Georgia Campus Learns From 2013 edTPA Pilot
In Preparation for Broader Implementation

By Pam Wetherington, Coordinator of Student Teaching/edTPA Coordinator, Columbus State University

As Georgia's institutions of higher education take the first steps toward broad implementation of edTPA in our teacher education programs, a new pilot program is providing lessons and insight to help guide those efforts.

After a limited pilot program in the spring of 2012 involving three students and teachers, Columbus State University launched a larger pilot this past spring to help prepare candidates and faculty for edTPA. The pilot involved 28 Columbus State student teachers from several different programs who explored and participated in the edTPA process.

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"Our 2012 pilot gave us an opportunity to see exactly what our teacher candidates were able to accomplish with a narrow understanding of edTPA," says Dr. Deirdre Greer, Interim Associate Dean, College of Education and Health Professions, Columbus State University. "Having that information helped us recognize the direction we needed to take as a Teacher Preparation Program in order to help our students connect their preparations for the classroom with the requirements of edTPA."

Dr. Deirde Greer (pictured left) and
Dr. Erinn Bentley (right)

The instructors and administrators working with the student teachers during the spring 2013 semester had little to no experience with edTPA and its process. We quickly learned, while working alongside our students, that the process was rigorous, intense, at times frustrating. Ultimately, however, it was tremendously worthwhile for all of us.

"edTPA, like many of the assignments and projects already embedded within our teacher preparation programs, requires student teachers to not simply demonstrate their content-knowledge and pedagogical knowledge," says Dr. Erinn Bentley, Assistant Department Chair for Teacher Education and Assistant Professor and Coordinator of English Education. "The edTPA portfolio also requires student teachers to analyze and reflect upon their decisions regarding planning, teaching, and assessing K-12 learners. That is, student teachers must think deeply and critically while documenting their self-analyses through written commentary and teaching artifacts.

Dr. Bentley notes that the edTPA portfolio is a particularly valuable tool for making visible the thought processes student teachers make when considering:

1. What are my teaching goals?
2. What are my students' learning needs?
3. Why do I believe my methods are appropriate for those goals and needs?
4. What evidence demonstrates those goals and needs are being met?

At the conclusion of the spring 2013 semester, student teachers and clinical faculty members who had participated in the pilot were surveyed. The purpose of this survey was to gain feedback focused on preparing future candidates and program faculty as our institution moves toward full edTPA implementation. Each survey item asked respondents to reflect on the process and discuss the notion of 'where do we go from here?'

Overwhelmingly, we found that although the students experienced some frustration because the assessment was new, they appreciated the process because they recognized its impact on their current and future teaching practices. Here are some samples of the revealing and helpful input we received from candidates and clinical faculty members:

- *"edTPA addresses very fundamental requirements for teaching. The experience my student teachers acquired made them more aware of those teaching skills. With training and preparation, the edTPA process would be a highly valuable tool to assess performance in the classroom."*
  – CSU Clinical Faculty Member

- *"It was difficult because it asked me to really think a lot deeper about my decisions in the classroom and even required me to record it in detail! In the end, it gave me confidence to know that I can do all of the things that are required by the program and helped me create the habit of being able to assess myself better."* – CSU Student Teacher

- *"This process contributed to me becoming a better teacher by showing me what I need to do to help meet the needs of all my students."* – CSU Student Teacher

- *"I learned how to really prepare lessons that will meet the needs of the students and how to use assessment to see what they learned, how it compares to the rest of the class, and how it can be used to plan further instruction."* – CSU Student Teacher

- *"edTPA allowed candidates to analyze and reflect upon their planning, teaching, and assessing choices as this is critical to their content areas and/or pedagogical growth."*
  – CSU Clinical Faculty Member

- *"It made me really think about how to better prepare my lessons. I had to plan for all students regardless of their abilities."* – CSU Student Teacher

- *"I think going through the process prepares student teachers to think in detail and globally. As they go into teaching jobs, they'll be able to work their way through the [Teacher Keys Effectiveness System] with more ease and confidence because of their experiences with edTPA."*
  – CSU Clinical Faculty Member

- *"This process really made me think about what I was doing and why; I had to justify my choices and prove that I am doing what is best for my students."* – CSU Student Teacher

- *"It gave them some practice in meeting deadlines and expressing themselves with professional terminology. Students were thrilled with the documented improvements that some of their focus students demonstrated."* – CSU Clinical Faculty Member