

## **2003-2004 IBHE Program Review Summary**

### **Program Reviewed 13.1204 Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education**

#### **Summary**

The Early Childhood Program addresses the needs and education of children from birth to age eight years. The strengths of the program are apparent from the fact that the program was reaccredited with NCATE. A significant number of our graduates from this program are currently employed. A departmental survey across programs that included students, cooperating teachers, and alumni indicate that all three groups felt that the pre-service teachers were well prepared in all areas of the curriculum with a slight drop in the area of fine arts. Further, a university alumni survey indicates that of the 131 surveys returned, 118 were employed and 106 were very positive about their attitude toward their majors. Test results for students in this program indicate a 98% pass rate for the Illinois Test of Basic Skills and content test scores show students are well prepared to meet the certification requirements of the state of Illinois as well as the reciprocal license agreements for other states.

Early field experiences and partnerships with area preschools, kindergartens, and primary schools provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to link theory with practice. Early childhood majors work in settings for each developmental area. Observation, interaction, lesson preparation and presentation opportunities provide experience with young children and their learning needs, styles, and exceptionalities.

At present, the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education where the Early Childhood Program resides is in the midst of a "sea change." Retirements and new hires are changing the department. Some faculty teach in all departmental programs of early childhood, elementary, and graduate programs. With the change in faculty, staff, and administration, as well as changes in state and national initiatives, program review is on going.

The Department completed a curriculum review during the 2003 academic year, to determine that the Illinois Content Standards were covered in all the departmental programs. Curriculum alignment specific to Early Childhood state standards and current research discussions are continued in 2004. PT3 grant money used to enhance technology for the elementary program and our school partners was a large thrust of effort and energy for integrating technology tools for teachers.

In addition, the departmental survey conducted Fall 2004 shows the programs in the department are strong in the preparation of pre-service teachers in both content knowledge and performance. A mean of at least 4.0 in a scale of 1-5 as assessed by students, alumni, and cooperating teachers was fairly consistent. Areas that were less than 4.0 included all three areas of the fine arts, art, drama, and music. Cooperating teachers rated preparation for classroom management slightly less than 4.0 while students and alumni rated their preparation at 4.0. While alumni and cooperating teachers found preparation in history and social science at the 4.0 level in both content knowledge and performance, current students felt slightly less prepared. English and language arts were the strongest areas with the area of grammar being perceived as slightly less prepared than written or oral communication and vocabulary. While the data includes some early childhood majors, additional information specific to the Early Childhood Major is planned.

As the program looks to the future, new ways to address teacher preparation to meet the needs of children are being explored. In addition, significant recruitment efforts to fill vacancies with excellent minority candidates, is an on-going goal. One of the new faculty hired for 2003-2004 is African American. The department also seeks to recruit more minority students. The 2003-2004 credit hour production is at 8764 with the cost per credit hour for the department at \$258.31. The department is also working on some additional study abroad opportunities that will allow pre-service teachers to broaden their horizons and experience other early childhood programs.

1. *Please discuss the professional opportunities for which the B.S. Ed. in Early Childhood Education prepares its graduates. Does the current curriculum appropriately prepare students for these opportunities? If not, what curricular revisions is the department planning?*

The professional opportunities for graduates of the B.S. Ed. in Early Childhood Education are growing. The collaborative program has two tracks. One is with Family and Consumer Sciences and one is with Special Education. Both prepare participants for licensure in schools from pre-K through grade three. In addition, quality child care centers need directors and “educarers” who are prepared to meet the needs of the developing child. New federal legislation requires Head Start Directors and Teachers to have additional education. At risk four year old programs are becoming common in schools as are more full-day kindergartens. The primary grades are seen as the special developmental level that they are. Schools that are K-3 need teachers with the Early Childhood degree.

The current curriculum gives the students the information and experience with children to prepare them for the jobs that are currently available and those that will most likely become more available due to increased knowledge of the importance of these years and societal demands for quality preschools. Curricula revisions are just beginning to be discussed within the department and will be shaped in part by the assessment of students, alumni, and cooperating teacher survey results.

2. *Documenting the connection between curricula, national standards, and assessment remains a priority in the College of Education and Professional Studies. How is the department continuing to ensure that coursework and other program requirements support these standards and appropriate assessment?*

During 2002-2003 a new full-time, terminally degreed and experienced faculty member was hired to assist with the early childhood program. The new chair that was hired also has a cognate in Early Childhood. However, a key early childhood faculty member also retired at the end of the academic year. A search is currently underway for another early childhood faculty member. Faculty who are current with the research and developments in this field insure that the coursework and program requirements support these standards and provide multiple ongoing assessments in class and a very successful 98% pass rate on required tests.

3. *What unique, noteworthy activity is the department involved in that the IBHE/state of Illinois should be made aware of?*

In addition to ongoing assessment and accreditation of the program, additional opportunities for students to have an international experience to visit exemplary early childhood research-based programs are under investigation. The early childhood faculty member is going to attend an international conference Spring 2004 to further her first-

hand knowledge of the Reggio Emilia programs in Italy with the possibility of providing an international component to one or more of the early childhood courses.

## **5. Major Findings and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Description and assessment of any major changes in the disciplinary context [e.g., (a) in the discipline or field; (b) student demand; (c) societal need; (d) institutional context for offering the degree; (e) other elements appropriate to the discipline in question; (f) other]..**

The program is relatively new, but with the addition of another faculty member in the next year, some program revision will likely take place.

### **5.2 Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement.**

Recent test results indicate that 98-99% of Early Childhood majors pass the required standardized tests. The Career Services 2002 Annual Report indicates that 91% of the Early Childhood majors responding to the survey were employed.

### **5.3 Description and assessment of any major program changes [e.g., (a) in the discipline or field (b) student demand; (c) societal need; (d) institutional context for offering the degree; (e) other elements appropriate to the discipline in question; (f) other]..**

A more definitive survey with the focus on the early childhood majors is needed.

### **5.4 Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes:**

An additional tenure track faculty member with early childhood expertise was hired in 2002-2003 and one retired the same year. The current chair also hired in 2002-2003 has a cognate in early childhood. A current search for another individual with expertise in this area is underway.

### **5.5 Description of actions taken as a result of this review, including instructional resource and practices, and curricular changes.**

New faculty hired do bring another aspect to the program.

**6. Outcome**

**6.1 Decision**

\_\_\_ **Program in Good Standing**

\_\_\_ **Program flagged for Priority Review**

\_\_\_ **Program Enrollment Suspended**

**6.2 Explanation**

**Appendix**

**Part One – Survey Results**

**Part Two – Current Vision Statement (under review)**