

REPORT OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

**Concerning the Application from Thomas College
to Add the Early Childhood Program to
Its Existing State Approved Teacher Education Program**

**March 15, 2012
Waterville, Maine**

College Review Committee:

Jaci Holmes
Early Childhood Specialist
Maine Department of Education

Harry Osgood
Higher Education Specialist
Maine Department of Education

BACKGROUND

In accordance with State of Maine Education Statute Title 20A, and state policies 05-071-Chapter 114 setting forth Maine State Board of Education procedures and standards relating to the review and approval of educator preparation programs, an application was received from the Thomas College to introduce a new program to its existing approved programs. When such requests are made, Chapter 114, §3.10, a) stipulates that “. . . the unit shall provide documentation that the new program demonstrates compliance with Subsection 2 (Standard 2.1 – Initial Teacher Candidate Performance, Standard 2.3 – Field Experiences and Clinical Practice, Standard 2.5 – Faculty Qualifications, Performance and Development, and Standard 2.6 – Unit Governance and Resources) with respect to each endorsement and/or certificate as to which approval is sought. Evidence of compliance shall be reviewed by the Department liaison person rather than by a visitation team as provided in section 3.2 of this rule. However, the Department liaison person, with assistance of such additional personnel as are required, may visit the unit to review the evidence submitted.” A visiting team comprised of Jaci Holmes, Federal State Legislative Liaison, Maine Department of Education; and Harry Osgood, Higher Education Specialist, Maine Department of Education met with the applicant on March 15, 2012 in Waterville, Maine.

The program under review is an Early Childhood Education program. The self assessment provided by the faculty at Thomas College provides both the history of the establishment of the program and the conceptual framework – “The Early Childhood Education Program, with coursework leading to the 081 (Birth to 5 year old) endorsement at Thomas College was approved by the Faculty Senate in the Fall of 2008 as an expansion of the College’s Elementary Education Program. The Early Childhood Education coursework is considered a distinct avenue leading to recommendation for the 081 endorsement and/or the 029 (Early Elementary K-3) with a program revision adopted in Fall 2011. The combined enrollment in all education programs in the Fall 2011 is 89 students.

The Early Childhood Education program’s conceptual framework is complementary and yet at the same time discrete from the Elementary program. Both are built on the premise that caring, competent, and culturally responsive educators who are capable of providing a developmentally appropriate learning environment are integral to high quality child care, pre-kindergarten programs and early elementary education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007).

One of the main foci of the program is to prepare students to become professional early childhood practitioners and leaders in their field. Students study and begin to apply professional standards related to early childhood practice. They are encouraged to be continuous collaborative learners who demonstrate knowledge, critical reflection and the ability to become informed advocates for sound practice and policy in early childhood

education (NAEYC, 2009 *Position Paper on Standards for Programs to Prepare Early Childhood Professionals*).

Woven throughout the Early Childhood Program is a respect for and willingness to embrace the rich diversity present in the local area, state and nation (Nyhan, 2009). Faculty and cooperating care-givers and teachers in student field settings are committed to preparing students to work with children and families from a variety of diverse backgrounds and experiences (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007). Early childhood education majors are encouraged to examine multiple perspectives of cultural, social, ethnic, racial, economic, and geographic diversity and to consider how these concepts inform their educational work and practice.”

Source: Status Report for the Maine Department of Education Early Childhood Education Endorsements 081 and 029, Thomas College, December 2011, Introduction and Conceptual Framework.)

The Review Committee reports its findings on each of 4 standards below.

Standard 2.1 – Initial Teacher Candidate Performance

The candidates in the Early Childhood Education program are well-prepared to meet the standards for both the 081 (Birth to Five Year Old) and the K-3 certification. Candidates are extremely knowledgeable about the Maine State Infant Toddler Learning Guidelines, The Maine Early Learning Guidelines for ages 3-5, the Maine Learning Results/Common Core Grades K-3, the Ten Standards for Initial Teacher Certification, and the principles and position statements of the NAEYC Standards. The standards are continually re-introduced throughout the program, appearing on course syllabi, included in course assignments, and used as a basis for evaluation during the internship.

Candidates completing the program have a strong understanding of the theoretical content area knowledge coupled with early and ongoing field experiences to integrate that theoretical knowledge. Building on this knowledge, candidates learn how to create developmentally appropriate activities through which children learn about concepts and content. Four course explicitly require the observational and reflective linkages – ED 323 Children with Disabilities, ED 324 Infant Toddler Development, ED 346 Brain Development, and ED 349 Observation, Curriculum, and Assessment in Early Childhood. Many students volunteer in early childhood environments throughout the year, during breaks and the summers to expand their field based knowledge and experiences.

Candidates are well-prepared in understanding the diverse ways in which children develop and learn. A particular strength of the Thomas College program is that it is thoroughly grounded in human development. In addition to regularly observing children throughout their various field placements, candidates are required to regularly reflect on children’s development and ways of learning through assignments such as case studies, lesson planning and implementation, and reflective essays. Students are also required to regularly incorporate universal design and the backwards planning model into project planning, so that the developmental needs of all children are considered. In addition, students benefit from their exposure to children with disabilities and diverse economic

populations, learning how to modify teaching strategies, materials, and curriculum for those children.

Technology is incorporated into the program in multiple ways. When completing the application for Teacher Candidacy, students develop an electronic and hard copy portfolio. Candidates are required to demonstrate competency in integrating technology into lesson plans, evaluating software designed for young children, evaluating websites geared for parents and teachers of young children, using the internet for research, and teaching using powerpoint. During the internship, students are evaluated according to the Ten Standards for Initial Teacher Certification, with Standard 5 addressing technological competence.

Throughout the program, candidates learn effective means of informally and formally assessing the work of children. Faculty model the use of rubrics in evaluating the work of candidates, and candidates are continually required to use rubrics as a means of evaluating students' projects/work, as well as software, websites, and the like. Activity plans are based on backwards planning with an emphasis on assessment. Candidates continually engage in reflective practice, evaluating the effectiveness of activities, setting personal goals, and synthesizing field-based experiences in final papers.

Thomas College's Early Childhood program consistently emphasizes the importance of family and community. Candidates demonstrate their knowledge of connecting with families and communities by participating in Knapsack Projects with the child and family, connecting with family members when children are brought to the programs, creating take-home literacy activities, and developing projects that "give back" to the children, teachers, and families in their practica sites.

This Standard is Met.

Standard 2.3 – Field Experiences and Clinical Practice

The Early Childhood Education Program provides three different practicum/internship opportunities: (1) a first-year field work for 15 hours (one day a week for a semester); (2) an advanced field work junior year for 15 days (one day a week for a semester); and (3) a student teaching placement for 15 weeks in one setting for the fifteen weeks or two settings for 7.5 weeks each. These opportunities provide early and ongoing field experiences with a variety of age groups and help students integrate their theoretical coursework into actual classroom practice.

The field placements are managed by the program's coordinator, who reviews the applications for teacher candidacy, reviews the student's self initiated field experiences, and places each student for each field work and student teaching internship. Many students do extensive volunteer and paid experiences above and beyond the required placements which provide them with many opportunities to assess students' learning

styles and teachers' styles, and for the student to refine his or her ability to implement effective, individualized assessments and curriculum.

As this program matures the College may wish to consider adding a lab school on the campus to allow easily accessible exposure to young children birth to age five throughout the four years the students are in the program. Multiple field experiences that enhance the theoretical knowledge will build confidence in the students' skills in the classroom.

This Standard is Met.

Standard 2.5 – Faculty Qualifications, Performance and Clinical Practice

The Early Childhood Education program is staffed by four (4) full-time faculty members who have appropriate depth and breadth in academic and professional experience. The Coordinator of the Early Childhood Education program joined the faculty in the fall of 2009. Holding a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Neuroscience and Learning from the University of Denver she is joined by three colleagues all of whom have earned doctoral degrees appropriate to the delivery of instruction within the Early Childhood program. In addition to the full-time education faculty, students in the program also benefit from the opportunity to work with a number of talented adjunct faculty members who offer instruction in the program. Adjunct faculty in the program include an appropriately credentialed school administrative unit literacy specialist who has offered courses in Children's Literature and Language Development/Early Literacy; and a PK teacher with expertise in special education who teaches Teaching Early Childhood Students with Exceptional Needs. During the spring of 2012, Early Childhood student teachers have been placed with a cooperating kindergarten teacher at the George Mitchell School in Waterville, the Educare of Central Maine in Waterville, and a cooperating kindergarten teacher at The Breakwater School in Portland. Each of the cooperating teachers have specialized experience and professional expertise in Early Childhood Education.

The faculty members are well-regarded by students who view them as strong supporters and as being readily accessible. These faculty members were actively involved in developing and shaping the Early Childhood Education Program. In addition, the efforts of faculty were enthusiastically aided by the Chair of Arts and Science and the College's Provost. Initiated during the academic year 2009-10, when two (2) students enrolled, the program grew by four (4) students during the 2010-2011 academic year, and presently twenty-four (24) students are enrolled in the Early Childhood program.

This Standard is Met.

Standard 2.6 – Unit Governance and Resources

Thomas College is unique among Maine's higher education institutions in that it is organized into a day undergraduate program, and an evening division that includes both undergraduate and graduate programs. Full-time faculty members are assigned to one or two faculty departments at the College: Arts and Sciences and Business. The two department chairs report to the Provost. All graduate programs are under the direction of the Assistant Academic Dean, who also reports directly to the Provost.

The placement of Education programming within the Arts and Sciences Department allows education faculty members to coordinate program-specific proposals within the broader framework of the College. Education faculty members collaborate closely with their colleagues in Arts and Sciences, especially regarding courses required as part of the early childhood education curriculum.

The governance structure at Thomas provides that all curricular proposals be initiated at the Department level and then be reviewed by the Academic Affairs committee prior to a referral to the Faculty Senate for a final vote. This process means that any curricular proposal by the education faculty are first presented to the Arts and Sciences Department for discussion and approval prior to being forwarded to the Academic Affairs committee for consideration. The Academic Affairs committee consists of the two Department chairs (Arts and Sciences and Business), two faculty-at-large, the Assistant Academic Dean, and the Provost. Because of the close coordination throughout the different levels of faculty governance, all recommendations related to education have ample opportunity for review and comment before they are forwarded to the Faculty Senate for final approval.

The relatively flat governance structure at the College also means that course scheduling and sequencing can be carefully monitored within the Arts and Sciences Department and through the registrar's office to ensure that education students have ample access to the courses they need beyond those specifically offered by the education faculty.

Budget

At Thomas College, unlike at many other institutions, there are no separate budget lines for individual academic programs; hence, education does not have a specific budget allocated separately from that of other programs. Full-time faculty lines are assigned by the President in consultation with the Provost, and the budget for adjunct faculty is determined as part of the annual planning process by the Provost in consultation with the VP for Financial Affairs and Treasurer. These budgets are designed based on student enrollment and program needs. It was also shared, and affirmed by program faculty, that resources have been and are equitably made available whether it be for on-campus

programmatic resource collections or for on-going faculty professional development needs.

Personnel

Traditional full-time faculty loads at Thomas are 12 credits per semester or the equivalent. There was no evidence that faculty members were being asked to or were voluntarily undertaking increased teaching loads per semester.

Facilities

The primary classroom meeting space for the early childhood education program is a large, multi-purpose classroom that includes a MacBook cart with Apple laptops, wireless access and an LCD projector. Thomas College uses Moodle as its standard course management software. Students and faculty alike have access to the College's web-based information system that records student progress as an up-to-date degree audit.

Library and Learning Resources

As part of the College's long range strategic plan, a new library and academic building is scheduled to open in 2013. This 35,000 square foot building is the centerpiece of the College's current \$12 million comprehensive campaign.

To enhance the availability of educational resources to Early Childhood program candidates the College has arranged for students in education to have access to the resources of the ARC (Area Resource Center) in preparing classroom support material <http://arc.wtv1.k12.me.us/ARCWELCO.HTM>. In addition, faculty members have developed a set of resource materials stored for easy access located in a room within easy access for most education course enrollees. These materials are not included in the library's catalogued resources, but provide supplementary resources for class projects, research and presentations, and are catalogued in a separate database developed by students in the program.

In support of online and off-campus courses, the library offers information packets and the online help and resources outlined above. In addition, library staff members consult with patrons via e-mail, Skype or telephone, and create new printed or online finding aids as soon as the need is identified. Library staff members make a concerted effort to supply to remote students services and resources equivalent to those available to on-campus students.

This Standard is Met.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Visiting Committee finds that all required standards have been met.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE MAINE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

That the State Board approve addition of the Early Childhood Education program as an addendum to Thomas College's currently State approved program listing. With Board approval this program will be reconsidered, along with all other unit programs, during Thomas College's 2014 on-site visit.

INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED DURING ON-SITE VISIT:

Faculty & Cooperating Teacher:

Dr. Pamela Thompson, Associate Professor
 Dr. Wally Alexander, Associate Professor
 Dr. Richard Biffle, Associate Professor
 Dr. Philomena McPhee-Brown, Professor
 James Kingsley, Cooperating Teacher-Breakwater School

Staff:

Dr. Thomas Edwards, Provost
 Dr. Dale Dickson, Assistant Professor and Arts & Science Department Chair
 Meghan Reitchel, Registrar

Students:

Kim Grant	Samantha Moore	Samantha Gagne
McKayla Gastia	Bre Girard	Terrisa Ridge
Val Buteau	Lacey Jackson	Khaila Donovan
Nora Rausch	Samantha Felbaum	Brittney Bigsby
Sheri Clark	Michelle Dumont	Melissa Greenlaw
Jess Labbe	Sierra Marshall	Liz Morotto
Moriah Nutt	Joanna Sinsabaugh	Tabitha Turgeon
Stephanie Heald	Morgan Spaulding	