Graduate School of Education: Special Educator Program

Critical Concepts in Special Education

Scaffolding Instruction
Scaffolding enables a learner to perform a skill or carry out a task which would be beyond his or her unassisted efforts. Scaffolding encompasses many strategies and should be based on assessment of the learner’s current performance. It is a flexible, temporary support designed to be gradually removed as the learner’s performance improves.

Collaboration and Teaming
A dynamic process of effective communication, and mutual effort across stakeholders (e.g. learners, families, school personnel, community members) involving shared resources, collaborative decision making, and joint accountability to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Individualization
A systematic and collaborative process to develop and adapt environments, supports and instruction to individual needs. Individual considerations include the strengths, cultural and family contexts, preferences and priorities of the learner and family.

PSU Special Education Vision and Mission
The Special Education Department at PSU is dedicated to preparing and supporting professionals to improve the educational outcomes and quality of life for all learners. We strive to increase the use of evidence-based practices by preparing exemplary educators, collaborating with schools, building community partnerships and conducting and disseminating research.

Data-Based Decision Making
Continuous, purposeful process of collecting, interpreting, presenting and using data to inform actions that support positive educational outcomes. Data-based decision making considers the learner’s progress within the contexts of instruction, curriculum and environment.

Inclusion
Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure the right of every learner and family to full membership in classrooms, schools and communities. Supports enable all learners to be engaged participants in social, academic and extracurricular activities.

Leadership and Advocacy
Advocacy and leadership are guided by research and professional standards with a robust understanding of context including perspectives across stakeholders. Leaders and advocates actively engage a range of strategies to facilitate effective practices, systems and policies to support learner outcomes for an individual or across learners.

GSE Conceptual Framework
- Research Based Practices and Professional Standards
- Evidence Informed Decision Making
- Diversity and Inclusiveness
- Impact on Learning and Development

GSE Assessment Fair 2014
Special Educator Program
Ask a Question

**Question:**
Has the intentional integration of diversity content and activities into the Special Educator program improved our graduates’ perception of their ability to successfully work with diverse students?
Data Collection Tools:

2012 & 2013 Alumni Surveys
   • (Program graduates from 2008 to 2011)

2012 & 2013 Exit Surveys
   • (Program graduates from 2012 and 2013)

Methods:
   • Compared Alumni Surveys (pre-program redesign) to Exit Surveys (post-program redesign)
Problem

• Pre-2011/12 data indicate high rate of students feeling unprepared to work effectively with diverse populations

Context:

• Our local schools are increasingly becoming more diverse
• High proportion of program graduates felt they were not adequately prepared to support diverse students
Alumni Survey
Spring 2012

N = 20
1 - Completed program in 2011
11 - completed program in 2010
9 - 2009
2 - 2008
2 - other

My program helped prepare me to work effectively with diverse populations.
2013 Alumni Survey Data

5. My Special Education program prepared me to ....

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Support diverse learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

N = 20
18 - Completed program in 2011
2 - completed program in 2010
2013 Alumni Survey Data

8. Diversity and Inclusiveness

My program helped prepare me to work effectively with diverse populations.

N = 20
18 – Completed program in 2011
2 – completed program in 2010
Interventions

• Professional development in integrating diversity content and activities into course syllabi
• Developed course evaluation tools
• Diversity content integrated into SPED Program curriculum redesign in 2011-12
• Faculty shared new syllabi with diversity content
• Increased focus on diversity content and activities during the first term of program (e.g., equity work)
Graduate Perceptions After Program Changes

• Overall increase in program graduate ratings of preparedness to support diverse students in 2012 and 2013 exit surveys

• There are still some students who do not feel prepared suggesting the need for continued improvement in this area
2012 Exit Survey Data

17. My Special Education program prepared me to

- N=19
- Completed licensure program in 2012
2013 Exit Survey  \( (n=22) \)

17. My Special Education program prepared me to

- Support diverse learners across the full continuum of disabilities.  
  - Strongly Disagree: 9%
  - Disagree: 73%
  - Agree: 18%
  - Strongly Agree: 7%

- Support diverse learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
  - Strongly Disagree: 64%
  - Disagree: 32%
  - Agree: 52%
  - Strongly Agree: 43%
Action steps:

1. New instructors receive training materials about integrating diversity into courses

2. Conduct a yearly review of program syllabi to evaluate the inclusion and consistent implementation of diversity content and activities across instructors and course sections

Take Action
Reliability and Validity plan:

- Measure interrater reliability in evaluation of program syllabi and discuss discrepancies in scoring
- Continue to collect and review alumni and exit survey data
- Compare and contrast field experience evaluation data with survey data