Assessment Systems: An Explanation of the NCATE Transition Plan

NCATE understands that the development of an assessment system can take several years. It has made provisions for the development of assessment systems in its Transition Plan. The Transition Plan identifies levels at which the first two standards must be addressed at the time of the unit’s on-site visit. **During visits, NCATE expects the unit to make available performance assessment data that are currently collected.** These data include assessments conducted internally by the unit and external data such as state licensing tests, program review reports, and graduate and employer surveys. In addition to performance data that are already collected, the unit must, at a minimum, present a plan of the unit’s assessment system during the first year that the standards are effective, fall 2001 and spring 2002. Increasing implementation of the plan is required in each subsequent year. Consequently, all units\(^1\) should follow the schedule outlined in the Transition Plan for the development and implementation of their assessment systems. Units may move at a faster pace at their discretion.

This paper is written to detail NCATE expectations for institutions that are developing assessment systems and have visits scheduled for fall 2001 and beyond. **At a minimum, all institutions must have a plan for their assessment system during the 2001-2002 academic year.** Plans for assessment systems should include the six items detailed in this paper and should be developed collaboratively by the units’ educational communities. In addition, units should review the appropriate components of an assessment system detailed in the rubric and supporting explanation for Standard 2 of the NCATE Unit Standards.

According to the Transition Plan, units with visits in fall 2001 and spring 2002 should have a plan for an assessment system that:

1. **Identifies transition points at the unit and/or program level.**

   Transition points are key points in a program when the unit assesses candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and determines if candidates are ready to proceed to the next stage. The NCATE standards require transition points upon entry, prior to entering clinical practice, prior to exiting clinical practice, and upon program completion. While the four transition points stated above must be in place for all programs, institutions may have, at their discretion, additional transition points in their programs.

   The unit should anticipate a course of action if assessments indicate that candidates are not yet ready to proceed to the next stages of their programs.

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\(^1\)“All units” includes units undergoing initial and continuing accreditation review with visits scheduled during fall 2001 through spring 2005.
Possible actions might include remediation, re-taking assessments, denial of advancement, and academic probation.

2. **Identifies the major assessments to be used at the stated transition points.**

   Major assessments can include tests, portfolios, essays, student teaching/internship evaluations, student work samples with reflections, etc. The assessments should be linked to the learning outcomes in the conceptual framework and should reflect institutional, state, and national standards. The assessments must address candidate content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, professional knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, dispositions, and candidates’ positive impact on K-12 student learning.

   At this stage in the development of the assessment system, the unit must decide what assessments will be used and when. NCATE does not dictate the types of assessments used, however, evaluations of student teaching/internship and state licensing assessments, where applicable, are expected to be two of the components of the assessment system. NCATE supports the use of multiple assessments in evaluating candidates. The types of assessments may change over time based on considerations of fairness, accuracy, and consistency.

   While a review of all assessments in all courses may be in order to address unit and program coherence and the modeling of best practices by faculty, only major assessments should be identified as part of the assessment system. The instruments for these assessments may not yet be developed, but the unit must indicate a timeline for their development. See Item 3 below.

   The units should specify which elements of the standards each assessment is designed or being designed to evaluate. The same assessments must be administered to all candidates in a given cohort in a given program/unit. This means that all candidates in a program that reach the designated transition points should be required to complete the same assessments. When including course-based assessment(s) as part of the assessment system, the unit should ensure that candidates in different sections of the same course are administered the same assessment(s). Inevitably, assessments will differ across programs. The unit must coordinate the effort and ensure that each program is operating in the context of an overall assessment system.

   Assessments must be fair, accurate, and consistent. To ensure this, the unit may need to provide time and resources for the review of curricula to ensure that candidates have the opportunity to learn the materials assessed. In addition, the unit must provide time and resources for piloting assessments, developing benchmarks, ratings assessments, and analyzing the extent to
which the assessments were successful in measuring targeted candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

3. **Identifies a timeline for the development and implementation of the major assessments.**

   The timeline should include major steps in the development and implementation of assessments. These steps may include preparation, the development of drafts, piloting of drafts, benchmarking, ensuring that the assessments meet their intended goals, and refining the assessment instruments. Steps may also include revising graduate surveys, re-thinking faculty evaluations, and developing better focused employer surveys. The timeline should indicate what is to be done, by when, and what committee/person will be responsible for completing the tasks. It can be written in increments such as weeks, months, quarters, semesters, etc.

4. **Identifies the design for the collection, analysis, summarization, and use of data.**

   Once the system is in place, data from the system, particularly student assessment data, must be compiled at regular intervals. It is anticipated that these intervals will correspond with the transition points discussed above. Decisions should be made about student progress at each interval. The plan for the unit’s assessment system should identify how the data will be generated and when the data will be collected. Will portfolios be submitted and evaluated by a committee? What is the content for the portfolios? Will candidates have to sit for an exam that is then graded by two faculty members? Will they be required to complete a student teaching/internship assignment evaluated by peer review?

   Further, once the assessments are evaluated, the data must be summarized and analyzed. The purpose of summarization and analysis is to enable the unit to look across the cohort to examine strengths and weaknesses, to identify trends in comprehension of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and to pinpoint where additional support and academic work needs to be done. The summarization and analysis of graduate and employer surveys can further help the unit identify programmatic strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, the summarization and analysis of faculty evaluations can inform the unit of professional development needs. Summarization and analysis shifts focus from individuals to programs. Programmatic analysis, in turn, should lead to program change and improvement. For more information on the summarization of data, see Sampling and Summarizing Candidate Performance Information, a paper by Emerson Elliot available on the NCATE website.
The Transition Plan indicates that units should have a design for systematic collection, analysis, summarization, and use of data. The unit should describe in its plan for an assessment system what that system is expected to look like when it is operational. When will data be collected? How will it be collected? Who will do the evaluating? Who will summarize and analyze it? When will this take place? How will it be done? When will it be shared, with whom will it be shared, and what mechanisms will be in place to ensure that the data is used to improve the programs?

5. **Identifies aspects of the system that address unit operations.**

While the direct assessment of candidates is important, other mechanisms can and should be used to gauge the quality of the unit and its programs. The NCATE 2000 standards require that the unit collect data from applicants, candidates, recent graduates, faculty and other members of the professional community. The collection, analysis, and use of these data must be built in to the unit assessment system. The evaluations and surveys used to gather information are instruments that should be revised, when necessary, to reflect the unit’s mission and philosophy. These instruments should also reflect the extent to which the unit is meeting the learning expectations stated in the conceptual framework.

Other aspects of unit operations that could also be evaluated as part of the unit assessment system include the effectiveness of advisement, record keeping, the admissions system, student teaching placement, governance structures, etc.

In addition, provisions should be made to study the extent to which the requirements at the various transition points are adequate predictors of candidate success. The types of questions that might be posed by these studies include: are candidates who barely met admissions requirements scoring as well on the assessments as those who exceeded the requirements? Do candidates with high scores on the assessments have higher scores on employer surveys than those who had weaker scores?

6. **Identifies how information technology will be used in the maintenance of the assessment system.**

Tracking student progress and unit operations will likely require the use of computers and computer programs. The unit must have the capacity to retrieve and manipulate data. The unit should describe the role of information technology in the assessment system. The type and complexity of data management systems will depend, in part, on the size of the unit. Small units may be able to store assessment system data in Excel spreadsheets, while larger units may require more sophisticated software.
Units may be at different points in the development of assessment systems; at a minimum, all of the items listed above should be described in one document that includes all programs.

During fall 2001 and spring 2002, BOE members will base their assessment of Standard 2 on the extent to which institutions have addressed the Transition Plan, which is explained in the items above. If an institution exceeds these minimum requirements in the development of its system, then that institution should include the additional information in the document. This document could be the unit’s response to Standard 2 in the Institutional Report, or it could be a separate document that the unit makes available to the team via the web or at the time of the visit.

Visits in Fall 2002 through Spring 2005

Institutions with visits in subsequent years should be implementing their plans as delineated in the Transition Plan. For example, institutions with visits in fall 2002 and spring 2003 should have a plan for their assessment systems and they should have developed some performance assessments. Rubrics/criteria for scoring the assessments should be under development and steps or activities to ensure fairness, accuracy and consistency should have been planned. Some data collection should be underway.

Similarly, institutions with visits in fall 2003 and spring 2004 should have an assessment system plan that is inclusive of the six items above. In addition, the assessments should be fully developed. The rubrics/criteria for scoring should also be developed. The unit should be implementing the assessment system by using the assessments and rubrics/criteria with candidates and other members of the educational community. Data from the assessments should be collected and analysis should have begun. These steps should be in the timelines articulated in the assessment system plan.

Finally, institutions with visits in fall 2004 and spring 2005 should have fully developed systems that are being implemented, evaluated, and refined. The system should be clearly articulated and steps or activities to ensure accuracy, fairness, and consistency should be on-going. In addition, institutions should have evidence that data from internal assessments, as well as external assessments (state tests scores, graduate and employer surveys, etc.), are being used to make changes and improve programs.