

Submission date: 2/7/2020

Program/s in this review: Special Education GC and M.Ed.

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE); currently pursuing Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP); Specialty Program Review (SPA) through the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage

Members of the program review committee:

Tara Maltby, Term Assistant Professor, Anchorage Campus

Donna Gail Shaw, Professor Emerita and Interim Accreditation Coordinator, Anchorage Campus

1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)

Special Education teacher preparation has been a part of education at UAA for over 45 years, with the M.Ed. in Education, Emphasis in Special Education, included in the 1974-75 catalog. The current M.Ed. and Graduate Certificate (GC) in Special Education contribute to UAA's core theme of "Teaching and Learning" in that they prepare students for high-demand jobs in Alaska. The special education teacher shortage in Alaska and nationwide is well documented. According to the U.S. Department of Education Teacher Shortage Areas (TSA) Nationwide Listing, from 1995 to 2017, special education was an area of teacher shortage in Alaska with few exceptions*. Approximately 20,000 children and youth in Alaska (7 million nationwide) receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Unfortunately, the Alaska Teacher Placement website documents almost 60 open special education positions in December 2019, halfway through the school year. The need and demand are great.

In response to the special education teacher shortage within Alaska, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) created the Special Education Alternate Program Certificate. The program allows an educator who currently holds a valid Alaska teaching certificate with nine credits of special education coursework (instead of the 25-credit endorsement typically required) to be hired by a school district to teach in a special education classroom if no certified special education teacher applied for the open position. Teachers hired under the Special Education Alternate Program Certification must enroll in a higher education program that leads to an endorsement in special education. DEED's program allows for mutually beneficial school district/School of Education partnerships.

The UAA Special Education program maintains a close partnership with the Anchorage School District to coordinate with the General Education to Special Education (GETS) Scholarship program for applicants (80% of tuition is reimbursed for enrollment toward special education certification). Anchorage School District employs general education teachers for special education positions utilizing the Special Education Alternate Program Certificate and supports the teachers as they pursue an endorsement in special education via the GETS program. Many of the students who have completed or are currently enrolled in the M.Ed. in Special Education program have been GETS teachers. The UAA Special Education program works with other school districts across the state that use the Anchorage GETS program as a model to fill special education teaching positions. Alaska school districts currently working with UAA and using the GETS program as a model include Matanuska-Susitna, Kodiak, and Valdez.

*No TSA report was submitted by Alaska from 2000 to 2004. In 2005 Alaska reported no TSAs.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary. (2017). *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing 1990–1991 through 2017-2018*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/bteachershortageareasreport201718.pdf>

2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)

The IR website generates data tables used to examine program demand, efficiency, and productivity. Each data point is reviewed and analyzed below.

a. Data Point: Seven year degree and/or certificate awards trend.

Over the seven-year period there has been a 59% decrease in the number of degrees/certificates awarded in Special Education. The downward trend is consistent with that experienced by CAS and SOE. But, the decrease in Special Education awards is larger than that recorded by the SOE (41.4%) as a whole and CAS (35%; w/o School of Education Awards). The largest drop in SPED awards occurred between 2013 and 2015 (46%). Since that time the number of awards granted has been much more stable, with an average of 16 degrees awarded each year between 2016 and 2019. We suspect the decline in awards between 2013 and 2015 may have been due to the lack of stability and inconsistency in faculty appointments. In Spring 2013 there were 3 tenure-track faculty teaching courses in Special Education. By Spring 2015 none of these 3 faculty were at UAA and there was one new, tenure-track faculty member. This faculty member left after approximately one year and no tenure-track faculty have been hired in Special Education since that time. It is quite amazing that the average number of degrees awarded each year since 2016 has remained stable. (CAS data were determined by selecting Master and Lic/Post Cert under the Award Level tab, then selecting all CAS majors, e.g., Anthropology, Psychology, under the Major tab.)

b. Data Point: Credits Per Degree (Average Credits Earned)

The M.Ed. in SPED requires 36 credits. The average credits/degree over the seven-year period was 25. The GC requires 25-26 credits. The average credits/degree over the seven-year period was 26. These data indicate that students progress through the program in an efficient manner and do not take more credits than the program requires.

c. Data Point: Seven year majors or program enrollment trend

The M.Ed. and GC (combined) experienced a 59% decrease in enrollment in the seven-year period. During the same period the SOE experienced a 31% decrease in enrollment. This decline follows the trend of the school, but not the trend of the CAS, which experienced a 3% increase (excluding SOE data).

The largest drop in SPED enrollment occurred between the years 2013 and 2015 (48%). See the comment about instability and inconsistency with regard to faculty appointments under data point: Seven year degree and/or certificate awards trend. While the enrollment in the M.Ed. continued to drop from 2016 to 2019, the enrollments in the GC program remained stable with an average of 21 students enrolled.

For data points d through l, we were unable to duplicate the data provided to us in the original data tables from the IR site, so we generated and analyzed data for the following EDSE courses: EDSE A610, 612, 622, 623, 624, 625, 632, 633, 634, 635, 670, 695D, 695E, 695S, and 697. (Any EDSE course ending in Y was not used because these courses are associated with the M.Ed. in Early Childhood Special Education, which has suspended admissions and there are no longer any SOE faculty responsible for this program.)

d. Data Point: Course pass rates

The course pass rate is high, with an average pass rate of 92.1%. This is consistent with most non-science based graduate courses at UAA. The failure rate averages 4.3% over the seven-year period. This falls within the normal range of most graduate courses at UAA. These data appear to demonstrate that both faculty and students strive for excellence.

e. Data Point: Internal demand

The data show that 278 students outside of the UAA Special Education degree programs benefitted from taking our courses. These students represented 20 different majors. Nearly 1/4th (24%) of the SCH earned in 600-level special education courses were generated by students outside of the major. The data demonstrate the importance of special education coursework to students outside the major.

f. Data Point: Seven year Student Credit Hour (SCH) production trend

The data show a downward trend in SCH production. The largest decrease occurred between 2013 and 2016 (53%). See data point “Seven year degree and/or certificate awards trend” for a description of this unique period of time in the history of the program. From 2016 to 2019 there was a 17% drop in SCH production. A slight increase occurred in 2017 and 2018 as compared to 2016, but it was followed by a drop in 2019. The decrease in SCH production is consistent with decreased enrollment.

g. Data Point: SCH/FTEF

Despite a slight decrease (7%) in SCH/FTE over the seven-year period, the Special Education Graduate Programs are more productive than most CAS and SOE graduate programs when comparing SCH/FTE faculty and total SCH by program. The IR site creates a scatter plot of CAS courses (SCH per FTEF and Total SCH by Subject), with “SCH with Audit” on the y-axis and “SCH/FTEF” on the x-axis. Special education courses are positioned relatively high on the y-axis. The plot illustrates that special education SCH productivity is higher than all but one non-SOE, CAS subject area. Special education is also positioned slightly over the halfway point on the x-axis. The plot illustrates SCH/FTEF productivity exceeds all but one non-SOE, CAS subject area.

h. Data Point: Enrollment/Full Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF)

The Enrollment/FTEF in CAS (excluding SOE programs) is fairly stable over the seven-year period. Special Education programs, however, experienced a 9% decrease from 2013 to 2019. But, Enrollment/FTEF in Special Education is consistently higher than the average CAS Enrollment/FTEF every year in the last seven-year period. For example, in 2019 CAS (excluding SOE programs) had an Enrollment/FTEF of 42.5 while Special Education had an Enrollment/FTEF of 85.3. Instructional productivity is two times higher in Special Education in terms of Enrollment/FTEF as compared to an average of the non-SOE, CAS programs.
(Method for acquiring CAS comparison data: Select CAS, exclude all SOE subjects, select 600-699 level.)

i. Data Point: FTES/FTEF

IR data show a very slight downward trend in FTES/FTEF in the Special Education programs. CAS graduate programs data (excluding SOE) show a slight increase. But, the number of FTES/FTEF is consistently higher in Special Education graduate programs than in the average FTES/FTEF of CAS graduate programs. For example, in 2019 CAS (excluding SOE programs) had an FTES/FTEF of 5.3 while Special Education had an FTES/FTEF of 11.2. Instructional productivity is about two times higher in Special Education in terms of FTES/FTEF as compared to an average of the non-SOE, CAS programs.
(Method for acquiring CAS comparison data: Select CAS, exclude all SOE subjects, select 600-699 level.)

j. Data Point: Class Size (Average Class Size)

There is a downward trend in class size for Special Education programs and CAS graduate programs as a whole, with exceptions in 2017 and 2018 where the average class size for Special Education was larger than any other year in the seven-year period. The average class size in Special Education Programs is consistently larger than the average class size in CAS graduate programs in each of the seven years analyzed. CAS (excluding SOE) has an average class size of 4.74 for the seven-year period as compared to Special Education’s average class size of 9.4.
(Method for acquiring CAS comparison data: Select CAS, exclude all SOE subjects, select 600-699 level.)

k. Data Point: Cost/SCH

From 2015 to 2019 there was a 12% increase in Cost/SCH for Special Education programs. In terms of the cost of SCH, however, Special Education is well below the average of CAS. The average Cost/SCH in 2019 for CAS (1258.8) is more than 4 times higher than the average Cost/SCH for Special Education graduate programs (307.4).
(Method for acquiring CAS comparison data: Select CAS, exclude all SOE subjects, select 600-699 level.)

l. Data Point: Tuition Revenue/SCH

The Tuition Revenue/SCH for the Special Education programs is consistent with the trends and amount for the CAS as a whole. The Tuition Revenue/SCH generated in Special Education more than covers the instructional costs of

the programs. This statement cannot be made for CAS graduate programs as a whole. Excluding SOE programs, the instructional costs of CAS graduate programs substantially exceed tuition generated.

m. Data Point: External Demand

There are no "Post UAA Award NSC Data" for this program. Refer to "Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role" for information related to external demand.

3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

Specialized Accreditation Process and Status

Since 2005 the School of Education advanced-level programs have maintained continuous accreditation under the standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). As a part of the national accreditation process, the GC in Special Education is nationally recognized through 2023 by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The School of Education is currently pursuing accreditation for advanced-level programs from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). A virtual site visit is scheduled in the Spring semester of 2021.

Currency of the Curriculum

In 2017 - 2018 the faculty engaged in a substantial curriculum revision of the GC and M.Ed. in Special Education. Implementation of the new curriculum began in Fall 2018. The curriculum revisions were made in response to stakeholder feedback, assessment data indicating the need to increase field-based experiences in course work, and updates required to better align key assessments with the CEC Professional Standards. The curriculum revision was approved through the UAA Curriculum approval processes.

In Fall 2019 faculty met with stakeholders to review program data and to identify general areas of need in special education across the state. One area of need identified by stakeholders was the importance of preparing new special educators, especially those who will be teaching in rural Alaska, to respond to a variety of exceptional needs and behaviors in K-12 classrooms. In an effort to bridge the identified training gap, an SOE faculty member met with two members of the UAA Psychology Department to explore the possibility of using an existing psychology course in Applied Behavior Analysis as a requirement in the Special Education programs. This addition would provide students with a strong foundation in the basics of behavior management enhancing their ability to support the needs of a diverse population of learners, and distinguish UAA's Special Education programs from the similar programs at UAF and UAS. Discussions with CAS are ongoing as CAEP accreditation is being pursued.

Innovative Program Design

The GC in Special Education is designed for certificated general education teachers who want to become special education teachers. This program expands teaching competencies by providing the theory, knowledge, and practical experience in special education needed to effectively serve children with disabilities and their families. It provides on-the-job support to teachers as they transition to becoming special educators. The M.Ed. in Special Education is designed for individuals who desire advanced professional preparation in special education. The program encompasses theory, research, and practice pertaining to individuals who experience disabilities. The program provides candidates with the knowledge and application of assessment and intervention strategies that support the learning of children with exceptional learning needs for grades K-8 (Elementary) and/or grades 7-12 (Secondary) and aims to prepare scholarly practitioners grounded in purpose and research. The coursework in each program focuses on evidence-based practices and embraces culturally-sensitive practices.

Availability and Indications of Quality of Distance Offerings

Special education has a long, rich history in distance education, beginning with videotaped lectures mailed to students in the 80s and advancing to the use of modern technologies today. It was the first education program at UAA delivered completely by distance technologies. Both the GC and M.Ed. programs are offered via distance delivery in order to be accessible statewide, and classes are offered in the evening to accommodate working students. Historically, approximately 90% of the students hold full-time teaching jobs while in the program, so they are working toward the degree as part of an employer agreement. This approach to program design and delivery

aligns with the University of Alaska Anchorage mission to serve the needs of the state, communities, and diverse peoples. It also encompasses the School of Education's Core Values of Intellectual Vitality, Collaborative Spirit, Inclusiveness and Equity, and Leadership by preparing high-quality personnel who will be responsive to and inclusive of the diverse needs of Alaska's learners, families, and communities.

Program Student Learning Outcomes:

The Academic Assessment Plan for the M.Ed. in Special Education and the GC in Special Education was substantially revised in May 2017. The mission of the programs is to prepare educators and support the lifelong learning of special education professionals to embrace diversity and to be intellectually and ethically strong, resilient, and passionate in their work with Alaska's learners, families, and communities.

The GC program utilizes seven key assessments, six of which are incorporated into five courses. One assessment is a nationally normed exam of content knowledge and is not based in a course. The key assessments are used to measure the candidate's mastery of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Professional Standards and the UAA School of Education Student Learning Outcomes. This program is nationally recognized by CEC. As required by CEC, the assessments measure the candidate's content knowledge in special education, ability to plan instruction, performance in clinical experience, and affect on K-12 student learning. The course-based assessments are scored using rubrics that are aligned with the national standards. Faculty analyze the data to help them improve courses and experiences.

Key Findings, Actions Taken to Improve Student Learning, and Evidence That These Actions are Working

A complete reporting of key assessment data findings, analysis of data, and actions taken to improve learning can be found for each of the seven key assessments in the UAA Annual Assessment Report for Special Education programs. Following are selected findings.

A. Highlights of Key Findings

1. All of our graduates pass nationally normed content area exams required by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development for professional licensure.
2. Students show a particular strength in the ability to plan instruction for K-12 students with special needs.
3. In the culminating clinical experience, students demonstrate that they have met all CEC standards.

B. Areas for Improvement and actions taken to improve student learning of special education majors

1. Area for Improvement: Data collection on some key assessments is inconsistent.

Action taken: In Fall 2019 the School of Education implemented a new student data management system (VIA by Watermark) for collecting and analyzing key assessment data. This will ensure that data for all students are consistently collected, stored, and analyzed even with faculty turnover.

2. Area for Improvement: One key assessment in the course on mathematics for special learners indicates a need to modify the course instruction and assignment to better prepare graduates to understand how language, culture, and family influence K-12 student learning in mathematics.

Action taken: The Special Education program lead revised the course assignment and rubric, and then met with the adjunct faculty responsible for teaching the course to discuss adding an emphasis in this area through lectures and readings.

C. Evidence that actions are working

Alumni and employer survey data provide evidence that past actions taken based on the key findings related to program learning outcomes are working. The most recent survey of 2017-18 special education graduates and their employers conducted by ISER include the following highlights.

1. All (100%) of the special educator employers responding to the survey indicated that they are satisfied with the preparation of UAA's special education graduates.
2. The surveys asked employers to rate 11 attributes expected of our program graduates. All employers responding to the survey agree that the educator (UAA special education graduate) exhibited the attributes.

Student Success: High Impact Practices

Students in the GC and M.Ed. in Special Education programs engage with a variety of high-impact practices throughout the program. Students have a common intellectual experience as they complete a set of required common courses. Students learn to work and solve problems together as they engage in collaborative assignments embedded in course work including case studies and professional workshop presentations. Students who begin their work in special education through the GC program complete a 500-hour internship experience and capstone project that demonstrates their ability to meet national standards and the Program Learning Outcomes.

Student Success: Student Support

The special education faculty member provides academic advising to each student in the Special Education programs. The faculty member assists students as they track their progress toward graduation in DegreeWorks, and communicates a minimum of once per semester with each enrolled student.

Student Accomplishments

One of the most significant accomplishments for students is the ability to secure employment upon completion of a program in higher education. Due to the high demand for special educators, most of the graduates from the GC in Special Education program secure teaching positions in the field of special education.

The program has also produced two Alaska State Special Education Inclusive Practice Award Nominees in the last three years. The Inclusive Practice Award, presented by The Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education, honors outstanding educators who work to ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity for an inclusive education with their peers as part of the general education curriculum and school community.

4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

There is significant duplication of special education endorsement programs across the UA system due to the high-demand need of special educators in Alaska and nationwide. UAF offers a postbaccalaureate certificate and M.Ed. in Special Education. UAS offers a Bachelor of Arts in Special Education, a Graduate Certificate in Special Education, a Master of Arts in Teaching in Special Education, and M.Ed. in Special Education. Given the high-need status of Special Education, duplication is justified. The UAA Special Education program's partnership with the Anchorage School District is both politically and professionally significant.

5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)

GC Strengths:

1. The GC in Special Education prepares educators to meet the workforce demand of one of the most significant teacher shortage areas in Alaska.
2. There are beneficial program connections with school districts that use the General Education to Special Education (GETS) model to employ general education teachers for hard to fill special education positions utilizing the Special Education Alternate Program Certificate. The general education teachers pursue an endorsement in special education via the GC in Special Education program. Alaska school districts currently working with UAA and using the GETS program as a model include Anchorage, Mat-Su, Kodiak, and Valdez.
3. The GC in Special Education is nationally recognized by the Council for Exceptional Children. It is one of three program areas being reviewed as part of the CAEP accreditation at the advanced-program level.

M.Ed. Strengths:

GC graduates can continue into the M.Ed. and complete a master's degree with only 4 additional courses. M.Ed. courses provide students with additional content knowledge to improve their practice with an emphasis on Special Education Law and education research.

Areas of Concern:

1. Currently, there is only one term faculty member responsible for program-level decision making, including the development and implementation of all new curriculum, advising, and accreditation processes. For this program to

continue with long-term consistency, resources should be allocated to hire and retain a full-time, tenure track faculty member.

2. The program review process and the CAEP accreditation process are not aligned. If, as a result of the current program review process, the GC program is recommended for discontinuation, the School could lose its national accreditation and be unable to recommend program completers for licensure. The only option would be for students to immediately transfer to UAF or UAS to complete their programs. Such transfers would be unexpected by students and abrupt disruptions to their established pathways for program completion. CAEP accreditation of UAA's advanced-level programs occurs in Spring 2021. Following that semester and with CAEP accreditation secured, UAA, in keeping with its commitment to students, would then be positioned to provide a UAA teach-out (not a teach-out by transfer) to any program that was recommended for discontinuation.

Opportunities:

There is significant potential to work collaboratively with additional school districts to increase the number of certificated special education teachers in Alaska utilizing the GETS model. See the School of Education Recruitment Plan for specific recruitment goals and strategies.

Challenges:

1. The GC requires that program faculty be involved in CAEP accreditation. The associated workload is burdensome and time-consuming for a one-person program.
2. Funding for external course reviews for Quality Matters is very limited through UAA Academic Innovations and eLearning (limited # of courses that can be funded across UAA).
3. Efforts to increase enrollment are negatively impacted by limited resources (one-faculty program in special education and limited faculty and student support services in SOE) and the damaged reputation of SOE due to the loss of initial programs and UAA due to the financial difficulties and restructuring uncertainties.