

Middle Level Education

Undergraduate Program Assessment Information

Introduction

The Middle Level Teacher Education Program at Illinois State University is one of three undergraduate teacher education majors located in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education. Illinois State University established this program in Middle Level Teacher Education nearly fifty years ago. It continues to be one of the largest undergraduate programs preparing teachers specifically for the middle grades in the United States. At the foundation of this program lies a commitment to preparing middle level teachers to meet the developmental needs of the young adolescent. Since the 1960s, a national thrust in restructuring middle grades practices has yielded a demand for teachers knowledgeable and skilled in utilizing the student-centered components of effective middle grades education in their teaching, i.e., teaming, advisor/advisee programs, exploration, hands-on techniques, curriculum integration, service learning.

Students completing a Bachelor of Science Degree in Middle Level Teacher Education at ISU earn a K-9 teaching certificate from the State of Illinois. Currently, once the students finish their coursework they can complete their degree by participating in a typical, one semester student teaching option, or by following a year-long, clinically intensive Professional Development School (PDS) partnership. These PDS options are available at Bloomington Junior High School, in Bloomington District 87, and at Lincoln Middle School, located in Peoria District 150. In the partnership programs, university courses are delivered within the public school setting. Furthermore, university course content is closely correlated to the kinds of work occurring in the public school classroom in an effort to create a clinically intensive experience that is relevant to the daily activities that the students will face when they become middle school teachers.

Assessment Options – Multiple forms of individual and small group assessment are used to determine whether or not students meet program goals (see program assessment matrix). These multiple forms include traditional paper/pencil exams, research papers, lesson plan development activities, curriculum projects, peer/cooperating teacher/university supervisor observations (both written and oral), oral exams, journal entries, electronic portfolios, resume development, and microteaching. In addition, middle level program faculty meet on a monthly basis to discuss the progress that students are making during their final year, as this is when they take the “block” of three courses (333, 390, & 395) and student teach. The wide array of assessments creates a balance between evaluating the students’ performance in real and simulated classroom experiences and gaining an understanding of their knowledge of educational theory. Program faculty use information drawn from assessments and student comments to alter assignments when warranted. For example, as a result of student input this past semester (Spring 2003) changes were made in the electronic portfolio. Decisions like this one are made on a monthly basis during middle level program meetings.

Student Assessment

Standards: Standards are set and maintained in accordance with National Middle School Association (NMSA) standards, which are essentially the learning outcomes for the program. The four main middle level courses are aligned in accordance with these standards. Student assignments are designed to meet these standards and specific assignments have been institutionalized within the courses. Therefore, regardless of who teaches the course, learning outcomes remain consistent. Rubrics, steeped in standards, are used to assess students on these assignments. In order to enter the final year block of the middle level program, seniors must have a minimum of grade point average of 2.5. The middle level team holds monthly meetings and part of this meeting time is used to discuss student progress while they are in the block. If/when students are not progressing as they should, they are called in for consultations which may result in a formal plan for improvement. This is especially pertinent when students are participating in their clinical block experience, as program faculty believes it is critical that middle level majors be able to appropriately interact with young adolescents. In addition, the college of education uses dispositional forms to make all those concerned with teacher education aware of students who are not making adequate progress. This process takes place not only in the classroom, but also applies to the four week clinical experience, and if need be, for student teaching.

Certification/license exams: Rarely do students fail exams required by the Illinois State Board of Education. This is rather remarkable, given the fact that none of the four required exams are specifically written for middle level majors. Students in the middle level program must take exams that are either written for secondary or elementary majors. Unfortunately, middle level majors' test scores are not reported separately. Rather, they are combined with secondary students who have similar endorsements or with all elementary majors. All middle level majors are endorsed to teach a minimum of two subjects, and it is not uncommon for many to be endorsed in three and even four areas.

Student/alumni satisfaction with the program: Based on mostly anecdotal evidence, our students and alumni express satisfaction with the program. A significant number of ISU graduates act as cooperating teachers for the year long partnerships, clinical block experiences, and student teaching. They have indicated that they enjoy the opportunity to give back their expertise to the program and help future teachers grow professionally.

Job placement: Information taken from the recent NCATE report indicated that since 1992, the employment rate for middle level graduates is 98%. Principals throughout the state have indicated that they tend to place the resumes of ISU graduates on the top of their piles when considering applicants for teaching positions in their schools. Anecdotal reports from ISU graduates, usually in the form of emails and personal contacts, indicate that they are finding good jobs and contributing to their profession. One other anecdotal report was especially insightful in relation to the success of middle level graduates and the program in general. This email came

from Mr. Donald Perry, principal of Kennedy Junior High in Naperville and was forwarded to the middle level department by Dean Ashby. Among other things, Mr. Perry indicated that:

“I must tell you how impressed I am with the teaching candidates from ISU! They interview far above the rest of the candidates I have interviewed. They know current educational terminology, best practices in the delivery of instruction, they are articulate, and they know the basics of teaching in today's middle school.”

Implementation of Assessment Data

Middle level program faculty receive and review multiple sources of data on program candidates that contribute to discussions regarding program improvements. Data sources as indicated above include student feedback on course evaluations and via course reflections, student results on state teacher certification examinations, supervising classroom teacher evaluations from internships and student teaching, and classroom based assessments. These data sources are constantly monitored and reviewed at regularly scheduled program level faculty meetings.

In addition to these data sources, program faculty receive information from the Teacher Education Assessment Committee and College of Education Curriculum Committee. Both of these College of Education committees provide information about our students and college and university wide student and curricula issues. Finally, information regarding up-to-date middle level teacher training practices is shared with program faculty through NMSA, NCATE and the Alliance of Illinois Middle Schools (AIMS). Program faculty serve as a member of the NCATE/NMSA Program Review Board that approves middle level programs for NCATE accreditation, as a member of the NMSA Teacher Preparation Committee, and on the board of AIMS. Information gained from these state and national contacts and the corresponding meetings and conferences is also discussed and reviewed by program faculty and has an impact on programmatic decisions affecting middle level teacher preparation at Illinois State University.

Future Assessment Practices

In preparation for the recent NCATE re-accreditation visit, ISU's College of Education implemented a Performance Based Assessment (PBA) system. The PBA system calls for documentation and analyses of student performance on various skills deemed appropriate for future teachers. Students are assessed on their understanding of the College's conceptual framework (*Realizing the Democratic Ideal*) at the beginning and end of their programs; their ability to plan effective lessons that include all learners, especially those with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds and cultures; their ability to utilize technology in instruction, management and communication; their ability to write and speak effectively; and their ability to reflect on their own teaching practice. Data for these assessments either are or will be submitted by students using software created by the Live Text Corporation.

The unusually rich data collected and compiled via the Live Text system will provide middle level program faculty new opportunities to reflect on the success of the program in preparing outstanding teachers for middle schools in Illinois and elsewhere. It is anticipated that the data derived from the PBA system will add new insights into programmatic issues that will result in positive changes for the middle level program.

Assessment is an on going and evolving process in the College of Education at ISU. Likewise, the middle level program strives to utilize assessment data for continual program renewal and improvement.