

**Summary of the Case (from the Inquiry Brief)**  
**Bluefield University**  
**Teacher Education Program<sup>1</sup>**  
**Audit Dates: April 19-22, 2009**

*The Summary of the Case is written by the auditors and approved by program faculty. The Summary reflects the auditors' understanding of the case the faculty are making for accreditation.*

**Authorship and approval of the *Inquiry Brief*:**

The *Inquiry Brief* was written by Donna Hardy Watson and Phyllis J. Owens and was approved by the program faculty on February 24, 2009.

**Introduction:**

Approved in 1920 by the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Bluefield College was founded as a two-year college in 1922. The college was approved for four-year baccalaureate degrees in 1975; it now offers four-year baccalaureate programs culminating in either a B.S. or B.A. degree in 20 major fields of study. Located in the Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia, Bluefield College currently has a student body of about 800 traditional and adult students. The college also operates regional offices in Roanoke, Virginia and Richmond, Virginia. The academic programs are organized into eight divisions. Bluefield College has been ranked among the top 50 comprehensive undergraduate colleges in the South in *U.S. News and World Report's* "America's Best Colleges" since 2004. It is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The Teacher Education Program grew out of a self-study done in 1972; the first five teachers graduated in 1977. Today, the Division of Education offers program options with state endorsements in 13 areas.<sup>1</sup> From 2004 through 2008, nearly half of the graduates were in the Elementary preK-6 option. Bluefield College notes that they have a small program with only two full-time faculty members with 6-12 graduates per year. Students in the Teacher Education Program are required to have a broad foundation in the liberal arts, an academic major, professional studies courses and multiple field experiences, as well as student teaching. The program graduates earn either a B.A. or B.S. depending on the major. Because of its location on the border of West Virginia and Virginia, the program notes that it meets the needs of public schools and the content regulations of both states and is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL).

The Teacher Education Program claims that it prepares teachers who are competent, caring, and qualified and are reflective practitioners who "take charge of their own learning so they can then better understand students and how they learn." The program states that it incorporates the efforts of all college faculty,

including those in the arts and sciences, as well as public school practitioners in its planning, administration, and evaluation.

**Program claims:**

The faculty proposes to show evidence that their graduates have:

1. An expertise in one or more content areas;
2. A broad foundation of general knowledge in the liberal arts;
3. An understanding of the teaching and learning process (how students learn) in order to address the needs of the “whole child,” and to teach students effectively;
4. A commitment to the larger community;
5. Skills to manage teaching and learning as reflective practitioners;
6. Abilities to respond to the “whole child”
7. Technology skills;
8. Ability to pursue professional development.

**Evidence supporting the claims:**

The faculty asserts that students are assessed by a number of qualitative and quantitative means. For each claim, four to seven assessments are provided. The faculty’s evidence is based on four years of data gathered from 2004—2008. Because a complete change of faculty occurred in those years, not all measures were available across the four academic years of data collection.

1. Standardized Test (Praxis II);
2. Grades (GPA upon admittance to program, GPA in major, GPA in professional education courses, field experience grades, and grades in specific courses);
3. Grades in selected courses (EDU 3133 or ESS 4133; EDU 2213) field experiences (EDU 3901, EDU 4101); and student teaching (EDU 4608, 4708, or EDU 4908);
3. Portfolio rating/portfolio presentation ratings;
4. Evaluations of Field Experiences and Student Teaching (ratings by faculty supervisors, mentors, and principals);
6. Faculty rating form on reference form for admission to program.

**Validity and Reliability:**

The faculty acknowledges concerns about reliability and validity of single measures, especially grades from a single course. They decided to use grade point averages in the major/ state endorsement area as evidence for the claim on content knowledge; they argue that the major GPA is a valid measure of students’ content knowledge because all of these courses are aligned with content requirements mandated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Following the same logic, the faculty chose to use the GPA in

professional education courses as evidence of pedagogical knowledge because the content of those courses is again aligned with all the competencies required by the VDOE. Additionally, a student's overall GPA at the time of application to the Teacher Education Program is seen as evidence of the general knowledge.

The faculty states that it has revised its policy regarding recommendations from faculty members based on concerns about content validity. The Praxis II is required by the state for licensure; the program accepts statements of content validity and reliability from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Evaluation instruments used by the supervisors, mentors and principals were not field tested; faculty note that this is seen as a weakness. The *Brief*, however, states that "specific questions on the instruments did directly relate to the claims of professional studies, caring, decision-making and critical thinking, and diversity...and provide a modicum of content and concurrent validity... and reliability." The faculty notes concerns with reliability and validity linked to the evaluation instruments used for portfolios and field experiences; they pointed out that new forms were introduced in fall, 2008, to improve the trustworthiness of the data. Grades in selected courses have been used for some claims; the faculty determined these to be valid measurements because of alignment with course content and requirements and noted that criterion-related indicators are being developed.

The faculty also acknowledges the inherent difficulties, such as lack of variability and lack of pilot testing, which exist when dealing with small numbers of students, inadequate instruments, and newly designed measurement instruments.

**Internal audit:**

Based on suggestions derived from TEAC materials, the faculty selected a random sample of five folders from a total of 35 students from 2004-2008 and created a number of questions related to curriculum, faculty, facilities, practices and policies.

Student folders were checked for alignment to requirements in the college catalog, education course requirements, and field work, financial aid, and advising. Six courses were also randomly chosen for a syllabus review; faculty focused on state competencies, college requirements, approval process, mandated policy statements, and grading scales. The courses led to the review of files and policies relating to the recruitment, hiring, qualifications, and evaluations for four faculty members. Additionally, the classrooms and facilities where the selected courses had been taught were inspected. Interviews and document reviews led to the verification of other areas such as general college admission policies, student support, and student feedback.

The faculty asserts that most of the components were adequately addressed, although exceptions were found that have already been addressed or are included in plans for program improvement. They concluded, "Following our internal audit, we are satisfied that our quality control system is effective and beneficial to our students."

### **Plan for program improvement**

The faculty plans to refine and enhance its systems for systematically generating, collecting, and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data related to program claims and use it for curriculum improvement. Additionally, they wish to continue to refine and develop their field evaluations and provide training for those who will use them. They found they need to collect and retain data and general records more consistently and formalize a process to collect and analyze student feedback.

### **Commitment and capacity:**

The faculty concluded that Bluefield College is committed to the Teacher Education Program and that there is sufficient capacity to offer a quality program.

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**<sup>1</sup> The program includes options in the following areas and Virginia, following to its own policies and regulations, may grant teaching licenses in these areas to the program's graduates:**

Bluefield College has Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) approved undergraduate programs including program options for initial licensure in Elementary Education preK-6 , Art preK-12, Health and Physical Education pre-K-12, Vocal/Choral Music preK-12, Biology 6-12, Business 6-12, Chemistry 6-12, English 6-12, History and Social Sciences 6-12, and Mathematics 6-12. Add-on endorsements in Algebra I, Journalism and Speech are also offered. The state, following its own policies and regulations, may grant teaching licenses in these areas to the program's students.