

Section IV: Evidence for Meeting Standards

Assessment I: Content-Based Assessment/Praxis II tests

English Language, Literature, and Composition: Content Knowledge (0041)

English Language, Literature, and Composition: Essays (0042)

1. Description and Use of Assessment:

The English Department and the Secondary English Education Program at Rhode Island College require all English teacher candidates to pass two Praxis II content tests (with a score of 160 for 0041, and 150 for 0042) as well as a Department-scored English Content Portfolio (Assessment #2). The State of Rhode Island requires a Praxis II test in Pedagogy (Principles of Learning and Teaching, 7-12, 0524) but does not require a content area assessment of its teacher candidates. These content assessments required by the College's English Department demonstrate one layer of a multi-layered approach to assessing our English teacher candidates' content knowledge.

Prior to requiring the Praxis II content tests, the English Department at Rhode Island College administered its own written exam to English teacher candidates. But in the ensuing years, with increasing demands and pressures to score various forms of assessments within the Department, our dwindling English faculty could not absorb the added responsibility for scoring these exams each semester. And so, six years ago the English Department ended its homegrown assessment of teacher candidates and began requiring the Praxis II Content (0041) and Essay (0042) exams, with cut scores of 160 and 150 respectively. The cut scores were determined by examining the cut scores of other comparable states and institutions that require these same tests. While we believe that these two tests partially measure content knowledge specified in NCTE program standard 3.0, we agree with NCTE's illumination of the inadequacies in these tests in many key areas: oral & visual literacy, non-print media, technology, research theory, adolescent literature, and works by authors of color and women authors.

Our English Education teacher candidates must take and pass the Praxis II tests prior to their entrance into Practicum (SED 410) and Student Teaching (SED 422). Should a teacher candidate not pass one or both tests, the English Department allows a candidate to retake the Praxis II test/s up to three times. Should a teacher candidate fail both tests upon their third attempt, the student is counseled out of the English Education Program or is allowed, in certain circumstances, to appeal to the English Department for a waiver of the requirement.

While our Program requires passing scores on 0041 and 0042 prior to entering the "Professional Year" (Practicum and Student Teaching), and while we will be using the data from these test scores to inform improvement of our English Education Program, we have addressed the inadequacies in the Praxis II content tests by developing two new assessments, the Teacher Candidate Work Sample (Assessments #3 & #5) and the Critical

Analysis of Media Lesson (Assessment #6). These additional assessments demonstrate evidence of our candidates' English language arts content knowledge in many of the areas neglected by the Praxis II tests (namely oral & visual literacy, non-print media, technology, theory, and diverse works of literature).

2. Description of How the Assessment Specifically Aligns with NCTE Standards:

By studying sample Praxis II tests (0041 and 0042), the “Test at a Glance” and “Topics Covered” materials from ETS (www.ets.org/Media/Tests/PRAXIS) and the findings of NCTE’s Research Project on the Assessment of the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts (Jan 2001), we see an alignment of test items with these NCTE Standards:

- 3.1 (Knowledge of the English Language),
- 3.2 (Knowledge of Written Literacy),
- 3.4 (Knowledge of Different Composing Processes),
- 3.5 (Knowledge of an Extensive Range of Literature).

We do not see so clearly, however, how the Praxis II content tests align with NCTE Standards 3.3 (Knowledge of Reading Processes), 3.6 (Knowledge of the Range of Print, Non-Print Media and Technology), and 3.7 (Knowledge of Research Theory and Findings in ELA), which is why we ask our teacher candidates to demonstrate their knowledge in these fields in other program assessments.

3. Analysis of Data:

Praxis II test performance has increased marginally (+1-2 points for 0041 and 0042) over the course of the two years (four cohorts) reported below. Additionally, our students consistently score within the “Average Performance Range” reported by ETS (www.ets.org). Since this content test is not mandated by the State of Rhode Island (there is no State content exam), there are no State averages with which to compare these scores, so we have used National averages.

Fall 2008

	# of Passing Scores/# of Test Takers	Percentage of Passing Scores	Mean Program Scores	ETS Average Performance Range
0041: Content (160 cut score)	7/7	100%	174	166-187
0042: Essay (150 cut score)	7/7	100%	158	150-165

Spring 2009

	# of Passing Scores/# of Test Takers	Percentage of Passing Scores	Mean Program Scores	ETS Average Performance Range
0041: Content (160 cut score)	11/11	100%	173	166-187
0042: Essay (150 cut score)	11/11	100%	157	150-165

Fall 2009

	# of Passing Scores/# of Test Takers	Percentage of Passing Scores	Mean Program Scores	ETS Average Performance Range
0041: Content (160 cut score)	8/8	100%	176	166-187
0042: Essay (150 cut score)	8/8	100%	159	150-165

Spring 2010

	# of Passing Scores/# of Test Takers	Percentage of Passing Scores	Mean Program Scores	ETS Average Performance Range
0041: Content (160 cut score)	15/15	100%	176.5	166-187
0042: Essay (150 cut score)	15/15	100%	159	150-165

Mean Scores on Praxis II Subtests (only partial data reported)

To date, our Program has required candidates to submit their Praxis II scores as part of the English content portfolio, though we have never specified to our candidates that we need to collect their entire score report, including the breakdown of their tests scores by subtest. By virtue of having collected data to write this report, we now see our error in not requiring the complete score report. We will begin requiring the entire Praxis II score report from our candidates starting in Fall 2010. Because of this oversight in our Program requirements, we were only able to collect partial data for each cohort's Praxis II subtests (i.e. only 3 of 7 students from fall 08 reported their subtest scores). This partial data is displayed below.

	Fall 08 n=3 (7)	Spring 09 n=3 (11)	Fall 09 n=3 (8)	Spring 10 n=3 (15)
Reading & Understanding Text (0041) (66 items)	54 (82%)	46 (70%)	59.3(90%)	55.6(84%)
Language & Linguistics (0041) (20 items)	10 (50%)	12.3(61%)	15 (75%)	12 (60%)
Composition & Rhetoric (0041) (34 items)	29 (85%)	25 (74%)	32 (94%)	30.3(89%)
Interpreting Poetry (max. 6 points)	2.6 (43%)	2 (33%)	4.6 (76%)	3.33(55%)
Interpreting Prose (max. 6 points)	4.3 (72%)	4 (66%)	4 (66%)	4 (66%)
Understanding Literary Issues (evaluate the argument and rhetorical features of a passage that addresses an issue in the study of English) (max. 6 points)	2.3 (38%)	3 (50%)	4 (66%)	3 (50%)
Literary Issues & Literary Texts (take and defend a position on an issue in the study of English, using references to literary works) (max. 6 points)	3.3 (55%)	2.7 (45%)	5.6 (93%)	4.6 (76%)

Clearly, there are limits to this data on Praxis II subtests. The students who voluntarily submitted their complete score reports were self-selected, and in some cases, it was the most conscientious students who did this, thus skewing the data. Also, in Fall 2009, we had an usually strong cohort of English teacher candidates, as their scores demonstrate. But, we believe this data, taken as a whole, is still valuable to us, as it most directly points to consistent areas of weakness across cohorts. Namely, our students are consistently weaker on the 0042: Essay test, and in particular, they seem to struggle with three of the five subtests, though their scores in these areas have increased over time:

(1) interpreting poetry,

(2) linguistics, and

(3) understanding and being able to argue issues in the study of English.

4. Interpretation of Data as Evidence of Standards Met:

Collecting the data for this Assessment #1 report has been an eye-opening experience for us, especially as we work to create better systems of communication and collaboration between the English Education program and the English Department. Though we only had partial data with which to analyze our candidates' performance on the Praxis II subtests, that partial data is quite revealing.

In analyzing the above data on subtest performance, we are able to see that, over time, our students' scores are increasing on most sections. This is due, we believe, to our candidates' acclimating to this newer program requirement and also to the seriousness with which they approach this requirement. Our candidates' score increases over time also speaks to the multiple ways in which the Unit, FSEHD, is working to provide preparation workshops to our candidates in order to prepare them for these Praxis II tests.

Additionally, the data for Assessment #1 will be presented to and shared with the English Department faculty during the Department's annual fall retreat (September 10, 2010), so that English faculty can determine a course of action intended to help our candidates better prepare, most specifically, for the sections of the Essay test. To our knowledge, the English Department faculty has not seen this kind of data on our English education candidates, and it is hoped that the data here will speak to the ways that all of us can work together to strengthen our program's depth and breadth where content is concerned.

Finally, insofar that the Praxis II tests identified here meet NCTE program standards 3.1, 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5, our program completers in English language arts meet those standards. Despite this evidence of mastery of English content knowledge by our program completers, we require greater evidence, in the way of Assessments #2 and #6, to ensure that our candidates meet NCTE's 3.0 standards and indicators.

