

To: Dr. Arlen Viste
From: Bob Kiner
Subject: Praxis II Bush Grant Report
Date: August 4, 2004

In September 2003, the Education Department requested funds from the Bush Faculty Development Committee to complete a pilot project related to Augustana College education majors performance on the Praxis II content area exams and the Praxis II Principles of Learning and Teaching exam. Passing scores on both exams will be required for teacher certification on July 1, 2005.

The analysis of student performance is an important element of the assessment process that is critical to developing and maintaining quality programs in the Education Department at Augustana College. Enhancing the assessment program of Augustana and each academic department is a major goal of the Bush Faculty Development Grant. This Bush Faculty Development grant specifically provided enhanced assessment practices and provided information that will inform decisions about curricular content in secondary, elementary and special education major areas of study. The grant also provided specific feedback that will direct instruction and preparation of student in content areas related to Praxis II testing which is critical in teacher certification in South Dakota.

In addition, the information gathered from the study demonstrated the importance of mentoring and faculty advising. Part of our strategies for competency exam preparation will be careful monitoring of student performance, imbedding test taking strategies in coursework, special study sessions and referral to electronic and print materials that support students in preparation for the Praxis II exams. This is a significant addition to our assessment plan and should improve the total assessment strategies for the Education Department.

The Faculty Development Grant was awarded to answer the following questions:

1. How does the Augustana curriculum align with Praxis II content exams?
2. Are there significant bodies of information that is tested in content areas that we have not included in the Augustana College departmental curriculum?
3. Will lower performing students perform at a level on the Praxis II that will meet cut scores for teacher certification?
4. Do we need to provide additional study seminars to prepare students for the content exams?
5. Should students complete the PLT prior to or during student teaching?
6. Should departments be including Praxis II style questions on exams during normal examinations in content areas?

The Bush Faculty Development Grant provided funds for twenty secondary, five elementary education and five special education students to complete the Praxis II content and PLT exams. Actual participation in the project included three elementary

education majors, three special education majors, two K-12 majors and fourteen secondary education majors for a total N of twenty-two students.

Augustana student performance on the Praxis II content exams included the following content examination scores:

Content Exam Performance

Major Area of Study	Praxis Content Avg. Score	Content Cut Score	ETS Avg. Range for Major	Failure to achieve cut score
Art	159	146	162-180	
Biology	165	157	148-171	
Elementary Ed.	163	146	149-175	
English	186	163	166-188	
HPER	184	145	154-170	
History/SS	156	143	157-178	
Math	150	139	128-158	
Music	175	151	156-174	
Special Education	156	152	164-184	1 student

The data shows that in the content area exams, the average scores of students, with admittedly small numbers of students in each major, two majors exceeded the upper end of the average range, four majors fell in the average range of scores and three majors fell below the average range of scores. One student, a special education major, would have failed to qualify for certification according to the standards that will apply on July 1, 2005. One of the questions prior to the pilot project was performance on the history/social studies exams because of known non-alignment of the Augustana curriculum with the Praxis II content exam. The data shows all students would have exceeded the requisite cut score; however, the average score for the students fell one point below the average range. In addition, one student in special education failed to achieve the required score on the content knowledge Praxis II exam.

Participant anecdotal responses to the Praxis II content exams indicated that students felt advanced preparation in the form of study sessions, writing case studies and questions in courses on regular exam would have been helpful in the examination process. Analysis of GPA vs. Praxis II examination performance indicates that the participant with the lowest grade point average failed the content exam. The number is too limited to generalize, but, it is instructive to note this parallel performance.

A second portion of the Praxis II exam was the performance of students on the Principles of Learning and Teaching exam. The total number of participants included six elementary education majors and twelve secondary education majors. The results of the participant performance on the PLT exam are shown in the chart below. ETS reports PLT scores in a range of 100-200.

Principles of Learning and Teaching Student Performance Chart

Major Area of Study	Praxis PLT Avg. Score	PLT Cut Score	ETS Avg. Range for Major	Excellence in Performance
Elementary Education	180	161	167-181	1
Secondary Education	181	165	166-180	5

The data related to the Principles of Learning and Teaching exam shows very good performance on the part of the students. In general, students from all departments performed quite well on the PLT.

The following are comments related to the study questions.

1. One of twenty-two students who participated in the project would not have qualified for certification under the new DOE rules effective July 1, 2005. That is a 4.5% failure rate. One student would have failed in the content area and there would have been no failures in the PLT. It is interesting to note the participant who failed the content exam received recognition for excellence in performance on the PLT exam. That same person had the lowest gpa of all participants.
2. Conversely, ETS recognizes excellence in performance of students on the PLT exam for those students who score 184 or above out of a possible 200 maximum score. Six out of twenty-two education majors were recognized for excellence in their performance on the PLT. Over 27% of the participants in the study scored in the exceptional range on the PLT. In addition, the average score for secondary education majors on the PLT exceeded the national average range of scores. That is an exceptional demonstration of performance on the part of the students and a strong statement about the curriculum, quality of instruction and field experience elements of the Augustana College education program.
3. While the number of participants from each department was small, we can say that it appears the curriculum will support students with a body of information that will allow them to meet the cut score requirements. Some analysis of curriculum in a couple of departments may help support the students in the testing process.
4. Overall, student performance was higher on the PLT exams than the content exams. That is consistent with nationwide test analysis of ETS.
5. Student participants strongly encouraged study sessions, study guides and inclusion of Praxis II test taking skills in regular curricular courses including modeling of questions and case study writing on exams.

The Praxis II Pilot Project funded by Bush Faculty Development grant funds was very helpful in the process of identifying areas of strength and needed improvement for Education Department majors. Our challenge should be provide rigorous curricula that will allow Augustana students to perform at the highest level of performance on the Praxis II examinations. This project has been very helpful in setting the stage to reach that goal.

All project funds were expended through the business office of Augustana College.
A full report of grant expenditures can be obtained from accounting services.

This project was excellent and reached our intended goals.