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Concordia University Chicago Awarded Continuing NCATE Accreditation for All Education Programs

Distinction places University in top 2% of schools in the nation



When the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) launched in 1954 as the premier body assessing the standard of excellence in teacher education, Concordia University Chicago was one of the first institutions that underwent the voluntary process of being reviewed, assessed and accredited. Since that time, the University has held the distinction of having all its education programs being continuously accredited—a testament to the consistency of its high quality programs.

“This confirms the notion that we are national leaders in education,” says **Kevin Brandon, EdD**, dean of CUC’s College of Education.

This year, Concordia–Chicago not only received overall NCATE accreditation, but received it without any conditions, or areas noted for improvement. “This is a huge accomplishment,” says Brandon.

Programs are evaluated against six standards: candidate knowledge; skills and professional dispositions; assessment system and unit evaluation; field experiences and clinical practice; diversity; faculty qualifications, performance and development; and unit governance and resources (evaluating, improving practices and meeting standards).

Also significant is that Concordia received national recognition in numerous content specialties (undergraduate programs: biology, English/language arts, chemistry, elementary education, early childhood education, music, math, social studies; graduate programs: educational leadership, reading education, and curriculum and instruction: English as a Second Language (ESL) concentration).

“NCATE is a seal of approval that the candidates that graduate from CUC meet the highest standards of training for the classroom,” says Brandon. “We are also a model for other institutions. Our recently implemented assessment system for students was a standout to many of the NCATE reviewers. Some of them wanted to take it back to use at their own institutions. The co-teaching model of student teaching we are developing was also noted, as only a few others in this country are using it.” (See related article on pg. 12.)

Special certifications earned for specific graduate programs

The rigorous NCATE review process on campus takes many weeks and is done by a team of reviewers. But preparations for the review began three years prior and involved collaboration between the College of Education and the College of Graduate and Innovative Programs, where all of the graduate programs in education are housed.

According to **Margaret Trybus, EdD**, assistant dean of graduate studies in the College of Graduate and Innovative

Programs, the graduate school and faculty were highly involved with the NCATE process as it relates to graduate certification programs. For Specialized Professional Association (SPA) reports, NCATE digs deeper for a higher level of accountability for programs that lead to certification.

The three specialized graduate areas where Concordia–Chicago received SPA national recognition are in the preparation of educational leadership at the school building and school district level, and reading education.

The extensive three-year process involved curriculum mapping, alignment to specific national standards and the reassessment of all course syllabi. To enhance the clinical aspect of each program, CUC developed capstone projects within specific graduate courses, which led to the capstone requirement for each program. Many of the graduate course changes were rolled out in the past year.

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“For example, the major capstone project in educational leadership is the clinical internship experience,” says Trybus. “In coursework you’re getting the theory, during the internship you demonstrate the practice.” A similar shift will also be prevalent in the revised undergraduate education curriculum, which will be launched in the fall of 2012.

“The whole NCATE review process is challenging, but one we embrace as an opportunity to continuously improve our programs,” says Trybus. “At the end of the day, what is really important is that the improvements we made for the NCATE process will really benefit our students.

“NCATE is the catalyst, but the end-goal is to create stellar programs that prepare students well for future challenges. The whole process of curriculum alignment and assessment-driven decision-making is certainly the cornerstone of quality graduate programs. And we feel we are right up there with the best in the nation.”

Trybus notes that the assessment component was the biggest change that Concordia

University Chicago made in this NCATE cycle. “We knew we had a good curriculum, but the next level was to develop quality assessments to indicate measurable student performance outcomes.

“What put us in a position to receive national recognition was the development of comprehensive standards-aligned assessments that do show outcome measurements. This was a significant enhancement to our program. We took that challenge very seriously, and will continue to work on this aspect of our programs.”

Accreditation spurs continual improvement

The NCATE process does not end with news of national recognition; rather, the next cycle of assessment and improvements begins and is continuous. “We look at this as an improvement cycle and evaluate specific courses every eight weeks,” says Trybus. “Any good process of improvement continually looks at the ‘what,’ the ‘how’ and the ‘how do we know.’”

She also notes that NCATE certification is not the work of any one person, but involves the collaboration of the entire education faculty—both graduate and undergraduate. “Our faculty has made a tremendous effort to utilize the process to create stellar programs,” she says.

As for how this cycle of changes translates to actual teacher success in the classroom, time will tell. The next step of assessment could possibly include evaluating alumni who have graduated from the program and are now in the field. But for now, the education faculty are confident that NCATE certification goes a long way toward attracting students to both the undergraduate and graduate education programs of Concordia–Chicago.

“I think it gives our students across the entire program more confidence that their diploma means something,” says Trybus. “Our candidates are good consumers of education programs. They really do their research.”

—Kristin Aasmundstad Walsh

Teaching to Learn — Learning to Teach

Concordia University Chicago is well positioned to serve the changing needs of students and the educators who serve these students.

Teacher preparation and training, like everything else, is constantly changing. Concordia University Chicago has a long history of training excellent teachers, and it has recently undertaken a large-scale revision process to continue meeting the needs of today's teacher candidates.

The University consistently prepares graduates to be highly qualified teachers. “We're always assessing ways to better prepare our teacher candidates for the classroom,” says **Kevin Brandon, EdD**, dean of CUC's College of Education. “We continually update curriculum to meet the needs of today's teachers.”

The impetus for program evaluation is three-fold: a new set of Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTS), the recent National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation process, and Concordia's own philosophy to continually assess and improve its programs. CUC's College of Education is at the beginning of this process, though some of its changes are already in place and were commended by recent NCATE evaluators. Many changes in the graduate education programs were made during the NCATE preparation process (see related article on pg. 10).

Curriculum changes, assessment strategies

The major areas to be addressed are: better preparing teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students; providing training in strategies to work with students who aren't meeting standards, called Response to Intervention (RTI); preparing teachers to assess learning and use assessment data to plan more effective instruction; training teachers in differentiated

instruction, a strategy aimed at reaching students across the spectrum, moving everyone forward; and maximizing the use of appropriate technology in the classroom.

Brandon says the faculty is using curriculum mapping to measure the new Illinois standards against Concordia-Chicago's current curriculum, determining where standards are addressed and where there are gaps or redundancies. This will lead to a thorough vetting and refining of the curriculum. “Every course will be revised to some degree, and others may disappear,” he says.

This mammoth task is being taken on collectively by CUC's education faculty, many of whom have completed extensive research on these current educational topics. “We are well-positioned to meet the challenge,” says Brandon. “God has blessed us with a faculty who understands all of these new issues and strategies—CLD, RTI, differentiated teaching, assessment—on an expert level.”

One of the biggest changes to Concordia's undergraduate education programs will be an enhanced emphasis on the clinical components. Most teacher education courses will include a clinical component that provides the opportunity to apply what has been learned in real classrooms. Best practice is to have interactive and meaningful field experiences early on in the program, so the field experience model of each course will markedly change.

Early hands-on field experience

As Concordia-Chicago has stayed at the forefront of best practices in education, it should come as no surprise that this hands-on field experience model is already incorporated into some existing courses. **Lorinda Sankey, PhD**, assistant professor of

education and coordinator of the elementary/middle grades program, teaches the diversity in education course.

Teacher candidates in the course tutor at Karel Havlicek Elementary School in North Berwyn, which has a high population of Latino students, once a week for 10 weeks. The school has identified students who need assistance in the area of literacy, and the Concordia tutoring program addresses this need. “Our army of 60-80 students we send there each semester is one of the school's interventions,” says Sankey. “They have come to rely on it to serve their students' literacy needs. And for our teacher candidate students, it is a very meaningful experience.”

While the current curriculum includes hands-on field experience in the methods courses later in the program, this diversity course is typically the second or third education course students take, giving them the opportunity to work in a classroom early on in their program. “That's really the current best practice to have the field experience support the coursework,” explains Sankey. “It builds efficacy, as the students see what impact they can have.” Brandon hopes to use the elements of this course as a model to apply to other education courses, so that all of them will directly connect field experience to coursework.

“What that means is closer relationships with schools and more prescribed experiences for our teacher candidates,” says Sankey. “Having everyone in a course at the same school really makes a tremendous difference in the quality of how the field experience supports the coursework. We're not increasing the hours of field experience; we're just changing the way it will serve the course and the teacher candidate.”



New student teaching model

In addition, CUC will make a significant change to the student teaching experience—putting CUC at the cutting-edge of teacher education. The new model will employ a co-teaching partnership, where student teachers work side-by-side with the master teacher from the very start. With each lesson there will be a lead teacher and a support teacher, and those roles will be equally shared.

This student teaching model was successfully implemented by the University of Minnesota four years ago, and participating schools have seen student test scores rise by 25%. Mentor teachers also say they like not having to “give up” their classroom for a semester. This model allows them to work alongside the student teacher while continuing the classroom culture and care of their students in a more symbiotic partnership, creating a win-win-win—for student teacher, master teacher and the pupils. Concordia is in the process of forming partnerships with both public and private

schools willing to partner in this model. So far, the response from schools has been very positive, with many schools already signed on.

Implementation: Fall 2012

Undergraduate education faculty spent the late spring and summer doing curriculum mapping and revising courses, with plans to have the entire new curriculum in place by the fall of 2012.

Brandon acknowledges that even the best teachers can't fix all that is broken with today's education system. “There are students who face the challenge of coming to school hungry, not having medical care, and not knowing where they will sleep that night,” he says. Still, he thinks there is room for improvement in what teachers can bring to the multi-faceted equation.

“We can't do it all, but our goal is to continue to prepare teachers to be the very best classroom teachers they can,” says Brandon.

He cites CUC's other advantages, such as new technology tools, a committed faculty and a great location for students to experience high-need schools as well as well-funded, well-supported districts.

Another change that will make Concordia–Chicago's program more competitive is requiring at least one endorsement for every teacher candidate, and structuring the program so that multiple endorsements are possible. This is another element that makes CUC's education program a cut above the rest.

“We're using the new Illinois standards as a catalyst to examine our entire program in great detail,” says Sankey. “We have this moment in time where we are required to make changes, and we're trying to maximize it. It's really exciting, and I believe we have the capacity to ensure our programs are among the very best.”

—Kristin Aasmundstad Walsh

A Legacy of Preparing Educators: Past, Present and Future

Concordia University Chicago has a long-standing commitment to preparing competent and compassionate leaders no matter which vocation they ultimately pursue. From its founding as Concordia Teachers Seminary in Addison, Ill., in 1864, to the present day comprehensive University, Concordia University Chicago is well-recognized as a leader for its education programs at the undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate levels.

Continuing national accreditation for education programs in general and special recognition of several specialized academic programs and endorsement areas, continues to make CUC the university of choice for those in the field of education.

To date, there are 13 CUC alumni who serve in the teaching profession recognized as outstanding educators by the Golden Apple Foundation. In addition, nine Concordia students have been designated as Golden Apple Scholars. Students with the Golden Apple designation are talented college-bound high school graduates who after successfully completing a vigorous nomination process are chosen as scholarship recipients pursuing a teaching degree and demonstrating a commitment to teach in an Illinois school serving high-need students for five years.

A Historical Perspective

Concordia Teachers College was established in its River Forest location in 1913, and was the first college of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod devoted exclusively to teacher preparation programs for graduates who would serve in parish schools. Through the years, the education program expanded to include offerings that met the interests of students who wanted an educational experience in a faith-based institution, but wanted to teach in public schools, as well as Lutheran students seeking preparation in the liberal arts.

“Concordia has long been recognized as a national leader in the preparation of educators,” says **Kevin Brandon, EdD**, dean of the College of Education. “Concordia was in the first group of NCATE accredited teacher preparation programs established in 1954 and has been continuously accredited with many programs nationally recognized for excellence.”

The first graduate degree in education was introduced in 1957, and it was a program for principal preparation. Concordia’s graduate programs rapidly expanded after changes to teacher licensure were enacted in the 1980s and 1990s, and teachers who required continuing training sought graduate programs.

“We have a strong reputation, nationally, and are an institution of choice for people across the nation,” says Brandon. “Our programs have received national recognition from professional organizations for excellence in curriculum and instruction.”

In 1979, Concordia added liberal arts degree programs to suit the needs of its students. In addition, the education program incorporated curriculum for those seeking to teach in public school settings.

“We attract a larger number of students, since we established programs in the arts, the sciences, business and the like,” says Brandon. “These liberal arts programs further strengthened our education programs, particularly for students studying to teach at the secondary level [where endorsements in various areas are required].”

With growing enrollments and further expanding curricula, Concordia Teachers College transitioned to Concordia University in 1990. Today, Concordia University

Chicago includes the College of Education, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business and College of Graduate and Innovative Programs—and enrolls more than 5,000 combined undergraduate and graduate students.

The College of Graduate and Innovative Programs houses all advanced education programs at the master’s and doctoral levels as well as other degree programs. The College of Business, established in 2007, offers undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as an MBA program with several areas of concentration.

In total, more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs are offered; 18 of these programs are education specific. Doctoral programs in early childhood education and leadership are among those offered.

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Undergraduate students can major in director of Christian education, early childhood, elementary, secondary and special education. In addition, there are opportunities to specialize in K-12 art education, Spanish education and physical education as well as many traditional areas such as secondary biology, computer science, English, math and other subject areas.

The extensive offerings of graduate education programs include a master of arts in teaching, Christian education, curriculum and instruction, curriculum and instruction and English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement, early childhood education, educational technology, reading education, school counseling and school leadership.



Also available are Type 73 Certification (School Counseling), Type 75 Certification (General School Administration), Type 75 Certification with Superintendent Endorsement, Certificate of Advanced Studies and a new addition, Type 75 Certificate with Principal Endorsement (see related article on pg. 31).

Faculty Leaders

Consistently, for the past several years, the University continues its leadership position in teacher education—Concordia–Chicago graduates Illinois’ largest number of masters degree public school teachers among private Illinois colleges.

“We have an outstanding reputation, locally and nationally,” says Brandon. “We are an institution of choice for students across the country who seek a solid, Christian education.”

As the needs of learners and classroom teachers change, teacher preparation curriculum and standards are changing. Concordia is already incorporating best practice models that prepare and equip

graduates in practices that are key to the success of today’s learners.

Graduates of Concordia’s education program will have the benefit of curriculum that prepares them to serve a growing number of culturally and linguistically diverse students, devise appropriate learning interventions, employ differentiated instruction strategies, develop outcomes assessment and utilize technology.

“Concordia is on the right track,” says Brandon. “We’re already incorporating these changes into our curriculum. This just demonstrates that we continue to remain at the forefront of education.”

Another important component needed to meet teachers’ needs is faculty involvement and input. Many faculty members have completed and/or are in the process of completing research on current challenges facing educators, strategies for revising curriculum, incorporating technology in the classroom and much more.

“Faculty are an integral part in ensuring the University is successful as changes are implemented,” says Brandon. “All of our faculty were first practitioners, some for many years. And, we feel strongly that faculty members need to have been successful practitioners in the field first before entering into the practice of preparing the next generation of teachers.”

As continual changes are made, Concordia–Chicago remains true to its mission, its students and its commitment to preparing Christian educators.

“Although our teacher preparation programs have changed,” says Brandon, “we stay true to our mission of preparing our students to serve the needs of the church and society.”

—Sarah A. Hickman and
Kristin Aasmundstad Walsh