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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Graduate Programs Alumni Feedback
CAEP Accreditation Report

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Executive Summary

Purpose of Study/Problem Definition

The purpose of the study was to collect longitudinal data from graduates of four Master of Education programs for the Frostburg State University Graduate School of Education's Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) programs accreditation. The purpose of this study was to provide evidence in reference to Standard 4 - Program Impact on completers and employers by engaging completers regarding employer satisfaction, as evidenced by achieving milestones such as promotion and retention, and completers' satisfaction as evidenced by their perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of the program to their employment experience.

As consultants in the "expert" role, the team gathered diagnostic data related to the client's request, analyzed the data, and developed recommendations. (Stroh, 2005)

Organization Description

Frostburg State University, founded in 1898 and a member of the University System of Maryland, is a comprehensive institution located in the rural Western Maryland town of Frostburg. The university offers forty-seven undergraduate majors, fourteen graduate programs, and one doctoral program for students to select from. The only four-year public institution of higher learning west of the Baltimore/Washington Corridor, Frostburg State University had a Fall 2020 enrollment of 4,119 undergraduate students, 662 graduate students, and 77 doctoral students. Roughly 82% of students hail from the state of Maryland, with 40% of students identifying as being a minority. Frostburg State University is a major economic driver in Western Maryland and works toward preparing its graduates to be both civic leaders and successful professionals in their community. Frostburg State University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Graduate Programs for teachers at Frostburg State University include five Master's Degree programs for teachers: Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership, Literacy Education, Interdisciplinary, and Special Education. A Master of Arts in Teaching is also available at both the elementary and secondary levels, and two Master's degree programs for Non-Teachers: Interdisciplinary and School Counseling.

Description of Procedures/Research Methodology
Team Processes

Determining Team Roles and Responsibilities - the team met and collectively determined the team leader who would communicate directly with the client on behalf of the group. The team also developed norms for meetings, materials, and a plan for conducting the work. Genie Massey volunteered to be the team leader; the team concurred. Colleen Bernard served as the secretary for the team, keeping minutes and developing the team task log to

monitor progress and curate team documents. Reagan Clutz and Jeanine Horst served as focus group transcriptionists and coded the data. The team worked separately on individual program specific data and collaborated on the creation of the Executive Summary.

Developing the Letter of Agreement - the team collaboratively developed the LOA with input from the client. The LOA included a definition of the "problem," project objectives, a description of the process the team would use, deliverables, team consulting responsibilities, a project schedule, and approval signatures. After developing the initial language, the team leader shared the LOA with the client for feedback. The team made revisions per the client's request, then forwarded them to the client for signature. Each team member individually signed the LOA; the final fully executed LOA was sent to the client.

Developing the Project Management Plan - the team reviewed the project proposal submitted by the client and identified vital steps in completing the project. The team held a preliminary meeting with the client to clarify project expectations and receive information to help guide the project. The team used the previous year's project to devise a project management plan. The team then had a second meeting with the client to share the plan and clarify the next steps for the project. Each team member volunteered for specific responsibilities as part of the plan and tracked their progress on the Project Task Log. The project management closely aligned to Cook & Belliveau's Process Flow Model.

Problem Solving Process Utilized – the team collaborated via text message and virtual meet to discuss and resolve problems during the project. Although the team was frustrated at times with a lack of participation of subjects for the study, the team leader maintained contact with the client, who provided guidance on expanding our focus group and survey participants. The group chose a collaborative approach to problem-solving utilizing the steps in the group problem-solving process - define the problem, analyze the problem, generate possible solutions, evaluate solutions, implement and assess the solution.

Informed Consent

The team did not use a formal written informed consent. At the beginning of each focus group, we provided information about how the information gleaned from the session would be stored and used before taping the session. We asked if anyone wanted to leave before we began taping, no one left either focus group. We then began recording, rereading the statement, so it was recorded with all participants.

The verbal informed consent stated:
> "Welcome, thank you for taking your time to provide this valuable feedback to Frostburg State University about their graduate programs in education. It is our intention to preserve your privacy. Transcripts will be turned over to Frostburg State for their use. The transcripts will be free of names of participants, but the overall list of the participants may be provided to Frostburg State University upon their request. The recording of this meeting will not be turned over to Frostburg, but will be retained as a video file on Colleen's personal computer that is password protected. The video will be deleted at the conclusion and satisfactory completion of the practicum in late August 2021."

Sampling

The team used both convenience and snowball sampling for the study. We sent multiple emails to all participants on the list provided by the client. These emails invited graduates to participate in a survey linked in the email and a focus group. We then sent a broadcast email to all participants on the list provided by the client inviting all graduates to the focus group on June 28, 2021. We reached out via email and phone to each survey respondent who supplied contact information to individually invite them to the focus group. Both the survey and focus group participants comprised a convenience sample of volunteers willing to participate.

Timeline of Communications

June 14, 2021	Initial surveys sent to 163 email addresses (total on list - 178 graduates)
June 17, 2021	Email to program coordinators for additional contact assistance
June 19, 2021	Invitation to Focus group sent to 163 email address with the survey link
June 28, 2021	Focus Group #1, two participants
June 29, 2021	Follow-up emails to program coordinators
July 14, 2021	Follow-up emails to survey respondents
July 15, 2021	Focus Group #2, six participants
July 16, 2021	Follow-up emails to program coordinators
July 21, 2021	Invitation to focus group sent to 155 remaining email addresses
July 22, 2021	Focus Group #3, three participants

The team also reached out to each graduate school program coordinator at the client's direction, asking their help in contacting recent program graduates; we then reached out directly via e-mail to the individuals the program coordinators recommended. We also asked the participants to recommend others to participate, creating convenience and snowball sampling for the second focus group held on July 15, 2021 and the third focus group on July 22, 2021.

Figure 1. Focus Group Participation by Program

	Ed Leadership	School Counseling	Reading/ Literacy	Special Education
Focus Group 1 June 28, 2021	1	1	0	0
Focus Group 2 July 15, 2021	0	4	0	2
Focus Group 3 July 22, 2021	0	0	3	0
Totals	1	5	3	2

Data Collection

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the survey sent to all graduates on the list supplied by the client. The survey captured demographic information for each participant, including: graduation year, length in program, years of experience, job title, employment site, level, Title I, undergraduate institution, teaching certification institution, race/ethnicity. It is important to note that the survey did not include a demographic question about sex/gender identity, and thus this data was not captured. Likert scale questions included information relating to the graduate's specific program and open-ended qualitative questions. This data was collected via a google form survey, then transferred to a google sheet for analysis.

More in-depth qualitative data was collected via two focus groups held three weeks apart. These focus group sessions were recorded via video and audio. The audio was captured using Otter.ai and transcribed by the Otter.ai program. The team then reviewed data, and the review team corrected any transcription errors by the artificial intelligence program.

Data Analysis

The team reviewed the quantitative data captured in the survey, and identified all measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) for each Likert scale question. Each program's quantitative data was then summarized.

The team's qualitative data and focus groups were reviewed by the team and themed by program and CAEP accreditation standards. Strengths and weaknesses of the program were identified based on the survey and focus group data. In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016) was used to "prioritize and honor" (p. 106) survey participants by identifying specific language in responses that related to participants experiences. The data was then themed using the categories of strengths and weaknesses. Survey data and focus group data were reported separately for each program.

Findings

Overall, the team feels confident in reporting that completers were well prepared for successful performance on the job and were satisfied with the preparation they received in the program. Survey respondents (n=22) reported an average completion time of 25.64 months, with a median and mode of 24 months. The population of survey respondents included Asian (n=1), African American (n=3), Hispanic (n=1), and White (n=17), with just over half (n=12) having completed their undergraduate degree at Frostburg State University and just under half (n=10) having completed their teaching certification at Frostburg State University. The average number of years on the job was 3.95 with a mean of 3 and 0 mode. There was some diversity in work placement with most respondents from the elementary level (n=14), and a few from middle (n=3), high (n=2), early childhood education (n=1), and one respondent not applicable; half of the respondents (n=11) also noted their work in a Title I school.

Indicators related to successful job performance included employer satisfaction expressed through employee evaluations, honors/awards, current employment status. An overwhelming number of respondents reported superior (n=13) or effective (n=7) evaluation scores, with the remaining two respondents not providing an answer. Respondents also overwhelmingly (n=18) reported that their employer was satisfied with their job performance as evidenced by their

retention or promotion. Twenty percent (n=4) of respondents indicated they had received accolades on the job, to further support the program's efficacy related to employer satisfaction.

Indicators for preparation within the program include: overall program rating, mentor rating, and the program-specific Likert scale questions. There was a great degree of variance in the respondents' employment status, half of the respondents (n=11) noted they were able to retain their job in the field or acquire a new position within the field of their program of study, while the next highest number of respondents (n=7) remained in the educational classroom, with one respondent not working in the field at all and the remaining respondents (n=2) seeking employment within their field of study. Although average scores varied across the Likert scale questions, all questions scored an average between 1.5 and 2.14, with medians and modes of 1 or 2. Respondents also rated their mentors as highly effective (n=13), effective (n=7), developing (n=1) and n/a (n=1). Finally, the overall program ratings from respondents were very positive with ratings for highly effective (n=13), effective (n=8), and developing (n=1).

Program-specific qualitative and quantitative data are addressed in subsequent sections of this report.

Figure 2. Measures of Central Tendency for all Respondents

	Years to Complete	Months to Completion	Professional Core Courses	Program Specific Core	Capstone/ Internship/ Practicum	Content & Instructional Materials	Capstone Paper or Project
Mean	3.95	25.64	2.14	1.77	1.5	1.73	2.1
Median	3	24	2	1	2	1	2
Mode	0	24	2	1	1	1	2

Figure 3. Demographic and Ratings for all Respondents

Mentor Rating	Program Rating	Employer Satisfaction	Evaluations	Honors/ Awards	Level	Title I	FSU Undergrad / FSU Teaching Cert	Race / Ethnicity
13 Highly Effective 7 Effective 1 Dev. 1 N/A	13 Highly Effective 8 Effective 1 Dev.	18 Yes 1 No, but rated the program highly effective 3 not working in the field	13 Superior 7 Effective 2 N/A	4 provided information about honors/awards	14 E 3 M 2 H 1 Mix 1 NA 1 ECE	11	12/10	1 Asian 3 African American 1 Hispanic 17 White

Validity & Reliability of Findings

The use of a convenience sample provides some issues with validity and reliability, as does the small sample size. The team could not account for issues of representation within the sample for the survey, focus group, or both due to a lack of demographic data provided by the client. The survey sample (n=22) netted consistent results using similar questions across all four programs. For focus groups, we used the same pre-scripted open-ended questions that also resulted in consistent answers from participants. We triangulated data between the survey Likert Scale answers, qualitative answers (survey and focus group) and program ratings finding that they correlated. We also used thick descriptions in this report to provide context for our findings. In addressing issues of bias, it is important to note that all team members are part of the 2019 Doctoral in Educational Leadership cohort and are thus students at the same institution studied. Further, one of the four team members graduated from the Educational Leadership Master's program; however, we do not believe this biased the data as this individual did not lead the questions during the focus group. When discrepancies were found in the data, the team addressed those within the narrative analysis of each program.

Recommendations

Repeat the survey and focus group in the fall instead of the summer. In the fall educators are at work and more likely to participate in a survey and focus group. Summer is a difficult time to ask for participants as folx are on vacation, or in the case of 10- and 11-month employees may not check their work e-mail. Capturing cell phone numbers in addition to e-mail addresses would also help future researchers. When contacted via phone, every contact agreed to participate in the focus group in July and followed through with their participation. Cell phone numbers allowed for the team to send text message reminders as well. Folx today are more likely to check their text messages than their e-mail messages. Also, providing demographic data to the research group would allow for analysis of representation within the sample data.

Program Summaries

Overall Demographic Data

Figure 4. Overall Survey and Focus Group Participants by Program

Total Survey Participations	Counseling	Ed Ldr	Lit	SPED	Total
2017	1	0	1	1	3
2018	4	0	0	1	5
2019	5	0	0	2	7
2020	0	3	0	0	3
Other	0	0	2	0	2
Programs totals	10	3	3	4	20
Total Focus Group Participants	**Counseling**	**Ed Ldr**	**Lit**	**SPED**	**Total**
2017	0	0	1	0	1
2018	3	0	0	0	3
2019	2	1	0	1	4
2020	0	0	0	1	1
other	0	0	2	0	2
Program totals	5	1	3	2	11
Demographic Data for Focus Groups	**Counseling**	**Ed Ldr**	**Lit**	**SPED**	**Total**
Black/African American	1	0	0	0	1
Hispanic/Latinex	0	0	0	1	1
Asian	0	0	0	0	0
White	4	1	3	1	9
Program Totals	5	1	3	2	11

Ed Leadership

Survey Data ([Survey Data](#))

Recent graduates of the FSU Master of Education in Educational Leadership program were sent a survey via Google Forms to complete. The survey aimed to capture participant demographic information, thoughts and opinions on the master's degree program experience in Educational Leadership at FSU, and satisfaction with career readiness and professional preparation for career advancement as a result of completing the degree. The survey consisted of twenty-three program and demographic-specific questions using multiple-choice, Likert Scales, and short answer questions.

The survey generated responses from three graduates, all were white females who graduated in the year 2020. Two out of the three graduates completed the program in twenty-four months, while one participant graduated in thirty-six months. One of the three participants earned their undergraduate degree and teaching certificate from FSU. The other two participants attended small public universities in Maryland and West Virginia, where they became licensed to teach. All three participants identified themselves as elementary school teachers, with an average number of 4.33 years of professional experience combined. Two of the three participants currently teach in a Title I school, while the third participant does not. All three participants stated that their employers were satisfied with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that were developed through the graduate program. Two of the three participants stated that their job evaluations related to the knowledge gained from the FSU graduate program in Educational Leadership resulted in superior ratings, while the third participant stated that they had been evaluated as effective. When it came to the strength and support of their building level professional mentor, one participant ranked their mentor as highly effective while two participants ranked their mentor as effective.

When asked about strengths of the program, two out of the three participants stated that the professors were a strength, with one participant noting that the professors were flexible and available to discuss student needs. Another strength of the program identified by one participant was the quality of the assignments and how these enabled the student to dig deep into the educational systems within the county that they worked in. Regarding areas of improvement, one participant focused on the practicum, stating that they found it confusing. Another participant mentioned difficulty with connecting to professors to ask questions during the core class period before educational leadership specific program classes began. One professor was named as standing out for being responsive. The third participant in the survey did not list any areas for improvement. Two of the three participants rated their overall evaluation of the Master's degree in Educational Leadership program as highly effective, with one participant listing it as effective.

Additional quantitative data was collected from four Likert Scale questions focused on experiences within the Master of Education in Educational Leadership program. The scale ranged from a score of one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree). When asked if the professional education core courses prepared the participant to succeed, the mean for the question was 2.66 with a median of two, range of four, and no mode. When asked if the area of concentration prepared the participant for success, identical scores were given with a 2.66 mean, median or two, range of four, and no mode. A survey question on the capstone practicum preparing graduates for success generated lower scores than the other three Likert Scale questions, with a mean of 2.66, median of three, range of three, and no mode. The fourth and

final question on content and instructional materials being relevant to the current field garnered a mean of 2.33, median and mode of one, and range of four.

It is important to note that in the four Likert Scale questions relating to program experiences, one outlier score of five was recorded for each question response. In reviewing the additional data provided from the survey, the remainder of the participant responses were positive and gave accolades to the program. It is our team's belief that the participant mistakenly chose a score of five (Strongly Disagree) consistently across the four questions when a score of one (Strongly Agree) was intended. The data outlined above represents the actual participant response, however.

The participant survey concluded by asking participants if they would be interested in joining a focus group session to further discuss their feedback and responses. None of the survey participants agreed to participate in a focus group.

Focus Group Data

As stated above, none of the three survey participants were willing to participate in the focus group to discuss the Educational Leadership Master's degree program. After sending additional emails for a second time to recent graduates, one participant agreed to join a focus group. The graduate was not able to complete the initial survey due to technical issues. Our participant was asked seven questions based on the seven standards outlined by FSU for their Master's program in Educational Leadership. Responses to the questions were analyzed and major themes were pulled from them. Questions and responses during the focus group are available in the appendix of this report.

The sole participant in the focus group was a white male who works in the central office of a Maryland school system. The completion of his Master's degree in Educational Leadership in 2019 was critical to his promotion to this position. At the time of his graduation, the Master's degree program was a hybrid model of in person and virtual meetings.

The participant had many positive comments to share on his experience in the graduate program. He gave accolades to the theory of education explored during the program, saying that it was heavy in research and theory and helped him to feel well prepared for future endeavors. The technology used in the program was appropriate and helped to enhance the instruction and rigor of the courses. The participant felt that he was exposed to various apps, platforms, and software that would be beneficial to him in his career, and he was expected to both use and apply learning through them.

The curriculum and program design, as well as instructional strategies, were deemed appropriate for the program and beneficial in the current employment of the participant. The participant felt prepared to evaluate educators using the Framework for Teaching tool that is utilized in all Maryland school districts. Satisfaction with the ethical and moral collaboration and communication displayed in the program was also spoken to. The program featured a strong emphasis on cultural proficiency in the coursework. The participant stated he became well versed in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) as well as the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). He stated that opportunities for communication and collaboration with peers on important topics were adequate for both the physical and virtual components of the program.

The participant was candid in sharing the weaknesses that he felt existed in the program. The program clientele lacked both physical diversity in the ethnicities of students in the program with him and professional diversity in the experiences that students brought to the FSU Educational Leadership Master's program. In relation to professional diversity, the participant felt that FSU could do more to build system wide leaders, not just school administrators. He also shared concern for the need to have additional experiences and exposures to different leadership opportunities.

One final area of improvement surrounded data driven instruction. The participant felt that this was unclear in his program. Tracking student data and performance was not a strength. Additionally, the participant mentioned that the program was heavy on backward mapping and that this emphasis was not as smoothly put together as other program initiatives.

Recommendations for Program

In review of both the survey and focus group data, several themes have emerged that the program should both continue to focus on and look to adjust. Related to strengths, graduates appear to enjoy their professors and appreciate the way that instruction was delivered. They felt prepared for their professional career aspirations based on the core courses and Educational leadership specific courses that were taught. Participants felt that the content and materials were appropriate and relevant to the current field. The emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness was listed as a strength. Overall, the graduates and their employers appear happy with the information that graduates gained from the program, leading to professional success.

Based on feedback from participants, the program should seek to improve in several areas. First, the overall makeup of the applicants was generally homogeneous in nature relating to both ethnicity and career background. FSU should look to increase the diversity of graduate students in the program from different ethnicities and professional backgrounds to help create a more well-rounded program that provides unique and different thoughts, ideas, and experiences to all students. The ability for students to tailor their work toward their career ambitions, be it school administration or a central office supporting role, would be appreciated. Second, the practicum experience was described as confusing and question provoking. More specific feedback from recent graduates in this area would be beneficial as FSU continues to alter the program based on the shifting needs in education. Finally, tying in reading data, understanding data, and how to use data to drive instruction and school improvement would be helpful for graduate students and better prepare them for the professional roles they will be embarking on upon graduation.

Counseling

Survey Data –

Demographic Data

The survey generated responses from 10 graduates across three years, (n=1) - 2017, (n=4) - 2018, (n=5) - 2019. Respondents included Black/African American (n=3) and White (n=7) students. Sex and gender identity were not questions on the survey and cannot be assumed from the data. Nine of ten respondents completed studies within twenty-four months; all of these students were 2018 and 2019 graduates. The only respondent from 2017 completed the program in 36 months; thus, the overall program completion time average for all students is 25.2 months across all three years but is skewed based on the one response from the 2017 graduate. The overall program rating of the ten respondents was 50% (n=5) rated the program as highly effective, 40% (n=4) effective, and 10% (n=1) as developing; it is important to note that the 2017 graduate was the only candidate who rated the program developing. Of the ten respondents, 80% (n=8) rated their mentor as highly effective, while 20% (n=2) rated their mentor as effective. 70% (n=7) of respondents indicated they were rated superior in work performance, 20% (n=2) were rated effective, and 10% (n=1) did not answer. Two respondents cited special awards, one at the conclusion of the program received an award for service, and another was interviewed for School Counseling Week, one of only four counselors in the county asked to participate in the interviews. Overall time in the field averaged 2.3 years for survey respondents. Respondents reported matriculating at Frostburg State University for their undergraduate program (n=4), other Maryland State Institutions of Higher Education (n=2), out of state institutions (n=3) with one unrelated answer. Of the respondents who earned teacher certification (n=4) all earned that certification at Frostburg State University.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Program

Four Likert scale questions were asked, with a 1 being "Strongly Agree" and a 5 being "Strongly Disagree". Of the ten respondents, Likert scale answers were fairly similar across all graduation years within each question.

- Likert Question 1 - Respondent answers for the first question, "the professional core courses prepared me to succeed," had the poorest rating, but still high with a mean score of 2.1, median, mode, and range of 2. 30% (n=3) of respondents rated the professional core a 3. In comparison, 50% (n=5) rated it a 2 (n=2), and 20% gave it the top score of 1.

- Likert Question 2 - In answer to "the school counseling core courses prepared me to succeed," the mean response was 1.6, with a median, mode, and range of 2. This question had the greatest range of scores between 1 and 4, with 60% (n=6) rating the counseling core the highest score of 1, 30% (n=3) rating it a 2, and 10% (n=1) rating the program a 4.

- Likert Question 3 - The question "the Capstone internship prepared me succeed," received the highest marks with a mean score of 1.3, and median, mode, and range of 1. Of the three questions, the Capstone was rated the highest, with 70% (n=7) of respondents rating the Capstone a 1 and 30% (n=3) rating the Capstone a 2.

- Likert Question 4 - When asked "the content and instructional materials used in the Master's of School Counseling program were up to date and relevant to the current field", the mean score was 1.6, median and mode 2 and range 1.

Overall - Based on the Likert scale data the program rated an average of 1.3 to 1.6 on all items except the question on the professional education core courses which rated a 2.1. 60% (n=6) of respondents rated the relevance of the instructional content and materials a 2 and 40% (n=4) rated them a 1. It is important to note that the respondent who rated the program the lowest on the Likert scales, also rated the program "Highly Effective" which seems incongruous.

When discussing the areas of strength in the survey respondents cited the internship and practicum (n=4), the professors' knowledge in the field (n=3) and coursework (n=2). Qualitative data from the survey supported these statements.

Respondents stated the internship and practicum:
- "was so important to me"
- "were the most helpful courses"
- "provided "vital exposure and real-life experiences with relevant issues found in students, schools, and the community,"
- while one additional respondent simply cited the internship and practicum as a strength.

In regards to Professors Knowledge as a program strength, respondents stated:
- "The professors' knowledge from previous experience in the field and their ability to share their experiences and knowledge was very beneficial."
- "Professors!"
- "The professors and supervisor experience in education played a significant role in my development as a young counselor."

Finally, Coursework was also cited as a program strength:
- "The diversity course was eye-opening and critical to learning in our society today. Real-life scenarios. Interview preparation."
- "The learning and literature taught me so much"

Areas for improvement: In discussing areas for improvement, respondents indicated a need for more real-world experiences (n=2), updating of course materials (n=3), and requested for courses specific to special education/IEP/SST (n=3).

Feedback regarding the need for increased real-world experiences included:
- "I believe Frostburg's School Counseling program would benefit from more real-world scenarios and role-play exercises."
- "More internship hours"

Updating courses and materials included the following feedback:
- "The Assessment course is not applicable to school counseling practice today. As a counselor for 3 years, I haven't found myself using educational assessments in my practice. "
- "Some of the classes could be updated or changed"
- "Assessments course curriculum needs to be updated. Materials in other courses need to be updated."

Finally, a number of respondents (n=3) requested specific course work in special education, IEPs and SST, comments included:

- "More information on 504 and SIT/SST. Depending on the county, School Counselors lead 504 and SIT/SST meetings and are responsible for all documents and forms."
- "Some classes or training on IEP/504/SST data and the terminology currently used in our school systems would have been beneficial."
- "Special Education course needed."

Focus Group Data
Demographic Data

Five counseling program alumni participated in two different focus groups one in focus group one and four in focus group two. Racial and ethnic diversity of participants included Black/African American (n=1) and White (n=4). All five participants serve as school counselors, four in elementary school and one in a mixed level elementary through high school, two in Washington County Public Schools, one in Montgomery County Public Schools, one in Arlington Public Schools, and one in Mineral County Schools, WV. All participants completed the Frostburg program in 24 months.

Survey data of Focus Group Participants: Three participants graduated in 2018 and two participants graduated in 2019. Three participants cited in their survey that they earned their initial teacher certification through Frostburg, and one earned their undergraduate degree from Frostburg. These five participants had an average of three years of experience in the field, ranging between two and four years. Four of five participants rated the Frostburg program Highly Effective, while one rated it Effective. All cited "yes" to the question about employer satisfaction as evidenced by retention or promotion, and all stated they were rated superior or highly effective. All participants stated the program helped them gain a new position in the field of counseling and one add that the program helped them retain their position in the field. One participant cited having received an award for service upon graduating from the program. Four participants rated the contributions of their mentor as highly effective and one rated the mentor effective. Likert question mean scores varied slightly from the population of respondents to the survey with focus group means being Q1 - 1.8, Q2 - 1.2, Q3 - 1.2, Q4 - 1.6. Mean Likert scores for questions 1-3 for the participants were higher than for the population with the question four mean being the same.

Strengths of the Program
Some very specific themes developed during the course of focus group discussions related to the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Overall strengths identified included: familiarity and comfort working with professional standards, program design and using data, addressing legal issues, working in diverse environments, and experiential learning including guest speakers and internships.

When discussing the overall evaluation and design of programs, respondents (n=2) cited their familiarity and comfort in working with the standards from ASCA:

- "ASCA being a nationally certified program for school counseling we learned how to effectively evaluate our school counseling program. And there's even an ASCA book that we used in our graduate courses to help us understand how to evaluate our program, and if it's being successful or not. So, I felt confident when I graduated, on how to apply

ASCA and its standards to not only my school counseling program but also to the WCPS curriculum, and to tailor it to best fit my program."

- "we did learn how to like effectively plan a lesson and how to effectively take data on if our lesson was, you know, productive or effective towards the students. So, I feel like that kind of fits within that category. Based on the ASCA standards, we basically know how to… what particular standards will work for which lesson, which mindsets would really work for which lesson and then based on what we've, you know, given to the students, what books you know, what activities we've done, it's always good to check for understanding."

A number (n=5) of lengthy responses were provided by respondents when asked about measuring student progress using data, designing program, and keeping data for employment retention/justification:

- "we started working on data driven and how to measure, analyze, and collect data in our first or second class. So we started really pretty early based on the ASCA national model and we kind of, you know, dove very deep into those books, we learned how to create fictional data, we learned how to analyze that fictional data, we learned how to create SMART goals, what that looks like, you know, to be a schoolwide, what it looked like to be student specific, what it was like to be great specific, we created school improvement goals based on the ASCA model.
- "But like data, we have to keep that in order to keep our jobs because if we don't, you know, we can just be RIF'd and it's you know like, hey, what are you doing in order to be successful with this school, why do kids need you there. So, I mean I feel like at least in my county, data is very important."
- "I think we had a specific data course in our grad programs, so the difference of qualitative and quantitative data, how to assess it, you know, pre and post assessments, especially when you go into a classroom to work with a group of kids you're looking for that growth with whatever you're measuring. So, we were taught to make goals, and align those to the standards and then to also assess data for each time we work with a child or a group of children."
- "we actually had to document, document how we were literally working with kids. You know, was it you know just like… said like in person, or were we doing the behind the scenes work, I think there was like 20 different things that we could put our minutes into but we literally had to put kind of a time limit of how long we were doing certain things in the school building"
- "And then when I was looking at the students' needs we went over how to construct the student needs assessments to see the real needs that you have in your building because every building is different, every place you go is different."

Focus group participants (n=3) discussed a thorough understanding preparation for dealing with legal issues, while qualifying remarks based on the limitations of actually being able to experience these issues within the program:

- "It becomes complicated. But I feel like, that, you know, our program did the best to prepare us for as much as they could."
- "I would say preparing us for when to do it, yes. But like the physical act of doing it was lacking but again, I don't think you can really ask a 20-year-old, you know 21 sit across and say hey we're gonna pretend to call CPS. It's not the same thing."
- "I believe we went over a lot of the different type of county guidelines, we learned about what a mandated reporter is."

In reference to student preparation for work in a diverse environment, students spoke directly and positively about how and to what extent they felt they were prepared (n=4):

- "I was well equipped with learning about different diversity and different cultures. I just had to kind of go into that, what, the different things that I endured in Frostburg and Cumberland were not necessarily the same things I would endure in Montgomery County,"
- "So, we kind of not only learned like within our diversity class but learn within our own cohort for two years."
- "We learned about all types of diversity, socio economic status being one included. I think it's prepared myself, and probably since we both work in Washington County so I felt prepared for it."
- "But looking at all these different stories and situations I think really made us ready to enter these cultures and to become a part of them, and help as much as we can."

as well as specifically about the diversity class (n=3):

- "So, I really remember that class as being monumental and learning about not only yourself but how to appreciate other cultures."
- "I think our diversity class was beneficial."
- "diversity class just like… has been telling it, that it was great. In terms of the information that we gained and having to go somewhere that we were really comfortable with."

The experiential learning components of the program through role-play, guest speakers, the practicum, and mentor interactions were highly praised:

- "my mentor, we would talk every day like I wanted that I just wish we could do more in person and get more hands-on experience because that's how we really learn"
- "I remember this I don't know if it necessarily prepared us but it definitely just helped in general. At one point we had like an elementary and middle and a high school counselor come in and talk with us just about, you know, their day and you know what it looked like at each level."
- "But the way my program kind of gave us that is they had other counselors from around the Frostburg/Cumberland area actually come in and talk to us about it."
- "very grateful that when we were going through the program, we got a middle, high school, and elementary job experience"

Weaknesses of the Program

Weaknesses of the program were also gleaned from the focus group data. Participants cited the need for more focus on working with stakeholders/parents, that most of their experience with educational research especially around standardized testing took place on the job, exposure to technology was limited, and the need for adding more opportunities for experiential learning, as well as course content and experiences specific to special education/504/SST.

All focus group participants responded to the question regarding ethics, morals, and legal issues. Some participants discussed work with stakeholders specifically (n=2):

- "I think that might have been a weak area of the program, you know, just generally touched on it you're gonna have to work with community stakeholders. But I think more so, working with community stakeholders and understanding what all of that involved just came with on the job experience."
- "I think with the outside stakeholders, it's one of those things where like, you can't really practice it unless you're doing it"

Participants (n=2) stated that preparation for educational research took place on the job more so than in the classroom:

- "I kind of learned it on the fly, and I'm still learning about it in like my actual, so I think we've had some classes that go over that kind of stuff, but maybe not
- "like in the job on the fly with testing, whether it be in standardized testing or some individual testing with school psychologists. And then, you know, like my previous friend had mentioned, just research in the class, as far as like theorists and like that I mean but both of those"

Discussion about familiarity with technology showed limited exposure to counseling related technology during the program. Responses from participants (n=4) included:
- "I don't think in the School Counseling Master's program we did a lot of work a lot with technology. I don't think there was any, any extra, you know, technological, technological platforms that we used other than the normal.
- "we didn't learn much about technology. I guess we didn't need too much of it then. I don't really specifically remember ever learning about technology-based practices to use in school counseling,"
- "I don't really remember, like our teachers, our professors talking about it"
- "I feel like some of our education people, like with our undergrads, that they knew a lot more than some of us coming from non-education degrees about some of those programs."

In discussing the realities of the educational setting in relation to their program experiences participants (n=7) mostly discussed program recommendations regarding experiential learning (n=4) and content related to special education/504/SST (n=2):
- "I'll go with more internship hours."
- "I just think, like if we have to spread our wings a little bit instead of just going with WCPS for our internship that we do, possibly like Frostburg could allow maybe Frederick County or something like that, because it is crucial. "
- "So, I think anything that involves just unpacking your own backpack, unpacking, you know, your feelings, unpacking, you know, what makes you, you know, have to judge a student or understand where a student is coming from. It's really important."
- "If there is an ability to have, you know, the graduates or people in the cohort branch out of Frostburg and Cumberland, I think that will be very beneficial to them, "
- "school counselors are required to be the facilitators of 504 Plans, which I don't know if you're all aware of but it's a document that can accommodate a student with a disability. we barely touched on what a 504 plan is. I remember reviewing it and thinking like okay cool, I understand it, I read about it in the grad program, but it came down to actually having to be the facilitator and the leader of the meetings and understanding what the classroom accommodations are knowing I'm not a teacher. I felt very ill prepared,"
- "I wish that that could have been modeled with what you're going to facilitate and be a leader with within the school counseling role 504 plans being one of the biggest ones that I wish we had done"

Final comments included feedback (n=1) about utility of courses and the need to expand course/program content (n=5):

- "I feel like some of our first few classes... were maybe a little paperwork oriented. And when we got to our internship, it ... on the back burner of my mind …. how to create our school calendar, how to, ..., build a school counseling program, how to do a SMART goal. So, I feel like those classes maybe shouldn't be like right off the bat. I feel like the one that we had with Dr. Jackson, ...I felt like maybe that should have been a little later on, like when we're actually in our internship and learning more of those hands on."
- "since COVID, you know maybe if there was a technology class that could be incorporated into something"
- "And then one thing I don't think it prepared us a lot for and maybe it's just the community that we're in, but those relationships with parents. Like we were always told about documenting stuff, like we need to document everything that the kid says, we need to do our DSS reports, we need to check all of our, you know, dot all the i's and cross our x's. Like all nine yards. But it wasn't about the parent side of it, and I think that's the thing that, unfortunately, you know, our parents don't want to be a part of this school experience."
- "contact with the IEP s and knowing about goals and stuff but that's something that I think this program could really benefit from as well."
- "maybe doing some activities on, like, understanding your own implicit bias would be helpful."
- "Learning how to effectively like track your time, that is something that we do now as counselors, and it opens up guide to what you actually spend a lot of your time on"

Recommendations for Program

Overall, the counseling focus group participants in both focus group 1 (n=1) and focus group 2 (n=5) were positive about their experiences with the FSU Counseling Program. The lowest Likert score for the education program's core courses is represented in focus groups' discussion regarding the significance (n=2) or insignificance (n=3) of some of the course content. Survey data clearly showed a wish for specific coursework regarding Special Education (n=3), data that is supported by qualitative statements to the same effect in the focus groups (n=5). Specific courses and course content was also discussed (n=5); the diversity course received praise for its content and relevance in both the survey (n=1) and in the focus groups (n=3), while the assessment course (n=2) was specifically discussed in the survey as lacking relevance and needing updating, but not discussed by focus group participants. Positive responses about the internship and practicum from the survey data (n=4) was supported by focus group data (n=2), with both survey and focus group participants expanding on the importance of those experiences (n=4), the need for greater geographic and demographic diversity in those experiences (n=3), and the need overall for more real-world experiences (n=2). Finally, respondents (n=3) positively discussed the impact of the professors on their learning, while focus group participants qualified their comments specifically to courses (n=3).

Based on the survey and the focus group information FSU should consider adding coursework specific to the counselor's role in special education, 504 and SST. Additional internship hours and real-world experiences incorporated into classes would be well received by students and build their efficacy. Expanding the types and geographic locations of internship experiences would also provide a broader skill set for participants. Finally, emphasis on the integration of technology into courses as it specifically relates to use by counselors would provide a needed update for course content.

Literacy
Survey Data

Survey Data

Demographic Data

The survey generated responses from three (n=3) graduates from 2017, 2021, and one unknown graduation year. All of the respondents were white females. Each of the three graduates' time to complete the degree varied from twelve months, twenty-four months, and thirty-six months. All three participants earned their undergraduate degree and teaching certificate from FSU. Two of the participants identified themselves as elementary school teachers, and one is employed in a middle school. Two of the graduates had six years of professional experience, while the most recent graduate is from the spring of 2021 and has not yet taught independently. Two of the three participants currently teach in a Title I school, while the third participant does not. The two participants with teaching experience stated that their employers were satisfied with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed through the graduate program. Two of the three participants said that their job evaluations related to the knowledge gained from the FSU graduate program in Literacy resulted in superior ratings. When it came to the strength and support of their building-level professional mentor, all three participants ranked their mentor as highly effective.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Program

When asked about strengths of the program, two out of the three (66%) survey participants stated that the professors were an asset, with one participant noting that the professors "led an amazing program that was powered by real-life experiences." Another strength of the program identified by one participant was the way courses interconnected. This led to significant insights as she synthesized concepts across the curriculum. Additionally, one participant indicated that Clinic 1 & 2 were beneficial to her skills development as a teacher. Regarding areas of improvement, communications with professors was a common theme among two participants. One mentioned specifically the difficulty of connecting to adjunct professors who were not physically on Frostburg's campus. Additionally, one participant felt the program needed to more thoroughly explore various reading disabilities and the relevant methods to assist affected students. Despite these criticisms, all three participants rated their overall evaluation of the Master's degree in Literacy program as highly effective.

Quantitative Data from Demographic and Likert Scales

Quantitative data was collected from four Likert Scale questions focused on experiences within the Master's of Education in Literacy program. The scale ranged from a score of one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree). Participants generally rated the program's various components highly, rating professional education core courses, area of concentration courses, and the content and instructional materials used in the program within the one to two range on the scale. The mean for professional education core courses was 1, with a median of 1 and a mode of 1. The mean for concentration courses was 1.6, with a median of 1.6 and a mode of 1. The mean for content and instructional materials was 1.8, with a median of 1.8 and a mode of 1. The capstone practicum earned slightly lower scores from respondents with a mean of 2.2, a median of 2.2, and a mode of 1. Overall, the graduates responded positively to the components of the Master's of a Literacy program.

Three Frostburg graduates (n=3) participated in a focus group in the summer of 2021. All three were females, one of whom had been in the classroom for 18 years in Washington County Public Schools, one of whom was employed for four years by Frederick County Public Schools. The third participant who graduated from the Master's of Literacy program in the spring of 2021 was not in the classroom yet.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Program

The emphasis on research-based practices in the Literacy program prepared the focus group participants (100%) for success in the classroom. Exposure to formative assessment techniques and proper diagnostic tools during the coursework has allowed one graduate (33%) to measure student progress and respond to students' needs.

All three graduates (100%) repeatedly indicated that the faculty in the Literacy program had a positive impact on their experience and career outcomes. One participant noted the professors' focus on professionalism, while another mentioned the emotional support and encouragement she received. While the program included a specific course on ethics, the graduates made clear that their sense of handling difficult situations was formed in part through exemplary faculty modeling professionalism. Two participants mentioned that they felt comfortable navigating parent meetings, social media, and the challenges of mandated reporting due to their experiences in the program. The ethos that there are many techniques and strategies and that teachers need to be versed in many of them positively impacted the confidence and success of all three graduates.

Regarding research-based practices and data-driven instruction, all three (100%) of the focus group participants indicated many strengths of the program. They entered the workforce prepared to diagnose reading problems through various methods, including tools such as DIBELS and Words Their Way and spelling assessments. One participant indicated that being exposed to rubrics for reading skills influenced her practice, while two of the participants praised the faculty for teaching them to keep running records and giving them training with data-collection with students.

A particular strength of the Literacy program has been its emphasis on educational technology. 100% of participants acknowledged that a wide variety of tools were deliberately introduced in coursework, and participants were encouraged to share new tools as they encountered them outside of the Frostburg program. Graduates had a robust toolkit to draw on, including NearPod, Zoom, Classkick, Padlet, Kahoot, and Jamboard.

Collaboration was emphasized within the Literacy program, according to the all three (100%) of the focus group participants. Sharing among peers was encouraged by various faculty members, preparing graduates for working with colleagues in grade-based teams and collaborative school teams. One participant remembered faculty members inviting many guest speakers, including from MSDE and various teaching groups. A professor's collaboration with the campus teaching club led one participant to view joining the Maryland State Association of Educators positively.

All three of the focus group participants (100%) indicated that the Literacy program included a strong emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Strategies such as using equity sticks to include more students in the conversation, techniques to modify assignments based on student needs, and an emphasis on multicultural literature have positively influenced the participants' success in the classroom. One participant (33%) specifically mentioned being encouraged to pursue DEI principles within research projects. Additionally, another valued how her professors encouraged self-reflection and the various ways to get to know and honor students' individuality.

The participants identified a few areas for improvement in the program based on challenges they have encountered in the workforce. One participant (33%) emphasized the challenge of providing differentiated readings to students on the same topics and suggested that more efforts be made to expose future reading specialists to tools to facilitate this effort. Limits to funding in K12 education led one participant to indicate that the faculty consider incorporating lessons on how teachers can connect with grant-making sources in productive ways. Additionally, one participant (33%) discussed tense relationships between faculty and administration at her school and suggested that incorporating conflict resolution techniques into the curriculum would be beneficial for future graduates.

Special Education
Survey Data
Survey Data
Demographic Data

Recent graduates of the FSU Master of Education in Special Education program were sent a survey via Google Forms to complete. The survey aimed to capture participant demographic information, thoughts, and opinions on the Master's degree program experience in Special Education at FSU, and satisfaction with career readiness and professional preparation for career advancement as a result of completing the degree. The survey consisted of twenty-three program and demographic specific questions using multiple-choice, Likert Scale multiple choice, and short answer questions.

The survey generated responses from four graduates across three years, (n=1) - 2018, (n=1) - 2019, and (n=2) 2020. Respondents included 1 Asian, 1 White/Hispanic, and 2 White students. Sex and gender identity were not questions on the survey and cannot be specified from the data. Two of four graduates completed studies within 36 months: and were both 2020 graduates. The only respondent from 2019 completed the program in 12 months, and the only respondent from 2018 completed the program in 24 months (about 2 years); thus, the overall program completion time average for all students is 27 months across all three years. Recent graduates of the FSU Master's in Special Education program were sent a survey via Google Forms to complete. The survey aimed to capture participant demographic information, thoughts, and opinions on the Master's degree program experience in Special Education at FSU and satisfaction with career readiness and professional preparation for career advancement due to completing the degree. The survey consisted of twenty-three program and demographic-specific questions using multiple-choice, Likert Scale multiple-choice, and short answer questions. Two of the four participants earned their undergraduate degree and teaching certificate from FSU. The other two participants earned their undergraduate degrees at public universities in Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico. One participant or 25% (n=1) identified as a birth to 5 teachers, 25% (n=1) as an elementary school teacher, and 50% (n=2) as a secondary teacher with an average number of 4.5 years of professional experience combined. 50% (n=2) of the four

participants currently teach in a Title I school, while 25% (n=1) one participant does not, and 25% (n=1) one participant does not hold a teaching position. 100% (n=4) of the participants stated that their employers were satisfied with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed through the graduate program. 25% (n=1) of respondents indicated they were rated superior in work performance, 50% (n=2) were rated effective, and 25% (n=1) did not answer. When it came to the strength and support of their building-level professional mentor, 75% (n=3) rated their mentor as effective, while 25% (n=1) participant rated their mentor as developing.

Quantitative Data from Demographics and Likert Scales

Quantitative data was collected from five Likert Scale questions focused on experiences within the Master's of Special Education program. The scale ranged from a score of one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree). Participants generally rated the program's various components highly, rating professional education core courses, area of concentration courses, and the content and instructional materials used in the program within the one to three range on the scale. The mean for professional education core courses was 2, a median of 2, mode of 2, and a range of 0. The mean for the area of concentration courses was a 2, with a median of 2 and a mode of 2. The mean for content and instructional material was 1.5, the medium 1.5; the mode was 1 and 2, and the range was 1. The scores for the Capstone course ranged from a 1 to a 3. The mean was 2, the median 2, and the mode and range were each 2, respectfully. The practicum and scored slightly lower scores from respondents. The mean for the practicum was 2.5, the median 2.5, the mode 2 and 3. Overall, the graduates responded positively to the components of the Master's of Special Education program.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Program

The emphasis on special education content prepared the respondents (100%) for success in the classroom. The core classes provided a solid foundation for respondents to then transfer that learning to the classroom. Another program strength was the professors, two out of the four participants stated that the professors were well prepared, and the coursework was rigorous with information relevant to the special education program. One participant noted that the professors were prepared and very communicative, with timely responses. Another strength of the program identified by two participants was the quality of the courses and the depth of knowledge attained to apply in a classroom setting. One participant stressed the diversity of the special education courses that gave her a solid foundation to work with students. One participant did not list any areas of strength. Regarding areas of improvement, two participants focused on the program's format, specifically, the concerns with downloading documents for assignments and studying purposes. Another participant mentioned difficulty connecting to the advisor, stating that she rarely heard from her advisor and felt detached from the program. Two participants felt little communication and assistance since the program is online, suggesting more meetings via a zoom type class and not only responding to colleagues' comments for learning purposes. The fourth participant in the survey did not list any areas for improvement. One of the four participants rated their overall evaluation of the Master's degree in Educational Leadership program as highly effective, with three participants listing it as effective.

Five Likert scale questions were asked, with a 1 being "Strongly Agree" and a 5 being "Strongly Disagree." Of the four respondents, Likert scale answers were fairly similar across all graduation years within each question.

- Likert Question 1 - Respondent answers for the first question, "the professional core courses prepared me to succeed," had a mean score of 2, a median and mode of 2, and a range of 0. 100% (n4) of respondents rated the professional core courses for special education a 2.
- Likert Question 2 - In answer to "the special education core courses prepared me to succeed," the mean, median, mode had a score of 2 and a range of 0. This question had no range of scores between 1 and 4, with 100% (n4) rating the special education core a score of 2, agree.
- Likert Question 3 - The question "the Capstone internship prepared me to succeed," the mean, median, mode, and range all had scores of 2. This question had the greatest ranges of scores between 1 and 4, with 25% (n=1) rating the Capstone the highest score of 1, 50% (n=2) rating it a 2, and 25% (n=1) rating it a 3.
- Likert Question 4 - When asked "the content and instructional materials used in the Master's of Special Education program were up to date and relevant to the current field," the mean score was 1.5, a median of 1.5, a mode of 1 and 2, and a range of 1. 50% (n=2) scored the highest score of a 1 (strongly agree) and 50% (n=2) scored the program materials a 2 (agree). This question received the highest marks from the Likert scale questions.
- Likert Question 5 - The question "the practicum prepared me to succeed" had the poorest rating, with a mean score of 2.5, median of 2.5, and the mode a 2 and 3. The range was 1. 50% (n=2) of the participants scored the practicum work a 2, and 50% (n=2) rated the practicum a 3.

Overall - Based on the Likert scale data, the program rated an average of 1.7 to 2.0 of all items except the question on the practicum, which rated a 2.5. 50% (n=2) rated the relevance of the practicum a score of 2 and 50% (n=2) rated it a score of 3. Overall, the graduates responded positively to the components of the Master's of Special Education program.

When discussing the areas of strength, two respondents cited the professors as a strength.

Professors Knowledge:
- The professors were prepared and communicative, with timely responses.
- The professors were timely in their responses.

Coursework:
- The quality of the courses.
- The depth of knowledge gained to apply to a classroom setting.
- The diversity of the special education courses gave me a solid foundation to work with students.

One participant did not list any areas of strength.

Areas of improvement: In discussing areas for improvement, focus on the program's format, updated technology, and lack of communication with the advisor were shared.

Program's format and technology
- I had concerns downloading documents for assignments.
- I had difficulty accessing documents for studying purposes.

Accessibility to the advisor:
- I had difficulty connecting to the advisor, I rarely heard from her.

- I felt detached from the program.
- There was little communication and assistance since the program is wholly online.
- I would suggest more meetings via a zoom-type class and not only responding to colleagues comments for learning purposes.
- The fourth participant in the survey did not list any areas for improvement.
- Now that zoom is available and know that it is a successful program, it would've been nice to have live discussions regarding a theme via cybernetic meeting instead of reacting to some of our colleagues. (2020 graduate)

Overall: One (25%) of the four participants rated their overall evaluation of the Master's degree in the Special Education program as highly effective, with three participants (75%), effective.

Focus Group Data

Demographic Data

Two special education alumni participated in focus group two. The participants were both female, one white and one white/Hispanic. Both of the participants in the focus group were recently hired in Western Maryland, one at an elementary school in Allegheny County, and one as the director at The HUB, located at the University System of Maryland at Hagerstown, part of Washington County. The program serves children ages from birth to five-year-olds and is a grant funded by the state of Maryland. One participant completed the Frostburg program in 12 months and one in 24 months.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Program

Several strengths and weaknesses emerged from the focus group questions. While participants appreciated the broad overview of theorists related to theory and research, more application of developmental theory and research principles for special education students would have been beneficial. One participant expressed a lack of depth due to COVID and project-based activities, not delving deep into research and theory specifically for special education preparation. Another central theme was technology in the classroom. While both participants share exposure to various applications, platforms, and software, it was mainly through other classmates and not part of the program. One participant shared that learning new technology was self-directed and not part of the program. Participants felt a strong emphasis on cultural proficiency in the coursework but that they did not take any courses dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion. They were encouraged to choose diverse texts for assignments and in their classrooms. Both participants agreed that the Frostburg program was not diverse and recommended more diversity in internship placements to broaden the students' perspectives. Both participants agreed that the programs did not provide training on completing special education paperwork and state mandated policies and procedures. One participant shared that there was considerable anxiety about the responsibility of legal documentation without knowledge of how to facilitate a meeting or complete documents for families.

Participants stated that preparation for educational research for special education was a broad overview:
- Further application of developmental theory and research principles for special education students could have been beneficial.
- About experiential learning, having classroom observations was a plus.

- The program had a robust research component in the final paper at the end of the program
- We went through every single part of the checklist of the theorists and things, it was more just here here's some cool people.
- I don't wanna use the word memorize, but like to understand and get a deeper knowledge of that stuff, rather than application.
- The professor helped me modify the research proposal to accommodate the new online learning environment.
- So part of my research opportunities were very limited because COVID hit.
- Due to COVID, access to families and children was minimal.

Current Technologies:
- We mainly learned about technology through classmates and not part of the program.
- New technology was more self-directed and not part of the program.
- Most of what we learned about various applications, platforms, and software was through other classmates at the beginning of class.

Diversity:
- Participants felt a strong emphasis on cultural proficiency in the coursework and took any specific courses dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The course addressed literature and the importance of displaying diverse materials in your classroom.
- They were encouraged to choose diverse texts for assignments and in their classwork.
- Both participants agreed that the Frostburg program was not diverse and recommended more diversity in internship placements to broaden the students' perspectives.
- I can't exactly remember a specific course, other than just like little comments here and there about if you wanted to include something this is how you would do it, but not a whole course dedicated to it.

Additional comments:
- The participants discussed having differing experiences regarding exposure to legal documentation in special education, such as IEPs and 504s. One participant explicitly indicated that the programs did not provide sufficient training on completing special education paperwork and state-mandated policies and procedures. This prompted considerable anxiety for her regarding the responsibility of legal documentation without knowledge of how to facilitate a meeting or complete documents for families. In contrast, the other graduate stated that her coursework provided extensive experience writing IEPs, emphasizing goals-setting and in-depth critique from professors. Both graduates indicated that they had found positions in special education in Western Maryland.
- We did one class very early on was the only time I was given a sample scenario and said here fill out this IEP. Granted, I know that there's going to be new teacher orientation and training on the job and stuff and I'm open to that I've been doing my own research and things, but in a Master's program for special education, throw in one sample please.
- But like I have some serious fears of like, I'm going to be responsible for making goals for those students. First day, never met them before. I'm gonna have to do things, and I don't know where to sign, what information needs to go where.
- In my case, I had to develop a couple of IEPs for one of my courses. So, I kind of had a different experience, and it was looked over and it was thoroughly looked over, especially when it comes to writing goals, because you have to meet a deadline to achieve those goals with the child.

Recommendations for the Program

In a review of both the survey and focus group data, several themes emerged regarding coursework, internships, and working with faculty. Related to strengths, graduates appear to appreciate their professors' depth of knowledge and encouragement during the program. They felt prepared for their professional career aspirations based on the core courses and Special education-specific courses taught. Participants in the online survey group felt that the content and materials were appropriate and relevant to the current field. The emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness was listed as a strength. Despite the program not including a specific course on diversity, the program design allowed participants to pursue different career paths. Overall, the graduates and their employers appear happy with the information that graduates gained from the program, leading to professional success.

Based on feedback from participants, the program should seek to improve in several areas. Although the survey participants seemed pleased with the content and materials in the program, the focus group data indicates that completers need more specific instruction in the preparation of legal documentation necessary for a special education teacher or case manager. This should include robust experiences with the initial identification of needs, goal-setting, data collection, and progress monitoring. The program should more deliberately pursue diverse experiences and settings for program participants in securing internship placement, ranging from urban to rural, socioeconomic level, and racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Finally, the sudden transition to online learning during the COVID pandemic highlights the need for the special education program to include deliberate instruction in various online learning platforms, software, and apps to facilitate student achievement.

Synthesis of Data, Limitations and Conclusions

The data from the surveys and focus groups highlighted many strengths of FSU's graduate programs in education, while calling out a few areas for improvement.

Limitations of the research include the low number of participants that the team was able to draw from the four programs for both the survey and the focus groups. A total of twenty-two graduates participated in the survey, with Educational Leadership and Literacy only drawing three participants. Special Education had a mere four participants. Focus group participation was not as high, with only eleven graduates participating. Educational Leadership only had one representative and Special Education had two. The data collected is from a small sample and may not provide an accurate total representation of the thoughts and feelings of the many recent graduates of Master's degree programs in FSU's College of Education.

This research project has the potential to provide the specific data FSU is looking for relating to strengths and weaknesses in its College of Education graduate programs. Disappointingly, and of no fault to either FSU or the research team, the timing of this work was unfortunate on several levels. As the nation was seemingly beginning to pull itself out of the Covid-19 pandemic, educators across the county collectively turned away from outside distractions and requests. The exhaustion, frustration, and bitterness brought on by teaching both virtually and concurrently was enough to create a barrier between participating in yet one additional thing on top of the many others requested of educators this school year. Additionally, the survey and focus group invitations were sent to graduates over the summer break when many educators turn off their email and shut down their work responsibilities to spend time recharging, unwinding, and regrouping for the next school year. By waiting until school was back in session and educators were once again engaged in their craft, the ability to tap into a much larger pool of participants is significantly greater. This project would best be repeated in the Fall of 2021.

In conclusion, the data gathered by the research team for this project shows that FSU has four healthy, successful programs that are doing a good job of preparing graduates for the demands and expectations in the specific academic fields of study. Students gave above average scores to the program in many areas, including satisfaction of their learning, instructional strategies and techniques, and preparation for a different career path related to their degree.

References:

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Stroh, L. (2005). *The basic principles of effective consulting*. Routledge.

Appendices

- Appendix A. LOA
- Appendix B. Focus Group 1 Transcript
- Appendix C. Focus Group 2 Transcript
- Appendix D. Focus Group 3 Transcript

Links to Supporting Documents

- [Counseling Survey Responses](#)
- [Literacy Survey Responses](#)
- [Educational Leadership Survey Responses](#)
- [Special Education Survey Responses](#)
- [Team Task Log](#)