

## **The Process of ISLLC/ELCC Standards Implementation in School Leadership Preparation Programs**

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### **RATIONAL FOR THE STUDY**

To remain viable, organizations need to align themselves to their changing environment (Weber, 1999). Theoretical endeavors to study the complexities of change have spanned generations. Over the last two decades studies have analyzed the change process itself (Foulkes, 2003; Fullan, 2000; Hart & Fletcher, 1999; McNaught, 2003), its principles (Hall & Hord, 2006), stages and characteristics (Akmal & Miller, 2003; Hagerott, 2004; Twadell, 2003) and the factors that affect change (Berg, Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2003; Hearn, 1996; Martin, 2000). There is wide agreement in the literature that effective change is characterized by good planning (Akmal & Miller, 2003; Hagerott, 2004; Kotter, 2000; Twadell, 2003); and assessment and adaptation to internal and external forces (McNaught, 2003; Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

One of the most significant reform initiatives of the last decade is development and implementation of the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Standards (ISLLC). There is a growing body of literature that examines the impact that this standards-based reform movement has had on the performance of school leaders in the field (Boeckmann, 1999; Coutts, 1997; Holman, 2005; Marklay, 2004; Pope, 2004; Ray, 2004; Reeber, 2003; Sumpter, 2004; Thorns, 2002). However, there is a dearth of literature that describes the process by which school leadership preparation programs are aligned with standards. Since standards implementation is an ongoing process a better understanding of the process, identification of the different action steps that were taken, and the effectiveness of different strategies will add to our knowledge base and ensure that subsequent alignment efforts are conducted more efficiently (Machado, 2008).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What was the process by which school leadership preparation programs were aligned with the ISLLC and/or ELCC standards?
2. Which strategies were used to align programs with the standards? How did faculty rate the effectiveness of the identified strategies?
3. Did accreditation status, affiliation status or Carnegie classification status contribute to group differences in the strategies identified as most useful?

4. Which additional strategies did faculty identify, in retrospect, as ones that could have aided the alignment process?
5. To what extent were faculty satisfied with the process and outcomes of the alignment process? Did accreditation status, affiliation status, and Carnegie classification status have an impact on level of satisfaction?

Given that the subject matter under investigation was both new and underdeveloped a mixed method approach was used for data collection. Qualitative data collected from eight faculty members during the preliminary phase of the study were used to develop the instrument that was administered to faculty nationwide during the secondary phase of data collection; this survey generated both qualitative and quantitative data.

Demographic characteristic of the survey respondents presented in Table 1 shows that the sample which comprise of 222 faculty is representative of the population in terms of both affiliation status and Carnegie classification status. However, in terms of accreditation status the sample comprises of a greater number of institutions with full NCATE accreditation status than the population; the proportion of programs with probationary/conditional NCATE accreditation for the sample is representative of the population, even though it is a little smaller.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents' Institutions.

Demographic characteristics	Population		Sample	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
NCATE Accreditation Status <sup>a</sup>				
Full (A & I)	246	65	162	75.7
Probationary/conditional (P & C)	24	6.3	12	5.6
None	109	28.7	40	18.7
Total	379	100.0	214 <sup>b</sup>	100.0
Affiliation Status				
Public institutions	282	74.4	176	83.4
Private institutions	97	25.6	35	16.6
Total	379	100.0	211 <sup>b</sup>	100.0
Carnegie classification status				
Doctoral/research – extensive	108	28.5	57	26.8
Doctoral/research – intensive	66	17.4	53	24.9
Masters I	202	53.3	101	47.4
Masters II	3	.8	2	.9
Total	379	100.0	213 <sup>b</sup>	100.0

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> “A & I” programs have both undergraduate and graduate accreditation; “P & C” programs are currently on probation and/or have not met one or more of the NCATE standards and must do so within a two year period; and programs labeled as “None” have not sought NCATE accreditation. <sup>b</sup> The totals vary because of missing cases.

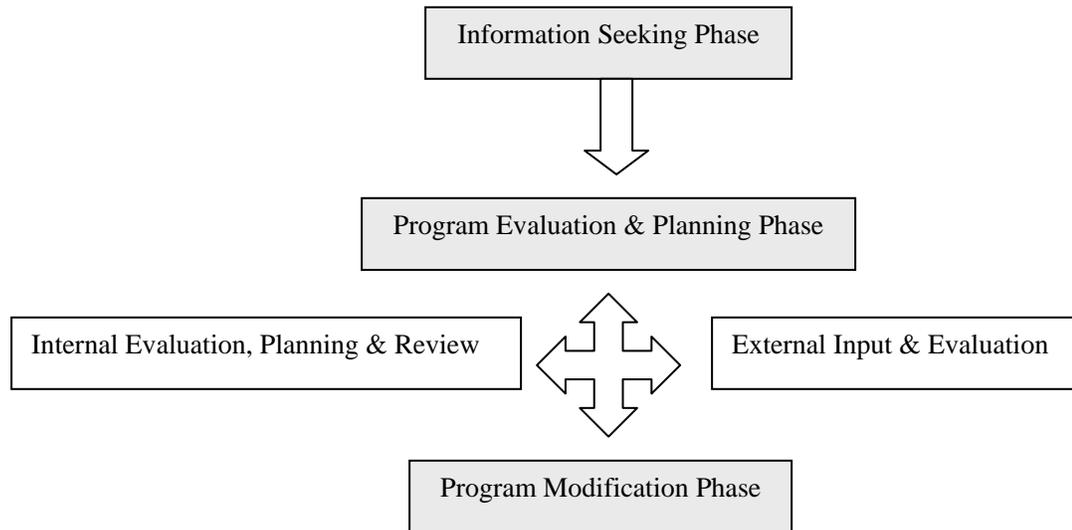
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *ISLLC/ELCC Standards Implementation*

#### *Stages of Program-Standards Alignment*

Qualitative data indicated that standards implementation occurred gradually over a period of time and took anywhere between six months to several years. Quantitative data confirmed this. As many as a fifth of the respondents reported that, to date, their departments had made between three to five attempts to align their programs with the standards. A little over one third of the respondents reported that review and program modification is now an ongoing process.

Content analysis of the eight narratives generated during the preliminary phase reveals that departments employed a wide range of action steps to align their programs with the standards. These action steps were broadly categorized into three distinct phases depicted in Figure 1 and Table 2.



*Figure 1. Program-Standards Alignment Phases.*

The literature suggests that evolutionary change is long-term and therefore less likely to be adopted by leaders and change agents; on the other hand, revolutionary changes have the potential to damage an organization (Kezar, 2001). Analysis of the action steps presented in Table 2 confirms that the standards implementation process was neither evolutionary nor revolutionary; it was essentially a planned transitional change. Like most transitional changes the process of standards implementation was a controlled process, driven largely by clearly defined structures and timelines. The primary motivation was to 'fix' the problem. The process was clearly project-oriented, focused on modifying existing programs (structure, design, content, delivery, assessment) and work practices.

**Table 2. Phases of ISLLC/ELCC Standards Implementation: Action Steps.**

Phase 1 Information Seeking Phase	Phase 2 Program Evaluation & Planning Phase	Phase 3 Program Modification Phase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attending meetings organized by the state department to obtain information about expectations and resources available;</li> <li>- Reviewing the literature and other print material;</li> <li>- Corresponding with resource agencies;</li> <li>- Studying model programs identified by professional organizations or prominent professionals in the field;</li> <li>- Visiting other schools on their own campus, or other school leadership preparation programs that were in the process of revising their programs.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Internal Evaluation, Planning and Review</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Outlining objectives and short – and/long-range steps ;</li> <li>- Organizing focus groups;</li> <li>- Structuring committees to address different areas;</li> <li>- Discussing possible alternatives, benefits and problems;</li> <li>- Review of existing courses independently or in focus groups; existing courses;</li> <li>- Developing a matrix to describe existing program and outcomes and how they relate to the standards and or NPBEA domains;</li> <li>- Identifying aspects of the existing program that can be retained and/or those that have to be dismantled or dropped;</li> <li>- Identifying areas that need to be created from scratch to meet the new requirements;</li> <li>- Redesigning benchmarks and translating them into learning goals and targets;</li> <li>- Determining how to assess students and give students and departments feedback;</li> <li>- Making a lists of assignments and expectations;</li> <li>- Determining how long the transition is likely to take;</li> <li>- Carrying out the actions and activities entailed in operationalizing the change;</li> <li>- Examining the outcomes of the changes made or some aspects of it.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>External Input and Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attending professional meetings that gave orientation to the work that had to be accomplished;</li> <li>- Inviting principals and superintendents from in and around the state to participate in the evaluation of existing syllabi and the recommendation of content areas that need to be further developed;</li> <li>- Engaging focus groups in discussion;</li> <li>- Seeing feedback given by state reviewing teams and/or NCATE reviewing teams;</li> <li>- Hiring external consultants to provide additional information and facilitate the process;</li> <li>- Seeking feedback from employers program graduates;</li> <li>- Getting feedback from current graduate students and graduates of the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Working in committees to address different areas;</li> <li>- Ongoing communication between faculty to redefine objectives of the program; and individual courses and how they were aligned with ISLLC or ELCC standards;</li> <li>- Engaging adjunct faculty in collaborative activities and in the rewriting of sections in their area of expertise;</li> <li>- Modifying existing syllabi; ensuring connectivity between standards, targets and benchmarks;</li> <li>- Hiring new faculty members to teach new/ modified courses;</li> <li>- Eliminating excessive overlaps or breaks in the existing curricular delivery system and coursework;</li> <li>- Developing a consensus and moving the curriculum forward to full time faculty.</li> </ul>

The data suggest that the implementation process was highly participative and time consuming. In addition, the non-linear process called for generative change rather than adaptive change. This generative process, like the action research process, required more than a one time response to the external environment. Stakeholders were engaged in “learning by doing”– they identified problems with the existing program, planned a course of action to resolve the issues, evaluated the outcomes to see how successful their efforts were; when they were not satisfied they repeated the action cycle of reflection, planning and implementation.

Overall analysis of the response time suggests that for the majority of institutions change could be classified as reactive, for a few exceptions the change was proactive, these departments had initiated major program modification prior to embracing the standards; the standards just added to their momentum.

### *Program-Standards Alignment Strategies*

The mean scores and standard deviations presented in Table 3 shows the degree to which survey respondents perceived that the strategies identified by interviewees during the preliminary phase of the study contributed to program-standards alignment.

**Table 3.** Ranks, Means and Standard Deviations of Program-Standards Alignment Strategies.

Rank	Program-standards alignment strategies	<u>M</u> <sup>a</sup>	<u>SD</u>
1	Program evaluation by faculty	2.5333	.71306
2	Committees	2.2429	.96000
3	Program evaluation by graduates of the program	2.0047	.90022
4	District, principal and superintendent input	1.8815	.91036
5	Guidance from state certification/licensure	1.7746	1.00748
6	Graduate student employer’s input	1.6934	.92637
7	Professional development provided by/for faculty	1.6698	1.04606
8	Graduate student input	1.6415	.85641
9	Guidance from NCATE <sup>b</sup>	1.6256	1.04522
10	Adjunct faculty input	1.5634	1.01031
11	Focus groups	1.2087	1.09550
12	Input from external consultants	1.1469	1.07890
13	Input from successfully aligned departments	.8199	.79029
14	Availability of additional resources	.8019	.93302

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> The following scale should be used to interpret the mean scores: 0 = Definitely not, 1 = Somewhat, 2 = Moderately, 3 = Substantially. <sup>b</sup> Some of the survey respondents (n = 38; 17%) worked at institutions not accredited by NCATE; these figures are subject to multiple interpretations and should be interpreted with caution.

More than fifty percent of the faculty indicated that 9 of the 14 strategies listed contributed either moderately or substantially to the implementation process. However, Table 4 shows that on average, only three strategies were deemed highly effective. A series of one way ANOVAS was run to examine the perceived effectiveness of the strategies and compare them across accreditation status, Carnegie classification status and affiliation status.

Group differences were observed in the degree to which ‘program evaluation by faculty’ was found to be effective when compared across affiliation status [F (2,204) = 6.408, p = .002] and Carnegie classification status [F (2, 202) = 3.122, p = .002]. Faculty at public institutions (M = 2.56) perceived that this strategy was more beneficial than those at private institutions

(M = 2.4). Similarly, faculty at masters level institutions (M = 2.22) perceived that this strategy was more effective than those at doctoral extensive institutions (M = 1.73).

Group differences were observed in the degree to which ‘committees’ aided the process when compared across accreditation status [F (2,203) = 3.957, p = 0.21]. Faculty at full NCATE accredited institutions (M = 2.35) rated the effectiveness of this strategy significantly higher than faculty at institutions not accredited by NCATE (M = 1.95). Group differences were observed in the degree to which ‘program evaluation by graduates of the program’ was found to be beneficial to the process when compared across affiliation [F (2,204) = 6.118, p.003] and Carnegie classification status [F (2,204) = 4.696, p = .003]. Private institutions (M = 2.03) rated the effectiveness of this strategy slightly higher than public institutions (M = 2.00). Similarly, masters level institutions (M = 2.22) found it more beneficial than doctoral extensive institutions (M = 1.73).

Availability of resources, input from other departments who have successfully aligned their programs, input from external consultants and focus groups were identified by many respondents as strategies that had minimal influence on program-standards alignment. However, the alternative strategies identified by faculty, in retrospect, presented in Table 4 suggests collaboration with departments that have successfully aligned their programs with the standards, and greater involvement of superintendents, principals and graduates students would have been beneficial. The instrument was not sophisticated enough to ascertain if faculty were unwilling to collaborate with other institutions and agencies, or if their desire to do so was inhibited by the lack of funding. Either way, this appears to be an avenue with much potential which needs to be exploited in the future.

**Table 4.** Alternative Program-Standards Alignment Strategies Identified by Survey Respondents.

Alternative program-standards alignment strategies identified by survey respondents	<u>n</u>
Collaboration/Visits with programs that have successfully aligned their programs with the standards	10
More input from principals and superintendents	9
Current graduate student involvement in the program review/program modification	9
Clearer, more consistent information on expectations from NCATE/ELCC	6
Consider time spent as part of faculty work load/Provide faculty with release time	5
External consultants	5
More input from graduates of the program	5
Professional development workshops with faculty	4
Formal review of research literature on preparation program efficacy	4
Greater use of focus groups	4
Start process earlier/more time	4
Strengthen discussion with the field regarding the success of students 2-3 years after program completion	3
Alignment among various groups ELCC/State to eliminate duplicity or overlap in standards-setting	3
Collaboration with colleagues in other Ed.D programs	3
Clearer, more consistent information on expectations from department of education at the state level	3
Monetary reward for faculty’s involvement in such labor intensive work	3
Greater involvement of adjunct faculty, clinical faculty and T/P	3
Discussions at national conferences at UCEA, AERA and NCPEA	3
Greater commitment from faculty	2

### *Level of Satisfaction with Implementation Process and Outcome*

All eight of the interview participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the process and outcome of program-standards alignment. Of the 222 respondents 19 (8.6%) did not report their level of satisfaction. The majority of survey respondents (n = 162; 73%) reported that they were satisfied with the implementation process and outcomes. Only a small proportion of the sample reported indifference (n = 33; 14.9%) and an even smaller proportion (n = 8; 3.6%) expressed dissatisfaction. A three-way ANOVA revealed that accreditation status, affiliation status, and Carnegie classification status, in combination, did not have an impact on faculty level of satisfaction.

### **EMBRACING THE CHALLENGES AND PROMISES**

Based on the results of this study, it would be safe to conclude that departments have begun to address the charges of “too much theory” and lack of integration with practice. The standards implementation process which is ongoing is characterized by: good planning, anticipation of the real world demands on school administrators and collaboration. Faculty have demonstrated that they are not obstructionists when they come to change. They worked in committees and drew on collective wisdom, critical thinking, and creative problem solving to address issues unique to their individual programs.

The results of this study suggest that departments should draw on a wider range of strategies rather than relying on those that are conveniently available. In particular, they should collaborate with other departments who have successfully carried out program-standards alignment. Group differences in the degree to which some strategies aid the process were observed when compared across accreditation, affiliation, and Carnegie classification status. Departments should study these trends carefully. Drawing on strategies that “worked” for departments with similar characteristics is recommended. Conversely, collaborating with departments that might be dissimilar, but who made other strategies “work” could also prove beneficial.

To sustain continual improvement departments need to develop a mechanism for evaluating the implementation process within their respective departments and the degree to which curricular changes are linked with K-12 student success. Program modification should be driven not just by feedback from professional development organizations and accrediting agencies, but by self-regulatory benchmarks identified by the department.

If we apply systems thinking to standards implementation it stands to reason that working towards implementing collaboratively developed standards – in isolation – could lead to unintended and unfavorable outcomes. Faculty need to become effective system thinkers because their primary role will be to manage the systems for which they are accountable. The invisible walls that have been built up around programs need to be removed. If we are to create a generation of high achievers, regardless of background there needs to be a movement from competitiveness to cooperation. “No program left behind” should be our new slogan.

Finally, professional organizations like American Educational Research Association (AERA), University Council for Education Administration (UCEA) and National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) should facilitate the process of dialogue by establishing think-tanks organized across institutional characteristics like affiliation status, accreditation status, and Carnegie classification status. Working within and across these groups will allow departments to move from competition to cooperation, from isolation to

interdependence. The expense attached with traveling to a common venue can be eliminated altogether if professional organizations employ collaborative platforms that draw on the wide range of alternatives that new advances in technology provide.

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