



Employer and Completer Case Study Initial Programs 2021-2022

Introduction

This case study was developed by UNA's Educator Preparation Program to examine completer impact on P-12 performance and completer and employer satisfaction with candidate preparation in the University's initial education preparation programs. It provides critical evidence for CAEP Standard 4 in the absence of state-provided data.

Implemented during the 2021-2022 academic year, this case study examines the extent to which recent completers of UNA's educator preparation program are satisfied with their UNA preparation, the extent to which their employers are satisfied with their novice teachers' UNA preparation, and the extent to which the recent completers are impacting P-12 student performance and demonstrate effective teaching during their first three years of teaching. This study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) captures satisfaction data from completers and employers through focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

Case study data will collect evidence for UNA completer impact on P-12 student learning and development (4.1), indicators of teaching evidence (4.2), satisfaction of employers (4.3), and satisfaction of completers (4.4) and will be used to guide continuous improvement decision making as our EPP seeks to identify areas of strength and areas for growth across our programs.

Literature Review

Effective teachers are the product of exemplary teacher preparation programs; teacher candidates who do not complete exemplary educator preparation programs will likely fail to sustain research-based best practices when they enter the profession (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Effective educator preparation programs equip candidates with critical knowledge related to learning and modes of inquiry in the discipline and how to translate this knowledge into practical application of effective curriculum, teaching strategies and assessment (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Truly effective educator preparation programs prepare candidates for "productive lives and careers" (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust & Shulman,

2005, pp. 441) and they are most effective when centered around three critical components: firm coherence and integration among courses and between course work and field experiences, extensive and intensely supervised field work strategically integrated into courses utilizing pedagogies that link theory and practice, and collaborative, proactive relationships with partnering schools that serve diverse learners effectively and can offer powerful examples of strong teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Even with the benefit of strong educator preparation programs, studies indicate that 20-30 percent of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2001) while most leave within the first two (Gordon, 1991). The experiences of many new teachers have been so disastrous that education has been described as "the profession that eats its young" (Halford, 1998, p. 33). A beginning teacher is expected to perform as a veteran (Andrews & Quinn, 2004) in a culture that demands teachers exhibit multifaceted skills, including those of counselor, nurse, psychologist, social worker and content expert, while being evaluated on P-12 student performance (Devon, 2016) using standardized tests often suspected to be biased and reflecting arguable performance benchmarks (Arbuthnot, 2011). This difficult – and often impossible – entry level culture that often excludes opportunities for professional mentoring, causes many young teachers to exit the profession before their careers have really begun (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Educator preparation programs (EPPs), play a powerful role in the success, self-perception and persistence of recent completers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). EPPs must continuously and systematically measure the satisfaction and effectiveness of their recent completers, along with the satisfaction of their employers, to identify trends of strengths and areas for growth as part of ongoing programmatic continuous improvement efforts.

Design

This case study analyzes completer and employer evidence collected from recent completers of both initial and advanced programs and their employers. Completers in this case study completed UNA programs during the 2019-2020 academic year. Case studies generally rely on the trustworthiness of the design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998; Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case study will rely on trustworthiness, verified by triangulation of data and persistent observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Creswell, 1998).

Participants

Four recent graduates participated in this focus group. These alumni graduated between 2020-2021 in Elementary Education, Collaborative Education K-6 or Early Childhood Education. They are currently employed in their field.

Summary:

The EPP collects evidence related to Initial Program completer and employer satisfaction,

completer impact on P-12 learning and completer teaching effectiveness through a case study that includes focus groups and interviews with recent completers and their employers. Participants in these focus groups included recent graduates from elementary, early childhood, collaborative and secondary education programs currently in their first year of teaching. Focus groups were conducted during fall semester 2020 by two faculty members representing elementary and secondary education.

Analysis:

Data from these focus groups indicate that overall, recent graduates perceive themselves to be well prepared for the classroom – “classroom ready.” Strengths across programs include strong satisfaction with preparation to develop effective lesson plans, preparation to teach reading in early childhood and elementary grades, and preparation to utilize technology to impact student learning. Authentic field-based experiences during programs prior to internship were cited as especially helpful for preparation.

Across programs, new teachers indicated they felt less prepared for the amount of paperwork that would be required of them and classroom management. Collaborative education graduates indicated they needed opportunities prior to internship to write IEPs.

Employers echoed these strengths and weaknesses, indicating UNA graduates are especially strong in content knowledge, skill in using technology to impact learning, and readiness to teach. They also indicated classroom management, specifically trauma-informed management, is an area for growth, although they also indicated this is common for new teachers and would develop with experience. Employers indicated they prefer to hire UNA graduates because of their strong content knowledge and readiness to teach and that any weakness in classroom management was not greater than those hired from other institutions and was considered developmentally appropriate for a new teacher and would grow with time.

Programmatic changes that have resulted from this analysis include:

- 1) Adding an IEP assignment to EEX 440, required for collaborative majors
- 2) Coordinating with the Mitchell-West Center for Social Inclusion to offer trauma-informed training through a variety of workshops for both pre-service and in-service teachers, including annual workshops exploring the neuroscience of trauma.
- 3) Coordinating with the UNA Collier Library to create a LibGuide for students featuring the neuroscience of trauma and trauma-informed materials
- 4) Increasing course content related to classroom management, particularly the trauma-informed classroom, in required classroom management courses
- 5) Coordinating with faculty in counselor education to provide specialized trauma-informed and mental health training for both

