

Chapter 10: Graduate Discipline Spotlight

Each year, the Assessment Almanac contains one chapter dedicated to spotlighting the assessment practices of a specific undergraduate discipline. This year, this practice has expanded to include a chapter in the Almanac dedicated to spotlighting the assessment practices of a specific graduate program. It is intended to publicize the behind-the-scenes assessment work that goes on at Truman and to highlight the practices of one specific department. For 2013, the Education Department is the focus of the Graduate Discipline Spotlight.

The Master of Arts in Education Program (MAE Program) has recently started making changes to how they tackle Assessment. Within the past year, the program has developed a new “Assessment Team”. One of the first tasks of this team has been to take an inventory of the data that is already being collected. There is a lot of this data being collected, but until recently it has not been utilized to its full potential. For example, data about how faculty mentors are performing is collected from each student when they complete their internship experience, and also from each interning student’s faculty mentor. This data has been collected for the past 8 years, and the new Assessment Team will hopefully be able to use it to improve the internship process and experience for future graduate students.

Another form of assessment in which the MAE program participates is a survey given to graduates from the MAE program after they have been teaching for one year. The purpose of this survey is to see if students who go through the MAE program are prepared to work as a teacher by the time they graduate. The data from this survey is very useful because it is taken after the graduate has some “real-world experience” under their belt and can reflect on how well their education prepared them to deal with actual situations in the classroom. Some data that the Assessment Team has been able to interpret suggests that teachers may need to get more education or experience in areas such as ‘classroom management’ and ‘dealing with diversity’ during their time completing the MAE program. One of the ways that the MAE program has addressed this problem is by requiring an Early Field Experience of the graduate students. In these Experiences, the students are observed while teaching in a classroom so they can improve their skills through practice and the criticism and advice they receive from their observer.

The MAE department also must participate in a state-wide assessment program. This is called “Performance-Based Assessment” because the state wants to move toward standardizing the way they assess MAE programs across the 39 schools in Missouri that offer such a program. This Performance-Based Assessment will be completed during the graduate student’s internship and will be externally evaluated. That is, it will be evaluated by someone impartial to any specific school in the state so that all the teaching schools can be compared objectively. Truman MAE students are expected to do well in this area of assessment because they typically have higher than state-average test scores and tend to be very successful after graduation.

The PRAXIS is not really a focus of the MAE program because students are mostly prepared for this test by their studies in their undergraduate major. However, the nature of the test is discussed in the MAE program in order to prepare students to take it. One problem with the PRAXIS is that while it does test the knowledge of a student in their particular area of study, it does not test one’s actual ability to teach. Since teaching is a difficult skill to test with pencil and paper, the state is developing a new kind of test to compare the 39 schools. One example of this kind of performance-based assessment that many of Truman’s MAE program graduates will encounter is the National Board Teacher Certification test, which requires that a video showing the individual teaching to be sent and assessed in order to obtain certification.

One type of personal assessment that every graduate of the MAE program completes is the “Action Research Project”, which is carried out by the student during their internship. While working in their internship, the student is expected to carry out an assessment in the classroom which they design themselves. They then take data on the results of the assessment and use this information to reflect on how they have done as a teacher. The idea is that this important data-based decision-making process will help and encourage the student to make improvements on their own teaching skills and styles. The Action Research Project is integral to one of the underlying themes of the MAE assessment practices: a systematic reflection process.

Learn more about the MAE Program at
<http://gradstudies.truman.edu/academics/education/>.