



Employer Assessment Project of Advanced Programs' Candidate Outcomes

Final Technical Report

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The purpose of the Employer Assessment project is to gather feedback from employers regarding the quality of preparation received by those who have completed advanced educational programs from the College of Education and Affiliated Projects at CSULB. The College of Education Conceptual Framework guides all undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs within the College. Although the College of Education prepares advanced graduate candidates for work in a field related to education, the graduate programs are divided into two groups: (1) programs evaluated by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and (2) programs not evaluated by NCATE. We held a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews, which prompted participants to reflect on our candidates' skills and knowledge as they aligned with the College of Education Conceptual Framework. The findings reveal that our graduates do have the knowledge and skills of their field, but they also recommend areas for improvement. More interestingly, even though some of the Conceptual Framework elements are viewed similarly across all programs, other elements, even though they are equally important, are interpreted differently by each field. We discuss the implications of the findings for program improvement, rather than an assessment of the effectiveness of individual graduates and specific graduate programs.

Methodology

Employers participated in a one-hour focus group or individual interview. The focus groups engaged employers in conversations about both the effectiveness of the preparation of our candidates and areas for improvement. This more detailed information enabled us to tease out strengths and challenges of our alumni within specific contexts. Each focus group included at

least two facilitators, one of whom had experience in qualitative interviewing techniques and thus was discrete with the information they heard about individual programs. The criterion for identifying employers was that they supervise or are familiar with the work performance of at least three of our graduate alumni. The recruitment process included graduates from all 18 Advanced Programs within the College of Education, both NCATE and Non-NCATE programs (see Table 1).

Table 1 NCATE and Non-NCATE Groups

NCATE	Non-NCATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted Physical Education • Curriculum and Instruction • Dual Language Development • Early Childhood Education • Math Education • Education Specialist II • Administrative Services I • Educational Technology and Media Leadership • Reading and Language Arts • School Counseling • School Psychology • Speech-Language Pathology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling • Educational Psychology • Marriage and Family Therapy • School Social Work • Social and Cultural Analysis of Education • Student Development in Higher Education

Participants

There were more participant in the NCATE group compared to the non-NCATE group. For the NCATE group, participants included ten females and four males, age 36 years and older. The ethnic breakdown included one Asian Pacific Islander, two African-Americans, one Latino, one of mixed race, and ten Caucasian. The educational level extended from a Bachelor’s degree, Master of Arts degree, to Ph.D. or Ed.D. Participants represented four school districts, two institutions of higher education, and one local agency, specifically, eight principals, two assistant principals,

three directors, and one community college faculty. Whereas for the non-NCATE group, we had three participants, age 36 years and older. The one female and two males self-identified as either Asian Pacific Islander or White/Caucasian. They all had a Masters of Arts degree, and represented the Community College District and one local agency.

Instruments

The employers completed a demographic questionnaire and responded to a series of prompts. The demographic questionnaire asked about their backgrounds, position, number of our alumni they supervise, and number of years they have worked with our alumni. The focus group prompts integrated elements of the College of Education Conceptual Framework elements, such as alumni's knowledge of effective pedagogy, evidence-based practices, collaboration, innovation, leadership, scholarship, and advocacy (see Appendix).

Data Collection

This was a two-phase data collection process: Phase I took place in the Spring of 2014 and Phase II occurred in Fall 2014. Phase I focused on employers of candidates who graduated from the Advanced Teacher Preparation programs as well as programs for other school professionals, programs within the NCATE group. One of the participants in this initial phase spoke to the higher education program alumni, which is a non-NCATE program. For Part II of the project, we invited employers of the non-NCATE program graduates to participate. Employers who showed interested in participating during Phase I, but were unable to attend for various reasons, were invited to participate in the fall focus group meetings.

Spring. Recruitment started the fall semester before data collection. The advanced program coordinators and graduate alumni, who responded to an alumni survey, indicated the alumni worked in school districts, foundations, private sector agencies, and institutions of higher education. Using this information, we contacted 21 school districts, three charter schools, two institutions of higher education, and five private sector agencies. We started by receiving CSULB IRB approval for the project and attempting to work with the IRB offices at the districts and charter schools. We found smaller districts did not have IRB offices and larger districts had an extensive IRB application process. From these efforts, only nine districts responded. Next, we turned to our local partners. Administrators from ten school districts, two institutions of higher

education, and one private sector agency responded positively. Although there was a positive and supportive response from our partners, the number of employers able to take the time to participate in a focus group was minimal. For example, as a result of our partnership with Long Beach Unified School District, they provided a list of all schools within the LBUSD school district that employed our alumni. Using this list, we drafted and mailed over 100 letters addressed to every Principal, Assistant Principal, and Director of Schools at the school sites. Through recruitment emails and personalized letters, 30 individual employers responded that they would participate in a focus group meeting. Due to scheduling conflicts and last minute cancellations, 14 employers attended one of four focus group meetings. Additionally, the timing of the meetings occurred around spring break and toward the end of the school year, limiting the availability of participants.

Fall. The focus for the fall was on non-NCATE program alumni and employers who were unable to attend the spring focus group meetings. The advanced program coordinators were contacted and asked for their input about how to effectively reach graduate alumni. One coordinator suggested that alumni would be more willing to provide their employers contact information and assist us if the request came from the program coordinator. The invitation letter was drafted and revised. All non-NCATE program coordinators forwarded the message to their alumni. A similar emailed was sent to 646 alumni via the graduate alumni survey listserv. We also re-contacted the 15 employers who were unable to attend the spring focus group meetings. Ten employers responded, and three participated in a focus group or one-on-one interview.

Data Analysis

The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed. Using line-by-line coding, 8 codes emerged from the spring focus group transcripts. We used these codes to analyze the fall transcripts; six new codes emerged. We recoded the spring transcripts using the new and initial codes. The result was a final list of 13 codes (see Table 2). Eight codes are aligned with the College of Education Conceptual Framework elements. The five codes that do not directly align with the Conceptual Framework elements include application, excitement, logistics, professional dispositions, and soft skills.

Two codes that will not be discussed in the findings are excitement and application. The **Excitement** code emerged from the participants' responses to the first question, *When you are interviewing for a job position and learn that a candidate graduated from CSULB, what comes to your mind?* Their responses predominantly reflected the employers' experience as former students of the College. Those who were alumni themselves assumed our graduates would be highly qualified, and therefore, were eager to hire CSULB graduates. Other employers had worked with many of our alumni over the years and raved about the quality of our candidates. The **Application** code focused on how well our candidates applied theories or knowledge they learned to their specific practice. The participants differentiated their responses from the overall candidates' knowledge of the field and their implementation of instruction or effective pedagogy. Due to limited responses for this code, it was removed from the final discussion of the findings.

Table 2 Final Codes

Code	Definition
Advocacy*	Innovation/Initiation*
Application	Leadership*
Collaboration*	Logistics
Evidence-Based/Content Knowledge*	Professional Dispositions
Diversity*	Soft-Skills
Effective Pedagogy*	Technology*
Excitement	

* These codes align with the College of Education Conceptual Framework.

Findings

Participants shared the strengths of our graduates as well as some areas that require additional support and preparation. The interview questions meant to gain a deeper understanding of how we as a College are preparing our advanced graduates with the skills and knowledge described in our Conceptual Framework. The results surprised us. Three concerns regarding the preparation of our graduates emerged that are not part of the Conceptual Framework elements. These codes were logistics, professional dispositions, and soft-skills. As for

the Conceptual Framework elements, the employers viewed them as important. However, only four of the elements were interpreted similarly across both NCATE and non-NCATE groups, whereas each group defined two of the elements in relation to their field and organization's need. Furthermore, two other elements were seminal to the NCATE group, and almost dismissed by the non-NCATE group. Before we explain the findings, we describe who the employers supervise.

Demographic Information

Of the employers evaluating the effectiveness of our NCATE program alumni, the participants were familiar with the work performance of 101 graduate alumni. The position titles of CSULB graduates reflected in this study were as follows: Teacher, Coordinator, Counselor, Assistant Principal, Principal, College Instructor, College/University Administrator, and Other. The 14 participants provided feedback for a range of our alumni; however, most of the graduate alumni worked in a school district setting and six worked in institutions of higher education.

Of the employers of our non-NCATE alumni, the participants were familiar with the work performance of 56 graduate alumni. The positions of the CSULB graduates reflected in this phase included: Counselor, Director, Coordinator, College/University Counselor or Administrator, and Dean. The participants provided feedback for a range of our alumni. However, all of the graduate alumni worked in institutions of higher education and support agencies.

Similar Interpretations

The five codes viewed similarly by both the NCATE and non-NCATE groups are Content Knowledge, Initiation, Leadership, Advocacy, and Logistics. There was consensus among the participants that our graduates were strong in **evidence-based practices** or **content knowledge**, including the core content areas and knowledge of their fields. Participants said graduates wanted to learn more, and went out of their way to do so.

I think content-wise, they are prepared. In going through and doing a specific strategy that you want them to be able to do, they don't necessarily have those things, but I think content, they are strong

Whereas some participants viewed our graduates as knowledgeable about the Common Core, others felt the graduates lacked some of the Common Core knowledge and skills. They also

appeared limited in their familiarity with the CELDT levels associated with English language learners. Other areas of possible improvement included training and knowledge of the latest technology and software and teaching diverse groups of adults, specifically in a community college setting.

A huge component that could assist with the, looking at the English learners no matter what district they are going to be at, they are going to be tackling how to support these children and be sure that they understand the academic language and what is expected of them.

Employers of graduates from both NCATE and non-NCATE groups characterize graduates as “go-getters” and willing to “jump-in.” Graduates take **initiation** of on-going and new projects. They are open and willing to try something new and follow through.

At other tasks like, you know, having them take a project from the very beginning, that they would want to do, you know, help me take it from the very beginning to inception to recruiting the students, through the whole process... I would say yeah, they are really, I mean, go-getters. A lot of the students that have come out of the program are extremely ambitious and go-getters

Even though the overwhelming response is that our graduates do take initiative, one employer gave an example of when they do not. In the following example, the graduate teacher was hesitant and frustrated that she could not do more. The reason was not her unwillingness, but rather the context in which she worked prevented her from “doing the right thing”.

And I think we ask that of any program of any school or any university at any school site, but I think there’s a little bit of a hesitancy towards us, especially like the staff I have. It’s a little bit more veteran and set in their ways that she wants to, I’m thinking of this teacher in particular. She wants to and is frustrated but yet doesn’t take the initiative to do more than demanded. Because I think it’s a lot more powerful obviously if it comes from the teachers themselves instead of being mandated from the administrators.

The employer does not blame her, but instead explains a larger concern within her school that is unrelated to how we prepare our graduates.

There was a positive and consistent consensus among the employers regarding our graduates **leadership** and **advocacy** skills. Employers provided several examples of our graduates taking on leadership roles and being viewed as leaders by their colleagues and supervisors. Examples of leadership roles included site union representative, technology support for the school site, leading programs and projects, applying for grants, piloting new books or curriculum, and instructional coaching. They also were viewed as gravitating towards leadership roles. *“CSULB teachers were very involved in leadership teams at their site and they actively sought out opportunities to be involved as leaders on campus.”* Another employer explained *“they are people who are always involved or want to be in the know and involved, both. I would, none of them have been the type that sit on the sidelines waiting for it to be handed to them.”* Employers provided examples of graduates being advocates for students and their families. Graduates become aware of a need, ask questions, and find solutions.

So the history teacher with the refuge club and stuff like that. She started that because she saw that kids really had a need. We see a lot of kinda abuse and neglect and a lot of kids in foster care and things like that. And so she wanted to pair with her local church and she wanted to start offering some stuff for our kids on campus. So in that way she’s an advocate.

The CSULB student was working with a male student who, surprisingly, felt comfortable approaching the instructor (CSULB grad) even though she was opposite gender and confiding in her about an incident that was occurring with a different instructor. The CSULB grad was extremely supportive of the student and took the necessary steps to advocate on behalf of her student in confronting the ill-behavior of the other faculty member.

Most graduates seemed to fit in with the culture and subculture of the school site, and were willing to participate in meetings and school activities. Employers positively commented on the graduates’ knowledge of the field. However, they did identify certain skills and knowledge that cannot be learned from a textbook. The graduates appeared to struggle with the **logistics** of their jobs, or the everyday practical knowledge of teaching and of being a new employee. For example, employers felt graduates needed to learn how to: survive the first year of teaching; read and setup a roll book; create a syllabus and order books for a course; set up a cuing

systems; read acronyms; combat, prevent, and deal with teacher burnout; and create lesson plans. Additional practical information that would help graduates is knowledge of the school wide programs; organizational structure and culture; and handling, dealing with, and navigating paperwork, such as bargaining agreements. Some participants identified classroom management as another concern and challenge for our graduates, noting that graduates were challenged to handle limited parental support and involvement, de-escalate negative and combative student behavior, deal with limited resources, and establish classroom expectations. Regarding special education, the employers felt our graduates need to be better prepared in writing an IEP, scheduling IEP meetings, and preparing for IEP meetings.

As a special ed person now, you are talking about having to interact with the SLP and the psych and the OT and the PT and the parent and, on and on and on.... That's a big undertaking, to try to deal with all those people and find dates and then, you know, looking at goal writing and understanding that it isn't just your goals, but it's the OT's goals and the PT's goals, everybody's got goals for this kiddo and, you know, trying to integrate all of that. How to run an IEP, I mean that's an art in itself, to run that and it depends, sometimes the psych runs it, but often times, the special ed teacher at least starts it out, you know, and, yes, everybody does their part, but somebody has to orchestrate it and generally it is either the psych or the teacher, who is going to do that. And that's an art, trying to do that, so that might be something to look as is how prepared are they to step into that role and get that done.

As the employers noted, these skills are unique to the organization and institutional culture and expectations, and may not be learned from a book.

Unique to NCATE Programs

The knowledge and implementation of effective pedagogy and technological strategies or approaches was of interest to all employers. Employers of our NCATE group graduates discussed in more detail the importance and uses of instruction and technology in their organizations. The non-NCATE group mentioned effective pedagogy and technology, but seemed more dismissive of the importance of these skills for their organizations, and referred to it as on-the-job training. For example, for the NCATE group, the code of **effective pedagogy** was the knowledge of different theories regarding how students learn, teaching approaches, and methods of assessment, and the ability to transfer them into practice. A common theme that emerged during the focus

groups was a paradigm shift from direct instruction and viewing each child as the same universal learner to perceiving them as individuals and diverse learners. Some graduates have the ability to meet and educate every student individually; however, other graduates require additional preparation in educating the whole child and meeting the needs of the child as an individual in order to raise grades and achieve positive results. Some graduates, both at the district and community college levels, were willing and able to diversify their instruction in response to individual student performance. However, several employers commented that our graduates required, as one said, a *“deeper understanding of curriculum and the ability to implement it using various teaching strategies and techniques.”* Because of the shift away from a direct instruction model, graduates needed to “update” their teaching skills and knowledge. In addition, participants felt graduates teaching in classrooms should come with a better understanding of how to effectively review and use assessment data to inform instruction. Whereas for the non-NCATE group, one employer described that when a graduate was unsure, *“I mean she’ll run it by me; you know, we’ll talk about pros and cons, and should I do it, and should I not do it.”* The employers from this group responded as though our graduates had a tool kit of strategies to pull from. As a result, they viewed evidence-based practices and effective pedagogy as a similar concept.

The second code specific to the NCATE group is **technology**. NCATE employers discussed the use of technology in terms of our graduates using it professionally, for instruction, and for global learning. A few employers mentioned our graduates have “better” technology skills than others on their campus and are able and willing to assist teachers and administration with issues surrounding computers and technology, both hardware and software. Graduates also had strong basic knowledge of the day to day operations of computers, hardware, and software. Although employers stated some graduates were comfortable incorporating technology into their teaching, many more lacked the ability to integrate technology as an instructional teaching tool, beyond using PowerPoint slides. Employers said they would like to see our graduates working with the district to implement a technological infrastructure to support growth and skill development and using various technological devices as learning tools (iPad, Kindle, Tablets, etc.). Finally, another area of need identified by employers was knowing how to use technology

professionally and within district policy guidelines, such as writing electronic correspondence, knowing the consequences if technology is abused or used negatively (emailing to parents, students, etc.), and establishing guidelines for using technology properly and safely with students. The non-NCATE employers expected our graduates to have basic technology software skills. The example below shows this employer almost being dismissive of the expectations regarding technology. His organization does not appear to have certain expectations regarding the knowledge and uses of technology; thus, drastically differing from the NCATE employers expectations.

at least they have to come in and they know how to use all the Microsoft products and our own information systems and they have to learn all that stuff. And, you know, quite frankly we don't do a lot of training. We give them a book and kind of show them a few things and then they kind of have to go, so yeah, they are very adaptable in that area in technology and probably, again, even more so than a lot of the longer-serving faculty members on our campus. When I go observe them in their teaching, you know, when they're teaching from a program, I can sit there and I can see that they are using the technology, they're using PowerPoint and Prezi and all kinds of different things to engage the students.

Similar, but Different Interpretations

The last four codes, collaboration, professional dispositions, diversity, and soft skills, were discussed by both NCATE and non-NCATE groups. Yet, there expectations diverged among them. Employers viewed graduates as able to **collaborate**. The NCATE participants noted our graduates generally have the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively with parents and the community in which they teach, both in the school and outside. Graduates understood the importance of collaboration and how to collaborate with colleagues; conversely, employers also noted that collaboration improves with experience. Nonetheless, employers also stated that our graduates require additional training and development in collaboration, specifically in collaborating with various constituents, such as parents, school staff, special education teachers, and community partners. Communicating with various constituents and dealing with conflict, such as irate parents, veteran teachers, principals, and other staff, is an area in which our

graduates struggle. *I think it could be included in your, maybe mock interview or mock, let's pretend we are talking to an irate parent or this is your first day of school.* Employers representing our non-NCATE graduates viewed collaboration as an equal partnership between employer and employee, such that they turn to each other for support and extend the cohort model to the workplace environment. Even when placed in close working conditions, our graduates were collegial with everyone.

Yeah. I mean they seem to blend well, because at -- College where I work we have a mixture of programs and program staff that has to fit in very close proximity to each other because there's not a lot of space. They share cubicles and they have, you know, a shared work space and a lot of them are on top of each other and they have to work closely with each other because our activities commingle so much. You know, I don't think I have any, in fact I can't think of any in the last fifteen years... really any issue, personality issue-wise, working with others.

On the rare occasion graduates must interact with families, they tended to struggle and were not prepared for these interactions. These employers emphasized collaborating with co-workers, whereas employers of the NCATE group included collaborating with students, parents, community, as well as co-workers.

Discussions of **professional dispositions** emerged throughout the group meetings. For the NCATE group of employers, younger more recent graduates tended to have a positive attitude and were willing to accept change, whereas veteran teachers tended to be more resistant to change. Participants described some graduates as ready to receive critical feedback and willing to make changes that lead to improvement. Some graduates participated in professional development activities, and other needed to work on being more involved in the process. Recommendations for improvement included graduates learning to seek help in dealing with challenging and difficult situations, increasing their willingness to learn, improving their listening skills, and working on being humble and patient. The non-NCATE employers also described how eager our graduates were to learning and receptive to feedback for improvement. They too sought out professional development workshops and trainings. *"Some people are a little more quiet; but I mean they are always open to feedback and want the opportunity for training, and*

want to grow.” The deviation from the NCATE group comes in the form of conference presentations and publications. This particular non-NCATE employer noticed a slight drop in this type of activity.

the new ones that are coming out who are trying to get themselves established so they can apply for the tenure track jobs and try to get them to do the conference thing. I know you guys did a lot of it. Previously it was, I think, more. I think these guys are going NAFTA, like, you know, all different... a lot of different times and doing NAFTA presentations, all those different types of places. So I kind of picked up on that and said, hey, let's write a proposal to present somewhere and, you know, I kind of gave them the opportunity to write their own proposal and submit it and they jumped at that and, you know, I've taken tons of alumni on conferences... I think they also contribute to the profession and the body of knowledge in a way that I think is different than other graduate programs. I think they're kind of either taught that as part of their development. It's the whole idea of, you know, professional development is important and then also contributing is important as well

Contributing to the body of knowledge of the field is important.

The mission of the College of Education emphasizes the preparation of candidates for working in diverse urban settings. There is clear distinction between the NCATE and non-NCATE groups regarding how well we prepare our graduates for working in **diverse** settings. The non-NCATE employers acknowledge our graduates *“display respect and appreciation for differences”*. Our graduates help students on probation, with AB540 status, and learning English as a second language.

Are they, you know, keen to the barriers that individuals from whatever background faced in higher education and it seems that the -- students coming out are very attuned to that. They understand it, they know it. A lot of them have lived it. They understand all those barriers.

However, the NCATE employers felt we could do more, specifically expand the definition of student diversity beyond poverty, income status, and English language status. Although graduates acknowledge they are in a multicultural environment and are open to embracing

diversity, employers believe the graduates practice tolerance rather than embracing diversity. Graduates should learn to embrace and respect students that are different than oneself on every level, such as homelessness, religious, gender, and/or disability status. The employers felt graduates should learn to connect and develop relationships with individual students, and avoid generalizing based on demographics.

to think beyond just what you already think. Because I think if you research, you think, oh, high poverty area, a lot of at risk students that is what I'm going to see. Rather than think about the individual and really not do it as a big population type thing, because that does give you that tolerance for a group that you don't really specify, rather than here's a child who has been bullied for two or three years. He hasn't told anybody and then comes to you. That kid is at risk and he is probably failing his classes, you know, and it's not because he is bored and it's not because he doesn't understand.... And it's not the EL issue and it's not a poverty issue. It's much more than that... To look at the actual person and not talking about, we do talk about populations a lot as far as education, but really taking them individually would help break down that and make more of a kind of individual student.

The code of **soft skills** differs from diversity because it has to do with how our graduates respond to others, and the ability to listen to individual needs of their students and colleagues. Graduates need to stop and listen, get to know their students/clients. One non-NCATE employer noted our graduates are so eager to help the students/clients that they forget *"the more soft skills, people skills"* to stop and really listen to the concern of the student.

they want to jump in and help and you know, even though they are telling you everything about the facts and everything up and down about the facts. the fact that the student isn't engaged with them at that specific moment, they don't catch up on that, they just keep going, flowing past all of that and so, the stopping and listening and engaging and, you know, being able to talk about, you know, How are you feeling right now, You seem kind of anxious, or those kinds of counseling skills...

The employers of the NCATE group also think our graduates should stop and listen before jumping in. However, for this employer, teachers should have the ability to understand your population of students and be able to connect with students. Because of these connections, students follow and do what the teacher asks. For this employer, if teachers do not have these skills, she will not consider them for a job. *"But I'm a bull dog when it comes to that because I really need people who get that. And if they don't get that I don't care how much content*

knowledge they have, they're not going to be able to reach the kids with that content knowledge."

When working with colleagues, our graduates are eager to get involved and answer questions. However, some of the employers would rather they first get to know the cultural norms of the group. *"Taking in the culture and not just jumping in and trying to make any changes right away... when to push and when to pull"*.

And you really have to kind of get a lay of the land and, you know, every group that you are with has a different expectation so, they just really need to sit back and sort of figure out the people that they are with and, you know, on the one hand, I think people come in and think, jump in, jump in, but there is a certain time and place for that and sometimes it's good to just put the brakes on for a little bit and.

Nevertheless, some of our graduates have these soft skills when working with colleagues.

One of the things that I really like about her is that she's got a nice quiet strength and people gravitate to her. She's one of the cultural and moral leaders of this school. So people go to her when they find out their sister has cancer. She's the one that people gravitate to in that way.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project is to understand how well alumni of our advanced educational programs from the College of Education and Affiliated Projects are prepared after they graduate. Overall, participants felt graduates are prepared. Employers state graduates know their content, take initiative, are leaders, and advocate for those they serve. They also identify areas of improvement. There are two possible explanations. First, the field of education is experiencing shifts in defining effective pedagogy, collaboration, and technology. The paradigm shift from direct instruction and universal learners to problem solving and individual learners, as played out by the integration of Common Core Standards, is illustrated in the employers' responses. The NCATE participants note they have both graduates who are familiar with the Common Core Standards and those who still need to learn more. This also may be a reflection of when the graduates actually graduated from our programs, five years ago or in the last two years. In the past decade, districts have increased their emphasis on partnering with families and community businesses. Most of the recommendations from NCATE employers are better preparation for

communicating and collaborating with families and community agencies. Teacher preparation programs also need to shift their curricula to include collaborating with individuals who are in the lives of students. Rapid changes in technology challenge all teacher preparation programs and employers to find ways of supporting and preparing employees for staying current. The non-NCATE group show additional evidence of these shifts and challenges. Since they are not directly affected by shifts in K-12 education, they offer minimal recommendations for improvements in effective pedagogy, collaboration, and technology. Another explanation for the types of recommendations made by employers is that we have less influence on the development of certain skills. Professional dispositions, soft skills, and logistics, as mentioned by some employers, cannot be learned from books and are unique to certain organizations and positions. Graduate programs should be aware of these concerns and address them in the program curriculum. However, ultimately, it is the graduate who will decide how comfortable they feel in participating and applying these skills.

Although the finding provided valuable information regarding our graduates, the methodological approach of the project highlights challenges of this type of work, as well as learning opportunities for future assessments. The challenges and limitations include both recruitment and data collection. Recruitment of alumni requires an evolving and updated database of where they work and contact information. Even when alumni provide this information, for this project, the decision to only invite employers who supervise at least three of our graduates added to the narrow pool of potential participants. It narrowed the pool to school districts and institutions of higher education, and almost eliminated the possibility of employers from the private sector. This decision was to avoid an overrepresentation of one person and one graduate program. One solution is to increase the sample size and continue data collection over a longer period of time. The collection of data occurred in two semesters and over a year. Unfortunately, the timing overlapped with beginning of the school year, major holidays, and end of the school year for employers in preschool to higher education settings. Several employers showed interest in participating; however, only half of them actually participated. Accommodations for one-on-one interviews helped to increase the data. Future evaluations should offer both one-on-one and focus group interviews, which may increase the sample size.

The project findings provide a unique window into our programs. They also posed questions that require reflection and consideration for the College of Education as a unit. The main question, are the College of Education Conceptual Framework elements applicable to all programs of study? If they are relevant to some, but not other programs, how do we separate them? Or do we need to re-evaluate the Conceptual Framework elements to only include those that apply to all areas of study? On the other hand, as our findings suggest, all the elements are important for all programs, just defined and implemented in ways that are unique to the organization in which our graduates work. If this is true, should each program define the element in relation to their specific field of study? Or, do the elements and assessment unit take into account individual program differences? These questions must be asked, reflected, and answered by the faculty of the College.

Appendix

Employer Focus Group Protocol

Before we begin, we ask that you keep all information discussed during this meeting confidential. Please do not to share anything you hear with anyone outside of this room. The purpose of the focus group meeting is to learn more about the effectiveness of our graduates and how to better prepare them for their jobs. Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers, and we are not building consensus. We want to hear about each of your experiences with our alumni.

1. When you are interviewing for a job position and learn that a candidate graduated from CSULB, what comes to your mind?
2. How prepared are our graduates with the content knowledge and skills they need to be effective?
 - a. Have you noticed any particular strengths or gaps in our graduates' knowledge base or skills? Explain.
 - b. How well do they use evidence to inform their practice?
3. How well do they collaborate with colleagues?
 - a. How well do they collaborate with community members?
 - b. How well do they collaborate with their clients? Parents?
4. Are our graduates prepared to effectively use the technology related to their field? Explain.
 - a. How familiar are they with the software and hardware used at your site?
 - b. How comfortable are our graduates in trying or using innovative strategies, including those that use technology?
5. How open are our graduates to change and to learning new things? Explain.
 - a. Are they open to change?
 - b. Are they willing to engage in program initiatives and new projects?
 - c. Are they willing to engage in ongoing professional development?
6. What kinds of leadership roles have our graduates take on?
 - a. How well are they perceived as leaders?
 - b. Do you see them taking on more responsibilities?
 - c. Is there evidence that our graduates advocate for their students or clients or the community?
 - d. Can you give us specific examples?
7. To what degree do our graduates display understanding and respect for various types of diversity – gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, and disability?
8. Have you seen our graduates make meaningful contributions to your school or agency? Can you give us specific examples?
9. What are some ways that our programs can improve the preparedness of our graduates?
 - a. Are there specific skills or attributes that we could help strengthen?
10. Anything else you would like to share with us about our graduates?