The current focus on accountability and high stakes assessment at the P-12 level and the subsequent criticism being leveled against higher education for the quality of classroom teachers has increased the urgency for teacher education programs to develop systems of accountability to ensure the quality of their graduates. With this focus on educational reform, there has been an increased interest in the area of assessment, especially as it relates to predicting future teacher quality. Up to this time assessment was largely pencil and paper in nature with objective formats being most prominent. While the information from objective assessment techniques was and still is valuable, it is only a snapshot of a period in time and does not provide insights into how future teachers can use the knowledge they have acquired to make decisions, solve problems, and address real world issues—skills that affect their ability to impact P-12 student learning. To overcome this limitation and in an effort to align assessment with Kentucky’s New Teacher Standards (Education Professional Standards Board, 1994), Western Kentucky University, as part of its restructuring efforts within the BellSouth’s Reinventing Schools and Colleges of Education initiative, set a goal to design and implement technology centers that facilitate production, development, and implementation of comprehensive data management systems that include an electronic portfolio of authentic assessments.

An interest in identifying different types of assessments has been driven in part by educational reform issues that included greater demands for accountability, implementation of high stakes testing and the subsequent negative consequences, increased criticism of standardized tests (Worthen, 1993) and greater calls for more “authentic” assessments (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Although identified by various names, such as performance assessments or authentic assessments, all have included direct assessment of teacher candidate performance on tasks that are real world in nature or simulations. Feuer and Fulton (1993) have identified seven common forms that are often associated with K-12 schools: (a) constructed-response items, (b) writing, (c) essays, (d) oral discourse, (e) exhibitions, (f) experiments, and (g) portfolios. While these forms of performance assessment have been widely used in schools, it was the Coalition for Essential Schools (Sizer, 1984, 1992) and the accompanying use of exhibitions, whereby students shared their application of knowledge, that gave credibility to efforts to go beyond traditional methods of assessment.

We have entered our fourth year of teacher candidates loading their exhibits in an electronic format. All “core” teacher education courses across all undergraduate teacher education programs have critical performances in place that teacher candidates are submitting electronically. More critical performances for courses housed outside the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences but related to teaching are being added each semester. Progress, procedures and difficulties associated with this process will be discussed.

In developing the overall data management system, our initial focus was to bring all existing candidate data, of which critical performance entries into the Electronic Portfolio System are a part, under one electronic umbrella. The next challenge has been to utilize these data efficiently and uncover relationships among these data that can help us answer key questions, such as:

- How well prepared is each candidate with respect to KY New Teacher Standards?
- How well prepared is each candidate to facilitate learning of all students?
- What candidate characteristics affect his/her ability to meet New Teacher Standards and/or to facilitate learning of all students?
What are the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses? What factors contribute to these strengths and weaknesses?

What are the program’s strengths and weaknesses?

What aspects of the program contribute to these strengths and weaknesses?

Finally, as we have begun developing data based reports to answer these and other key questions, we have recognized the need to make more explicit the connection between reports and these key questions. Early critical performance reports, for example, informed faculty on the percentages of candidates performing at beginning to above standard levels on each critical performance. These reports were based on the assumption that faculty would make the connection between critical performances and New Teacher Standards. They did not. Newer reports that group critical performance scores based on their relationship to the New Teacher Standards have led to more faculty interest and action to improve programs.

During this session the presenters will discuss: 1) Issues related to performance assessment; 2) Research on portfolio use in teacher education; 3) Digital Portfolios; 4) The development of an electronic portfolio system; and 5) The integration of an electronic portfolio into a broader data management system.