

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR THE M.A.T./M.ED. SPECIAL EDUCATION – GENERAL CURRICULUM**

### **Major Findings of the Program's Quality and Productivity**

#### **Program Quality: Very Strong**

In February 2013, a continuing approval review of the Educator Preparation Unit at CSU was conducted by a Board of Examiners (BOE) consisting of representatives from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC). The 2008 NCATE Standards and the Georgia 2008 Standards were used to assess the unit and its programs. The BOE judged all standards to be met for the unit and for all initial and advanced programs. There were no areas for improvement cited, and the team noted multiple areas of strength.

In March 2013, the MAT program received recognition from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) without conditions. This was the first time that recognition for the MAT program was sought and it was received on the first attempt.

Overall, the M.A.T. and M.Ed. Special Education – General Curriculum programs are very strong and prepare highly qualified special education teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help all students learn. This is demonstrated by GACE pass rates of 100% consistent ratings of meets or exceeds expectations on performance evaluations, overall GPAs of 3.5 or better, and satisfactory completion of a comprehensive examination.

#### **Program Productivity: Satisfactory**

In 2011-2012, enrollment in M.A.T. and M.Ed. Special Education – General Curriculum programs increased from a combined total of 45 in 2010-11 to 48, a slight increase of 6%. Reasons for this increase in enrollment are not clear but may be partly due to economic conditions and/or additional demands placed school systems with increased accountability measures to have more highly qualified special education teachers. Further study is needed to determine the reasons for this increase in enrollment and to see whether or not it will become a trend. The program has a diverse group of majors (on average 76% female and 34% minority) from a wide range of age groups. Graduates of the program are in high demand.

The number of M.Ed. Special Education – General Curriculum degrees conferred by CSU is small (an average of 17 per year) but has been fairly consistent over the past four years and is comparable to the number of degrees conferred by other USG state universities. As the only USG institution within a 90 mile radius of Columbus that offers a master's degree in special education, CSU provides special education teachers in its service region an opportunity that they might not have otherwise, to gain expertise in special education.

## **List of Recommendations for Improving Program Quality**

Though the program quality is very strong, we continue to look for ways to make improvements. Current initiatives include:

- aligning the curriculum with the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in an effort to help prepare teachers to teach with the new standards,
- continue to improve the conditions that have led to program recognition from the Council for Exceptional Children into the advanced programs.
- Apply for program recognition for the M.Ed. in Special Education – General Curriculum program.

## **List of Recommendations for Improving Program Productivity**

The Special Education Program Advisory Council (PAC) oversees the M.A.T. and M.Ed. programs in Special Education – General Curriculum and works to improve the curriculum, courses, and resources offered to teachers. Recommendations to improve program productivity are as follows.

- Align coursework with the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in an effort to help prepare teachers to teach with the new standards. By responding to current initiatives and mandates, we hope to recruit more teachers into the M.A.T. and M.Ed. programs.
- Provide additional support for students in graduate special courses through advising and/or offering prerequisite courses or professional development opportunities that better prepare students for the graduate special education courses.
- Connect the content of the graduate special education courses to the special education academic curriculum. By making the coursework more relevant to teachers, we hope to attract more teachers into the M.A.T. and M.Ed. programs.
- Attract more students into the graduate special education programs through an innovative Online MED program that will then provide a larger pool of students for the M.Ed. program.

## **Conclusion about the Program's Viability at CSU**

The M.A.T. and M.Ed. Special Education – General Curriculum programs at CSU are viable. As indicated by the evaluation of the NCATE/PSC Board of Examiners in February 2013, the quality of the programs is very strong. All NCATE/PSC standards were judged to be met for all initial and advanced programs with no areas for improvement and multiple areas of strength cited. In addition, program quality is enhanced by special opportunities available at CSU.

The program received recognition without conditions from the Council for Exceptional Children in March 2013 for the first time in the program's history. This recognition by the professional organization in the field of special education is a high honor that is not casually granted.

Special education majors have access to resources and professional development opportunities offered through the Georgia Learning Resource Service (GLRS). The College of Education and 4

Health Professions, Department of Teacher Education, Special Education Program, Reading Endorsement program, GLRS, and P-12 teachers work collaboratively on the design and implementation of the special education programs at all levels (B.S, M.A.T., M.Ed., and Ed.S.). Representatives from each of these groups work together to make improvements to the special education programs at CSU and to impact special education in our region. The M.A.T. and M.Ed. programs in special education are valuable resources for teachers in our region who want to grow professionally and gain expertise in the field of special education. Graduates of the M.Ed. Special education – General Curriculum program are also a valuable resource for our undergraduate program in special education. A substantial number of program graduates teach in systems served by CSU, especially Muscogee County. Our graduate programs in special education have helped to create a cadre of leaders within our Partner School Network. Graduates often serve CSU as pre-student teaching cooperating teachers and cooperating teachers for student teaching. They are an invaluable asset in assisting with the development of our undergraduates. Though small, the number of M.Ed. Special Education – General Curriculum degrees conferred by CSU has been fairly consistent over the past four years and is comparable to the number of degrees conferred by other USG state universities. As the only USG institution within a 90 mile radius of Columbus that offers a master’s degree in special education, CSU provides special education teachers in its service region an opportunity to gain expertise in special education. This is an opportunity that they might not have if CSU did not offer this degree program. With the critical shortage of highly-qualified special education teachers, we need to provide every possible opportunity for teachers to grow professionally and enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching students with special education needs.

### **Program Improvement Plan**

In response to the findings of the Comprehensive Program Review, the faculty members and administrators of the M.Ed. in Special Education – General Curriculum propose the strategies outlined below to improve the quality, productivity and viability of the program. These strategies will be facilitated by the Special Education Program Advisory Council (PAC).

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Projected Timeline</b>
Implementation of LiveText to store student work and evaluations.	2013-2014
Greater emphasis on student engagement; focus on student learning	2013-2014
Emphasis on practicing assessment and using the data to differentiating lesson delivery.	2013-2014
Smart board usage, utilizing IPADs and smartphones in class presentations and responses. Also, use of school’s Twitter and Facebook postings for parents and students	2013-2014
The course sequence for Special Education Major courses has been revised and no courses are required over the Summer semester and student credit hour load per semester has been reduced in some semesters and increased in others to be more manageable for students. Through advising, ensure that students are taking required courses in the semesters in which they are offered so they can complete their program in a timely manner.	2013-2014
Full implementation of edTPA instrument for student teachers and interns	Fall 2014-ongoing

The resources needed to accomplish these priorities should be minimal to the university. Departmental resources will be allocated as necessary to accomplish these plans. The program

coordinator will communicate additional resource requests as needed to the appropriate administrator within the College of Education and Health Professions at Columbus State University.

Due to the adoption of the edTPA student fees will go up an additional \$300.00 during the semester of student teaching. Currently there is discussion at the state level to have these fees spread out over a number of semesters.

### **Summary Recommendation and Supporting Rationale**

#### **Recommendation:** *Continue to Maintain and Enhance the Program*

The program quality is very strong, but the number of degrees conferred each year is small. Because of critical demand for special education teachers in the local, regional, state and national levels, the number of students seeking professional teaching degrees in Special Education will increase. The current opportunity to develop and deliver a completely Online MED in Special Education – General Curriculum will enable us to be more visible to the community so that we can recruit and graduate more students beginning in Fall 2013. Recently we began to recruit more students into undergraduate programs in special education and this will be a result in future expansion of the program.

CSU will continue to work to improve the current BSED program in special education by responding to new initiatives such as improving the curriculum, aligning the curriculum with the edTPA model of teacher assessment model which is currently piloted for student teachers, providing better support and resources for students, preparing P-12 teachers to teach online, developing a retention and graduation plan to improve program viability, and intensifying recruitment efforts.

By enhancing the quality of the BSEd program, we hope to attract more potential students to the graduate program.