

From Compliance to Engagement: Lessons Learned from Applying a Transformational Approach to Addressing NCATE Standard 4-Diversity

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In March 2007, Florida Atlantic University hosted a joint NCATE/ Florida Department of Education site visit. This successful site visit and following Unit Accreditation Board report resulted in full NCATE accreditation with only one weakness cited. The weakness related to the implementation of the College's assessment system at the Advanced Levels. This article documents how the professional education unit at the University successfully addressed NCATE Standard 4-Diversity. While the focus of this article is to address Standard 4, it is impossible to understand how Florida Atlantic University's College of Education responded to this standard in isolation from the entire self-study journey. This process was rewarding but at times painful as faculty and administrators struggled to identify how the College's beliefs and practices aligned with an assessment system that would adequately capture the essence of who we are and what we do as professionals and as a unit. Over several months, initial group discussions and work sessions yielded an informal consensus of issues worthy of exploration. The culmination of this work resulted in a

process where isolated issues were woven into interconnected themes involving faculty, students, administrators, staff, and stakeholders within and outside the College. When viewed as a system, these themes revealed a College transitioning from a culture of compliance to a culture of engagement.

Our primary purpose was not to document compliance but to use the enormous effort of the self-study as a springboard to self-improvement through reflective assessment-based decision-making at all levels. Our goal was to build an infrastructure of collaborative decision-making and continuous improvement in the College at the program, department, and unit levels that would be sustained for years to come. It was through this lens that the College approached NCATE Standard 4 as well as all NCATE and Florida Department of Education standards.

Unit Commitment to Diversity

The College of Education has a longstanding commitment to diversity. It is impossible to completely understand this commitment without conducting an examination of the context where the University operates. Worldwide economic, cultural, and social conditions are changing the demographic composition of our society. South Florida is a clear example of how shifting demographics are having a profound impact on the mission and the profile of educational institutions. The University serves the multicultural communities of the southeastern coast of Florida stretching from Miami to Port St. Lucie. This area includes three of the largest school districts in the nation: Dade County; Broward County; and Palm Beach County. Unit faculty and staff live, work, and embrace this commitment.

The College's program of study and the diversity of its students, faculty and staff are exemplified in the unit's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) efforts. In the mid-1990s, the College was the first in Florida to develop a state-approved infused ESOL endorsement for all Elementary Education graduates. Due to this groundbreaking effort, the embedded ESOL endorsement is now required of all state-approved programs in Florida that offer initial and advanced Elementary Education, Exceptional Student Education, and Secondary English Education programs.

Assumptions

While it is not the purpose of this article to describe the unit's conceptual framework, it is relevant for the reader to understand

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the assumptions that the College used in the development of this framework, which was prepared in a collaborative effort over a period of two years. In this process, the following underlying assumptions were identified:

- Technology will continue to be an evolving, pervasive presence in learning throughout the world;;
- Society will become more diverse;
- Society will continue to change, which will require life-long learning and re-adjustment to evolving conditions for our graduates;
- Competition will continue to increase, and we must be willing to develop dynamic, creative, and proactive responses to the needs of our constituencies; and
- Accountability is here to stay and will foster a culture of continuous assessment in schools and universities.

The importance and significance of these assumptions were not to be underestimated, and in fact they became the integral thread through all ensuing processes.

Self-Study Ethos

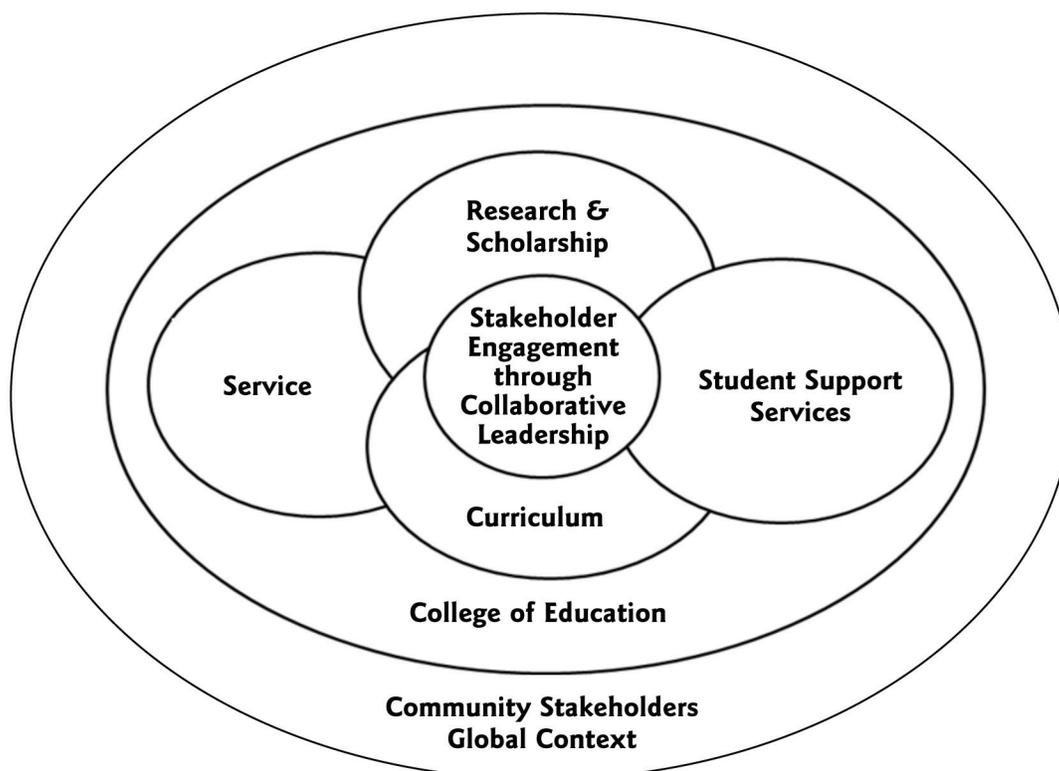
The self-study was taken as an opportunity to go beyond compliance with external re-accreditation requirements, a process which could have been approached from a linear perspective that Argyris and Schön (1978) have defined as single-loop learning. In this approach, change does not affect the values and overall culture of an organization and, once incremental improvements have been incorporated in response to an external mandate or from senior management, the tendency is to go back to operating in business-as-usual

mode. In view of the identified assumptions and their connection to the rapidly changing social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental global context within which higher education as a whole is currently operating (NCEE 2007), it was felt that a transformational approach would be more purposeful, and especially relevant to issues of diversity.

More meaningful change within the culture of the College, termed double-loop learning by Argyris and Schön (1978), would not only seek to modify and improve performance results, but also serve to challenge traditional approaches to change. This process would also bring into question the underlying purposes, values, assumptions, and beliefs of the College community with regard to what constitutes a quality education. Given the values-laden nature of diversity, this would be especially relevant to the issues addressed in NCATE Standard 4. This transformational process was deliberately designed to engage College faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders in a more purposeful change effort crossing existing barriers of individual sociocultural idiosyncrasies and academic disciplines. It was therefore necessary not only to bring faculty, staff, students, community, and other stakeholders to the table, but also to empower them in the process that the authors defined as collective wisdom in action, an approach which underscored Webber's (1993) assertion that in the present time conversations are the most important form of work.

From the outset, it was apparent that the College did not function as a cohesive unit. It became clear that the complex tensions arising from issues of governance; accountability and assessment; promotion and tenure; current core curricula; accreditation; data management;

Figure 1
Proposed Collaborative Leadership Model Integrating
All Departments and Units in a Common Purpose



decision-making processes; budgetary priorities; grade inflation; diversity; social justice; ethics; economics; environment; technology; and online instruction could not be effectively resolved through a linear, incremental approach.

Consequently, for purposes of the self-study, it was critical to create a collegial culture of engagement applying a collaborative decision-making process where the College, its departments, and individual faculty members were responsive to the challenges of the global environment. The resolution of these tensions was only possible through the establishment of a dynamic balance between individual and common agendas (Glaser 1993), which in turn was the result of instilling the process with an ethical imperative capable of allowing all stakeholders to participate in an honest revision of the organization's underlying values (Burns 1978).

Authentic, meaningful, long-lasting transformation in institutions of higher education is often derailed by issues of tenure, departmental agendas, external pressures, scarce resources, and tradition (Earley 2005, Kezar 2008). While historically higher education has embraced shared governance models, faculty reward structures have prioritized individual faculty agendas. Attention to issues that address common institutional needs, such as those presented during accreditation self-studies, compete with a governance structure that rewards individual

faculty productivity in research, service, and instruction. The consequence of this culture is fragmentation of academic programs; lack of support for shared research and service initiatives; and a resulting disconnect from issues of diversity and the global context. The model proposed as having the greatest potential to unify the College's mission and practice, using the accreditation process as a pilot, consisted of a collaborative leadership framework as depicted in Figure 1.

Self-Study Organizational Structure

To foster an environment of engagement where collective wisdom could balance tensions and competing issues, it was necessary to create a self-study organizational structure that would facilitate an effective transformational model. In keeping with this focus, the organizational structure had to ensure horizontal and vertical articulation of the work to be accomplished. As a result, the NCATE Co-chairs recommended to the College Executive Committee the formal creation of a multilevel, interdisciplinary self-study organizational structure that was unanimously approved. (See Figure 2.) This structure defined how the work was to be delegated and established the communication systems across the College that would enable the most effective implementation of the self-study.

Figure 2
NCATE Committees Organizational Chart

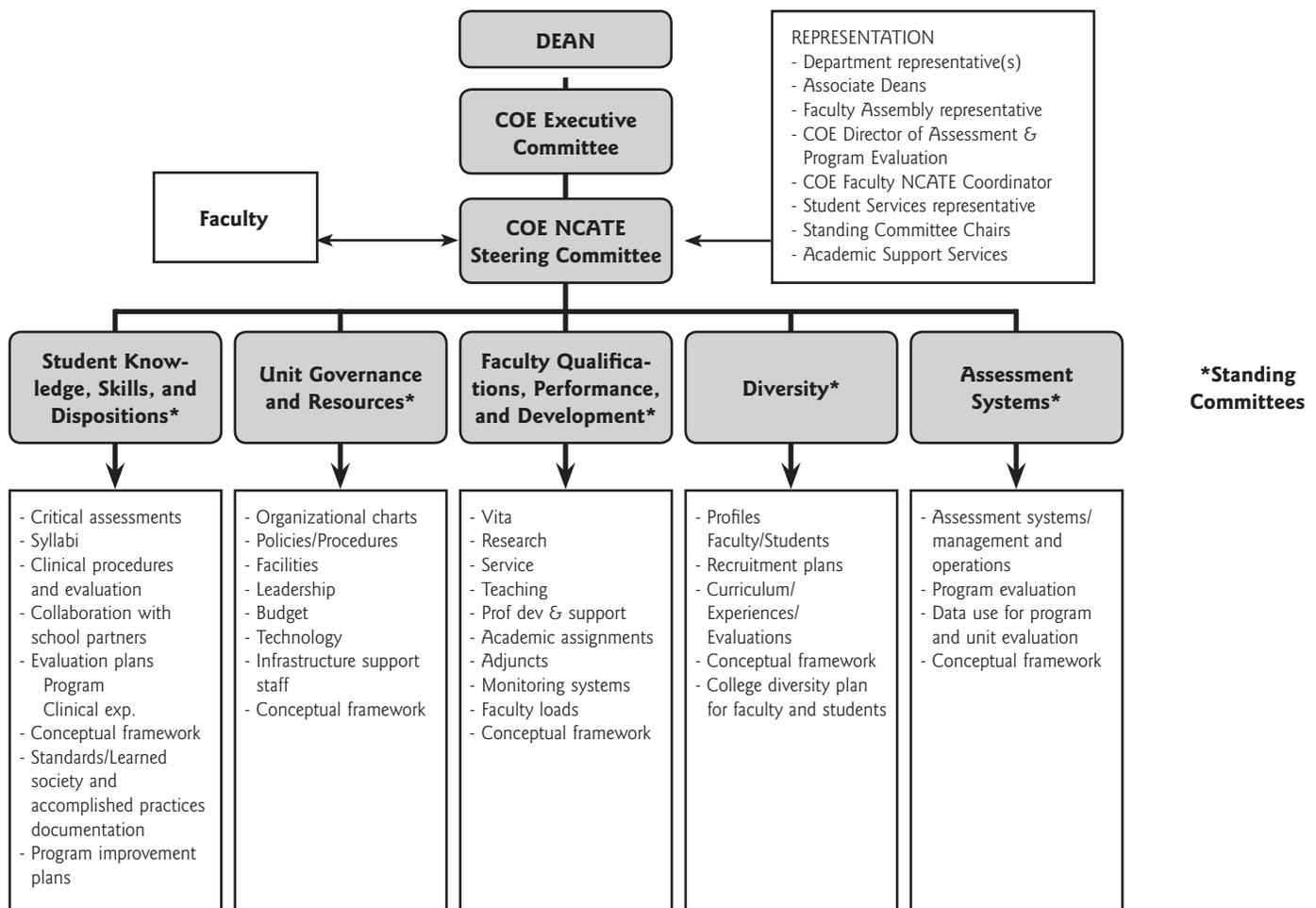
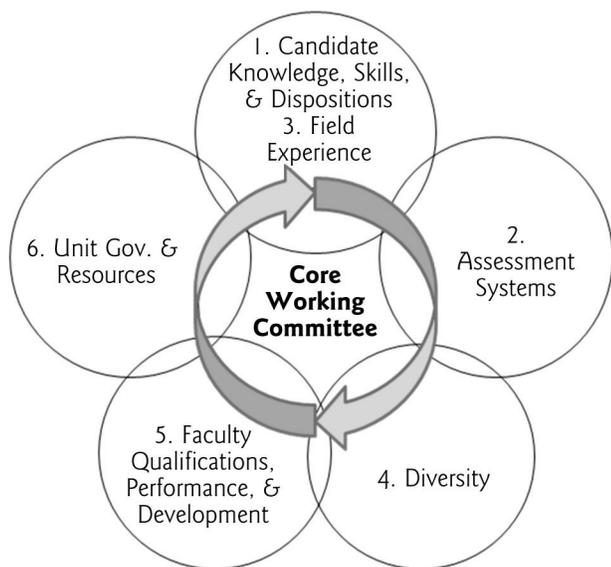


Figure 3
Ad hoc Operational Structure for Authentic Engagement by NCATE Standards 1-6



The goal-setting and oversight of the process was assigned to a steering committee. Standing committees, consisting of representatives of all academic units, were assigned NCATE standards to address while tasks and timelines were identified. The steering committee consisted of the chairs of all standing committees, department chairs, as well as associate deans. The NCATE Co-chairs and the Unit Assessment Director served as *ex-officio* members of all committees. This organizational structure, as depicted in Figure 2, allowed for themes and issues to be interconnected and reinforced throughout the process.

To facilitate the process, it was agreed that the transformational model required the support of a small core working committee. Consisting of the NCATE Co-chairs (one administrator and one faculty member), the Director of Assessment and Program Evaluation, and a Systems Manager, the committee served as *ex-officio* members of the standing committees. To ensure the full engagement of all stakeholders, the adequate coordination of the standing committees, and provision of progress reports to the NCATE Steering Committee, an ad hoc structure was created with the Core Working Committee at its operational center. (See Figure 3). For purposes of the self-study report, it can be seen in Figure 3 that one standing committee addressed both standards 1 (Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions) and 3 (Field Experience and Clinical Practice) while other standing committees addressed a single standard.

Unit Diversity Committee

As determined by the self-study organizational structure and purposes, the Unit Diversity Committee was charged with the responsibility to oversee the College's diversity planning for faculty, staff, and students, as well as the College's commitment to preparing professionals for a diverse environment. This committee was composed of one member from each College academic department as well as a member from the College Office of Academic and Student Services. The chair of the committee also represented the unit on the

University Diversity Committee and the College NCATE Steering Committee. The members of the committee acted as liaisons to their academic departments to ensure that committee recommendations were considered in light of department diversity plans and curricular offerings.

The Unit Diversity Committee outlined the following tasks for the self-study:

- Conduct an audit of academic programs related to diversity issues including a review of syllabi and candidate performance on diversity-related competency assessments;
- Collect and analyze aggregated and disaggregated data on students, programs, and faculty;
- Review existing diversity plans, goals, and policies;
- Prepare recommendations to departments and the College regarding diversity issues and policies;
- Conduct an audit of field experience, practicum, and student teaching/internship experiences with regard to the diversity of placement and candidate assessments;
- Conduct an analysis of stakeholder satisfaction surveys related to the preparation of candidates to effectively address multicultural issues and engage diverse students and school communities.

In order to fulfill these tasks and to ensure that decision-making was based on accurate and timely information, it was necessary to provide the committee with relevant data in each of the identified areas. For example, it was important to identify and map the demographics of the university's broad service area. This information served as a benchmark to compare demographic data within programs, departments, and the unit as a whole. Further, this led to an interest in understanding how school district personnel across the university's broad service area view graduates in terms of their ability to work with a diverse student population. It was also important to know how diversity of the College faculty, staff, and students compared to other colleges within the university, and to universities across the state and the nation.

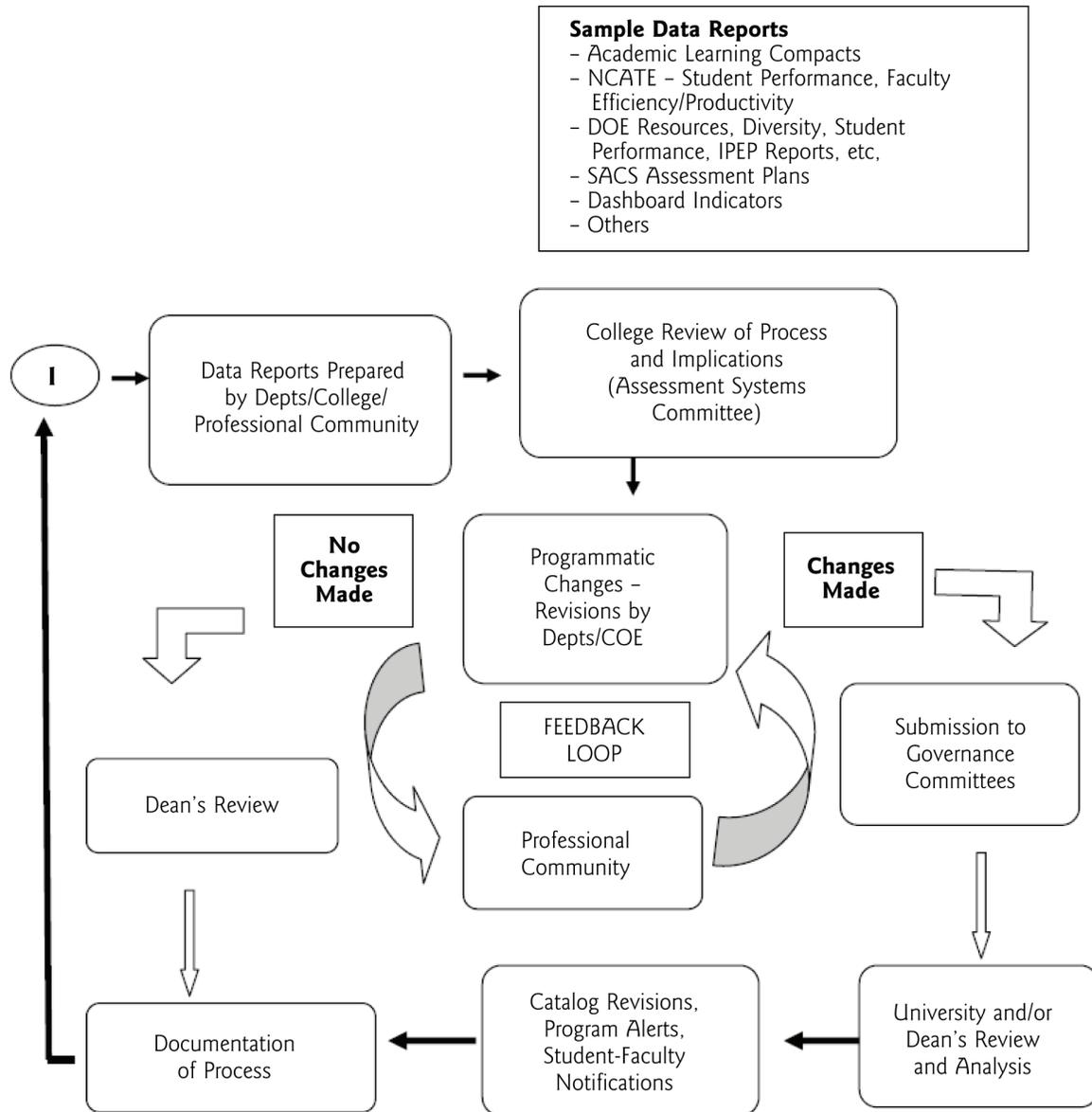
These and numerous other questions required the design and implementation of a comprehensive data collection and management system. As with the remaining committees involved in the self-study, a shared process used for data-informed decision-making was delineated in the unit's Data Assessment System as depicted in Figure 4. Comprehensive aggregated and disaggregated data reports on faculty, staff, and students were presented to committee members for purposes of detailed analysis and discussion. All reports provided a summary and analysis noting areas where further attention was needed.

Reflecting on the Process and Outcomes

Application of the transformational model includes the need to reflect on the process and outcomes that resulted from the self-study. Now that three years have elapsed since the re-accreditation visit, it is well worthwhile to reflect on the intended and unanticipated outcomes of the work of the Diversity Committee during this time. The following summarizes a few of these results:

- The Establishment of a College Diversity Committee
 The work of the Diversity Committee during the self-study was viewed by faculty and administration to be so valuable that the faculty voted to establish a permanent committee

Figure 4
College of Education Data Assessment Process (Adopted December 2006)



in the College's Policies and Procedures. Consequently, the work of this committee continues today.

- The Adoption of a College Diversity Plan

Based upon the recommendations of the Diversity Committee, the College adopted a diversity plan entitled "The Recruitment and Retention of Under-represented Faculty, Staff, and Student Candidates for the Development of a Diverse Learning Community of Learners." While a prior plan existed in the College, this plan differed greatly because of the efforts and attention given to retention. In this document, the following values, beliefs, and priorities of the College are clearly stated as follows:

The College of Education faculty values inclusiveness and diversity. Further, given the pluralistic and multi-ethnic makeup of the South Florida region that

this university serves, we believe that it is essential that our faculty, non-instructional staff and students reflect this diversity. As such, it is incumbent upon the College to be pro-active in seeking outstanding members of underrepresented groups as faculty, non-instructional staff and students (candidates). Not only is the College of Education committed to securing and maintaining a diverse faculty, non-instructional staff and student body, we are also committed to ensuring that these individuals are provided the best possible opportunities to learn and grow.

- The Creation of an Annual Diversity Report

This report is prepared using data from the latest census, institution, state department of education, and school

districts. It is often used in the preparation of grant proposals, state reports, and candidate placement in clinical experiences.

- The Establishment of a Data Tracking System for Clinical Placements

To monitor the ethnic diversity of schools where candidates are placed, a comprehensive data tracking system was established to implement a large clinical placement system in multiple school districts. Protocols were established to ensure that all candidates are provided diverse settings in their multiple field placements during early field experiences, practicum, and student teaching/internships. These systems aid the College during the complex process of working with school district personnel to place candidates in multiple school districts.

Planned strategies to increase the College's support of diversity efforts have been complemented and extended by ongoing faculty-led initiatives that are having a significant impact on the College's culture. There has been a marked increase in diversity-focused lectures, seminars, and workshops in the College. Leading scholars in the field of diversity and multicultural education have been invited to visit and interact with our faculty and candidates. Faculty have also taken a leadership role in university-sponsored diversity events related to issues of gender, social justice, globalization, and multiculturalism.

While many planned changes occurred as part of the routine NCATE self-study process, profound, more subtle, long-lasting changes are reflected in the new dimensions that daily work has taken on for faculty, staff, and students. If the self-study had been driven from a compliance perspective rather than through the adoption of a transformational model, this unanticipated momentum may never have resulted. Diversity is now firmly embodied in the mindset of the College and is embedded in the renewed purpose of the College as we go about our mission in the areas of research, service and teaching.

The self-study process was successful on two levels. On a basic level, the institution successfully complied with all NCATE requirements for re-accreditation. On a second, deeper level, the transformational model adopted for the self-study process allowed for authentic conversations regarding diversity across disciplines, departments, hierarchical structures, and cultural differences among our candidates, our faculty, our staff, and our multiple stakeholders. These conversations continue today, and they have had a transforming effect on the College's culture as a whole.

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