

## 2018-2019 IBHE Program Review

1. **Eastern Illinois University**
2. **Special Education, B.S. Education**
3. **Date: January 23, 2019**
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### 5. Overview

The undergraduate program mission is to prepare graduates for entry-level safe and effective professional practice with individuals with exceptional learning needs across the range and spectrum of exceptionalities and across the life span. The faculty of the department are committed to teaching, research/creative activities, and service and are role models for special education majors. The Eastern Illinois mission statement reflects, "Students learn the methods and outcomes of free inquiry in the arts, sciences, humanities, and professions". The Special Education program prepares candidates for a profession in education and faculty use instructional methodologies to assure students learn the methods and outcomes of free inquiry. The University mission further states that, "The University community strives to create an educational and cultural environment in which students refine their abilities to reason and communicate clearly so as to become responsible citizens in a diverse world". Field experiences embedded in courses, required service learning and volunteer activities require candidates to demonstrate commitment across their program to diversity within communities in which they live and work.

The primary learning objectives of the B. S. in Education, Special Education program reflect the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and InTASC national standards for safe and effective practice of entry-level special educators and the State of Illinois Standards for Learning Behavior Specialist I (LBSI) teachers. The mission of general education of the University is three fold: to enhance student literacy and oral communication, to encourage students to think critically and reflectively and to introduce students to knowledge central to responsible global citizenship, these goals are also learning objectives incorporated into special education courses.

The undergraduate program has two options: Standard Special and Early childhood Special Education. Graduates of each option must demonstrate having met the CEC/InTASC standards and the State of Illinois LBSI standards. In addition, graduates of the Early Childhood Special Education Option must also demonstrate mastery of the CEC standards for "Initial Special Education Professionals in Early Childhood/Early Intervention (Birth to Eight)" and the State of Illinois standards for Early Childhood Special Education Teachers.

The undergraduate program options were fully recognized by the Council for Exceptional Children and the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation Programs (CAEP) as part of the CAEP process that culminated in full institutional recognition November 2018. The national specialty program review process (SPA) involves external reviewers' determination of whether programs meet the CEC/InTASC national level special education standards. Submission of three years of candidate standards based performance data is required as part of this process. In the reviewer summary specific to the "Early Childhood Special Education" option the report states: "It is evident that faculty are actively using data to influence program development and enhancement. There are 3 feedback loops: faculty looking at his/her own assessment data, the faculty with guidance from the Chair looking at the assessment data generated, and the Department Curriculum Committee analyzing and discussing the data for purposes of program improvement." In the summary of the recognition report for the "Standard Special (LBS I)" program

reviewers commented: “This program is clearly driven by evidence and data. EIU has demonstrated an exceptional level of evidence based decision making and program refinement over the past several cycles and, as a result, has developed an outstanding program with excellent candidate outcomes.” The State of Illinois confers continuing program approval based on CEC/CAEP recognition.

The prior IBHE review of the special education undergraduate program was in 2010-11. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards’ revisions in 2012 required realignment of courses, assignments, and assessments to the 2012 CEC Standards and elements. Programmatic assessments have been refined to focus on candidate performance resulting in more meaningful and useable data. The extensive nature of the performance assessment system and on-going analysis and use of data for purposes of assessing candidate performance and program improvement are distinguishing characteristics of the Eastern Illinois University B. S. in Education, Special Education program. Plans for the future include on-going refinement of this extensive assessment system as CEC revises the 2012 Standards and systemic on-going use of data.

The undergraduate program is rich in field experiences and other integrative learning experiences, including requirements of candidates to be involved in a minimum of 30 hours of service learning and documentation of a minimum of 16 hours of volunteer service. Candidates and faculty are involved in university, community and business collaborations, which facilitate candidates to relate theory to practice and enhance the life of individuals with exceptionalities in the varied communities of the university and profession of special education. The extensive nature of these experiences sets this program apart from other state university special education programs.

Majors in special education are academically strong. Fall 2016, the most recent fall for which data was included in the institutional CAEP report, the undergraduate grade point average of special education majors was 3.35 (4.00) and the average ACT-Composite score was 26.43. In the 2016-17 academic year 100% of all special education student teachers successfully passed the edTPA on the first attempt with an average total score of 45.1 compared to a University average of 43.8.

## **6. Major Findings and Recommendations**

### **a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program**

The societal need for professionals prepared in the field of special education was significant in 2010 and it remains the number one teaching shortage area nationally and in the State of Illinois. The Illinois State Board of Education “2017 Educator Supply and Demand Report” provides a list specific to the largest number of full-time equivalents (FTE) educators, in which the greatest needs through 2019-2020 are expected and the list includes special education teachers. Of the positions on the “greatest need list” special education has the highest estimated need with 2,146 FTE through 2019-20. Data included in this report also reflects that there were 271.6 unfilled FTE positions in special education in Illinois in 2016-17 which was the highest area of unfilled positions.

Fall 2010, the special education program had 483 undergraduate majors; fall 2018, there were 112 undergraduate special education majors. The review by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation Programs (CAEP) reflected that the EIU special education programs were exceedingly strong in the most recent 2018 review. The strengths of the EIU special education programs were recognized in the 2009 review also. The external review by CEC/CAEP validates the on-going quality of the program. Given this to put the enrollment decline into perspective it is important to look at impinging State of Illinois factors that have affected enrollment in teacher education programs statewide and in higher education institutions across the State of Illinois.

In 2010, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) changed the passing score on the State of Illinois Basic Skill Test, the “Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP).” The pass rate on the test went from approximately 68% to 33.3%; the pass rate was set as an equivalent to a 26 on the ACT and 2 standard deviations from the mean. As passing, this test was required to progress through a teacher education program in Illinois, enrollment in teacher education programs statewide plummeted. Compounding the issue were the State of Illinois changes to the “Teacher Retirement System” and all the related bad publicity related with the pension and the changes. Concomitantly the FY 16 Illinois budget standoff that resulted in no budgets for Illinois State institutions of higher education resulted in a public loss to confidence in State institutions like Eastern and resulted in graduates of Illinois high schools choosing to go out of State to School.

An additional impact on the number of majors has to do with number graduating versus freshmen entering as majors. Fall 2010, 43 undergraduates completing program requirements; 94 freshmen entered the program. These 94 freshmen represented 19% of the 2010 Special Education majors. Fall 2018, 15 will graduate; 26 freshmen entered the program which equates to 23% of the majors are freshmen. This increase in percent of freshmen is an early sign of the rebounding in more Illinois high school graduates electing to attend a State of Illinois University.

Four hundred and twenty undergraduate program graduates responded to a department survey in spring of 2010. Ninety-four percent responded to the query, "Overall, how do you view Eastern Illinois Universities' Special Education preparation program?", that the program was a "quality program" or "mostly a strong program". The survey done summer 2018 resulted in 112 responses. To this same question of “overall view” 98.2% responded “quality program (74.1%)” and “mostly strong (24.1%).” Responding to the question in 2010, "How do you perceive that other professionals view Eastern Illinois University's Special Education preparation program?" 90.3% said "well" or "very well." The 2018 responses were even more positive with 96.4% indicating “very well (56.4%)” or “well (40%).”

Fifty two principals working with EIU prepared special educators responded to a survey sent to them in fall of 2018. Program graduate survey responders had provided their names as individuals currently supervising them. And in addition, commuting distance to EIU district principals were sent the survey. To the question: "Overall, what is your perception of the reputation of the personnel preparation program of Eastern Illinois University Department of Special Education? 100% responded "satisfactory" or better with 78% saying "well thought of" or “very well thought of".

Ninety-seven percent of the undergraduate 2010 survey respondents reported they took their first position in special education within one year of leaving EIU. In the 2018, survey of graduates of the undergraduate special education program 94.5% (105 of 112) took their first position within one year of graduation. Using the Illinois State Board of Education licensure site to track graduates the department has verified a 100% job placement rate for graduates who chose to seek a position within a year of graduation.

## **b. Description of major findings and recommendations**

National recognition of Special Education programs by the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) requires submission of performance data aligned to CEC's initial special education teacher learning outcomes. Performance data must provide a preponderance of evidence that candidates demonstrate the knowledge and skills for effective and safe entry-level professional practice across the 2012 CEC 7 Preparation Standards and field experience standard. Data from eight assessments across three academic years were submitted for both the Standard Special Option and the Early Childhood Special Education Option. Results from the State certification test and student teaching evaluations are required CAEP assessments. The other six assessments for the Standard Special Option included: "Methods Clinical Practice", "Language/Reading Lesson Plan", Individualized Education Plan (IEP)", "Functional Behavior

Assessment”, Diagnostic Summary Report”, and “Curriculum Unit Plan”. For the Early Childhood Special Education program the six additional assessments included: “IEP for ages 3-5”, “Lesson Plan for ages 3-5”, “Functional Behavior Assessment, K-3”, “Early Childhood Diagnostic Summary Report”, “Unit Plan, ages 3-8”, and “Early Literacy Lesson Plan”. Relative to the data provided the team of external reviewers stated in the 2018 Standard Special (LBSI) program review report: “Assessments include practical application of knowledge and skills and are well developed and analyzed. EIU has provided rich data and evidence of a comprehensive, high quality preparation program.” In the Early Childhood program review report reviewers said: “The program has provided examples of the use of performance data to inform program change and improvement, and it demonstrates that assessment data are systematically and comprehensively reviewed by faculty and other stakeholders.”

Annually the University requires all programs to submit a “Student Learning Assessment Program” report. These reports document the program “learning objectives”; address “how, where, and when they are assessed”; “the expectations”; “the results”; and indicate “committee (person responsible”, as well as “how the results are used”. These reports are evaluated by the Director of the Center for Academic Support and Achievement (CASA)” based on established guidelines. Spring 2010 the undergraduate major “Student Learning Assessment Program Summary” was determined to be of the quality that the program did not need to resubmit a report for two years. The most recent report required was for 2015-2017. In the summary evaluation of this report, the following evaluative comments were made: “Special Education has set a high standard of assessment and it models the behavior and professionalism that it teaches its students. This department clearly has assessment interwoven into the culture of the department.”

Among the indirect measures used by the department are surveys of program graduates and supervisors (employers) of graduates. One hundred percent (100%) of the bachelor degree program graduates in the survey sent Spring 2010 and the recent Summer 2018 when asked, “At what level do you consider your knowledge and skills to work with individuals with exceptional learning needs to be?” responded “high” or “very high.” One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents to the “Employer” survey responded that Eastern’s graduates in special education were “very well prepared”, “well prepared” or “adequately prepared” with 80% responding “very well” or “well prepared”.

Program faculty each fall review all data collected across assessments and the assessment reports submitted in the prior academic year. The Department Curriculum Committee acts as a committee of the whole faculty with faculty considering programmatic changes based on assessment data. After reviewing the data submitted as part of the CEC/CAEP program review process faculty collectively arrived at the conclusion that candidates in the Standard Special Option (LBS I) needed more intentional opportunities to use and interpret data. Changes were made to two programmatic assignments to address this issue: the IEP in the “Community Services course (SPE 4600)” and the data collection assignment in the “Characteristics and Behaviors” embedded field experience in SPE 3201. Specific to the “Early Childhood Special Education” Option based on review of assessment data by faculty and scrutiny of the alignment of course content with the 2012 CEC Standards faculty arrived at the conclusion that “literacy content” needed to be strengthened across the program and that collaboration needed strengthening also. The “literacy” courses were carefully scrutinized and changes have been made in these two courses (SPE 4525 and 4530). Relative to collaboration a collaboration project constituted as an action plan was added to the Early Childhood Special Education methods course, SPE 4920.

### **c. Description of actions taken since the last review**

The Eastern Illinois University two undergraduate “options” are recognized by the Council for Exceptional Children through 2025; the institution received its letter granting “full” accreditation of its educator preparation programs through 2025 November of 2018. The Council for Exceptional Children

(CEC) is an international organization that partners with the Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education (CAEP) serving as the Special Education, Specialty Program Association (SPA), in the program review process that results in educator preparation programs being “Recognized.” In 2012, the “Council for Exceptional Children” standards for special educator preparation were revised and all programs having or seeking CEC Program Recognition to sustain recognition had to realign its program, assessments, rubrics, and data to the new 7 CEC Preparation Standards and elements as informed by the appropriate special education knowledge and skill set(s). Commencing in fall 2012 the department faculty began the realignment process. The programmatic assessments, 23 in the “Standard Special” option and 14 in the “Early Childhood Special Education” option, embedded into the special education major coursework were revised and the rubrics and rubric language were refined and revised by faculty to align in apparent ways to the 2012 CEC Standards and elements. The revised and refined assessments and rubrics were completed across fall 2012 and piloted spring 2013. The Chair and program faculty scrutinized assessments, rubrics and the data generated spring 2013, across the summer of 2013. Further refinement as needed occurred across fall 2013. The resulting assessment and rubrics have been used to collect programmatic data since fall 2013.

#### **d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review**

The special education curriculum is a living entity. The program and the courses constituting the major and the two options are continuously scrutinized and modified, as needed, due to changes in standards, state rules and regulations, federal and state laws and litigation, educational reforms, and emerging research based practices. Curricular changes and practices responsive to legislation and litigation at the federal and state level will be a department focus in the near future as the federal law governing special education is reauthorized, the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).” The special education courses and assessments will be modified as the federal laws change and the federal rules are promulgated. State laws will then be modified to be congruent with the revisions of IDEA and this will necessitate additional curricular modifications.

Given the enrollment drop the Department has instituted and will further strengthen, as needed a recruitment process with multiple steps commencing when an individual expresses interest in Eastern Illinois University and in being a “special education major.” A series of contacts with interested prospective majors as they progress from “interest” to the “application” step have been implemented. Encouraging a prospective student from the interest stage to application includes an initial letter with special education state and national scholarship information. A follow up post card is sent, followed by a series of emails from the Chair and faculty. Personal contacts before “Admission events;” and invitations to follow the department its majors and activities on the department Facebook page are each next steps in the process. When a prospective student, declaring a “special education” major, is admitted they receive a department “congratulation” letter with the request, they send their tee shirt size so the department can send them a special shirt. The shirt designed by current majors says: Some heroes wear capes; some are Special Educators. Other recruitment efforts that have been tried: include, calling prospective students, student organizations sending notes with personal messages, and special sessions to “get to know the major” as part of the University admission events. The most fruitful and successful of these has been the “get to know” the major sessions that involve prospective students and their families interacting with current majors. These initiatives in combination with the State of Illinois providing FY19 budget monies to higher education, are beginning to show fruition as this fall 27 freshmen entered the program versus 18 in fall 2017.

## 7. Institutional Questions NA

## 8. Outcome

### 8.1 Decision:

- Program in Good Standing
- Program flagged for Priority Review
- Program Enrollment Suspended

### 8.2 Explanation

On behalf of Academic Affairs, I appreciate the commitment of the faculty and program to high quality programming and innovation. In particular, the use of data-driven program development, attention to state and federal laws, and personalized contact with prospective students is noteworthy. The report clearly demonstrates a commitment to academic excellence and student success.