Undergraduate Analysis:

When asked about making choices in the types of districts program completers chose to teach, the majority of respondents stated that they grew up in suburban settings and were more comfortable teaching in those settings. Some completers added that they had some experiences in urban settings but perhaps not as much as they could have. Participants who had completed both the undergraduate and graduate programs said they had exposure to rural and diverse urban settings which made them more comfortable applying for jobs outside of the suburbs. However, they also indicated that they would like more opportunities provided to go to urban and rural settings. Two of the participants indicated that while they spent time working at Geneseo CSD they did not have the opportunity to visit other schools in the area.

Adolescence program completers felt that their placements were rushed and based on connections faculty members had, rather than having placements made in a thoughtful manner tailored to the teacher candidates’ needs. Some completers felt that teachers in the field were not necessarily committed to working with them during their placements and they encouraged the EPP to make deeper connections with individual teachers.

Survey responses indicated that undergraduate program completers felt less prepared to deal with cultural understandings, and global and community issues. The majority of completers indicated that they did not have prior exposure to the types of cultures to which they would be exposed during their placements, and culture was not something that was explored in their coursework. Suggestions included addressing this issue through an undergraduate-level course that explores types of schools (rural, urban, and suburban) as well as using culturally responsive pedagogy. Graduate program completers suggested that the multicultural education course offered at the graduate level might be something that could be offered to the undergraduates.

Participants suggested that the undergraduate Social Foundations of Education course (INTD 203) was too focused on the history of teaching and could be updated to include current practices and address different types of settings in which teacher candidates would be placed.

Survey data showed that some undergraduate completers felt highly prepared to use multiple methods of assessment (Special Education, Science, Math, and Foreign Language, and English) while completers from the Early Childhood and Social Studies programs felt less prepared in this area. When questioned about this, the Childhood-Special Education program completers indicated that they felt well prepared to work with assessments and had a good understanding of how to administer and interpret test results. Early Childhood-Childhood program completers viewed assessment as an afterthought that was not incorporated into the curriculum. Completers from the Adolescence Education programs felt they were well prepared to use different types of assessments, as indicated on the survey.

When asked about strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement for the SOE undergraduate programs, focus group participants cited learning early- and elementary-level math concepts; appreciation for professors who understood what it is like being in a classroom; early and ongoing experiences in classrooms; field experiences in diverse settings; learning material that was directly applicable to being a classroom teacher; having qualified, knowledgeable, and supportive professors; and taking in a wide variety of classes as program strengths.

In considering weaknesses, themes extracted from undergraduate program completers input were:

• classroom technologies were not adequately addressed

• there was too much theory and too little *current application* of theories

• there was not enough *practical* knowledge of the field (e.g., 504 plans, consult-teacher model, writing IEPs in Special Ed courses)

• practicum experiences could be richer and better aligned with classrooms

• they were unable to choose classes that align with personal interests because the program has too few electives

• they are not able to register for classes they need, as there are not enough professors available, especially for the Adolescence program

• the program did not focus enough on using standards and laws

• student teaching placements were made too late

• there were changes to both professors and courses during the semester

• the quality of the course depends on the professor you get

• some professors change the course to make it what they want it to be, not what it’s supposed to be

• the SOE is not responsive to student concerns and advocacy efforts.

Suggestions for improvement included the following:

• the rigidity of blocks courses could be modified by investigating how they could change

• the SOE could provide more clarity in field visit expectations and better alignment of assignments within classrooms

• more time allowed for planning their future classrooms considering things such as “What are your expectations? What will your rules be? How will you talk with students?”

• overhauling scheduling and registration for classes and practica via better connections between the SOE and other campus departments

• participating in mock interviews and using more practical strategies that you can use in teaching

• more support from the SOE including better mentoring, facilitating connections with graduates who are currently teaching, with professors and Graduate Assistants

• providing general support and structural revisions for the adolescence programs

• communicating with and treating students with respect, with a focus on the “quality and oversight of professors.”

Graduate Analysis:

For the graduate program completers, focus-group questions were developed based on survey responses to shed more light on the completers’ perceptions of increased confidence in several areas of preparation, as compared to the same areas for undergraduate program completers.

When asked about their perceived degree of preparedness to deal with cultural differences as compared to undergraduate completers, graduate program respondents identified a major source of their confidence to be that graduate classes “are structured for conversation.”  They felt that courses like this offered them opportunities to engage in conversations with other teachers and colleagues about their classroom experiences, and that these discussions helped them “learn how to go about teaching culture” in their classrooms.

Another source of graduate program completers’ confidence dealing with cultural differences stemmed from elective courses that allowed for “more exploration into different cultures.” These courses required research assignments that focused on culture and/or cultural groups that helped completers to “understand the background…of students.”  Additionally, their confidence relative to cultural competence was also attributed to being at a point where “we have a lot of experience in the classroom and have had a lot of experience with students.” They also acknowledged that their undergraduate field experiences and student teaching have given them “more cultural understanding under our belt(s).”

For graduate completers, we also noticed an upward trend over time for confidence in written communication based on survey results. The common theme reported in this case relates to the practice of writing itself. “I think this all boils down to the ‘Practice Makes Perfect’ principle and how writing was so strongly… implemented in all of the different classes we took.”  Respondents cited writing reports, essays, research papers, “dozens upon dozens of reflections,” and a Master’s thesis as examples of the practices that had helped them improve their writing skills, noting “we had years of experience in terms of writing.”

While the graduate program completers in the Literacy program did not have much insight into the Adolescence MEd program, they did identify the strengths they perceived in the Literacy program. “I just know that the literacy program does a really good job at touching on the things that you actually will be doing.”  They stated that the program gives “many practical strategies and tools that you are really going to be using,” and that Literacy is a “very strong program and for every single class we took we could take those skills in the toolbox and immediately apply them to the classroom.” Program completers acknowledged the ways that the content they learned in the Literacy program could be applied throughout their teaching —  stating that having completed the Literacy program “makes me a more confident teacher and more prepared to teach all areas in the classroom, not just reading but how it applies to understanding mathematical literacy and different subject areas.”

When asked about making choices in the types of districts program completers chose to teach, the majority of respondents stated that they grew up in suburban settings and were more comfortable teaching in those settings. Some completers added that they had some experiences in urban settings but perhaps not as much as they could have. Participants who had completed both the undergraduate and graduate programs said they had exposure to rural and diverse urban settings which made them more comfortable applying for jobs outside of the suburbs, however they also indicated that they would like more consistency across course sections with opportunities provided to go to urban and rural settings. Two of the participants indicated that while they spent time working at Geneseo CSD they did not have the opportunity to visit other schools in the area.

When asked specifically about strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement for the SOE graduate programs, focus-group participants cited their preparation for implementing assessments; experiences that taught them how to work collaboratively/in teams; time for discussions, interactions, and sharing experiences with peers; and their experiences in the reading clinic courses as beneficial components of the programs.

In considering weaknesses, graduate program completers felt that their Literacy coursework did not emphasize how the English language works, and that there was too much emphasis on research, which is not particularly useful as a classroom teacher. A suggested improvement was to address *adolescence* literacy in the Literacy program.

One of the completers who was enrolled in the Adolescence English program noted that there is a lot of overlap with Literacy program courses, but that “anyone who is not in the Literacy program is a little bit of a sidebar.”  She also noted that while literacy information was provided, it was up to each (non-Literacy) individual to determine how to incorporate the material into his/her content area.