Web-Based Program Assessment for a Teacher Education Program

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Abstract: In responding to Middle States Association (MSA) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) mandates, the Teacher Education Department at SUNY Potsdam is developing clear learning outcomes for all programs. The Childhood Education (Grades 1-6) program has responded to this challenge by designing web-based assessment tools to collect, update, and analyze the extent to which program learning objectives are being met.

In the spring of 2002 the SUNY College at Potsdam had their on-site visits from the Middle States Association and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Both organizations emphasize institutional assessment as crucial to both program accountability and program improvement (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2002). As a result of this process, the college is taking steps to bring program assessment into the mainstream of faculty thinking. If such assessment is going to be useful, it must provide valuable information to faculty, be easy to use, and reflect learning outcomes of the programs being assessed. While assessment information can be gathered in a number of ways, e.g. surveys, post-graduation placement rates, etc., there was interest in utilizing available technology to target program learning outcomes.

In response to this interest, the Technical Help Center (THC) of the SUNY Potsdam Center for Rural Education (CRE) agreed to develop a technology-based program assessment pilot with the following characteristics: (1) be built utilizing existing assessment tools; (2) focused upon the pre-service field experience component of the Childhood Education (Grades 1-6) program; (3) minimize the use of special software or technology; (4) allow for data entry and revision; and, (5) have a user interface designed for ease of interaction. To meet all these criteria it was decided to utilize FileMaker™ Pro 5.5 for data storage and analysis and a web browser (Netscape™ or Internet Explorer™) as the interface. FileMaker™ was chosen because of the readily available CDML tags to simply the form creation process in HTML.

All students in the Childhood Education program must complete 100 hours of pre-student teaching field experience in public school classrooms. As these experiences have evolved, observational tools, based upon INTASC Principles, have been developed to document student progress. As a first step, a set of these tools were converted to web pages possessing HTML form elements allowing data entry through the web to a locally-created FileMaker™ database. Each web page allows the user, in most cases the college faculty member using the tool, to enter data, update records, and create new ones. Additionally, searches can be conducted to extract specific information from the database for display on the web. For example, a faculty member interested in determining which students have met a specific requirement of the public school classroom field experience can conduct a database search to obtain those results.

As more program-specific learning outcomes are developed, and the tools to assess them are created, they will be added to the database fields with appropriate web pages created to display them. Present efforts to
allow sophisticated dynamic analysis of the data are incorporating JavaScript and Java applets. Because data entry is time-consuming and has the potential to introduce errors, the use of PDAs to collect the data is being explored. With the appropriate software and hardware, these data can then be synchronized with the database eliminating entry errors at this level. A working example of the web-based interface and PDA device will be available during the poster session.

References

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2002). *Student learning assessment: Options and resources.* Philadelphia, PA: Author,


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