

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Division of Legislative Audit



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SUMMARY OF: A Special Report on the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education, Selected Issues, August 16, 2007.

### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

In accordance with Title 24 of the Alaska Statutes and a special request by the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee, we have conducted a performance audit of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education (SOE). The primary objective of our audit was to determine if the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education is consistently applying admittance requirements for the school's teaching programs. The secondary objective was to confirm students of the undergraduate student teaching program have all passed the competency examinations – *Praxis I* prior to graduation.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Beginning in July 1998, state law required applicants for teaching certificates to pass competency examinations. The examinations eventually incorporated into state regulations were a group of tests referred to collectively as *Praxis I*.

The *Praxis Series* is administered by, and is a trademark of the Educational Testing Service (ETS). ETS provides the *Praxis Series* examinations to states to be used as part of their teacher licensing process. *Praxis I* is a series of tests that assess academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. *Praxis II* essentially assesses subject-specific knowledge.

To help ensure that students would meet the standards for obtaining a state teaching certificate, the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – SOE made passing *Praxis I* an admission requirement for its student teaching programs. SOE's teaching programs involve both instructional study and classroom teaching work in a school district setting.

Starting with spring 1999 admission cycle for the 1999-2000 school year, undergraduate applicants were admitted into SOE's teaching program with the provision they pass *Praxis I* before starting work in school classrooms. In spring 2004, SOE began to require undergraduate applicants to submit their passing *Praxis I* scores with their application for admission.

## REPORT CONCLUSIONS

We concluded that SOE consistently followed its admission requirements; and, since the implementation of *Praxis I* at SOE, all but one graduate of the degreed teaching program required to pass the competency examinations did so. These conclusions are discussed further as follows:

### SOE has consistently followed its admission requirements for its student teaching programs

For the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, SOE consistently followed its admission requirements for its various student teaching programs. All admitted applicants submitted the required admission documents; admitted faculty reviews were completed; and, all admitted applicants passed *Praxis I*.

### With one exception, graduates of the degreed teaching program passed the competency exams when required by the SOE

In our review of the 229 graduates of the student teaching degree program since the 1999-2000 school year, we identified 17 graduates that did so without passing *Praxis I*. Fifteen graduates were not required to pass the competency examinations because their SOE admittance date was prior to the implementation of the *Praxis* requirement. One graduate was not required to pass the tests because she was a transfer student who already had student teaching credits. The last graduate in question was required to pass *Praxis I* but did not do so. Except for the one error that occurred during the implementation year of *Praxis*, graduates of the degreed teaching program have passed competency exams when required by SOE.

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August 31, 2007

Members of the Legislative Budget  
and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24 of the Alaska Statutes, the attached report is submitted for your review.

### UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA, FAIRBANKS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION SELECTED ISSUES

August 16, 2007

Audit Control Number

45-30045-07

The primary objective of our audit was to determine if the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education is consistently applying admittance requirements for the school’s teaching programs. The secondary objective was to confirm students of the undergraduate teaching program have all passed the competency examinations – *Praxis I* prior to graduation.

The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government audit standards. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the findings and discussion presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology.

Pat Davidson, CPA  
Legislative Auditor



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# OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In accordance with Title 24 of the Alaska Statutes and a special request by the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee, we have conducted a performance audit of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education (SOE).

## Objectives

The primary objective of our audit was to determine if SOE is consistently applying admittance requirements for the school's teaching programs. The secondary objective was to confirm students of the undergraduate student teaching program have all passed the competency examinations – *Praxis I* prior to graduation.

## Scope and Methodology

We reviewed the SOE admission criteria and process to its teaching programs. We reviewed the state statutes and regulations concerning teaching certificates.

We reviewed 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 applicant records for the SOE teaching programs. Specifically, we examined SOE student files, including the admittance evaluations and *Praxis* scores for 57 applicants to the elementary undergraduate program; 18 applicants from the elementary post baccalaureate program; and, 71 applicants from the secondary post baccalaureate program.

We examined the financial audit working papers of the University of Alaska's (UA) external financial auditor regarding the UA computer (Banner) system.

We obtained UA Banner graduate data from the 1999-2000 school year through 2006-2007 school year; and, reviewed the *Praxis* scores of these graduates. We also reviewed online Banner data when applicable.

We conducted interviews with SOE staff and faculty; and, Department of Education and Early Development personnel.

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## ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

The University of Alaska (UA) was established by the Alaska Constitution, Article VII, Section 2, and by AS 14.40 as the state university. The UA is administered by the President and Board of Regents. The Board of Regents is appointed by the Governor, while the UA President is appointed by the Board of Regents. University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF) is a major administrative unit of the UA system. The Chancellor serves as chief executive officer for UAF. A Dean is appointed to each college or school.

Currently, UAF's academic units are:

- College of Engineering and Mines
- College of Liberal Arts
- College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics
- College of Rural and Community Development
- School of Education
- School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences
- School of Management
- School of National Resources and Agricultural Sciences

### UAF School of Education

The UAF School of Education (SOE) is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE<sup>1</sup> is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that establishes standards for teacher education programs and holds accredited institutions accountable for meeting the standards. NCATE works with states to integrate national professional standards and state standards in upgrading the quality of teacher preparation in the United States.

SOE offers three teaching programs:

- an undergraduate elementary education degree program;
- an elementary education post baccalaureate licensure program; and,
- a secondary education post baccalaureate licensure program.

The two post baccalaureate licensure programs are for individuals that previously have earned a college degree and now want to be licensed to teach. SOE also offers a master's degree program and a nonteaching, undergraduate degree program. A key distinction

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<sup>1</sup>The U.S. Department of Education recognizes NCATE as a professional accrediting body.

between SOE's teaching and nonteaching programs is the former requires completion of a student teaching program while the latter does not.

Currently, students completing the undergraduate elementary teaching program receive a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Students who complete the post baccalaureate licensure programs receive a certificate of program completion. Students completing the SOE student teaching programs are then eligible to apply for an Alaska teaching certificate.

In order to be placed into a student teaching program, applicants must go through the formal admittance process involving various requirements. Currently, the student teaching program starts in the fall after an applicant has been admitted.

SOE expects its students to demonstrate and meet proficiencies during their student teaching program. Appendix A is a table prepared by SOE listing standards used in the assessment of students. Students are assessed at transition points during the program, regarding their abilities to meet the combined Alaska and SOE teacher standards. NCATE<sup>2</sup> reviews SOE assessment of students and its evidence of competent teacher candidate performances.

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<sup>2</sup>The next scheduled NCATE examination and visit to SOE will be in September 2009.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Beginning in July 1998, state law<sup>3</sup> required applicants for teaching certificates to pass competency examinations. The examinations eventually incorporated into state regulations were a group of tests referred to collectively as *Praxis I*.<sup>4</sup> This formal adoption of *Praxis* into regulation essentially ratified Department of Education's<sup>5</sup> practice of using *Praxis* as the competency examinations required by the new law.

The *Praxis Series* is administered by, and a trademark of, the Educational Testing Service (ETS). ETS provides the *Praxis Series* examinations to states to be used as part of their teacher licensing process. *Praxis I* is a series of tests that assess academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. *Praxis II* essentially assesses subject-specific knowledge.

To help ensure that students would meet the standards for obtaining a state teaching certificate, the University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education (SOE) made passing *Praxis I* an admission requirement for its student teaching programs. SOE's teaching programs involve both instructional study and classroom teaching work in a school district setting. Starting with spring 1999 admission cycle for the 1999-2000 school year, undergraduate applicants were admitted into SOE's teaching program with the provision they pass *Praxis I* before starting work in school classrooms. In spring 2004, SOE began to require undergraduate applicants to submit their passing *Praxis I* scores with their application for admission.

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<sup>3</sup>AS 14.20.020(i)

<sup>4</sup>*Praxis I* included in state regulation February 2000.

<sup>5</sup>Subsequently renamed to Department of Education and Early Development.

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## REPORT CONCLUSIONS

The primary objective of our audit was to determine if University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education (SOE) consistently applied the admittance requirements for the school’s student teaching programs. The next objective was to determine if, since the implementation of the competency testing, all undergraduates of the student teaching program passed the examinations – *Praxis I* prior to graduation.

We concluded that SOE consistently followed its admission requirements; and, since the implementation of *Praxis I* at SOE, all but one graduate of the degreed teaching program required to pass the competency examinations did so. These conclusions are discussed further as follows:

### SOE has consistently followed its admission requirements for its student teaching programs

SOE requires formal admittance into its student teaching programs. Undergraduate students, who have completed the required course work, need to apply for a formal admittance into the student teaching program that occurs during their senior year. This process typically happens in the spring, preceding the start of the program in the fall. Applicants for the post baccalaureate licensure programs also apply for admittance, during the spring, for the student teaching program which starts in the fall.

SOE applicants are required to complete an extensive admission packet.<sup>6</sup> The packet is then reviewed by at least two SOE faculty members. Both the undergraduate elementary program and the elementary post baccalaureate program require applicants to have passed the *Praxis I* competency assessment examinations. The secondary post baccalaureate program allows a conditional admittance regarding *Praxis I* which requires passing the examinations before the actual start date of student teaching. As stated in the Background Information section, the State requires passing *Praxis I* as a step to obtaining the initial teaching certificate.

For the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, SOE consistently followed its admission requirements for its various student teaching programs. All admitted applicants<sup>7</sup> submitted the required admission documents; admitted faculty reviews were completed; and, all admitted applicants passed *Praxis I*.

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<sup>6</sup>The undergraduate elementary application packet includes: transcripts, letters of recommendation, resumé, *Praxis* scores, life/work experience forms, content grade analysis form, teaching/learning and cross-cultural experience form, fieldwork experience forms, technology competence inventory form, autobiography, two application essays, and an extemporaneous writing sample.

<sup>7</sup>Of the elementary undergraduate program applicants reviewed, three students were denied admission due to the failure of passing *Praxis*. For the secondary post baccalaureate program, one student was denied student teaching due to not passing *Praxis I*.

With one exception, graduates of the degreed teaching program passed the competency exams when required by the SOE

Beginning with the spring 1999 admission cycle for the 1999-2000 school year, SOE required passage of *Praxis I* as part of its student teaching requirements. This action took place approximately six months after the State made the passing of competency assessment examinations a requirement for obtaining a teaching certificate. In the first year of the competency requirement, SOE undergraduate students were allowed to take *Praxis I* after being admitted. Currently, undergraduate students must pass *Praxis I* prior to their formal admission into the student teaching program.

In our review of the 229 graduates of the student teaching degree program since the 1999-2000 school year, we identified 17<sup>8</sup> graduates that did so without passing *Praxis I*. Fifteen graduates were not required to pass the competency examinations because their SOE admittance date was prior to the implementation of the *Praxis* requirement. One graduate was not required to pass the tests because she was a transfer student who already had student teaching credits. The last graduate<sup>9</sup> in question was required to pass *Praxis I* but did not do so. Except for the one error that occurred during the implementation year of *Praxis*, graduates of the degreed teaching program have passed competency exams when required by SOE.

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<sup>8</sup>Ten students graduated the summer and fall of 1999; six students graduated the spring and summer of 2000; and one student graduated the spring 2003.

<sup>9</sup>This individual passed *Praxis* one year after graduation and then went on to obtain an Alaskan teaching certificate.

# APPENDIX

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**Appendix A**  
 Alaska and UAF School of Education Standards  
 and Performances for Culturally Responsive, Effective Practitioners

<b>1</b>	<p><b>A teacher can describe the teacher's philosophy of education and demonstrate its relationship to the teacher's practice.</b></p> <p><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></p> <p>A. Engaging in thoughtful and critical examination of the teacher's practice with others, including describing the relationship of beliefs about learning, teaching, and assessment practice to current trends, strategies, and resources in the teaching profession.</p> <p>B. Demonstrating consistency between a teacher's beliefs and the teacher's practice.</p> <p><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Demonstrating a willingness to take professional risks.</i></li> <li>• <i>Demonstrating resiliency and flexibility.</i></li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>A teacher understands how students learn and develop and applies that knowledge in the teacher's practice.</b></p> <p><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></p> <p>A. Accurately identifying and teaching to the developmental abilities of students.</p> <p>B. Applying learning theory in practice to accommodate differences in how students learn, including accommodating differences in student intelligence, perception, and cognitive style.</p> <p><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Providing opportunities for all individuals to learn, no matter their age, race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ability, or exceptionalities.</i></li> <li>• <i>Assessing and teaching to individual learning preferences, interests, and ways of knowing.</i></li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>A teacher teaches students with respect for their individual and cultural characteristics.</b></p> <p><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></p> <p>A. Incorporating characteristics of the student's and local community culture into instructional strategies that support student learning.</p> <p>B. Identifying and using instructional strategies and resources that are appropriate to the individual and special needs of students.</p> <p>C. Applying knowledge of Alaska history, geography, economics, governance, languages, traditional life cycles, and current issues to the selection of instructional strategies, materials, and resources.</p> <p>(continued)</p>

Source: UAF SOE website

**Appendix A**  
 Alaska and UAF School of Education Standards  
 and Performances for Culturally Responsive, Effective Practitioners

<b>3</b>	<p>(Item 3 – continued)</p> <p><b><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Demonstrating and promoting respect for cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity.</i></li> <li>• <i>Supporting the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of rural and urban Alaskan communities in their professional lives.</i></li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<p>A teacher knows the teacher's content area and how to teach it.</p> <p><b><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></b></p> <p>A. Demonstrating knowledge of academic structure of the teacher's content area, its tools of inquiry, central concepts, and connections to other domains of knowledge.</p> <p>B. Identifying the developmental stages by which learners gain mastery of the content area, applying appropriate strategies to assess the stage of learning of students in the subject, and applying appropriate strategies, including collaborating with others, to facilitate students' development.</p> <p>C. Drawing from a wide repertoire of strategies, including, where appropriate, instructional applications of technology, and adapting and applying these strategies within the instructional context.</p> <p>D. Connecting the content area to other content areas and to practical situations encountered outside the school.</p> <p>E. Staying current in the teacher's content area and demonstrating its relationship with and application to classroom activities, life, work, and community.</p> <p><b><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Applying content within and across disciplines in culturally responsive ways.</i></li> <li>• <i>Critically examining forms, uses, and accessibility of technology.</i></li> <li>• <i>Demonstrating effective communication skills.</i></li> <li>• <i>Providing opportunities for students to engage in higher order and critical thinking (i.e., reflection, inquiry, and problem solving).</i></li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<p>A teacher facilitates, monitors, and assesses student learning.</p> <p><b><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></b></p> <p>A. Organizing and delivering instruction based on the characteristics of the students and the goals of the curriculum.</p> <p>B. Creating, selecting, adapting, and using a variety of instructional resources to facilitate curricular goals and student attainment of performance standards.</p> <p>(continued)</p>
	<p><i>Source: UAF SOE website</i></p>

**Appendix A**  
 Alaska and UAF School of Education Standards  
 and Performances for Culturally Responsive, Effective Practitioners

<b>5</b>	<p>(Item 5 – continued)</p> <p>C. Creating, selecting, adapting, and using a variety of assessment strategies that provide information about and reinforce student learning and that assist students in reflecting on their own progress.</p> <p>D. Organizing and maintaining records on students' learning and using a variety of methods to communicate student progress to students, parents, administrators, and other appropriate audiences.</p> <p>E. Reflecting on information gained from assessment and adjusting teaching practice as appropriate to facilitate student progress toward learning and curricular goals</p>
<b>6</b>	<p>A teacher creates and maintains a learning environment in which all students are actively engaged and contributing members.</p> <p><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></p> <p>A. Creating and maintaining a stimulating, inclusive, and safe learning community in which students take intellectual risks and work independently and collaboratively.</p> <p>B. Communicating high standards for student performance and clear expectations of what students will learn.</p> <p>C. Planning and using a variety of classroom management techniques to establish and maintain an environment in which all students are able to learn.</p> <p>D. Helping students understand their role in sharing responsibility for their learning.</p> <p><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Demonstrating personal responsibility for the individual's learning.</i></li> <li>• <i>Striving for equitable outcomes and success for every individual.</i></li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<p>A teacher works as a partner with parents, families, and the community.</p> <p><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></p> <p>A. Promoting and maintaining regular and meaningful communication between the classroom and students' families.</p> <p>B. Working with parents and families to support and promote student learning.</p> <p>C. Participating in school-wide efforts to communicate with the broader community and involving parents and families in student learning.</p> <p>(continued)</p>
	<p><i>Source: UAF SOE website</i></p>

**Appendix A**  
Alaska and UAF School of Education Standards  
and Performances for Culturally Responsive, Effective Practitioners

<b>7</b>	<p>(Item 7 – continued)</p> <p>D. Connecting, through instructional strategies, the school and classroom activities with students' homes and cultures, work places, and the community.</p> <p>E. Involving parents in setting and monitoring student learning goals.</p> <p><b><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Demonstrating respect for students, colleagues, and community members.</i></li></ul>
<b>8</b>	<p><b>A teacher participates in and contributes to the teaching profession.</b></p> <p><b><i>Performances that reflect attainment of this standard include ...</i></b></p> <p>A. Maintaining a high standard of professional ethics.</p> <p>B. Maintaining and updating knowledge of both the teacher's content area(s) and best teaching practices.</p> <p>C. Engaging in instructional development activities to improve the quality of or update classroom, school, or district programs.</p> <p>D. Communicating, working cooperatively, and developing professional relationships with colleagues.</p> <p><b><i>UAF School of Education additional performances:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Recognizing the legal and ethical responsibilities of a culturally responsive practitioner.</i></li><li>• <i>Incorporating technology effectively in professional settings.</i></li><li>• <i>Demonstrating high motivation and commitment to the profession.</i></li><li>• <i>Demonstrating intellectual curiosity and a commitment to ongoing professional development</i></li></ul> <p><small>Source: UAF SOE website</small></p>

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September 24, 2007

**RECEIVED**  
**SEP 24 2007**  
**LEGISLATIVE AUDIT**

Pat Davidson  
Legislative Auditor  
Legislative Budget and Audit Committee  
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Dear Ms. Davidson,

This letter is in response to your September 5, 2007 request for comments on the preliminary audit report *University of Alaska, Fairbanks – School of Education, Selected Admission Issues, August 16, 2007*. We appreciate the effort and professionalism of the work done by you and your staff. Based on the following report conclusions, we have no further comment.

**Report Conclusions**

*SOE has consistently followed its admission requirements for its student teaching programs.*

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. Please contact Dave Read at 450-8094 if you have any questions or need to clarify anything in this response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Hamilton'.

Mark Hamilton  
President

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