



MEMO

TO: University Supervisors

FROM: Cheryl Hanley Maxwell, Associate Dean

DATE: September 1, 2009

RE: STUDENT TEACHING, CERTIFICATION, AND OTHER
PROFESSIONAL LICENSING

Here is some important information regarding the evaluation of students seeking to become teachers or licensed professionals in the School of Education fields.

Background

Students enter student teaching or other clinical field placements near the end of academic programs in which they have made substantial investment of time and money. Therefore, as with all other academic decisions affecting program majors, the decisions regarding teaching certification or grades in student teaching courses must not be made arbitrarily. The students have access to the School of Education grievance policy. So your decisions may be reviewed by the Schools' grievance committee and ultimately a court of law. The grievance panel making a recommendation to the Dean of the School, in most situations, will look closely to make sure that students who received less than satisfactory grades were informed of the performance expectations and given opportunities to improve their performance. It is important to remember that student teaching and other field placements are learning experiences for students; in most cases, the students should have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

It is important that students be informed at the beginning of and throughout the experience what standards of performance are expected (both teaching skills and ethical responsibilities) and how they will be evaluated. Where notice of performance standards has been given and opportunity to improve has been provided, it is less likely that a grievance panel or court would reverse a decision not to certify a student who has been found to lack the skills needed to function as an educational professional.

Performance feedback

Students should receive regular appraisals of their performance in placement settings. While daily interactions by cooperating school personnel and university staff supervising the experience is extremely valuable, systematic, regularly scheduled feedback to the students is required. We recommend scheduling formal conferences several times during the placement to address areas needing improvement. Consult the director of your program for specific information about the number of required formal evaluations. Written evaluation forms prepared by the program are typically used during the formal evaluations. If the program does not include a written evaluation form, the university staff should retain a record of the points covered during the conference. A decision not to recommend a student for certification or to remove the student from a placement must be accompanied by a written report that details the reasons for the decision.

It is important that the same criteria and evaluation system be used for all students in each program. Students who are similarly situated should be treated in the same manner. Faculty and staff have an obligation not to certify students who have not met the performance standards skills necessary for teaching in their field. The use of the same criteria and evaluation system for students in each program and the documentation of conferences with students about performance will assist in making and sustaining these difficult decisions.

Course grades

Given a highly competitive job market, importance also is attached to the grades received by students in their professional courses. Using a standard system for the evaluation of performance in pre-teaching courses also helps to ensure that challenges to these grades can be answered. Over the years, challenges to grades and certification decisions that have been filed under the School's grievance system have been decided in favor of program staff, except where the student has shown that inadequate feedback was given or that an evaluation of the student on grounds other than those used for all students were shown.

Other areas of concern

When problems arise regarding the progress of a student enrolled in certification courses, field experience supervisors should work with their supervising faculty member or program coordinator in an effort to address the problems at the lowest level possible. If concerns cannot be resolved at this level, it is important that Education Academic Services (262-1651) be contacted as soon as possible. You should work with your supervising faculty member or program coordinator to make this contact. E.A.S. can advise university and school staff regarding the best way to handle such issues and may consult other professionals on campus as needed.

In any evaluation of a student's work where subjective judgments must be used, it is inevitable that complaints will arise. The recommendations contained in this memo are intended to increase communication between staff and students and avoid difficult situations. Although the success of each appeal depends on the facts of the situation, following these recommendations is likely to result in responsible and equitable decision making which will be sustained up appeal.