



# **Southern Connecticut State University**

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**CCSAR – Center for Community  
and School Action Research**

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**Academic Year 2004-2005**

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**SCSU Educator Preparation Program Evaluation**  
*An Analysis of Alumni Survey Responses*

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**An Analysis of Alumni Student Survey Responses**

The Center for Community and School Action Research (CCSAR) distributes the SCSU *Educator Preparation Program Evaluation Alumni Student Survey* to graduates of a SCSU Educator Preparation program. The purpose of this survey is to learn the thoughts and opinions of recent graduates regarding the quality of their preparation now that they are practicing educators. The specific goals of the Alumni Student Survey are:

- to determine the general capacity of SCSU to meet the professional needs of students graduating from a SCSU Educator Preparation Program;
- to gather ideas and suggestions for improving the quality of the educational and field experiences that SCSU provides its students;
- to determine how well SCSU educator preparation programs meet the standards set by all of the accrediting bodies for SCSU's various programs, e.g., NCATE, CSDE, etc.; and
- to learn how well students think their program has prepared them to become professional educators in their specialty area.

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

The SCSU office of Alumni Affairs (n=534) and the CSDE BEST Portfolio program (N=250) provided CCSAR with the names and addresses of alumni who graduated from SCSU in 2003. The majority of the respondents (n=106) were between the ages of 20 – 34 (54.81%). The ethnic background of the participants was predominantly white (93.3%), and the gender was primarily female (88.7%). A complete breakdown of participants' demographic information can be found in the appendix.

#### ***Apparatus***

CCSAR modified the Alumni Student Survey to coincide with both the cooperating teacher's survey developed by the SOE and the new CCSAR student survey. Section I of the survey includes demographic statements and questions regarding gender, age, ethnicity, employment, and year of graduation, and the bottom portion asks graduates to identify their area of study at SCSU. The second section of the survey includes 73 items regarding the quality and level of preparation received by the alumni. These items are divided into 10 subsections, which align with the 10 Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards, and are scored on a 3-point scale:

- 1 = *Met* - minimal preparation and support
- 2 = *Met* consistent preparation and support
- 3 = *Met+* exemplary preparation and support.

The last page of the survey consists of four open-ended questions where graduates are invited to write-in their responses in the spaces provided.

### ***Procedure***

The SCSU office of Alumni Affairs (n=534) and the CSDE BEST Portfolio program (N=250) provided CCSAR with the names and addresses of alumni (undergraduate and graduate students) who graduated from SCSU in 2003. The first mailing was sent to candidates at their home address that had been provided by the office of Alumni Affairs (n=534), during the summer of 2005. Each packet contained a letter from the Interim Dean, a CCSAR Alumni Student Survey and a return envelope. The Dean's introductory letter explained the nature and purpose of the Alumni Student Survey and encouraged alumni to complete and return the survey in a timely manner. At the end of the first data wave, only 56 alumni student surveys were received. Reminder postcards were then sent to graduates in an effort to improve the return rate. This, however, also produced a limited response. As a result, a second mailing was implemented. The CSDE BEST program identified the names of the schools where recent alumni were working when they submitted their BEST portfolio in the spring of 2005 and forwarded an electronic copy to CCSAR (n=250). From this list, a second mailing was prepared and surveys sent to the identified schools. Note: the two mailings were not exclusive and duplication was present. However, in order to increase the rate of return, duplicate names were not removed. As a result, the second mailing served as a reminder for some alumni.

The combined mailings generated 106 completed alumni surveys.

## **Results**

### **Part I: Area of Certification and Program of Study**

The information below represents the frequency of responses to survey items regarding area of certification, program of study, and current employment information. (*Valid percent*) **Note: Tallies may not equal 100% when SPSS computes frequencies.**

- **Program:**

- Undergraduate with Certification: n= 23 (21.9%)
- Graduate with Certification: n=45 (42.9%)
- Graduate without Certification: n=18 (17.1%)
- Sixth Year Diploma: n=17 (16.2%)
- Doctorate (Ed.D): n=2 (1.9%)

- **Program of Study – Undergraduate (n=14)**
  - Bilingual Elementary: n=1 (7.1%)
  - Early Childhood Education: n=1 (7.1%)
  - Elementary Education: n= 8 (57.1%)
  - History Social Studies Education: n=1 (7.1%)
  - Middle Grades Education: n=1 (7.1%)
  - Special Education: n=2 (14.3%)
  
- **Program of Study – Graduate/Sixth Year (n=81)**
  - Art Education: n=2 (2.5%)
  - Chemistry: n=1 (1.2%)
  - Community Counseling: n=1 (1.2%)
  - School Counseling: n=2 (2.5%)
  - Elementary Education: n=17 (21.0%)
  - English: n=4 (4.9%)
  - Environmental Education: n=1 (1.2%)
  - Exercise Science: n=3 (3.7%)
  - Foreign Language: n=2 (2.5%)
  - History Social Studies: n=2 (2.5%)
  - Reading: n=4 (4.9%)
  - School Health Education: n=2 (2.5%)
  - School Psychology: n=1 (1.2%)
  - Science Education: n=1 (1.2%)
  - Special Education: n=16 (19.8%)
  - Counseling Sixth Year: n=1 (1.2%)
  - Educational Foundations: n=3 (3.7%)
  - Educational Leadership: n=7 (8.6%)
  - Elementary Education Classroom Specialist: n=2 (2.5%)
  - Sixth Year Science Education: n=3 (3.7%)
  - Sixth Year School Psychology: n=1 (1.2%)
  - Sixth Year Special Education: n=5 (6.2%)
  
- **Currently Certified:**
  - Yes: n=101 (95.3%)
  - No: n=5 (4.7%)
  
- **Currently Employed:**
  - Not Employed: n=3 (2.9%)
  - Part-time: n=4 (3.8%)
  - Full-time: n=97 (93.3%)
  
- **Employed in Area of Certification:**
  - Yes: n=96 (90.6%)
  - No: n=10 (9.4%)
  
- **Current Employment Setting:**
  - Urban: n=43 (42.6%)
  - Rural: n=10 (9.9%)
  - Suburban: n=48 (47.5%)

## Part II: Analysis of Survey Items

The mean scores for the 10 INTASC standards (Table 1) were moderately high: section D ‘*Knowledge of Subject Matter*’ received the highest mean score (**M=2.15**) while section L ‘*Reflection and Professional Development*’ received the lowest mean score (**M=1.90**). Item D7 - ‘*Ability to formulate meaningful questions about the subject matter*’ (**M=2.29**) received the highest mean score and item H9 - ‘*Conducting effective parent/teacher conferences*’ (**M=1.64**) earned the lowest mean score. Fifty of the 73 items had a mean score of 2.00 or higher and 11 items (listed below) received a mean score of less than \*1.90 (2.00=Met). Section M ‘*Partnerships with School and Community*’ had the most responses with a mean score of less than 1.90. The mean score and the frequency distribution for individual items are located in the Appendix.

Items with a mean score of less than 1.90:

- H9 ‘*Conducting effective parent/teacher conferences.*’ **M=1.64**
- M2 ‘*Providing opportunities for parent and community involvement*’ **M=1.78**
- G8 ‘*Using differentiated curriculum to meet the needs of exceptional children*’ **M=1.80**
- L3 ‘*Identifying students who require the assistance of a specialist*’ **M=1.81**
- L4 ‘*Handling discipline fairly and consistently*’ **M=1.81**
- M3 ‘*Using community resources in instruction*’ **M=1.84**
- M7 ‘*Engaging parents in the learning process*’ **M=1.84**
- L1 ‘*Recognizing when students are deficient in the basic skills and providing or recommending corrective action*’ **M=1.85**
- G4 ‘*Engaging students in selecting their own learning objectives and activities*’ **M=1.85**
- M1 ‘*Encouraging and maintaining the cooperative involvement and support of parents and community*’ **M=1.88**
- J11 ‘*Designing lessons that integrate technology into teaching*’ **M=1.89**

**Note:** several alumni from non-student teaching programs were unable to respond to certain items because they were not applicable. As a result, alumni from non-teaching programs, e.g., educational leadership, school psychology, counseling etc. did not respond to many items.

**Table 1 - Mean Scores for each INTASC standard/competency area**

Scale Range: Met+ = 3, Met = 2, Met- = 1

INTASC STANDARDS	MEAN SCORES
1. Knowledge of Subject Matter, D1-D8	<b>2.15</b>
2. Knowledge of Human Development and Learning, E1-E7	2.07
3. Instruction is Adapted to Meet Diverse Learners, F1-F4	2.14
4. Use of Multiple Instructional Strategies and Resources, G1-G10	2.04

5. An Effective Learning Environment is Created, H1-H11	2.00
6. Effective Communication to Foster Inquiry and Collaboration, I1-I6	2.06
7. Lesson Planning, J1-J11	2.11
8. Assessment of Student Learning to Improve Teaching, K1-K4	1.98
9. Reflection and Professional Development, L1-L5	<b>1.90</b>
10. Partnerships with School and Community, M1-M7	1.95

### Part III: Open-Ended Questions

The four questions included at the end of the survey are designed to elicit information about, and to identify areas in need of, improvement within the SCSU Educator Preparation Programs. CCSAR staff analyzed responses by combining similar responses under each question that collectively defined a theme or concept. Quotes are also provided to support findings. Responses to questions one and two are summarized together due to the similarity and overlap of responses.

1. What would you do to improve the educator preparation program at SCSU?
2. What courses would you add to the program?
3. What courses would you delete from the program?
4. Additional comments.

1. **What would you do to improve the educator preparation program at SCSU?**
2. **What courses would you add to the program?**

#### Improvement in reading and writing instruction

Several alumni commented on the need for increased reading and writing instruction. *“This is such a crucial area of instruction and more emphasis should be put on preparing teachers how to teach these academic areas.”* Alumni also stated *“a course focusing on reading skills (i.e. Wilson program) would “be in Southern’s best interest.”*

#### Communication with parents

Another frequent remark was the lack of training regarding ‘dealing with parents’. Alumni *“found it difficult to initiate parental involvement in their classroom.”* One individual *“felt blind-sided when she was faced with a parent who had no desire to be involved.”* Recommendations included enhanced curriculum that deals with *‘how to communicate effectively with parents’* and inviting parents into the classroom to role-play and give pre-service teachers the opportunity to practice.

### More hands on experience

Alumni expressed the need for a more practical, hands-on experience. *“Allow more time for students to be hands-on with teaching.”* Others suggested that students serve as *‘in-school substitutes and teach a variety of courses during the school year’* and add *‘role playing interactive class where leaders are confronted with problems (PPT), go through it, and then debrief about the experience.’*

### Training in technology education

Another area of concern was the limited training in the areas of technology education. Southern should *“make infusion of technology a separate course which teaches how to use technology as a learning tool across the curriculum”* where students are *“introduced to different computer programs.”* The most important aspect of this training seems to be the application of technology in practical teaching situations.

### Teaching diverse populations

With many classrooms following an inclusion format, respondents felt the need for more training in differentiated instruction. Many of the comments made were not specific; they simply stated that there should be more emphasis on differentiated instruction. One respondent stated, *“teachers' knowledge of the world and culture can negatively or positively affect immigrant learners' educational outcomes.”*

### More special education courses

Alumni expressed the need for an additional course(s) in special education. *“With No Child Left Behind and more individualized instruction and modifications, now more than ever, more special education courses should be considered for teacher preparation no matter what the discipline.”* Another participant suggested that there be *“more exposure to professionals who understand and implement strategies for students with special needs.”*

### Behavior Management

A large portion of the respondents suggested that more training be provided in the area of behavior management. *“I think the biggest shock for me was effective classroom management. Maybe more help in this area would be beneficial as today's classrooms are many times and unfortunately focused too much on behavior and not enough on teaching.”*

### BEST Portfolio Development

Alumni felt the need for more training and a better understanding of the requirements of the BEST portfolio. Suggestions pointing to a *“portfolio development course that correlates with BEST”* may be one way in which to implement training into an educator preparation program.

### **3. What courses would you delete from the program?**

Alumni responses to this question were vague and no consistent patterns emerged.

### **4. Additional comments**

This section allowed respondents the opportunity to make general comments regarding their experience at SCSU. The following comments represent some typical comments provided by this sample. (Not in rank order)

*“I feel that Southern provided me with an excellent education and I am returning to Southern in the fall to start a graduate program.”*

*“The teachers were great and the context was helpful in preparing me for my current job.”*

*“Overall, I feel as though Southern prepared me exceptionally well for becoming a teacher.”*

*“I felt that Southern needed to focus more on what we were going to need for Praxis II. There was very little info given on mental retardation, however it seemed that ¼ of the test was on mental retardation.”*

*“Students of Southern need a better understanding of accountability of teachers today.”*

*“I wish you provided more doctoral programs.”*

*“Have college students go by state standards to create lessons. They will be able to use what they create in college later on in their classroom.”*

*“I learned much more about reading and writing instruction from my district than I learned at SCSU.”*

*“I didn’t have a positive experience with my advisor. He was not very informative nor did he help me to see different options that were available to me.”*

*“Many of these items did not apply to my sixth year degree, but I tried to check off the most appropriate box.”*

## Discussion

A mean score of 2.00 or higher on 50 of 73 survey items and on 7 of 10 INTASC standards suggests that alumni feel that the program has prepared and supported them in many areas. Student responses indicate that alumni feel most prepared and supported in the '*Knowledge of Subject Matter*' standard (items D1-D8) and least prepared in the '*Reflection and Development*' (items L1-L5) and '*Partnerships with School and Community*' (items M1-M7) standards. Alumni are also concerned with the lack of training regarding interacting and effectively communicating with parents. This theme was present in both the item responses and in the open-ended comments. Additional suggestions or recommendations for program enhancement include: (1) preparation in meeting the requirements of the BEST portfolio, (2) exposure to behavioral management techniques, and (3) more hands-on experience.