

Chapter 11

Creating Faculty Buy-In for edTPA and Other Performance-Based Assessments

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ABSTRACT

As candidate performance-based assessments like edTPA grow in use nationally, facilitating faculty buy-in of the assessment processes becomes paramount for implementation success. Many faculty, used to an environment of academic freedom and autonomous curriculum choices, may balk at the notion of implementing a structured assessment like edTPA across their teacher preparation programs. Identifying obstacles and developing responses that allow faculty a voice while maintaining a respectful and open dialogue becomes crucial. The selection of faculty leadership to carry out the initiative, the decision to score the products locally by faculty or externally through a third party, and a discussion of the impact of adopting the assessment on faculty workload are all part of this work. Developing appropriate faculty supports and resources and involving faculty in processes to embed knowledge and skills related to the assessment into formative coursework can prove to be invaluable strategies for EPPs going through these processes.

OVERVIEW

Any new initiative typically involves some degree of change within an organization; at the university level, faculty resistance to externally-mandated change initiatives can create immediate difficulties with successful implementation. Adopting pre-service performance assessments like edTPA, developed by the Stanford Center for Learning, Assessment, and Equity (SCALE), or the Praxis Pre-Service Portfolio, developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) are especially challenging, in that while they are summative in nature, using these kinds of assessments also drives formative course changes in

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coursework prior to the summative student teaching semester. Creating faculty buy-in for these kinds of widespread changes can be complex. Weinstein (2006) discussed the challenges of accountability assessments at the higher education level including faculty views of imposition and infringement. In recent years, faculty in educator preparation programs (EPPs) have been required to make numerous changes based upon the directives of the state licensing agency or policy makers. It is a real possibility that faculty may have soured to being “asked” to implement yet another change. While the foundations of these assessments are based on sound pedagogical practices, convincing faculty of the benefits of the initiative before push back occurs can be difficult. Engaging faculty in conversations and potential subsequent action related to performance-based portfolio assessments must be carefully planned if a different response by faculty is expected.

With any new initiative involving a paradigm change, identifying key obstacles to implementation before the change process is started can help to mitigate these obstacles by developing a plan for response in advance and reacting accordingly (Spencer-Matthews, 2001). In this chapter, we begin by presenting key obstacles we encountered in gaining faculty buy-in of edTPA implementation at our institution. We then share strategies we used to increase the levels of faculty acceptance of this initiative. This work is ongoing. We voluntarily began exploring edTPA as a possible assessment for our candidates in 2012, and yet we still regularly meet, discuss, and review faculty concerns and questions related to the implementation. As the logistical machinations surrounding edTPA become more entrenched in our programs, the resistance to the initiative has eased somewhat. Yet as practitioners of research-based best practices, our faculty continue to push, to question, to seek answers. In this regard, the process of gaining faculty buy-in is unending—which is a good “problem” to have. The presence of dissenting yet respectful voices force all faculty to gently question the efficacy of this work while persistently reviewing our processes for improvements. These kinds of interactions can only serve to better prepare our candidates as teachers.

Identifying Key Obstacles: Mandated or Voluntary Implementation?

As performance-based assessments (in particular, edTPA) gain wider use nationally, the decision of whether to mandate implementation becomes salient to the problem of faculty buy-in. EPPs in states where edTPA has been mandated either by the state education department or by legislative mandate have experienced varying degrees of faculty acceptance. In New York, edTPA was mandated by the NY State Board of Regents as a way of increasing teacher candidate quality; as Robinson and LaCelle-Peterson (2014) delicately put it, teacher educators in New York “encountered a variety of operational challenges” (EdPrepMatters blogpost, 29 July 2014). Push-back from faculty at a variety of institutions along with a well-publicized establishment of an edTPA Implementation TaskForce to address heated concerns made it clear that the logistical decisions of implementing this kind of mandate are far-reaching. In 2015, other states are beginning to adopt a mandatory policy on implementation; Georgia and Alabama have both recently opted to require edTPA completion for all teacher candidates as a condition of licensure. This has created a compressed implementation timeline for EPPs in these states, where faculty have been given little voice in the decision-making. Nonetheless, there are some benefits to a mandate from an implementation perspective. It is important to distinguish between faculty *buy-in*—circumstances in which faculty members agree with and support the direction or content of the initiative—and faculty *compliance*, circumstances in which faculty members merely follow the requirements of a directive. Faculty buy-in means the members of the EPP can stand behind the practice or initiative and believe there is a benefit to the candidates, faculty, college, etc. Compliance means faculty members will do

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