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COE Students Ready for New Certification Requirements

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COE students are prepared for the new teacher performance-based assessment, called edTPA, which is now a state requirement for all new teacher certification in addition to the Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators (GACE) content exam.

“Our faculty began piloting edTPA during spring 2013 with students in our Special Education program, commented COE Dean Thomas Koballa. “We involved additional students and programs over the next few semesters while also making any needed program changes to ensure the goals of edTPA are fully embedded in all programs,” he explained.

The new assessment is a portfolio-based capstone completed during student teaching that requires a teacher candidate to demonstrate their ability to plan, teach, and assess their teaching effectiveness and ability to positively impact student learning. The submitted portfolio includes teaching materials, video clips of their teaching, and reflections justifying their planning, teaching and assessments of student learning.

COE students generally have given edTPA positive reviews. According to recent graduate student in special education Cynthia Jersey, “edTPA influenced my actual teaching because it caused me to justify every part of my lesson plans, which ensured that the material that I was teaching to my students was appropriate based on the state standards and their strengths and needs. It also required me to make sure my instruction was supported by research.”

“We’ve worked hard to integrate edTPA into the curriculum,” said Pat Parsons, director of field experiences and clinical practice. “Our pilot programs gave us valuable feedback from both students and faculty so we feel confident our teacher candidates are well prepared,” Parsons said.

Some students feel COE already prepares teacher candidates so well for the classroom that edTPA isn’t necessary. “My courses in COE prepared me for edTPA before edTPA was even introduced because the education program at Georgia Southern is devoted to preparing future educators through a rigorous, experience-saturated undergraduate program,” said recent graduate Stephanie Dorminey, a graduate student middle grades mathematics education and currently a 6th and 7th grade mathematics teacher at Langston Chapel Middle School in Bulloch County. “I applaud the faculty for integrating edTPA into the curriculum almost seamlessly. Faculty support was abundant throughout the edTPA process,” she added.

“We need to keep in mind that a teacher education program is only the beginning in the making of a successful teacher,” Koballa said. Teachers are life-long learners and are continually updating and expanding their knowledge and skills. “In the business world, we don’t expect a recent graduate to perform at the same level as a 10 year veteran of a company,” he continued, “and the same is true for educators,” he added. “We’re continually looking at how we can improve student preparedness and better serve their needs once they’ve graduated,” he said.

COE credits much of its success in preparing future educators to its strong and lasting relationship with the 36 partner schools and 40 additional clinical sites hosting educator candidates. “These institutions are committed to improving their communities and elevating learning for everyone on so many different
levels,” Koballa added. “It’s truly a collaboration,” he added, not just between the College of Education and community, but between the entire university and the community as well. It benefits everyone,” he added.
NYAR Center Funds First Research Grants

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COE’s National Youth-At-Risk (NYAR) Center, now in its second year of operation, has awarded its first research grants to COE faculty. “One of the goals of the NYAR Center is to support COE faculty and doctoral student research projects related to serving youth placed at risk,” said Professor Dan Rea, co-director of the center. Associate professor, Eric Landers, co-director of the center, further stated, “We were pleased with the number and quality of the grant proposals submitted for our first round of awards and believe this is the start of creating a substantive body of research that will be accessible and useful for all those working with youth placed at risk.”

Two research grants were awarded. “Computer Science Education in Rural Schools” will use a qualitative research approach to gain insight into what teachers, principals, curriculum directors and parent representatives feel are barriers to science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM+C) education in rural areas. Led by Associate Professor Charles Hodges and graduate student Rachel Harris, the project will focus on rural high schools under the First District Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA).

The second project awarded is “The Impact of a CrossFit Intervention for Youth At Risk at the Boys and Girls Club of Bulloch County,” directed by COE Professor Michael Moore and College of Health and Human Sciences Assistant Professor Christina Gipson. The project will look at how an afterschool intervention program can impact middle school aged children who have been identified as being at risk. Using CrossFit philosophy that fitness is broad, general and inclusive, the project will look at how an exercise program impacts academics, physical, social and personal development.

Results of both research grants will be published in the NYAR Center Journal and be available online at the center’s site https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/nyar/