

Section 1 Introduction

Section Overview: Assessment has always been an important component of any educational reform. In recent years educators have emphasized the importance of alternative assessments, particularly performance and portfolio-based assessments in classrooms (Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is at the forefront of performance and competency-based assessments in terms of institutionalizing assessment reform in teacher education (NCATE, 2002). NCATE proposes that colleges, particularly departments of education, should “ensure that new teachers attain the necessary content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge and skills to teach both independently and collaboratively” (p. 3). Beginning in 2003, the State of Connecticut will collaborate with NCATE in assessing teacher preparation programs in Connecticut, with an emphasis on competency-based assessment. In fact, Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) has already prepared preliminary documents for NCATE and is in the process of revising them.

Support from this Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant for the project *Developing Performance Assessments for Competency-Based Teacher Preparation in Secondary Education (Grades 7 – 12)* has greatly assisted ECSU in developing and implementing competency-based assessment strategies in the secondary subject areas of English, Biology, Mathematics, and History. This project originated with the following question:

How can the Arts and Sciences and the Education Departments at ECSU ensure that teacher candidates have the necessary content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to become effective student teachers in the secondary subject areas of Biology, English, History, and Mathematics?

In turn, this question spawned two main objectives:

- development of competency-based assessments to assess teacher candidates’ content knowledge and skills needed for student teaching in secondary subject areas;
- implementation of these assessments in a systematic way.

The project team, which consisted of education faculty, arts and sciences faculty, and grade 7–12 educators, worked as a whole group and in discipline-specific subgroups to achieve these objectives. Throughout this project, the team supported the positions that

- collaboration among faculty from various disciplines and grade 7–12 teachers produces more effective competency-based assessments for secondary school teacher candidates than faculty from a single discipline could produce.

- bringing university faculty (both education and arts and sciences) and grade 7–12 educators to the same table greatly enhances ECSU’s teacher preparation programs.

Because this project focused on research- and practice-based models, both the deliverables (competency based assessments and support material) and project documentation have the potential to benefit other institutions of higher education offering teacher education programs both locally, in Connecticut, and nationally.

A List of Proposed Deliverables: This project has developed a competency-based performance assessment task to assess how secondary school teacher candidates in the respective fields of Biology, English, History, and Mathematics can apply their content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions in assessing secondary school students’ work and in designing lessons that build on the student work. The following is the list of proposed deliverables:

- a single competency-based portfolio assessment guidelines/task prompt to assess secondary teacher candidates’ content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions in Biology, English, History, and Mathematics;
- a scoring rubric to assess candidate work;
- sample performances from the pilot study, representing the range of performances, and analysis of pilot-study data;
- summary report on administration of project.

This report contains all of the above deliverables.

Workgroup Information: The ECSU workgroup consisted of the following members, who represent faculty members at ECSU, grade 7-12 teachers from area middle and high schools, and an outside consultant from Alverno College.

Principal Investigator

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- **Team Consultant(s) A:**

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Steve Merlino (Social Studies, Windham High School)

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- **Team Consultant(s) B:**

Ross Koning (Biology, ECSU)

Elena Tapia (English, ECSU)

Elaine Reynolds (Former Language Arts Coordinator, Manchester School District)

Laura Dawley (Math, Windham High School)

Karen Legg (Science, Somers High School)

Kathy Lake (Assessment Specialist, Alverno College, Wisconsin)

In addition, the workgroups received considerable assistance and support from Georgette Nemr, Title II director, Connecticut State Department of Education, and Janice Vuolo, a technical advisor assigned by the State to the project. The project reviewer, Irv Richardson from TBA Consulting, also provided valuable feedback.

Collaboration: Faculty members from the School of Arts and Sciences and the Education Department, and area 7-12 educators collaborated in developing and implementing these deliverables. A total of 14 people (see list above) collaborated throughout this project. The workgroup consisted of four subgroups (Biology, English, History, and Mathematics) with three members in each subgroup (a faculty member from the School of Arts and Sciences, a faculty member from the Education Department, and a grade 7 – 12 educator). Beginning in June 2002, each subgroup held several lengthy meetings to work on the tasks assigned by the whole group. The whole group met a total of nine times during this project and engaged in meaningful discussion in development of the deliverables. (Minutes of the whole-group meetings can be found in Appendix A.)

In addition to the nine whole-group meetings and several other subgroup meetings, the members continued their discussions via email and online chats through the ECSU *Mile* system. The use of these technologies greatly facilitated discussion and collaboration during this project without requiring that members be physically present at another meeting.

Clearly, the competency-based performance assessment task and rubric for teacher candidates developed for this project are the result of considerable collaboration among the education faculty, arts and sciences faculty, and 7-12 educators. Furthermore, generous feedback and expertise from Georgette Nemr, Janice Vuolo, and Irv Richardson had a substantial impact on the direction and quality of the deliverables in this project.

Project Milestones: The project has gone through several milestones. In the initial phase of this project, the workgroup focused on developing a portfolio system to collect data not only for NCATE standards but also for discipline-based standards from national professional organizations associated with NCATE, namely Biology with the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), English with the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), History with the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), and Mathematics with the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Examples of these initial assessment tasks and rubrics from various subject areas are provided in Appendix A.

The reader is advised not to spend too much time trying to understand the workgroup's first attempts at designing assessment tasks (refer to Appendix A). These tasks turned out to have very little reliability and validity. In fact, the workgroup actually had a hard time making them

clear, consistent and fair. In addition, the time commitment for scoring the original tasks would have impeded implementation. Because of these difficulties, the ECSU workgroup quickly abandoned them and became more interested in designing a single assessment task and rubric that could be used for all the disciplines. Hence, these initial tasks and rubrics provide a basis of comparison between the final deliverables and the initial attempts.

During September and October 2002, the workgroup designed a single assessment task, rubric, and response packet to be used for all disciplines: Biology/Earth Science, English, History/Social Studies, and Mathematics. This assessment task was piloted in November 2002. In light of the results from the pilot study, the workgroup further revised the assessment task, rubric, and response packet to come up with the current assessment task, rubric, and response packet provided in Section 2 and Appendix B of this report. The current assessment task will be implemented in Fall Semester 2003.

References

- Hargreaves, A., Earl, L., & Schmidt, M. (2002). Perspectives on alternative assessment reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 69-95.
- NCATE. (2002). *Professional standards for the accreditation of schools, colleges, and departments of education*. Washington, DC: Author.