

PREPARING BUSINESS TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR CERTIFICATION EXAMINATIONS

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Abstract

The following is designed to assist students and teacher educators with the preparation for completing competency examinations associated with obtaining teacher certification. A background discussion includes the types of examinations which teacher education students must normally complete to obtain teacher certification in the United States. Further discussion provides assistance for the preparation for the business content examination which is required of all business teacher education in the State of Illinois.

Background

The accountability movement in education in the United States is credited to *A Nation At Risk* which was written in the mid 1980's. This book highlighted the poor quality of the American educational system and grabbed the attention of many people throughout the world. The accountability movement in education gained more strength in 2001 when the No Child Left Behind Legislation was passed. The legislation provides for an emphasis to ensure that teachers are prepared to provide high quality instruction.

Related Literature

As the movement to make teachers more accountable progressed into the 21st Century, attitudes also changed with the times. Many writers believed that adding requirements to the already demanding expectations within teacher education were impractical or impossible to implement. Lozada indicated that the field of career and technical education was faced with the charge of placing qualified instructors into the postsecondary classroom. At the same time, career and technical teacher preparation programs reported a shortage of career and technical education teachers and reduced the number of programs to produce them across the nation (Lozada, 1999). Others expressed even more disdain regarding the increasing accountability of teacher education. Nikforuk indicated, "The more a government focuses on bureaucratic measures of teacher quality (courses taken or tests written), the less excellence it generally finds in its schools" (Nikforuk, 2001).

Research studies like one conducted by Kubow and DeBard in 2000 indicated mixed results regarding teacher accountability. The research indicated that although teachers believed proficiency testing resulted in teachers being held accountable for student outcomes, more than 94% of both secondary and elementary teachers asserted that proficiency tests were not a reliable way to evaluate teacher performance. Teachers (94%) overwhelmingly agreed that proficiency testing resulted in school curriculum being aligned, which might be considered a positive outcome of proficiency testing of teachers (Kubow & DeBard, 2000).

Another study reported in 2004 that a positive correlation existed between some areas on Basic Skills exam results and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium ([INTASC](#)) standards. However, no correlation existed between scores on

content area tests and classroom performance of first-year teachers as assessed by immediate supervisors on INTASC standards-based rubric. This study examined 66 teacher education graduates from the class of 2001 (Action in Teacher Education, 2004).

Another study shared findings which indicated National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certified teachers, based on student achievement gains, appeared to be more effective than their noncertified counterparts (American Teacher, 2004).

Accountability issues continue to make front page news in 2007. A recent issue of *U.S. News & World Report* (2007) indicates that many are concerned with the amount of value added knowledge gained while obtaining a college education. The article also compared this knowledge with the comparison of economic costs for gaining that knowledge. The news article outlined several testing procedures which are used to measure learning among colleges. Some states require all colleges to prove outcomes through assessment instruments including the following:

- Collegiate Learning Assessment (how much students learn)
- National Survey of Student Engagement (how much time students spend studying)
- Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (level of reading, writing, math, science, critical thinking)
- ICT Literacy Assessment (measuring technological literacy)

Research Questions

1. What can those who have completed competency exams share regarding exam preparation?
2. What online study resources are available according to those who have completed the exams?
3. What specific study resources are available to meet exam objectives?

Areas of Competency Testing

Competency examinations which are completed by teacher education students normally include the areas of basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; knowledge of teaching content; and knowledge of professional teaching practice.

Forty-four states use the Praxis testing program for teacher education students which is provided by Educational Testing Services. The Praxis I, Praxis II, and Praxis III exams measure basic skills, content knowledge, and professional teaching practice.

The Praxis I exam measures basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics as shown on Table 1.

Table 1.
Praxis I, Basic Skills

Test	No. Questions	No. Minutes
Reading	46	75
Mathematics	46	75
Writing	44	38
Writing	One essay	30

The Praxis II exam measures knowledge of content which will later be taught Table 2 illustrates the content for business teacher education students.

Table 2.
Praxis II, Business Content of 120 Questions

Topic	Number
United States Economic Systems	12
Money Management	17
Business and Its Environment	13
Professional Business Education	24
Processing Information	20
Office Procedures and Management, Communications, and Employability Skills	17
Accounting and Marketing	17

The Praxis III exam covers teaching practice and includes the following examination areas for teacher education students.

Component 1: Framework of knowledge and skills for a beginning teacher that assess the teaching performance across all grade levels and content areas.

Component 2: Instruments used by trained assessors to collect data, analyze, and score the teaching performance.

Component 3: Training of assessors to facilitate consistent, accurate, and fair assessments of a beginning teacher.

Six states do not use the Praxis testing system for examining competency among teacher education students. Those states include Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts,

Michigan, and Montana. New York reportedly uses the Praxis testing system only for Speech/Language Pathology education students (Educational Testing Service, 2006).

As is indicated above, Illinois is one of the six states which does not currently use the Praxis testing system to examine teacher education students. Illinois uses the Illinois Certification Testing System (ICTS) Prepared by National Evaluation Systems (NES). This examination system includes measuring knowledge on basic skills, teaching content, and the assessment of professional teaching (APT).

The ICTS basic skills exam used for teacher education students in Illinois consists of 125 multiple-choice questions in reading comprehension, language arts (grammar and writing), and mathematics in addition to a constructed-response writing assignment.

The ICTS Business teaching content exam used for business teacher education students in Illinois consists of 125 multiple-choice questions in the following areas.

- Accounting Principles and Practices
- Economics, Consumer Economics, and Career Development
- Marketing Principles and Applications
- Entrepreneurship, Management, Law, and International Business
- Business Communications and Computations
- Computer Education

Each ICTS assessment of professional teaching consists of 120 multiple-choice questions and 2 constructed-response assignments. The APT exam is offered for four levels of teacher certification: birth to grade 3, grades K–9, grades 6–12, and grades K–12

Limitations/Challenges for Creating a Study Guide

Study guides have been prepared by both the Educational Testing Service which creates the Praxis examinations for teacher education students and by National Evaluation Systems which prepares the examinations for teacher education students in Illinois. Students report varying success from using the review materials. Business teacher education teachers who assist students with the preparation for competency exams must remember that they are not experts in all of the content areas which are tested. Few if any teachers have deep knowledge in all fields tested on the exams. The Illinois ICTS content exam includes the areas of Accounting Principles and Practices, Economics, Consumer Economics, and Career Development, Marketing Principles and Applications, Entrepreneurship, Management, Law, International Business, Business Communications and Computations, and Computer Education.

Procedures for the Project

To assist business teacher education teachers assist their students when preparing for competency exams, content experts were enlisted to secure information for the preparation of a review guide. Students who completed the exam were asked to share preparation strategies they used when preparing for the examination. Student feedback was tabulated and shared. Students who completed the exam were also asked to share

study resources which were used for the preparation of taking the examination. Feedback was tabulated and shared.

Subject Review Resources

A listing of exam objectives was prepared for each of the six sub areas of business content exam. Space was provided for comments regarding where objectives were covered in coursework related to each objective. A graduate assistant and an honors student assisted the researcher by interviewing lead professors in the areas of accounting, economics, consumer economics, marketing, management, business law, entrepreneurship, international business, and business communication. The lead professors were asked to provide textbook and other resources where material regarding examination objectives could be learned by students in their courses. Lead professors were also asked to provide resources for learning material contained within examination objectives but which were not included within their courses.

The feedback from professors was included in a report which was published on the Internet for student access. Copies of suggested textbooks were procured and placed on reserve in the University library for students to use. These textbooks were keyed with the responses provided by professors.

Findings and Outcomes

Study tips from business teacher education students who completed the examination were tabulated and shared via the Internet for those who prepare for the exam. Those tips were grouped into the following categories: test content, time management, use of the study guide provided by the test creators, use of classroom materials, group study procedures, and other general insights.

Twenty-five web sites were identified as being helpful study resources by students who had completed the business content examination. These sites were recommended for studying for the examination. The web resources included materials in the following areas: accounting, economics, consumer economics, career development, marketing, entrepreneurship, management, international business, business ethics, test taking tips, and vocabulary review.

Lead professors were very helpful in providing suggestions for material which may be used to study for specific content areas of the examination. Over eighty exam objectives were covered during the interviews with lead professors, and resources were suggested when preparing for each of the examination objectives.

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