INTRODUCTION

The following document outlines the program assessment plan for the graduate Special Education programs in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education at Northern Illinois University. In fiscal 2002, 73 master's degrees in Special Education were awarded across the specialization areas. Up to and including the current semester (Spring 2003), seven graduate specializations in special education exist in the department: Behavior Disorders, Blind Rehabilitation, Early Childhood Special Education, Learning Disabilities, Multiply Handicapped Deaf or Vision, Orientation and Mobility, and Visual Impairments. However, recent changes in special education certification have been initiated by the Illinois State Board of Education as a result of federal court litigation. As a result, curriculum proposals are currently in process of approval for a revised special education program that reflects the new Learning Behavior Specialist I certification that encompasses the previous Behavior Disorders and Learning Disabilities specializations. In addition, the department has put forward a proposal to delete the specialization in Multiply Handicapped Deaf or Vision. In the next year, the department will develop proposals for Certificates of Graduate Study related to three Learning Behavior Specialist II categories: Behavior Intervention Specialist, Curriculum Adaptation Specialist, and Technology Specialist. This document addresses the program assessment plan for Special Education programs in this new configuration.

Context

The College of Education began a process of restructuring in the 1996-97 academic year which resulted in the announcement of seven new departments in January 1999. The Department of Teacher Education (subsequently renamed the Department of Teaching and Learning) officially began operation July 1, 1999 under the leadership of an interim chair. The department encompassed special education programs formerly housed in the Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education. Following that inaugural year, the department chair position was occupied successively by two acting chairs, each serving one year. Consequently, not all aspects of the former program assessment plan were implemented as proposed. The assessment plan and status outlined in this document provides a structure for future program assessment and includes relevant data as available for a baseline status report.

Department Mission

Integrating the diverse programs of the department (in Special Education, Elementary Education and Early Childhood Studies at the undergraduate and graduate levels; and in Curriculum and Instruction at the graduate level), the adopted mission statement is:
The Department of Teaching and Learning is a caring community of learners dedicated to identifying talented students and developing visionary, responsive, collaborative, and highly qualified educators. Viewing teaching both as an art and science, learning as a reciprocal process, and service as a responsibility, the faculty provides curriculum and instruction grounded in theory, research and best practice.

PROGRAM GOALS

The graduate program in Special Education goals are based on:

- Illinois Professional Teacher Standards
- Core Language Arts Standards for All Teachers
- Core Technology Standards for All Teachers
- Content Standards in specialization areas (LBS I, Vision, LBS II)
- Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Common Core of Knowledge and Skills Essential for All Beginning Special Education Teachers
- NCATE Standards
- The NIU Conceptual Framework

Common themes across these standards are included in the following program goals:

**Philosophical, Historical and Legal Foundations:** Students will demonstrate knowledge of various models and theories of special education and the provisions of laws regulating special education, will articulate their personal philosophy of education, and will teach consistent with federal and state laws and federal, state, and local district rules and regulations.

**Characteristics of Individuals With and Without Disabilities:** Students will identify the characteristics and defining features of each category of disability as well as the similarities and differences between individuals with and without disabilities.

**Assessment:** Students will use assessment terminology appropriately, demonstrate knowledge of legal provisions and ethical concerns related to assessment, implement and interpret the results of standard and curriculum-based measures for screening, pre-referral, referral, and classification.

**Instructional Systems:** Students will use assessment data to design appropriate instruction, develop or select appropriate instructional content and materials based on appropriate scope and sequences, and develop lesson plans illustrative of efficient, effective instruction. Instruction will include research-identified, effective instruction procedures.

**Orchestrating the Environment:** Students will develop instructional environments that facilitate effective instruction and allow effective interactions between professionals and paraprofessionals.

**Behavior Management:** Students will demonstrate effective analysis of behavior and manipulation of variables to improve students’ behavior consistent with legal and ethical issues.

**Communication and Collaboration:** Students will demonstrate skills and strategies used in collaboration and consultation with parents, teachers, and other school and community personnel.
**Multiculturalism:** Students will demonstrate positive regard for individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds, engage in clinical experiences in diverse classrooms, and will demonstrate understanding of ethical and legal issues regarding the relationship between cultural diversity and special education.

**Professional and Ethical Practices:** Students will demonstrate proficiency in oral, written, and mathematical skills, exercise judgment commensurate with objective professional behavior, and will demonstrate commitment to professional and ethical standards.

**ASSESSMENT MEASURES**

Currently, a variety of data that has been and will be useful in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education program is collected. In addition, the department and faculty will develop additional measures to assist in the thorough evaluation of the program. The following is a description of the data that are or will be collected, presented in the order in which they are collected as a student progresses through the program.

**Admission to the Program.** Data used to support the student’s application include the undergraduate GPA 3.0, results from the Graduate Record Examination, and references. In addition, applicants pursuing initial certification must provide evidence of passing ICTS Basic Skills Test scores. Admission data are currently available, but have not been organized in a systematic manner. The graduate student services secretary will summarize this data on an annual basis.

**Field Experiences: Clinical Experience and Student Teaching Evaluations.** For graduate students in Special Education seeking initial teacher certification, students must complete required and appropriate clinical experiences and student teaching as part of their degree program. With changes to state certification structures and standards, the evaluation forms completed by the NIU clinical faculty need to be revised. Program and clinical faculty will commence that task in the 2002-2003 academic year. The clinical coordinator will summarize evaluation data and maintain a data base of clinical placements to assure that candidates’ clinical experiences span grade levels and include settings with diverse students. Plans for LBS II Certificates of Graduate study include a capstone internship experience for which students would develop a standards-based portfolio.

**Certification Examination Results.** Students applying to the master’s degree program who are pursuing initial certification (LBS I) must take and pass the Illinois Certification Testing System (ICTS) Basic Skills Test prior to formal admission to the program. As provided in recent state legislation, effective with the Fall 2004 semester, these students must take and pass the ICTS subject matter test (LBS I or Vision) prior to student teaching. Special Education students will be encouraged to adhere to this requirement prior to the mandated date. A third ICTS examination, the Assessment of Professional Teaching, will be a certification requirement as of October 2003. As Certificates of Graduate Study are developed for LBS II areas, program evaluation data will include results from student’s taking the ICTS Content Test for the target LBS II area. Data from these examinations are summarized by the College of Education’s Research and Evaluation Office.
Candidate Exit Survey. The Committee on Initial Teacher Certification (CITC) is developing a standards-based survey, the Candidate Exit Survey, that will query student teachers’, cooperating teachers’, and university supervisors’ perceptions of the level of LBS I candidates’ preparedness in standards areas.

NIU Alumni Surveys. The University Assessment Coordinator surveys alumni one and five years after graduation. The survey addresses issues of program satisfaction and major-related employment. Special Education faculty has the opportunity to add a one-page supplement to this survey. A supplement based on goals and standards for the LBS I program will be developed to be included with the alumni survey beginning with the 2004 mailing. Similar instruments for LBS II areas will be developed as Certificates of Graduate Study are approved through the curricular process.

Program Advisory Committee. In the past, several advisory committees have provided regular feedback to the faculty with regard to special education programs. These committees have not been operational recently. Faculty had convened an external advisory group one for graduate programs. Typically, this external advisory committee has included program graduates, administrators from clinical site schools, and parents. Plans call for the reactivation of the external advisory committee over the next academic year. In addition to acting as focus groups to advise faculty, this external advisory committee may serve as external consultants and reviewers for candidate portfolios as portfolio development becomes an on-going assessment vehicle.

USE OF RESULTS

At least one program (faculty and staff) meeting each year shall be set aside to review findings from program evaluation efforts. The various faculty, staff, and administrators will be responsible for reporting on the data collection efforts for which they are responsible. Faculty feedback on the usefulness of the information will be sought. Faculty will be asked to use the information provided as they work to revise and improve the Special education programs.

The department administrators and any faculty so assigned will be responsible for overseeing coordination of the program review efforts and for coordinating reports to the appropriate college, university, and accrediting body entities.