

THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AT SCSU:
CLOSING THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT LOOP

MEMBERS OF THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

DRAFT/PROPOSAL

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MEMBERS OF THE ASSESSMENT & ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

Focus and Principles

The materials in this booklet consist of a summary of the assessment system of the St. Cloud State University Education Unit. The model laid out in these pages is based on the following documents and principles, all of which have been approved by the appropriate bodies (Teacher Preparation Initiative Assessment Work Group, Unit Assessment and Accreditation Committee, Teacher Education Advisory Council, Executive Teacher Education Council, and departments as appropriate):

- The *Road Map for Assessment in the Unit* developed by members of the Assessment Working Group of the teacher preparation Initiative (Road Map).
- Various documents describing the assessment system that have been approved by the Assessment and Accreditation Committee, including, but not limited to, the chart provided to CAP that lays out our assessments and the schedule for administration, analysis, and dissemination (hereafter "[Assessment Matrix](#)," AMAT, link active)
- A description of the SCSU continuous improvement model as of the 2008 NCATE accreditation cycle (Ackerman & Hoover, 2010)

The objective of the present booklet is to outline the assessment system existing as of the advent of Tk20 at St. Cloud State and to project practices into the future. We start with aspects of the model developed for the last accreditation cycle that continue to guide practices in the unit. This is followed by a look at changes forged in light of needs identified after 2010 that we continue to develop and institute.

The Past

We assume that regularly collected, analyzed, and disseminated assessment data are predicated on or cross-walked with the formative documents that guide unit practices. We intend that assessment data ought to be employed systematically to accomplish two tasks. First, we intend that program, departmental, and unit representatives employ data to improve programs via building on strengths and changing areas of need. Second, we need to employ assessment studies to systematically improve the assessment process itself, a process referred to by Ackerman and Hoover as "assessing assessment."

The theoretical model underpinning the assessment system in the education unit at St. Cloud State is based on a continuous improvement model (Soudarajan, 2004). The conception (as shown in Figure 1 (Ackerman & Hoover, 2010) was to move St. Cloud State's system forward via adding two essential components identified by NCATE at that time. We intended to systematize our practices in such a way that assessments were collected, analyzed, and disseminated systematically—on a [schedule](#) (link active). Second, as of our last NCATE accreditation visit, a sea change had occurred in assessment—both in the public and private sectors related to the *use* of assessment data in program improvement; we aimed to

(a) utilize assessment data in decision making in the education unit and (b) to document this “closing of the continuous improvement loop.” Specifically, 2006 modifications in NCATE requirements asked units to

- Include a comprehensive set of evaluation measures used to monitor candidate performance and to *manage and improve operations and programs* (NCATE, 2006, p. 21, italics added).
- Employ information technologies and *make use of that information to strengthen programs* (p. 23, italics added)

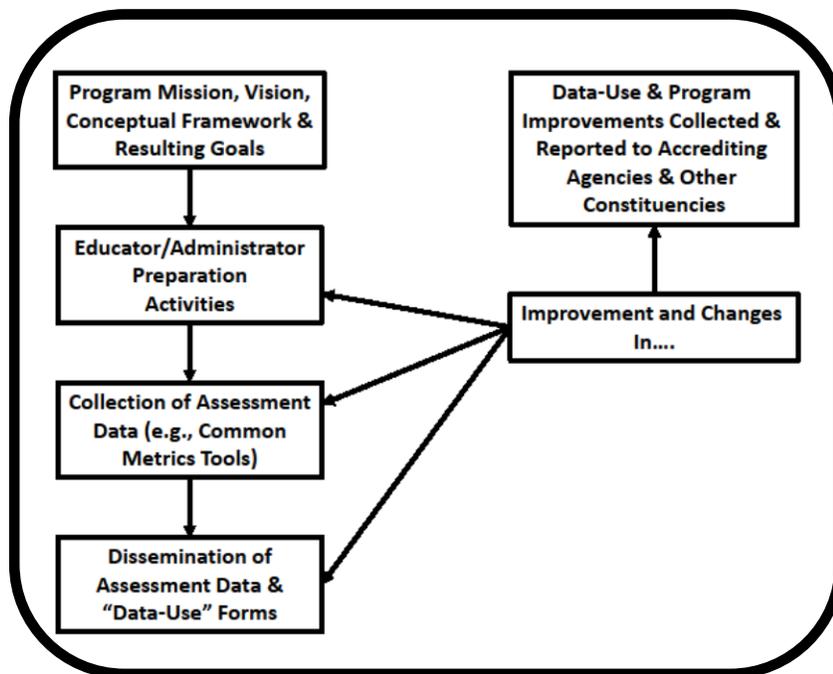


Figure 1. 2015 adaptation of the SCSU data system as envisioned in 2010 (Ackerman & Hoover, 2010)

The future

Since 2008, accrediting agencies and assessment experts have added language that we think reflects the need for six specific improvements in the 2008 plan. Our current practices are based on the concept that intention #2 (the ability to track improvements and changes to data) will largely be predicated on our increased data capacity achieved via the adoption of Tk20. The second component of truly utilizing data will be climate change in the unit—systematic efforts in this regard are currently underway and will be detailed in these pages (Road Map, 2015).

1. **Technology applications.** As we moved toward the 2015 accreditation cycle, we took steps to increase our ability to manage data via technology. Our primary intentions were to store data in relatively permanent and safe environments so that these data would be available as an aid to real-time decision making. Obviously, the advent of Tk20 represents an essential step in attaining this aim. We are in the process of (a) adding key assessments at the level of courses to

our system, (b) providing regular professional development to candidates and faculty, and (c) moving faculty qualifications to Tk20.

2. **Documenting the use of data.** We never attained satisfaction with our ability to track program improvements to data. Thus, we have experimented with several systems for closing the feedback loop. We suspect that ultimately we will need to develop a long-term schedule of program improvement meetings where data are managed in bite-sized quantities and, based on which, we can better track programmatic improvements (*Road Map*, 2015, also see [Program Forum Feedback, Appendix B](#)). These steps will constitute part of “changing the assessment climate.” The professional development aspects of these practices are well underway and we have experimented with a system for building data analyses and program improvement sessions. The latter session was well attended and we plan to employ it as a model for future retreats (See Report, [Appendix B](#)). Some data were collected on data use via the system approved in 2010 (See [Appendix A](#)) and a study on the use of data for program improvements was conducted and reported during the spring of 2014 ([Link](#)).
3. **Evidence of the effects of our candidates on P-12 student performance.** Tracking the impact of candidates on P-12 student learning has proved difficult. We held out great hopes for the work of the [Value-Added Research Center](#) as part of the Bush NeXT project. However, the state has not yet connected students with educators in their data system so this value-added approach is in a moratorium phase. We have taken several steps to move forward on this process and will continue with these efforts. (a) First, candidates are required to produce pre- and post-indicators of P-12 student learning as part of the edTPA. We have mined these data (Task 3) for indicators that candidates have produced measurable gains in P-12 students. It should even be possible to combine these data in meta-analytic studies such that an effect size can be estimated. (b) Second, in analyzing the MET study (2012), we discovered that two measures can be employed to predict value added scores, student engagement surveys and observations by trained observers. We have projects underway to examine the possibility of incorporate these activities into our armamentarium of techniques—specifically as proxies for value added indicants.
4. **Development of measurement technologies related to dispositions to the field of education.** Accrediting agencies require that programs track dispositions to the field. Current thinking in the area has it that we need to move away from lists of “compliance” behaviors in our conceptualization of dispositions and toward a theory of dispositions that places them within a sense of moral and ethical professional development (Murrell et al. Eds., 2010).
5. **Continuous reliability and validity evaluation.** Meeting CAEP standards in the future requires a strong commitment to continuous improvement of our instruments based, in part, on [reliability and validity studies](#). The advent of EdTPA and its validation external to our program, holds great promise for assessing the measurement qualities of the instruments that we employ in the unit.
6. **Disaggregating data for essential purposes/assessment of advanced programs and assessment of replications.** One pressing need in the assessment system at SCSU is to report disaggregated

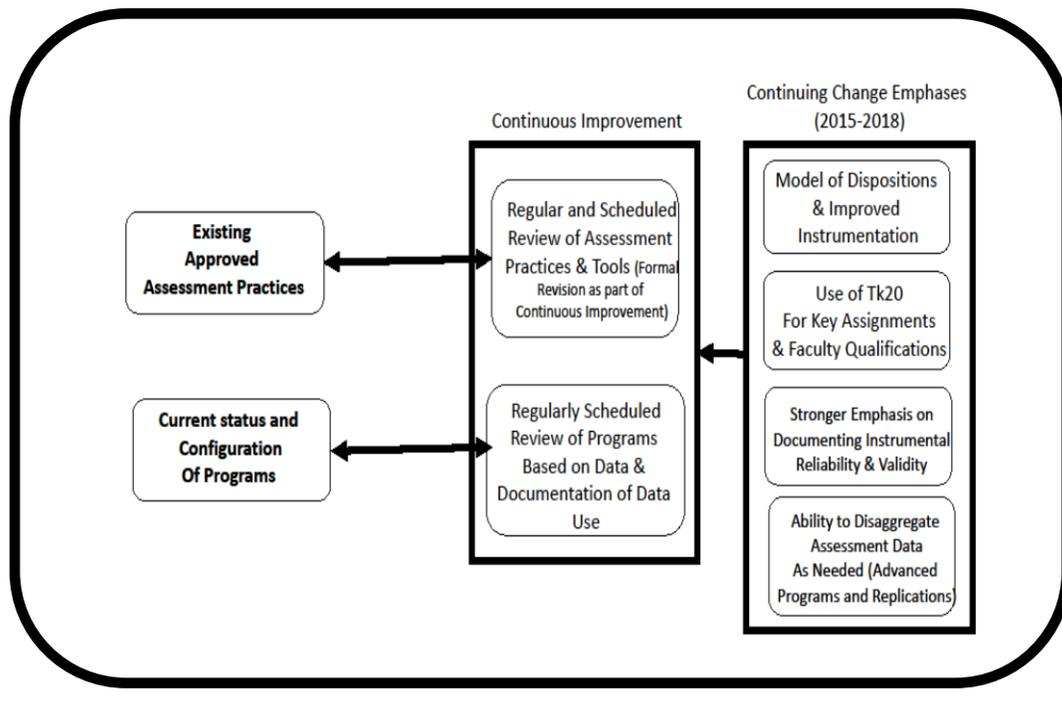
data for advanced programs. We refer to advanced programs, utilizing CAEP nomenclature, as programs wherein candidates with extant licenses complete second, third, or even fourth credentials.

Another need in the unit is to do a better job of disaggregating data for program replications. Program replications exist when ½ or more of a program’s credits are offered in a remote site. We plan to ascertain that data are collected at such sites and that the data from replications can be disaggregated. In the end, we must document that the programming offered remotely is of equal quality to that offered via the traditional menu of classes.

The Assessment Design

This revised assessment design is based both on aspects of past practices that have served us well and refers to aspects of the future that we have outlined above. The statements in this section refer to practices. The meta-assessment or “assessment of assessment practices” is developed in the section below. Figure 2 is a pictorial representation of our system and proposed changes therein as of April 1, 2015.

Figure 2. Revision of the SCSU data plan (2015-2018)



Continuous improvement

CI #1. We embrace the notion of continuous improvement as depicted in Figures 1 and 2. We take continuous improvement as the overall process of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data with the aim of its use for two primary purposes. First, via these practices, we aim to improve programming for candidates by building on strengths and reducing the effects of programmatic weaknesses. Second, continuous improvement in the SCSU model refers to the practice of honing data procedures—that is, reviewing and improving the collection and dissemination of data.

CI #2. We consider the current package of data management activities ([Assessment Matrix](#)) to be an organic document that will be revisited, reviewed, edited and approved under the auspices of input from programs collected via representation on the Assessment/Accreditation Committee. This task will be completed and documented during September and October of odd numbered years (following the 2015 accreditation visit).

CI #3. We will institute day-long or half-day program improvement and data forums. We have successfully experimented with a format whereby smaller bites of data are considered during each session from both unit-wide and program perspectives ([link](#)). These sessions will be scheduled into the future in two-year sequences, the first of which is to be approved before the end of fall semester, 2015. Follow up processes will include departmental responses to perceived program change needs to be collected within one calendar month following each forum. The reports, delivered to the Assessment and Accreditation committee will include reactions to the data, plans for improving negative indicators, recommendations for improving the assessment process, and methods for tracking changes. The document shown as [Appendix A](#) can be used a starting point for the collection of these data.

Technology Application

TA #1. We will continue the process of entering key indicators into Tk-20 such that student outcomes can be tracked to the level of courses. This process is well underway, but should be reviewed at the level of programs at least every other year. This review would be based on such questions as the following: (a) Are the rubrics sufficient for detecting student performances of knowledge skills, and dispositions? (b) Are enough indicators and rubrics entered into Tk-20 to reflect the needs of programs for continuous improvement? (c) Have the rubrics and indicators been modified in light of continuous improvement work completed at the program level.

TA #2. We will continue to improve our ability to track faculty qualifications to teach methods courses and to analyze partnerships and scholarships. This will be facilitated via increasing slowly to 100% the number of unit and support faculty members who have entered qualifications into Tk20.

TA #3. Members of the Assessment and accreditation Committee develop and institute a systematic plan for the provision of voluntary professional development opportunities related to assessment technology. The plan should include the following elements: (a) Professional development opportunities for new hires. (b) Professional development activities for adjunct faculty members whose positions entail participation in key assignments and in documenting qualifications. (c) Ongoing opportunities and support for veteran faculty members.

Tracking the Effects of Candidates on P-12 Students

TE #1. We will continue to hone our ability to mine data from edTPAs via the design and implementation of a system for sampling assessment data from these instruments. Formal planning will be undertaken in the fall of 2015 and a plan for collection and reporting of impact data will be in place and approved by December 1, 2015. The plan will include the following elements: (a) A defensible procedure on random sampling with programs serving as strata. (b) Methods for combining data from the edTPAs such that effect sizes can be estimated (if this should prove possible). (c) Resources will be considered, as will timelines and reporting methods.

TE #2. The unit will engage in planning to collect student engagement data, a strong correlate of value-added indicators. A feasibility plan that considers methods and resources will be completed via the efforts of the Assessment and Accreditation Committee by April 1, 2016. If it is so recommended, the system will be put into place after that date.

The Assessment of Dispositions

D #1. Members of the assessment committee and of the unit have considered a global model for a more systematic approach to the reliable and valid assessment of dispositions. A report to the unit on the Murrell (2010) resource has already been concluded. We concluded that the statements about *Transforming Learners* from the SCSU Conceptual Framework could serve as a platform for understanding dispositions. Based on this, a global platform statement about dispositions will be developed by members of the Assessment and Accreditation Committee that includes specific references to the connections between the CF and our unit theory of dispositions. This statement will be disseminated, discussed, and formally approved/adopted by the end of fall semester, 2015.

D #2. This step runs concurrently with the planning and approval process outlined in D #1. Based on existing feedback from the unit, a format for the assessment of dispositions will be developed, field tested and approved by December 1, 2015.

D #3. A schedule of administration times and associated courses will be developed and approved in the unit by December 1, 2015.

D #4. A study of the reliability and validity of the new dispositions instrument will be developed by the start of fall semester, 2016. Based on this study, the instrument will be revisited, with any changes completed by December 1, 2016.

Disaggregation of Data

DIS #1. Members of the unit Assessment/Accreditation Committee will develop a plan for disaggregation of data related to (a) advanced programs and (b) off-campus sites. In the latter case, the solution is rather straightforward—items related to site will be added to existing data sources.

DIS #2. Members of the Assessment & Accreditation Committee determined that data needs for advanced programs diverges, in many cases, from initial program [data] needs. Because of this, the set of existing items will be mined for variables with particular relevance to advanced programs. In the end, a flexible instrument will be developed, approved, and administered. Items will be mined from the

following sources: (a) the unit operations survey, (b) the cooperating teacher instrument, and c) the completer survey.

Milestones and Success Indicators

As we move into the future, we recognize that our desired changes are only partially fulfilled. Thus, we have identified the following milestone indicators allowing us to track our progress. These indicators are designed to answer the following question: How is the unit performing on making needed improvements in the continuous improvement cycle?

1. An approved document exists showing the dates/times for data consideration sessions for the remainder of 2015, 2016, and 2017.
2. In tracking the proportion of program representatives reporting formally on their use of data in instituting program improvements, the unit will experience an increase in participation, culminating in a participation rate of 90% by April 1, 2016.
3. A qualitative review of data-use feedback demonstrates that the majority of changes in program practices can be tracked to the consideration of specific data and that the indicators selected by members of program (a) show tracking of the data that resulted in alterations, and (b) that improvements have been detected.
4. The proportion of key assignments and assessments at the level of courses entered into Tk 20 increases regularly until 100% is reached and maintained by January 1, 2016.
5. Evidence exists, in the form of program notes that key indicators have been regularly revisited and that improvements have been made. A log of changes in Tk-20 is maintained in the assessment office.
6. The proportion of unit faculty members having uploaded their vitas to Tk-20 increases steadily until 100% has been reached by January 1, 2016.
7. Tracking of professional development related to assessment and technology is regularly undertaken and show that performance is highly rated. [These data may be useful in tracking changes in the assessment culture.]
8. A documented plan exists for mining samples of edTPA data for evidence of the impact of SCSU teaching candidates on P-12 students.
9. The data collected via the plan outlined in #9 above has been disseminated.
10. A proposal for the use of student engagement data in supporting teacher education candidates has been completed.
11. Any actions recommended by the student engagement plan have been instituted in a timely fashion.

12. A disposition assessment statement and plan is completed, disseminated, revised and improved.
13. A demonstrably reliable and valid dispositions instrument is placed in use. The instrument is piloted by Spring semester 2016, revised over the summer of 2016 and a final version is deployed thereafter.
14. A plan for the disaggregation of existing data sources for (a) advanced programs (where appropriate) and (b) replication sites will be in place (written, disseminated, and approved) by December 1, 2015.
15. An instrument designed especially for unit-wide assessment of advanced programs will be designed by October 15, 2015. The instrument will include items appropriate for unit-wide assessment and a system for the addition of items by program.
16. The above instrument will be approved by December 1, 2015 and piloted by spring semester of 2016. During the summer of 2016, the reliability and validity of the instrument will be evaluated and a revised version will be deployed during fall semester of 2016.

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Appendix A
Assessment Data Feedback Format
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Department, Program, or Unit _____ Date of Meeting _____

Person Completing Form _____

Name of Report(s)/ Information Considered:

Instructions: Please fill out this form after any meeting where information and/or data related to unit, program, and/or candidate performance has been considered. It is expected either that departmental chairs or the Assessment Committee representative fill out this document. At least one form is required after each set of unit- or program-level data is disseminated. Please fill out form electronically and take as many pages as you need. Members of the Assessment Committee ask that you fill out this form after any significant program change is undertaken (new course, change in course, change in program) in order to track the ways that data are employed for program changes. Please direct either a hard copy or an electronic copy to XXXXXXX

1. Based upon the above report(s) evidence for particular programmatic **strengths** (if appropriate, cite other data/information sources that confirm or question program strengths):

2. Based upon the above reports, evidence for consideration of programmatic areas **that show need for improvement**, if any (if appropriate, cite other data/information sources that confirm or disconfirm program area “need for improvement”).

3. Proposed **or considered curricular, policy, or procedural changes**. Please list programmatic changes that have been considered since the last report and the information upon which proposed change(s) was/were based. This information is particularly relevant given information contained in the report accompanying this form

4. Describe a prospective process for change, including timelines (if appropriate), and progress indicators.

5. **Need for more information**. Please enter requests for data, information, or reanalysis that are suggested by the information included in the report(s) listed above.

Appendix B
Summary of the February 2015 Data Use Meeting (Teacher Preparation Forum)
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1. The overall approach received considerable praise and participants portrayed it in a very positive light. An emergent theme was that such an event was sorely needed. Another example of this finding was that, of the 28 responses, 27 responded yes to holding these events at least annually (96% positive).
2. While nearly all respondents approved of meeting at least annually, several (N = 4, 14%) reported that the data analysis meetings ought to occur more often, at least once per semester.
3. Clearly, the strongest (at least numerically) theme emerging from the meeting was a positive response to collaboration and the felt need to communicate. While respondents employed a variety of words and phrases (interact, breaking down silos, communicate, collaborate, interdisciplinary collaboration, share, shared vision) the meaning seemed clear—that the foremost benefit of the meaning and the way that it was structured was a chance to interact across all of the teaching disciplines. When asked what they learned, by far the most common response (N = 5) was a form of the following content: We have common interests [across programs] revolving around the needs of students.
4. A strong plurality of respondents argued that, to build on the day's momentum, publicly visible actions (plans, "real products") must emerge (N = 8, nearly 30%). As one person put it, "We need to come up with concrete solutions." Another asked that we plan for, "One or two action items [on which] the whole group or subgroups should follow through."
5. Several respondents expressed appreciation for (a) the provision of specific data and (b) for holding down the sheer amount of information considered at any one time.
6. A strong minority of participants (N = 7 ~ 25%) noted that their colleagues across the unit clearly voiced a goal of benefiting students. In this same vein, it was noted that programs appear more similar than different in terms of what they experience and the challenges that folks face.
7. Several logistical suggestions were offered by participants; these are considered below in the "suggestions" section.