

Focus Groups Fall 2019 Update—Initial Programs

Results from the summer 2019 focus group were reviewed by the CAEP Coordinating Team (CCT) to assess question/answer integrity and pull themes.

During fall 2019, two additional focus groups were held; one for initial program and one for advanced programs. The initial program focus group had N(5) participants and the advanced program focus group had N(11) participants. CAEP CCT noted powerful information from the summer mixed major focus group and found the answers valuable. In addition, the fall results were just as impactful.

The CAEP CCT had planned on individual programs taking over the responsibility for their own program focus groups this fall but due to the limited time, the CAEP CCT invited participants and implemented the groups. Invitations came from the Office of Teacher and Administrator Certification and were sent to all candidates who had completed programs within the last three years. It is the belief of the CAEP CCT that focus group participation will increase when programs offer their own focus groups as they will have a higher level of familiarity with the program faculty.

The CAEP CCT did review and pull themes from the focus groups held this fall. The data that starts on page 2 combines information for initial level programs from the summer and fall 2019 focus groups.

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Initial Focus Group Questions (Combined)

8/5/2019 & 11/9/2019

Combined attendees: N = 11 (4 Secondary, 2 Early Childhood/Elem, 5 SPED)

1. Discuss the strengths of your WMU Teacher Education Program.

Summary: Attendees felt that a strength of their WMU teacher education program was the support they received by their professors. Many of the attendees reported that they are still in contact with their professors for ongoing support. They also felt that the small course size allowed for more personal relationships which was helpful. Additionally, they report that the program included not only theory, but also application – by being in different types of schools and settings. They also mentioned full year student teaching (for individuals in a program that includes a full year), programs that are run as a cohort as they were able to develop relationships and share ideas, and the hands-on and role playing experience.

2. Discuss the weaknesses of your WMU Teacher Education Program.

Summary: The weaknesses discussed were the limited experiences in the field, not enough preparation on dealing with trauma, not having enough special education embedded into the general education program, content in classes needs to be more of an area of focus, not enough strategies for classroom management (including behavioral, co-teaching, and working with other colleagues), difficulty in the transition to the full-time internship, and advising was a challenge (in regards to availability and what classes to take).

3. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your Clinical Experience (fieldwork) while at WMU.

Summary: Strengths of clinical experiences was the study abroad experiences, special education scaffolding classroom experiences throughout the program, including a special education and general education internship, and teach live (for SPED students) was beneficial. The weaknesses discussed were limited diverse experiences, internships (including pre), did not feel practical to the work environment. For example, having to create an eight-page lesson plan that did not align with writing a lesson plan in a school setting. Additionally, there was not emphasis on the reason for the exit portfolio (it felt like it was a waste of time), internship evaluations being done by a teacher at a different level (i.e., elementary teacher instead of secondary), a double major who had to do both internships together making it a very overwhelming and hard to manage experience, and limited special education observation.

4. If a perspective student asked you about your WMU experiences in teacher education how would you respond.

Summary: When asked how they would respond to a perspective student about their WMU teacher education experience, the attendees said: Be sure to research the profession and be ready to truly commit to being a teacher. There is a lot of busy work that does not always model the reality of what teaching truly is. It could be intense. Would encourage students to have more experiences (i.e., job shadows) and advocate for more learning outside of WMU classes. It was also a positive experience including positive relationships with professors. Overall, would recommend WMU, but should be mindful of the courses and be ready to advocate for your needs.

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5. Discuss the most important knowledge, skills, and disposition that you believe are necessary for a successful K-12 teacher and/or administrator.

Summary: The attendees were asked what the most important knowledge, skills, and disposition they thought were necessary to be a successful K-12 teacher and/or administrator and they mentioned relationship building, good classroom management skills, not internalizing things, open to continuing to learn and growing with the profession, being flexible and collaborative, and more training on trauma, poverty, and basic first aid. Additionally, more special education content for general education would be helpful.

6. What were the strengths of the instructor/professor of your favorite class in Teacher Education at WMU?

Summary: When attendees were asked to list the strengths of the instructor/professor in their favorite Teacher Education class they mentioned these instructors encouraged them to learn classroom management strategies, they modeled the strategies that are expected in schools, and encouraged a collaborative classroom, had high expectations, encouraged growth, and felt that they were informed on the most current information. Also, mentioned was the literacy studies courses and the strategies taught in those classes be applicable to almost all courses.

7. Discuss the frustrations you had when working with the WMU Teacher Education Unit (Advising, faculty, scheduling, student support, graduate school, etc.)

Summary: When attendees were asked to discuss the frustrations of working with the WMU Teacher Education Unit, they mentioned CEHD advising (not being on the same page as subject/content advisors, program planning miscommunication, and changes in advising staff), some professors not modeling what they were teaching, and professors telling interns that they are not good and should reconsider teaching. Additionally, curriculum changes in the middle of a program were also noted as a frustration.

8. ***(Question only for initial preparation)*** In the MDE Exit Survey of teacher candidates, the weakest areas reported were: 1) the ability to modify and differentiate curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities and English language learners and (2) the ability to integrate digital content into learning. What expectations need to change within the teacher education program to strengthen these areas? ***(Question only for initial preparation)***

Summary: What expectations (from the MDE Exit Survey) need to change within the teacher education program to strengthen weakest areas on the MDE Exit Survey: more communication between professors and what is happening in the high schools, more special education should be integrated into general education courses, integrating ESL into the general education curriculum, more ELL courses, include more in-depth training on different technology (current technology course not very practical), more PD on strategies and awareness to support teachers. Also mentioned was better communication between CEHD professors and Arts and Sciences professors, courses taught subject but not necessarily how to teach the subject (the example given was history), and how to continue education after school to support the changing environment.

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9. Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to share.

Summary: Additional thoughts were that it would be helpful if the program was more affordable, create an alumni programs so undergrad can communicate with alumni about grad programs, try to find more/different mentor teachers in the schools, encourage schools to allow interns to interview so they can get that interviewing experience, mock interviews at the end were very helpful, and continue to use Teach Live.

Common Themes:

Strengths: Relationships with professors, smaller courses were helpful in building strong support and relationships, study board experiences, and programs that include multiple diverse clinical experiences.

Weaknesses: Not enough preparation in dealing with trauma, academic advising does not offer the availability that some need and there is some confusion with program planning, not enough special education in general education program, more emphasis on connecting University classrooms with what is happening in the K-12 classrooms, and more diverse experiences.