

2.1.1. DEPCRIPTION OF CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

The College of Education (CoE) partners include approximately 79 schools and agencies, of which 81% are public, 13% are private, and 6% are laboratory schools. These partners collaborate in the design, delivery, and evaluation of the unit's field and clinical experiences. The largest partner is the state Department of Education, which includes the island wide central administration of the public school system, its regional offices and school districts, as well as the P-12 schools themselves. Other main partners are private schools, postsecondary institutes, Head Start and Early Head Start centers, as well as the University of Puerto Rico preschool, elementary, and secondary laboratory schools.

The CoE Office of Field Experiences and Clinical Practice (OFECPC), as part of the CoE Deanship of Academic Affairs, is in charge of establishing the unit wide requirements of the field and clinical experiences for the initial teacher preparation programs and coordinating the implementation and assessment of these experiences in close collaboration with its partners.

The Institute for Teacher Professional Development of the PRDE is the office directly in charge of establishing the norms and procedures for placing candidates in the field and clinical experiences within the public school system and of regulating requirements for cooperating teachers who will supervise candidates. This process takes place jointly with clinical experience coordinators of all teacher preparation programs on the island.

The criteria for selecting public schools for field and clinical experiences, as well as the criteria for selecting the partners' clinical faculty, is included in the PRDE Circular Letter 02-2012-2013, and the UPR by laws of Infant and Toddler and Early Childhood, Preschool Development Center, and the Elementary and Secondary laboratory schools. The mission of these centers is aimed at providing field and clinical experiences to the future teachers of the CoE as a main priority.

It is the CoE who addresses the requirements and norms established by the PRDE in Circular Letter 02-2012-2013, as a guide to organize and implement the candidates' clinical experiences. This Circular Letter was approved with the input of all PPE of universities in the island. UPR Faculty members also consider these requirements when planning and implementing field experiences. All candidates are required to complete a continuum of field experiences that prepares them for the clinical practicum. The continuum begins with classroom observations, followed by participation as teacher assistants, and culminates in the one year pre-practicum or Methods courses where candidates teach. Partner involvement in early field experiences provides opportunities for observations in the classroom and school facilities, interviews with school personnel, and certifying the time candidates spend in the school. Candidates must submit a report of their observations and interviews, which serves as feedback for faculty to evaluate the design of the experiences. The design of the pre-practicum or Methods course field experiences is discussed by faculty and school based personnel to ensure the optimal participation of the candidates in the teaching process.

Collaborations with the PRDE to engage in the design, delivery and evaluation of clinical experiences include periodic meetings between the clinical faculty and the cooperating teachers. The Coordinator of the OFECP participates in meetings each semester at the Institute for Teacher Professional Development through which all the initiatives related to student teaching are coordinated. In addition, the unit offers continuous professional seminars and activities which are open to the school-based and university- based clinical faculty.

The Institute for Teacher Professional Development approved the Guide to Evaluate the Operation and Compliance of Clinical Practicum Centers which stresses frequent visits to schools by the Department of Education staff to supervise the implementation of the norms and regulations of the clinical practice.

The unit's Clinical Experiences Handbook was developed by candidates and university and school-based clinical faculty. Specific meetings, discussion groups, interviews, and other activities were completed to ensure ample discussion of the content that was finally approved.

Each semester, the university-based and school-based clinical faculty collaboratively report on the achievements, concerns, and recommendations related to the clinical practicum. The number of meetings held between the university professors and the school personnel, as well as the visits to the candidates, are reported. In these meetings, the procedures of the clinical experiences, options for placement of candidates, course content, the assessment instruments, the evaluation process, and other related aspects are thoroughly discussed. This process also involves the participation of the Advising Committee. This body was created to guide the College of Education in aspects related to field experiences, practicum, and any other experiences which may be developed.

School and university- based clinical faculty jointly assess the candidates' achievement of ten competencies during the clinical experience using the Clinical Practicum Evaluation Instrument and other assessment processes which were developed and revised through collaboration between the unit and its partners. The data is summarized, analyzed, and discussed in clinical faculty meetings, and clinical faculty, in turn, discuss the information with the school based personnel. This information is gathered by academic programs and is compared to previous semesters to monitor and establish trends related to the preparation of teacher candidates.

Moreover, the unit and its partners collaborate in determining how and where candidates are placed for field and clinical experiences. In this process, the unit's role is to identify those settings that will provide the best possible field or clinical experience for candidates using various criteria. First, rules and regulations provided by the PRDE for field experience and clinical practicum sites, as well as input provided by the other partners, serve as a basis or guide for the placements. A second criterion used is experience of candidates in the sites. Veteran field and clinical faculty will usually evaluate past experiences with field or clinical centers to determine which will serve as the best scenarios for candidate placement. Aspects such as capacity for role modeling and critical reflection on behalf of school based clinical faculty are

essential for selecting field and clinical centers. Within these best scenarios, field and clinical faculty must ensure that candidates have opportunities to experience diverse settings that will enable them to have a full understanding of the educational system spectrum. Within this criterion, clinical faculty at the unit level also consider the needs of candidates to place them in an environment suited to fulfill such needs. This is particularly true for candidates that have special needs or live in distant or hard to reach areas.

The unit initiates and maintains communication channels open with partners to facilitate candidate placement through visits by clinical faculty to prospective centers to discuss with school-based faculty on expectations for candidate placement. Documentation is provided to school based personnel on the objectives and requirements of field and clinical experience, as well as instruments and criteria used to evaluate the candidates, information on the conceptual framework of the CoE and information on candidate profiles. For the clinical practicum, all candidates are jointly assigned to a certified cooperating teacher within an appropriate school according to their discipline and school level.

All field experiences and clinical practice are structured in a continuum to ensure candidates develop the necessary skills and knowledge that best prepares them for their role as future teachers. The sharing of expertise and resources between the unit and school partners related to field experiences occurs mostly at the level of pre-practicum or Methods course, in which the candidates become involved in teaching activities. Professors of the methods course communicate with teachers to discuss possible learning experiences for each candidate. During the clinical practicum, the formative evaluation process of candidates' performance provides the best scenario for the unit and its partners to share expertise and resources to support candidates' learning. During this process, they collaboratively assess the candidates' initial stages of performance in order to recommend educational strategies and interventions that may assist them in improving their overall performance. This formative evaluation process is guided by clear competencies which are included in the field and clinical evaluation documents that have been developed for these experiences. During clinical experiences, a minimum of three meetings per semester are required for candidate evaluation. Here, the candidate and the school and university -based clinical faculty meet to reflect upon diverse aspects related to the experience. The most important outcome of these meetings is the dialogic and reflective process that takes place which will result in recommendations and assurances on behalf of the candidate, the unit, and partners to advance identified strengths and improve on weak areas.

The CoE Handbook for Clinical Practicum, as well as the syllabi for each course in which a field experience is required, and for the clinical practice, indicates how field and clinical experiences are aligned with the proficiencies outlined in the CoE conceptual framework. This framework is aligned with the PRDE standards for teachers, the professional standards of the program areas, and the strategic plan of the UPRRP campus. Each specific teacher preparation program has identified the competencies that candidates should evidence upon completion of their field

experience and clinical practice. This includes programs that have internal institutional evaluation as well as programs subject to SPA.

This continuum of alignments was developed to systematically ensure that all candidates have the appropriate experiences at each stage, as well as to systematically gather data on the performance of candidates. A unit-wide rubric has been developed for each core field experience to assess candidate proficiencies. A main area of emphasis included during the revision of the field experiences was the integration of criteria to assess candidate dispositions as it is considered that dispositions must be demonstrated through candidate performance in real settings.

Faculty require candidates to prepare reports on their field experiences according to guidelines based on the evaluation criteria, which in turn are based on the expected candidate proficiencies for each experience. The evaluation of the report is included in the course grading process. Gathering of assessment data on field experiences started during 2009, when the first field experience level was fully implemented. This data is gathered and entered into the unit's central database to prepare aggregated data reports that are analyzed by faculty to determine the development of proficiencies in candidates and improve field experiences.

The assessment of the candidate proficiencies during the clinical practicum is a formative and summative process based on the use of the unit-wide evaluation instrument, which includes a rubric to assess performance levels of each of the ten competencies. Candidates are assessed by the cooperating teacher and the faculty supervisor based on direct observation of candidate performing teaching roles and evidences.

The use of technology as an instructional tool is established as one of the ten Principles and Competencies of unit's conceptual framework. To ensure that all candidates use technology as an instructional tool, various strategies are carried out. First, all candidates are required to take a 3-credit course on the use of technology for instruction during the initial stage of their academic preparation process. This course, which is adapted for the preschool, elementary and high school level, includes a ten-hour field experience in a school in which candidates carry out a participant observation activity related to the use of technology in the instructional process. Candidates prepare reports on this experience and are evaluated with a unit-wide assessment instrument.

An additional systemic strategy to promote the proficiency of candidates in the use of technology as an instructional tool is the inclusion of assistive technology as a main topic in course EDES 4006: Nature and needs of students with special needs, which is a core course required by all candidates. Furthermore, since 2005 candidates initiating their clinical experience are required to take a four- hour seminar on assistive technology followed by a two-hour workshop on the use of these technologies. Under this initiative, candidates are encouraged to borrow computer lap-tops with adapted programs to meet the needs of their students requiring special education. Since 2008, all special education candidates are required

to take a full course on the use of adapted technologies in order for them to improve outcomes for their students EDES 3205: Assistive Technology for Students with Special Needs. Finally, all candidates are required to integrate technology as an instructional tool during the clinical practicum, as it is one of the ten main competencies that is evaluated through the unit wide Clinical Practicum Evaluation Instrument, which includes a rubric on this competency that is used to assess the performance of all candidates.

The P-12 Clinical Practice Rubric for advanced programs includes two items related to knowledge about, and ability to apply, technology in their practices. Moreover, since within their programs of study candidates are expected to constantly use technology, the expectation is that technology is used in all academic activities in which they engage themselves, including clinical practices and field experiences.

Due to the nature of their discipline, the Special Education Program candidates are required to become acquainted with the assistive technology available for students and candidates with special needs. The School of Education has its own Assistive Technology Laboratory, from which candidates can familiarize themselves with the different technologies available for individuals with disabilities.

All field experiences from initial, to development and refinement are structured to provide time for candidate reflection and feedback from professors. As part of the field experience description presented and discussed with candidates at the beginning of each course, candidates are provided guidelines to reflect upon and make connections between what they are learning in terms of the principles, competencies and dispositions related to the course and their practices in the field experience, and to identify actions to improve their practices.

In the clinical practicum, ongoing reflection of the candidates about their educational practice is stressed, particularly through Competencies 8 and 9- Professional and personal proficiency, which state that "The candidate will reflect on his professional responsibilities, evaluate the impact that his or her decisions and actions have on other members of the academic community (students, parents, administrators, other professionals), and the general community, and as a result actively engages in his professional development". To facilitate reflection of candidates as a continuous process, the university clinical supervisor, together with the school-based clinical faculty and the candidate discuss ways in which to promote effective reflection as an integral part of the clinical practicum, and evaluate the candidates' reflective practices as part of the formative and summative evaluation process. Also, the university faculty supervisors encourage reflective discussions among candidates during the periodic seminars and other meetings among candidates, and maintain close communication with the candidates and the school based clinical faculty through email, online discussions, and telephone calls to support candidate reflection. Another important opportunity to encourage reflection among candidates is provided through the 3 Professional Reflective Seminars required for all candidates in which they develop their electronic portfolios. In all three seminars, reflection on field experiences or clinical practicum is encouraged and supported.

Candidates present reflections on their learning on each principle and professors provide feedback to encourage and guide further candidate growth.

The CoE field experiences and clinical practicum continuum is designed to emphasize the development of knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions among all candidates to prepare them as teachers for helping all students learn, as envisioned in the CoE Conceptual Framework. In alignment with this Framework, the assessment of candidate performance in field and clinical experiences systematically focuses on these capacities through a set of instruments used by all professors in the pertinent courses, and clinical supervisors and cooperating teachers that include specific rubrics addressing these aspects. The particular ways in which candidates are expected to demonstrate their dispositions towards helping all students learn throughout their practice in the field experiences, and on which they are directly assessed include the following: the candidate develops learning environments that are sensitive to diversity and encourage active learning, positive social interaction, collaboration, integration of technologies, collaboration with others, and self-evaluation to facilitate the intellectual social and personal development of all students; and the candidate plans teaching and assessment to address the diverse characteristics of their students considering their social contexts and development processes.

For the clinical practicum, the rubrics for Competencies 2 (seeking information to know students and their diverse needs), 3 (planning instruction according to students' needs), 4 (creating a classroom environment that promotes learning among all students), and 5 (assessing student learning considering their needs), are particularly related to the candidates' development in planning, teaching and assessment of all students. Furthermore, the unit stresses in Competence 10- the development of interactions and collaborations within the school and community to promote learning of all students. The unit's process for assessing candidate development in their ability to work with and promote learning of all students in field experiences and clinical practicum requires that faculty members submit a final report every semester and this data is aggregated and examined to determine the unit's effectiveness in promoting these knowledge, skills and dispositions among all candidates. The initial data collected through the assessment system on knowledge, skills and dispositions through the recently implemented field experience and clinical practicum continuum indicate that candidates are evidencing adequate development. The Evaluation Instrument of the Clinical Practicum that is used by all clinical faculty supervisors and cooperating teachers has been recently revised to strengthen the importance of addressing the learning needs of all students in each of the 10 competencies.

During the field experience of the second semester of the Pre-practicum or Methods course, as well as throughout the clinical practicum, all candidates become highly involved in the design of assessment methods and instruments, including modifications and adaptations, the collection and analysis of data on student learning, reflecting on the data and improving student learning. In the Methods course, one of the major tasks required of all candidates is the design and

implementation of a unit plan that must include the development of assessment instruments, the collection and analysis of data on student learning, and reflection on results to improve student learning. All candidates must prepare a report on this experience with evidence of the student performance, which is evaluated by the professor according to the field experience criteria that include: collection of data on student learning and reflecting on the results, planning of interventions based on the results to help all students learn, and implementation of an assessment system for the continuous assessment and improvement of learning of all students, and development and implementation of several assessment strategies that consider the diverse needs of students.

During the clinical practicum, all candidates become fully involved in planning and implementing instruction and assessment of student learning, under the coaching and supervision of the school based and university clinical faculty. All candidates must keep evidence of the plans and assessments they design and implement, the results of student learning, their analysis and presentation of results of student learning, and actions they take to address the learning needs identified through the assessment process, and present periodic reports for evaluation of their performance. This evidence is thoroughly assessed by the school based and university supervising faculty, who provide ongoing feedback to candidates to support their improvement. The Evaluation Instrument of Clinical Practicum includes Assessment of Student Learning as one of the ten competencies that all candidates must evidence to complete the practicum. The rubric components include that the candidate will develop, design, select, and adapt diverse assessment methods to evidence student learning, will analyze, present, and communicate results to students for their improvement and modify their teaching practices to further enhance student learning.

The development of a systematic formative and summative evaluation process to assess the development of all candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions has been a key feature of the clinical practicum in the CoE. The Clinical Practicum Evaluation Instrument has been revised through several iterations with the participation of university clinical supervisors, school based cooperating teachers, and candidates (See Exhibit Validation of the Evaluation Instrument of the Clinical Practicum) and trends in the results of the summative evaluation have been tracked during the past three years to identify trends in the development of the unit candidates.