3.3 Areas for Improvement Cited in the Action Report from the Previous Accreditation Review

Only one area for improvement was cited: “Field Experiences are not structured and orchestrated to allow the candidates sufficient opportunity to experience classroom teaching with school-age students”.

In response to this noted area in which improvement was needed, much effort has been made to allow education majors and teacher candidates more contact with P-12 students in positive and authentic learning experiences. One of the most significant changes made was the addition of two new courses in the P-4 program.

ED 3022 Field Experience I was added in Fall 2006 with an emphasis on field experiences in preschool, Kindergarten, and first grade classrooms. ED3032 Field Experience II was added in Spring 2007 with an emphasis on field experiences in second, third, and fourth grade classrooms. Each of these courses are two hour credit courses in which students meet face-to-face on Monday for 50 minutes and then go to one of our partner schools to observe and assist for two hours during the week. In both courses, students keep a portfolio of their experiences including photos, exemplary classroom management ideas, a wish list for their future classrooms, evidence of two mini-lessons taught, and answers to personal reflection questions. The portfolios are scored with a rubric which is included in the exhibits for 3.3f.

In both Field Experience I and II, students are assigned to two different partner schools to allow students to see differing school climates as well as different classrooms. As part of their course requirements, students must teach one mini-lesson at each of those partner schools. The WTEP makes the initial contact with partner schools and works with the partner school to make the assignments that will be at the appropriate grade levels for the course. After the initial contact is made, it is the students’ responsibility to make the professional contacts with the assigned teacher and work out a schedule for observations. Prior to this, class time is used to teach students the importance of professionalism in communicating with schools and teachers. Students also receive the “Expectations for Field Experiences” document which can be seen in the 3.3e exhibits. This information is taught in class as well. The document includes information about professional dress, demeanor, and confidentiality as well as other practical information for these novice teachers.

Along with the time spent observing in P-4 schools, the Field Experience courses afford students the opportunity for actual time spent teaching school-age students. Students are required to teach two lessons in different grade levels and different partner schools. The students are given a document that details the parameters of the assignment with suggestions and lesson ideas to get them started. Each lesson must address Arkansas Frameworks or Common Core standards. After teaching each mini-lesson, students reflect on the experience by answering seven reflection questions. These questions are found on page 2 of the Mini-lesson Details document in exhibits for 3.3e. The observation hours and the mini-lessons give students in these courses the opportunity to
gain a deeper understanding of the teaching profession and the developmental level of students in P-4.

In addition to the field experiences and mini-lessons, education majors in these two courses complete an Interview with a Teacher. Students must complete a face-to-face interview with a teacher in the grade levels associated with the course. Students typically choose to interview one of the teachers they felt was exemplary from their observations during field experiences. The interview consists of twenty questions about the profession. The student then completes a reflection of the interview and their own thoughts and ideas after completing the interview which is found on page two of the document. This document can be viewed in Exhibit 3.3.e.

Another significant change in both the P-4 Methods ED4143 and Mid-level 4-8 Methods ED 4123 courses is the addition of the video lesson in which students teach and video tape a lesson in one of the grade levels appropriate for their degree area. During the four days of PDST or Pre-Directed Student Teaching, these teacher candidates spend two days with each teacher that they will complete their internship with in the following semester. The students are encouraged to choose one of these teachers’ classrooms in which to complete the video lesson. P-4 Methods students are also strongly encouraged to use a lesson plan that he or she created for the Interdisciplinary Unit which is completed during the Methods course. The video must show the lesson from introduction to closure with no stopping of the video. The video lesson is scored with a rubric which is provided to students in advance to help them strive to be exemplary in their preparation and teaching of the lesson. Teacher candidates must collaborate with the cooperating teacher to plan a lesson that meets state standards and must also decide what type of assessment will be used to assess the learning. After teaching the lesson, the students reflect upon their practice and student achievement by answering ten in-depth reflection questions which can be seen on page four of the video lesson directions document. The video lesson directions and rubric are linked in Exhibit 3.3.f.

Perhaps the most beneficial aspect of the video lesson assignment comes after the lesson itself when teacher candidates in P-4 Methods ED 4143 choose a 20 minute segment of the lesson video to share with their peers in the Methods course. Teacher candidates write a justification of the why they chose that aspect of the video to share. Some teacher candidates try to show a segment of the video that he or she thought went particularly well and showcases teaching strengths. However, some teacher candidates choose to show a segment of the video in which he or she feels their own teaching or classroom management needs improvement in order to elicit ideas from their peers about how to grow in their own practice. The video segments are shared and the class as a whole discusses strengths and weaknesses in the video. Teacher candidates typically state that this is one of the most valuable parts of the program in preparing them for the classroom.

A third change that has been made involves both the P-4 and Mid-level 4-8 Programs. Students in both of these program areas are required to take ED 4153 Reading in the Content Area. In this course, students must complete an in-depth Reading Case Study. This is accomplished in collaboration with our partner schools which allow the
WBC teacher candidate to spend 3 hours of observation time and 7 hours working one-on-one with a third, fourth, or fifth grade student completing reading assessments and teaching vocabulary and comprehension strategies. The Case Study specific directions and Expectations for the Case Study are two documents provided to teacher candidates to ensure success in this assignment. (Exhibit 3.3.e) This assignment would not be possible without our partner schools and the experienced teachers with which our students are privileged to work. The cooperating teachers are provided with two documents to explain this assignment and the criteria for selecting a student in grades 3-5. The letter of explanation and the teacher responsibilities can both be seen in the exhibits section 3.3a. This assignment affords our teacher candidates the opportunity to work within a partner school to collaborate with a teacher, parents and a student. After a student is selected by the teacher that meets the given criteria, the teacher candidate by observing the student for three hours in reading-related classroom activities while taking detailed anecdotal records of the student’s behavior and academics. After that, the teacher candidate administers several reading assessments including the interest inventory, reading attitude survey, high frequency word knowledge survey, a silent reading comprehension assessment and a listening comprehension assessment. Using these assessments, the teacher candidate chooses seven comprehension and vocabulary strategies of the ten or so strategies that were modeled in the course to teach to the student. The assessments aide the teacher candidate in selecting the strategies and the text to use in teaching the strategy. After each strategy is taught, the teacher candidate writes a reflection and the student work sample is placed in the Case Study as documentation of the event. The Case Study rubric is used to score this assignment and can be viewed in Exhibit 3.3.f.

The WTEP feel that the changes that have been made in response to the area cited for improvement were positive additions to our programs and we will continue to work diligently toward continuous improvement.