 – Point Isabel Independent School District
- 1 – Rio Hondo Independent School District
- 13 – San Benito Consolidated Independent School District

UTB/TSC is commended for its impressive system of storage and retention of student files and documents. Student folders are well organized, labeled appropriately, and color-coded to differentiate students' status within the program.

Component III. Curriculum

According to the self-report, the teacher education program consists of three undergraduate EC-4 programs, three 4-8 programs, one 6-12 program, six 8-12 programs, and seven all-level (EC-12) programs. Thus, UTB/TSC provides a total of 20 certification programs. The self report indicated that the number of hours needed for graduation is 126. Students take courses requiring field observations, field experience, and field-based assignments as well as student teaching.

Findings

A review of the required curriculum documents for each certification area indicated that a syllabi format was established as a guide for faculty. It included objectives, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) coordination, materials and resources, prerequisite requirements, and methods of evaluation. However, interviews expressed a desire to tighten curriculum standards to respond more to testing requirements and competencies. At this time, there is no online curriculum included in the educator preparation program.

A majority of the eleven student teachers interviewed expressed positive comments about course content and required experiences. Although at times a few struggled with the actual application of acquired knowledge regarding classroom management when placed in the student teaching assignment, most indicated that coursework prior to student teaching significantly impacted their success in the classroom.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code Rule §228.30 – Educator Preparation Curriculum.

Commendation

The School of Education of UTB/TSC is commended for providing an extended student teaching experience for candidates from the required 12 weeks to a 14-week program. This requirement provides educator candidates an enhanced student teaching experience.

Component IV. Program Delivery and Evaluation

Student teachers are required to attend a week-long orientation prior to beginning their student teaching assignment at the district campuses. Guest speakers present information on topics such as first-year teaching strategies, resume writing, interview process, job opportunities, Code of Ethics, educational law, classroom management and expectations. Those invited to present include individuals from the following areas:

- District Human Resources
- Curriculum Department
- Special Education
- Principals
- UTB/TSC Faculty
- UTB/TSC Career & Placement Department
- Professional Organizations
- UTB/TSC Chess Director (to stimulate creative thinking skills and problem solving)

University Supervisors, who serve as field supervisors, formally observe the student teachers a minimum of four times during the student teaching experience. The field supervisor determines the needs of the student teachers and provides feedback. Documentation is maintained and shared with the designated cooperating teacher as well as the student teacher. The field supervisor conducts a minimum of two 3-way conferences with the cooperating teacher and student teacher as an ongoing assessment of the student's progress.

Effectiveness of the teacher candidate is based on formative and summative evaluations. At the completion of the student teaching experience, both the cooperating teacher and supervisor provide a summative assessment of the student teacher's experience. Observation records are then filed in student's folder at the end of the semester, and the student teacher's completion date is finalized.

In addition, the university provides an individual who serves as Supervisor Coordinator and who provides additional support to student teachers having special problems or difficulties. The Supervisor Coordinator works closely with the field supervisors when issues or concerns arise. This individual also contacts district and or campus personnel to keep all stakeholders apprised of current information and procedures and to develop strategies that assist students having difficulties.

According to the self report, program evaluation is conducted in diverse ways. A survey is administered to the teacher education candidates near the completion of their student teaching experience. The survey gathers information to determine the relevance of the educator preparation program. Feedback from numerous benchmarks and certification examination results also provides information that is analyzed and utilized to make program improvements.

Findings

Student teacher interviews revealed that the field-based experience requirements prior to student teaching were meaningful and helpful. They indicated that these experiences contributed to their familiarity with the classroom setting and contributed to their success during the student teaching semester.

Part-time field supervisors are limited to no more than twelve (12) student teachers served within two sections per semester. Field supervisors working in a part-time capacity may choose to supervise only one section, comprised of a maximum of six (6) student teachers. Interviews indicated that the low number of student teacher assignments per field supervisor had a positive impact at the classroom level.

It was noted that not all field supervisors had made initial contact with campus administrators during the first three days of the semester. One of the administrators indicated that field supervisors should sustain consistent communication with him about the student teacher candidates on the school campus, but another administrator stated that he preferred that the field supervisor focus instead on communicating with the cooperating teacher. Interviews suggested that the field supervisors should make a greater effort to connect with the campus administrators early in the student teaching placement process.

Program evaluation is conducted through a survey administered to the teacher candidates to determine the relevance of the educational program. In addition, a survey of campus cooperating teachers also provides an overall program evaluation.

Furthermore, the School of Education also utilizes the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) scores and other data, such as student and faculty surveys, to assess the success of its teacher educator preparation program. This information is also used to determine any curricular or program changes that should be implemented to positively impact student learning and maximize the student teaching experience. Test documents record a high passing rate for both the initial and final ratings of the UTB/TSC educator candidates.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code Rule §228.40 – Assessment and Evaluation of Candidates for Certification and Program Improvement.

Commendations

The UTB/TSC School of Education is commended for being aware of students' time constraints in addressing the field experience requirements. Field-based experiences include 30 hours of classroom teaching, observation, and assessment. In the event that the students are taking more than two field-based courses, the number of hours may be reduced to no less than 45 combined hours.

UTB/TSC is commended for modifying its program delivery to meet the needs of the teacher candidates enrolled in the School of Education. The program periodically reviews requirements for admission and initiates course changes resulting from the rigorous review of teaching competencies under the Texas Teacher Appraisal System. Providing TExES review tutorial sessions, combined with its curricular offerings, has promoted the program's success with attaining passing rates on the state examinations, including a 95% for the past assessment period from September 2006 to December 2007.

UTB/TSC is commended for hiring the Supervisor Coordinator to assist with the program's supervisory needs. Interviews indicated that this individual served as a trouble-shooter and an advocate for both campus administration and participants in the student teaching component. The Supervisor Coordinator also connected with campus administration and staff to provide additional support for any candidate that experienced difficulty in making the transition to the classroom setting.

UTB/TSC is commended for its low ratio of field supervisors to student teachers. Interviews of student teachers indicated that field supervisors provided adequate support and were accessible by phone, email, or in person. Student teachers also noted that they had an opportunity to communicate directly with the field supervisors during workshops held throughout the semester.

One of the goals of the School of Education in building external relationships is to engage in service opportunities for students and faculty. UTB/TSC education candidates are commended for volunteering in various school communities not only to gain more classroom and teaching exposure but also to positively impact area school district students and their communities.

Component V. On-Going Support

Support for student teachers comes in a variety of sources. Orientation meetings are held before the student teaching placements are made to facilitate the candidate's transition to the classroom. Additional support is also provided by personnel from the partnering school districts, various staff members, review/tutorial sessions, and monthly workshops.

According to the self-report, student teachers are offered a variety of support services, such as counseling, mentoring from field supervisors and cooperating teachers, tutorials, and small-group remedial instruction. The report also recognized the importance of recruiting effective and willing cooperating teachers. To enhance field-based supervision, UTB/TSC hired the Supervisor Coordinator to work closely with the Field Experiences Director and the University Supervisors. Thus, when a student teacher is identified as needing support in addition to that provided by the field supervisor, the Supervisor Coordinator can assist by meeting with the field supervisor, cooperating teacher, student teacher, and campus administration to help overcome the specific difficulty.

In addition, an individual was employed as Tutorial Specialist to create and implement tutorial sessions for candidates having difficulties with coursework and TEXES certification examinations. The Tutorial Specialist also assists educator candidates in preparing for the bilingual examinations. Program administration and staff credited the tutorial specialist with providing the support and guidance that helped candidates meet these challenges and experience success.

The Student Teaching Handbook developed by the School of Education to provide guidance and support for all participants clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities for student teachers, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and the campus principals. Addressing numerous effective practices, monitoring forms, and activities, the handbook provides an extensive and comprehensive Appendix. The Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS) framework for mentoring is a significant section of this Appendix. For efficiency, the handbook is also disseminated via CD.

Findings

Cooperating teachers found that the Student Teaching Handbook's emphasis on the TxBESS mentoring process strengthened their guidance of student teachers. Interviews of cooperating teachers revealed that training was not consistently implemented at the campus level. Those who experienced adequate training credited the program and their districts; others however, received minimal training. It was noted that increased communication from the field supervisors about expectations would also enhance the cooperating teachers' understanding of their roles.

Program staff commented that the School of Education is currently working on the development of the School of Education Handbook. The purpose of this additional handbook is to increase support to undergraduate and graduate educator candidates by providing more extensive information about areas such as admission criteria, field experience campus placements, student teaching, benchmark testing, TExES review sessions, certification, and graduation.

The expectation for initial contact by field supervisors is within the first eight (8) days of student teaching. Supervisors are expected to begin their observations within the third week. It has been noted that ensuring that this timely contact occurs has been a goal of the university administration.

Interviews with cooperating teachers indicated that they received no type of compensation. Since the cooperating teachers receive no stipend, the university should explore ways to reward cooperating teachers for their service, such as the promoting of appreciation events or awarding of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credit hours.

Cooperating teachers expressed that they would encourage the program to strengthen areas of instruction, such as the lesson cycle, classroom management, and teacher presence through the emphasis on "voice." They indicated that student teachers were particularly well-prepared in the content areas and pedagogy. They stated that candidates were enthusiastic, confident, positive, motivated, and willing to work with students. In particular, they praised the student teachers' willingness to take the initiative in the classroom setting and present innovative ideas in the utilization and integration of technology with the designated curriculum.

In helping the candidates to prepare for the job market, career assistance is provided in resume writing and the interview process. Discussions during the Post Approval Opening Session indicated that collaboration between UTB/TSC and the partnership school districts enriched this process for students. Student teachers expressed positive learning experiences gained from these workshop presentations.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code Rule §228.35 – Preparation Program Coursework and/or Training.

Commendations

UTB/TSC is commended for utilizing technology to disseminate its Student Teaching Handbook. CD copies of this handbook are readily accessible to all participants involved in the student teaching process.

UTB/TSC's School of Education administration is commended for addressing its concern regarding timeliness of the field supervisors' observation schedules. Beginning with the Spring

2009 Semester, cooperating teachers serving as mentors will fax a confirmation of initial observation implementation to the Field Experiences Office. This procedural change will not only facilitate documentation of the supervision schedule but also help all parties adhere to the recommended schedule to optimize the effectiveness of the student teaching experience.

UTB/TSC is commended for employing a tutorial specialist to provide additional support to educator candidates having difficulties.

Program Recommendations

- Increase efforts to include regional education service center, business, and community representatives in the UTB/TSC Advisory Committee to increase the sharing of diverse ideas and skills.
- Investigate transitioning from a paper-based to an electronic records storage system, where feasible.
- Enhance the academic advising component's availability to better meet student needs in a timely manner.
- Improve communication efforts with the campus Principal and Dean of Instruction by creating a notification system to document the process.
- Explore ways to reward cooperating teachers for their service.
- Implement increased utilization of the TxBESS framework for mentoring training for cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and student teachers.
- Follow-through with the administration's goal to strengthen the curriculum by increasing alignment with state standards and competencies.