

**2007-2008 Annual Program Review
Interdisciplinary Studies, Grades 4-8 Licensure**

Program: Interdisciplinary Studies, Grades 4-8 Licensure

Reviewers: Jody Piro, faculty
Benita Bruster, faculty
Bettie Barrett, faculty
Charmaine Lowe, faculty
Ede Tunstall, graduate of program, teacher at Richview Middle School
Sheila Pirkle, faculty chair

Program Description:

The “middle school” concentration, within the Integrative Studies major at Austin Peay has undergone changes and 2007-2008 was the transition year as the Tennessee license migrated from a grades 5-8 license to a grades 4-8 license. This report describes the program in place for the grades 5-8 license during and prior to 2007-2008. Of the thirty-nine students included in the cohort of middle school teachers, thirty-seven were identified as grade 5-8 licensure, and one as grades 4-8 licensure.

The grades 5-8 concentration, within the Integrative Studies major in the School of Education during 2007-2008, required the completion of 125-127 credit hours of study. The middle grades major included 45-47 credit hours and the choice of one cognate from mathematics, social studies, science, or literacy/English. The course load for the cognates varied, explaining the range in credit hours required for the major.

The course, Middle School Methods, Curriculum and Philosophy (EDUC 4090), is a requirement and it is now offered annually during the fall semester, but most of the students in this report were able to take the course in spring or fall.

Among the general requirements for this concentration are:

- GPA of 3.0 in the major,
- Appropriate dispositions,
- Satisfactory completion of 100 hours of field experience prior to student teaching, and
- A reflective portfolio of relevant work, which is evaluated by faculty at four milestones in the program.

Teacher candidates, to be licensed, must have graduated from the program and achieved a passing score on the PRAXIS PLT for Grades 5-9, in addition to other testing requirements, including Reading across the Content Area. The PRAXIS PLT for Grades 5-9 includes specific questions from the fields of social studies, science, mathematics and English/language arts.

I. Assessment of Candidates:

This cohort included thirty-nine candidates and there was one hundred percent completion.

Among the thirty-nine were thirty-eight teachers who successfully completed the program with licensure for grades 5-8, and one who completed the program for grades 4-8, the new license.

Of these teacher candidates, all successfully passed the PRAXIS Middle School Content Knowledge Test, however, there were a total of seven who succeeded only after two or more attempts. All appeared to succeed on the Reading Across the Curriculum PRAXIS test the first time.

Principals responded to a survey about the performance of APSU graduates currently teaching in their schools. In general the middle school group received the same or slightly higher marks than elementary and high school teachers in all categories of the evaluation document. The only area in which they were weaker than the elementary teachers (but still better than their peers in high school) was in classroom management of student behavior, and the difference was -0.2 points.

The students included twenty-nine females, of whom four identified themselves as African American, and the remaining females were white. There were ten males, of the males, one was African American and one was Asian.

Data was not available to describe the distribution of cognates among the group of thirty-nine middle school completers.

The majority of the completers are employed in middle school in Clarksville Montgomery County and the others either are thought to be working out of state or in another county, and the information is not available.

Anecdotal comments from a recent graduate were believed to be representative of the group. Those issues marked with an asterisk have since been addressed and changes made to the current program or the program in 2009-2010.

The comments included the following:

- *Provide course work in reading more relevant to middle school.
 - RDG 4040: Reading in the Content Area has been added.
- *Teacher-candidates should be required to pass all PRAXIS test prior to student teaching.
 - All students must now pass the PRAXIS prior to student teaching
- *A single faculty representative knowledgeable about the requirements for completion should advise all middle school teacher-candidates.
 - All 4-8 concentration students are now assigned to a particular faculty adviser.
- *Include guest speakers from the local school districts to give needed information not available to faculty.

- Guest speakers from the district are invited each semester to the EDUC 4090/5090 class.
- Provide practical information such as the need to manage time in the classroom. New teachers are unaware of the management routines that need to be repeated as classes repeat each period.
- Accumulate a LISTSERV of all teacher-candidates to keep them informed about graduate school and other professional development opportunities or promote their opportunities in the school district newsletters, etc.
- Keep the Library Resource Center (LRC) available after 4:30 PM.

Proposed Short Term Actions:

While there was a one hundred percent completion for this cohort, we are interested in identifying areas of strength and areas that are targeted for improvement. Quite a substantial amount of data is collected that would permit a more detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the grade 4-8 students, but the data is mixed with that of the K-6 students, and not readily available for inspection.

The proposed short-term actions related to data collection include:

- Coding and summarizing the portfolio evaluations of 4-8 students;
- Coding and sorting field-experience teacher evaluations for 4-8 students;
- Retrieving PRAXIS subtests scores and GPA data for those with the 4-8 concentration.

In addition to the above actions it is proposed that, on the surveys to graduates and on the survey of principals, we should include items that ask respondents to identify the undergraduate concentration. They should be asked if they are teaching classes outside the area of licensure and/or outside the cognate. Another addition to the survey might be to question if the alumnus has added a middle school endorsement to an elementary certificate, and reasons for the decision to teach at grades 4-8 level.

Proposed Longer-Term Actions:

In the longer-term, some suggestions might be to seek explicit feedback from these students on their early experiences in the middle school classroom and how we can improve our courses. During EDUC 4090, for instance, the opportunity for the establishment of a learning community is developed, and it would be interesting to learn if that community is sustained during the novice stage of the professional life of this cohort.

In the realm of what we can do soon to address perceived weaknesses, the following is suggested:

- Develop a LISTSERV of all 4-8 candidates for efficient delivery of information.
- Provide information about graduate school and professional development opportunities.
-

II. Assessment of Program Operations

Included in program operations are the courses, the field experience, and the evaluation systems.

Courses:

The program operation for this cohort had the students taking an unbalanced program of studies. Block I carried a light course load, and Block II demanded a heavy course load. During Block II, the students experienced the highest demands on their time while having the middle school field experience. With the changes made in 2008-2009, that weakness has been resolved. The cognate courses have also been modified, as a result of feedback, to include major and cognate courses more relevant to the standards.

This evidence is anecdotal, but students comment that the Block II experience would be improved if faculty would be more consistent in expectations on assignments. This year faculty met to make a plan that would eliminate duplication of student assignments.

A remaining issue relates to courses: the science methods are for grades 4-6 and the social studies methods is K-6. Only the course, Middle School Methods, Philosophy and Curriculum (EDUC 4090) is tailored specifically for the grades 4-8.

The option of providing specific courses for secondary teacher-candidates, especially 4-8 concentrators should be considered. Among those courses that could be targeted for adjustment are EDUC 3070, EDUC 4040, and SCI 4020.

Field Experience:

Placing students has been challenging due to incongruity in university and K-12 calendars, public school testing schedules, and our need to place students rather late in the semester. Each semester, depending upon the relative number of K-6 and 4-8 licensure students, and their cognates, there are varying needs for placements. With this cohort, we began working with the new Director of Middle Schools, Dr. Sean Impeartrice resulting in earlier placements. All the middle school students in this cohort were placed in the desired cognate in middle school.

A substantial amount of data is collected that would permit a more detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the grade 4-8 program operations, but the middle school data is mixed with that of the K-6 students, and not easily retrievable. If the surveys are coded to indicate middle school data, this should be resolved.

As with the proposed short-term actions recommended in the section I of this report, assessment of program operations would also be improved with availability of the following data sources:

- Survey of students immediately following the field experience;
- Identification of key assessments to be used in Block II courses;
- Mapping the Block II curriculum in the context of the total curriculum;
- Analysis of teacher evaluations; and,
- Milestone III portfolio analysis of data from the middle school teacher candidates.

With the data, courses in the middle school program could be analyzed and strengthened when areas of weakness are found.

Longer term, the consideration of a separate and parallel middle school program of study, with methods courses tied to the disciplines assessed by the PLT 146, should be considered (perhaps combined with the secondary program). Partnering consistently with middle schools and lining up field experiences during the semester previous to Block II are suggestions. The Block II coordinator could visit the Block I class to question the students on needs for the coming semester. Numbers of students are low for this program. Longer term, a consideration for switching middle school to Block I might also be weighed. This would provide students with exposure to middle school environments earlier in their programs of study, resulting in, perhaps, increased numbers of students for this high-demand field.

Assessment Systems:

The assessment system can be enhanced in the ways described in the next section.

III. Assessment System

As discussed in sections I and II, quite a substantial amount of data is collected that would permit a more detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the grade 4-8 students, graduates and program. In addition, new questions might be added.

The proposed short-term actions include:

- Coding and sorting the portfolio evaluations of those students declaring the Grades 4-8 concentration.
- Coding and sorting field-experience teacher-evaluations.
- If possible, retrieving and summarizing PRAXIS subtests and GPA data for those with the Grades 4-8 concentration should be considered.

Finally, the survey of graduates might question if the alumnus has added a middle school endorsement to an elementary certificate, and, if so, reasons for the decision to teach at grades 4-8 level. They might also be asked why they did not pursue this as part of the undergraduate program. For instance, *did we fail to adequately promote the program, were the opportunities for field experience at middle level delivered too late, or was it perceived as too difficult? Or, was the candidate carefully advised?*

Enrollment in the middle school concentration is low, while the need for middle school teachers is consistently high. The current class for EDUC 4090/5090 is at fifteen students, and that low enrollment has been consistent during the past several years. Ways to increase enrollment should be explored.

Some suggestions include:

- Partnering with local middle schools to provide more information about the middle school experience,
- Provide field placement in middle school *earlier* in the undergraduate program,
- Seeking and providing scholarships, and
- Converting some aspects of the program to online opportunities.

Summary

In summary, there was one-hundred-percent completion rate in this cohort and it appears that all have been successfully placed in a middle school positions. A great deal of data has been collected; in the short-term we are using the data to analyze strengths and areas needing improvement. We are streamlining the data collection to ensure we can identify categories and sort to retrieve more of the data useful for improving the program. There are longer-term recommendations that should be considered by the faculty, as there promises to be a continuing need for teachers to fill vacancies in middle schools in the region.

Many recommendations made by graduates of the program were resolved this year and others are reflected in the 2009-10 academic year. Still others are under consideration.

The annual review process continues to aid us in providing a program that provides our students with the skills and understandings required for becoming teachers in the middle school.