

# Reflections on the Quality Indicator Process

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to share a description of the process used by Fort Hays State University (FHSU) as a self-study of the FHSU alternative certification program, known as Transition to Teaching. Team members used the Quality Indicators designed as a part of a Department of Education Transition to Teaching Grant called the KNOTtT Project. KNOTtT is the acronym for Kansas, Nevada, Ohio, Texas Transition To Teaching.*

***Key Words:** Alternative Certification, quality indicators, program evaluation*

The FHSU Transition to Teaching program is an alternative pathway toward earning an initial Kansas State Department of Education teaching license. The program is part of the education unit at Fort Hays State University. As such, it follows the Professional Educator conceptual framework model subscribed to by the unit. The TTT program is designed to produce high-quality teachers who are capable of teaching to diverse groups of students using research-based methods and technologies. Additionally, this program, like all programs in the unit, is designed to produce a professional educator who is knowledgeable not only in content, but also proficient in the use of technology, relevant current pedagogy, and assessment procedures. Program completers, consistent with the University's mission, are liberally educated, self-aware, and self-motivated members of a learning community who meet the diverse needs of P-12 students in Kansas. All unit programs are approved through the Kansas State Department of Education and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Alternative route candidates must work with FHSU and their local education agency to complete admission documentation. Program specialists analyze the transcripts of candidates interested in the program or who have been recommended for hire by one of the local education agencies. A previous content degree in the area in

which the candidate will be teaching, a cumulative grade point average of not less than 2.75 on a 4.0 scale, a signed contract with a district for the upcoming year, passage of the PRAXIS II content exam, and a practicum are all requirements of the program. Once approved, a Plan of Study is agreed upon and signed by all parties. Candidates then work through the 24 credit-hour program of study which spans a two-year period.

## **The Process**

### **Initiating the QI Process**

Fort Hays State University utilized a collaborative process to implement and work through the Quality Indicators. The FHSU process epitomized the saying, “The sum is greater than the parts.” Collectively, we had the information and the determination to complete the process in a timely manner. Having just completed Kansas State Department of Education/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (KSDE/NCATE) accreditation, a clear direction and process were deemed essential.

The Quality Indicators (QI) project was designed to provide a foundation for alternative certification program self-assessment. During the first two years of the KNOTtT project, a task force designed a comprehensive framework of indicators of program quality and began to pilot those indicators with local districts that sponsored alternative programs. Revisions have been made at each level of design and after the alpha pilot was conducted. Fort Hays State University participated as a beta pilot site in December of 2010.

In the fall of 2010, leaders of the FHSU non-traditional teacher preparation program called Transition to Teaching began to meet as a team. They used the QI process and indicators developed by the KNOTtT/National Association for Alternative Certification (NAAC) Quality Indicators Project. FHSU utilized a collaborative process as they worked through the Quality Indicators. Individuals involved included the project director, two faculty members responsible for teaching much of the coursework, a licensure specialist, and the program specialist. Each individual’s role in the Transition to Teaching program at FHSU is unique. The director is the chair of the department that houses the program. She initiates meetings, represents the program on the KSDE and FHSU policy councils, and oversees the working of the program. The instructors are two of the five individuals that teach coursework for the program. These instructors are instrumental in developing and teaching the induction class that is the only face-to-face component of the program. The induction class is designed to get the newly hired teachers ready to begin their first teaching experience. The licensure specialist is the individual most versed in the Kansas licensure requirements. She works with each candidate from the time of initial interest in the program until coursework is completed and the candidate is recommended for licensure. The program specialist assists all other members of the program and is the first line of communication for all of the Transition to Teaching candidates.

The roles described above help to keep the program running smoothly, given the large numbers and large geographic area of the program. Just as each team member holds a specialized role in the program, each also played a specialized role in the Quality Indicator process. The director called meetings, set purpose, oversaw the overall project, and brought some of the history of the program to the study. The director has been involved with the project since its inception and has written three of the eight courses that comprise the program. One of the two instructors has been with the program since its inception, teaching courses each semester. The second instructor has worked with the project for the past several years, teaching courses and serving as advisor for the TTT candidates who desire to complete a Master of Science with the TTT coursework as an emphasis area. Both instructors have routinely taught the face-to-face induction class. They brought organization and structure to the QI process. The licensure and program specialists respond to initial inquiries for the program, analyze transcripts for content requirements for licensure, maintain communication with candidates, and devise programs of study. The licensure specialist brought rich history to the QI process that was not exhibited by other team members. The program specialist organized the team as the official "datatician," a term coined by the team to exemplify the key role this individual played in recording and organizing the discussions and documentation for the process. She also had a rich collection of the artifacts needed to provide evidence for achievement of the stages assigned for each dimension and component of the process rubrics.

Individuals had responsibilities between planned meetings, but it was the interaction during the planned meetings that energized the process to produce a meaningful product in the completed self-study. The five team members met formally as a group for five consecutive weeks in two-hour scheduled meetings. The first meeting was used mostly to acquaint the team members with the dimensions, the components of each dimension, and to talk through a process that made sense. After the first meeting, the team members decided to work through one dimension in each of the next four meetings and to use the final meeting to summarize and complete the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis.

## **Working Through the Process**

The Quality Indicators are divided into three dimensions: governance, design and accountability. Each dimension is divided into four components: preparation, recruitment, selection, and support. Each component is then divided into four stages. The table below shows the rubric for Governance: Recruitment with the four stages. As the name of the process indicates, each stage lists a set of indicators that is used to determine the status of an alternative program for that specific dimension and component. There are a total of 12 rubrics, each with indicators at four stages that collaborators use to measure the development of their individual programs.

The content of the meetings centered on discussions comparing FHSU Alternative Certification program components to the quality indicators. Using the table below, the first conversation focused on asking what available program documents would

demonstrate accomplishment of indicators within each stage of the rubric. The first question then was, “What practice, policy, process, or document exists that demonstrates the program has identified Governance Roles for the recruitment process?” When a practice, policy, process, or document was identified, the next indicator in that stage was queried in the same manner..

**Table 1: Dimension: Governance                      Component: Recruitment**

<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Stage 4</b>
<b>Developing Program, Identifying Resources and Personnel</b>	<b>Implementing Program Procedures, Policies, and Collaboration</b>	<b>Analyzing Program Policies and Procedures</b>	<b>Advancing Program Sustainability and Continuous Improvement</b>
1. Governance Roles are identified for the recruitment process. 2. Recruitment procedures are planned. 3. Recruitment Resources are Identified.	1. Recruitment partners are identified and consulted regarding recruitment processes and policies 2. Recruitment strategies are developed and implemented 3. Recruitment resources are secured, developed and allocated.	1. With partner input, program leadership systematically reviews recruitment processes and policies to ensure highest quality and to ensure that efforts are sustained. 2. Allocations of resources are modified as necessary to meet program needs.	1. With partner and stakeholder input, program leadership implements a plan for continuous improvement allowing for times of both low and high hiring needs. 2. Source of adequate financial and physical resources are guaranteed into the foreseeable future.

The team continued the process for each stage until confronted by the indicator or indicators for which the program had no practice, policy, process, or document that demonstrated achievement of that indicator. At that point, it was determined what stage the FHSU Alternative Certification Program had reached for each component of each dimension. Each of the team members held a different knowledge base regarding the FHSU Alternative Certification program. Through the collaborative conversations, team members were able to view and discuss all of the components of the FHSU program. These discussions proved beneficial to team members as each individually learned more about the FHSU program.

The datatician kept notes as the discussions unfolded. After each meeting, she would summarize the discussions and send out an e-mail with the meeting notes. She also would include the identification of any documents that needed to be located and who was responsible for locating the document and e-mailing it to her. The datatician role was critical in keeping everyone on track and keeping feedback and data organized and up to date.

When a document was identified that demonstrated attainment of an indicator, it was coded according to the indicator. Using the previous table, a document that verified FHSU had identified roles for the recruitment process would be codified GR1.1, meaning the document was for Governance, Recruitment, Stage 1, document 1. The second document in support of Governance Recruitment, Stage 1, would be codified GR1.2. The codified documents were then organized and titled to ensure consistency between the document title and document name. This process was significant to the submission of the self-study to the review team.

The self-study was reviewed by a team of Alternative Certification experts representing the National Association for Alternative Certification (NAAC). That team needed to be able to easily find documents that support program attainment of specific stages of the rubrics. The codification system then served two purposes. It helped the self-study team keep track of the process and it also provided the reviewers a systematic presentation of the documents for review.

Along with the coding system that was developed, a consistent set of phrases was used to describe how the Fort Hays assessment fit within the Quality Indicators. Sometimes referred to as “boiler plate” language, consistent statements from indicator to indicator assisted the reviewers in understanding the intent of the organization conducting the self-study. To that end, the FHSU consistent language for each indicator became, “Through this process we believe we are in Stage . . . “ This statement was followed by the listing of coded documents that provided the evidence of achievement of that particular quality indicator.

### **Advantages of the Self-Study Process**

The Quality Indicators provided multiple advantages and services to FHSU. As established, and due to the nature of Alternative Certification, the process to implement the Quality Indicator review was highly collaborative. No one person on the team held all the knowledge to complete the process in isolation. It took the whole team working collectively to explore and reflect on the components of the program. Reflection on the Quality Indicators as they pertained to the program was a major strength of the process. The identification of areas for improvement served as a basis for the SWOT analysis.

A significant advantage of the Quality Indicators and the process implemented at FHSU was the learning experience of the program participants. As stated earlier, no one individual held the information necessary to complete the process. Through the discussions, program participants learned more about the program parameters, thus enhancing the overall performance of the program.

While the Quality Indicators are not necessarily a target for all programs, they are a standard that provides affirmation of the qualities within programs. This affirmation is, in itself, an advantage of the process. Alternative Certification Programs have a tool that can affirm desirable characteristics of a program.

## **What FHSU Learned**

A self-study can be a very time-consuming process. Time must be devoted to collaborative meetings as well as individual research and study. A collegial atmosphere enhances the self-study process and allows for meaningful dialog among program participants. Someone on the self-study team needs to keep the process moving by establishing checkpoints and coordinating meeting dates, times, and topics.

One of the real ahas! for the FHSU study team was that more stakeholders need to be involved in the process the next time the self study is conducted. No representatives from program candidates, partner school mentors and administrators, or community members were included.

It was important for FHSU to thoroughly discuss each of the Quality Indicators. Because of the parameters of the FHSU program regarding recruitment and selection, team members believed that the recruitment component of each dimension did not apply and, therefore, little discussion would be needed. Through the discussion process, it became apparent that more in the area of recruitment was accomplished than was originally believed. It is important to discuss program parameters for each Quality Indicator using the process to discover program components.

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT Analysis)**

An important step in the overall process is the completion of the SWOT analysis. This again was a process completed collaboratively among the program participants. The FHSU SWOT analysis identified thirteen strengths, six weaknesses, ten opportunities, and four threats. Some of the items identified were known to the program participants, but not in the same light as produced by the QI process.

## **The Role of the Review Team**

The project review team reviewed the document submitted by FHSU during November of 2010. The two teams then planned a face-to-face meeting to discuss the submission and the Quality Indicator process. In December, the reviewers met in Kansas City, Kansas, to discuss the QI process with the FHSU team. All five members of the FHSU team participated in that discussion, which proved to be insightful and helpful.

A follow-up report was provided in February of 2011 that related the findings of the review team. The report highlighted components of the report, such as artifacts and evidence submission, program history and contextual descriptions, thoroughness of the submission, and a brief summary of the December meeting. Any conclusions presented in the report were intended to guide the revision of the Quality Indicators and the QI process.

## **Recommendations on the QI Process for the FHSU team**

Because of the successful process of the FHSU team, several recommendations were developed and provided to the review team to support the next phase of the Quality Indicator process revisions.

1. Form a team of stakeholders to participate in the collaborative process. Include university and local agency personnel as well as community members and current and former candidates.
2. Provide team members with specific roles and a description of those roles, (i.e., Historian, datatician).
3. Establish a codification system for supporting documents.
4. Plan your commitment of time.
5. Set aside time for familiarizing your team with the QI process and rubrics.
6. Budget time to discuss and work through the process. For the FHSU team, that was a minimum of six, one-two hour blocks of collaborative time plus organizing time between meetings.
7. Space meetings sufficiently to provide individual reflection time and time to gather evidence and summarize the previous meeting's notes.
8. Provide a datatician with dedicated time to record discussions and organize documents and information systematically.
9. View the KNOTtT website for orientation and process and the video for uploading the document.
10. Take advantage of all KNOTtT training.
11. Provide exemplars, not as a definitive process, but as a reference tool.
12. Provide a glossary of terms.
13. Do not allow teams to opt out of dimensions or components; discussion is the driving force of the self study.

### **Summary**

In summary, the FHSU team viewed the self-study as a valuable exercise in collaboration, a focused analysis of the program, and as an avenue to become more comfortable with the program itself and the individual roles within it. Suggestions for improvement were made that will enhance the program. Suggestions for improvement of the QI process were also made to the reviewers. The team is looking forward to continued work on the program having established a strategic plan, and to a second formal self-study in the near future.