**Vision 2020 Grant Application (AY1)**

**Project Title:** Supporting Our Students (SOS)

**Team:**
Nuran Bradley, Lecturer, Department of Mathematical Sciences, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Dr. Hope Smith Davis, Assistant Professor of Secondary Education/ Reading & Literacy, Chair of Initial Licensure Programs, School of Education

Dr. Terri Hebert, Assistant Professor of Elementary Education, School of Education

Dr. Dan Holm, Associate Professor of Elementary Education, School of Education

Dr. Julia Gressick, Assistant Professor of Instructional Technology, School of Education

M. Jean Henry, Staff Counselor, Student Counseling Center, IU South Bend

Dr. Deborah Marr, Associate Professor of Biology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Talandra Neff, Director of the Office of Student Teaching and Clinical Practice, School of Education

Dr. Sara Sage, Associate Professor of Secondary Education, School of Education

Dr. Kathleen Sullivan, Learning Strategies Specialist, School of Education

Aaron Turner, Elementary Education Undergraduate Student, President of the Education Student Association

Dr. A. Bruce Watson, Assistant Professor, Coordinator of Educational/Organizational Leadership, School of Education

**Abstract**

Supporting Our Students (SOS) is an initiative that will complement the design of three specific test preparation workshops to be funded by the School of Education. Two test preparation workshops will focus on coaching students for elementary and secondary mathematics exams. A third workshop will prepare students for three separate elementary subtests. If funded, this Vision 2020 grant will allow us to include information in the workshops on test anxiety and general test preparation strategies in addition to the discipline content. The grant will also allow us to develop collaborative assignments facilitated by faculty and student leaders. Finally, the grant will provide some student scholarships based on financial need and faculty recommendations.
Rationale

Currently, students in the School of Education must pass several Pearson content tests in order to graduate and receive their teaching licenses. With new tests required by the state in 2014, we have noted a trend wherein more students struggle to pass the tests than with the previously required tests. This struggle can lead to frustration, delayed graduation, or failure to complete programs. Our proposal is to use Vision 2020 funds to support summer test preparation workshops to help better prepare students for the tests, with the hope that they will pass the tests with fewer attempts in order to complete their programs and graduate on time.

The Pearson content exams, which became required for teacher licensure in Indiana in 2014, are new and more rigorous than past state licensure exams. Since their inception, pass rates on the Pearson content exams from various institutions have been closely examined by internal and external educational stakeholders. The test manufacturer, Pearson, provides a test analyzer that indicates how our pass rates compare to the state pass rates. Table 1 provides a comparison of the pass rates on the Pearson Content Tests for IU South Bend and the state averages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pearson Content Test</th>
<th>IU South Bend Pass Rate</th>
<th>State Average Pass Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Reading/Language Arts</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Mathematics</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Science</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Social Studies</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, in the table, our pass rates on several of the Elementary tests are below 60%, whereas an 80% pass rate is more ideal. We have not had enough secondary mathematics majors take the Secondary Mathematics test to generate any pass rates to date, but feedback and official scores received from secondary math majors has indicated that students struggle with that test as well.

There is an argument to be made that the tests were implemented too quickly for teacher education programs to realign their curricula, and, as a long-term solution, we are currently in the process of revising all of our program plans to better reflect the content on the new tests; however, it will take several semesters for those changes to have an impact. As can be seen by the pass rate data, in most cases, our students fall within the range of passing rates across the state, however, the bottom line is that we believe too many of our students are not successfully passing the tests, and we would like to use this grant to help increase those numbers.

Social cognitive theory suggests that early success has a positive impact on subsequent success (Bandura, 1986). The opposite can also happen. Students who are not successful with their initial attempt at passing the test often anecdotally report experiencing a decreased sense of self-efficacy and increased test anxiety. A sense of decreased self-efficacy may decrease the likelihood of future success (Tinto, 2012). This is combined with delaying graduation, a critical momentum point that comes at the end of students’ academic programs (Tinto, 2012). By implementing the high impact practices of providing tutoring workshops and completing collaborative assignments (Kuh, 2008) our hope is to increase student success resulting in timely graduation and licensing.
Analysis of the data from IU South Bend education majors who have taken the Pearson content tests over the past year indicate that students would benefit from additional preparation, especially in the areas of Secondary and Elementary Math. It is critical that students pass these tests in order to complete their programs and become licensed teachers in the state of Indiana.

Supporting Our Students (SOS) is an initiative that will complement the design and delivery of three test preparation workshops in the Summer of 2015 for education majors in content areas where IU South Bend passing rates are near or below the state average. Two of the test preparation workshops will focus on preparing students for elementary and secondary mathematics exams. The third workshop will prepare students for the remaining elementary subtests (Reading/Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies). Portions of these workshops will be funded by the School of Education and Vision 2020 funds would be used for additional instructional and motivational materials. (Please see Table 2 on page 6 for a specific breakdown of cost amounts and coverage.) We anticipate that between 30 and 60 students could benefit from these workshops each year. Although the School of Education will run the workshops regardless of whether the grant is received, the grant will provide critical components that will greatly enhance student attendance and practical instruction during the seminars. For example, grant monies would be used to purchase online practice tests, encourage workshop attendance through test registration scholarships, and provide modest stipends to students who share their test-taking experiences during interviews which will inform the development of the workshop curricula.

**Goal**

The overarching goal is to improve student passing rates (thereby improving graduation rates) on the state-mandated licensure exams in the three areas we have determined to be the weakest.

**What we will do to reach this goal:**

To reach our goal, the School of Education has committed to offering three summer test-preparation workshops. Vision 2020 Grant money, if awarded, will be used to:

1. Provide materials and support for three separate one-week summer workshops for education majors to help refresh and prepare for the required content-area tests.
2. Interview current students who have taken the content tests to better understand their test-taking strategies, and the barriers to passing prior to development of the workshops.
3. Develop supportive structures for test preparation, such as study groups with collaborative assignments, integrated within the summer workshops.
4. Provide information on test anxiety and strategies for minimizing test anxiety, especially after not experiencing initial success on exams.
5. Purchase practice test vouchers so students may complete online practice tests as collaborative assignments under the guidance of knowledgeable professors and select students.
6. Provide modest stipends to students who would like to present their successful test-taking practices during workshop sessions.
7. Provide scholarships for students to ease the costs associated with taking the Pearson Assessments.
How we will assess our efforts to reach this goal:

1. Successful delivery of summer workshops will be assessed by:
   a. Indirect measures:
      i. Student interest, participation, and enrollment in the workshops
      ii. Participant surveys on the impact of the workshops at the end of each workshop
      iii. Questions regarding test-preparation practices included on surveys administered to all School of Education program completers during their final semester
   b. Direct measures:
      i. Improved tests scores and pass rates for assessments covered in the workshops
      ii. Comparisons of test scores between students who do and do not participate in the workshops
2. The relevance and value of the test preparation structures will be evaluated by:
   a. Survey data from all workshop participants
   b. End-of-program survey data
3. The relevance and value of strategies to address test anxiety will be evaluated by:
   a. Survey data from all workshop participants
   b. End-of-program survey data
4. The relevance and value of collaborating on practice tests during workshops will be evaluated by:
   a. Survey data from all workshop participants
   b. End-of-program survey data

Timeline:
In the spring of 2015, faculty members interested in developing summer workshops for test preparation in areas of their content and pedagogical expertise were invited to participate in development of this grant. Through collaborative discussion, the following activities have been identified:

1. Spring 2015:
   a. Faculty members who will be delivering the workshops will register for and take the Pearson Content exam in the area for which they will be developing workshops.
   b. Analysis of the content on the exams will be conducted, identifying areas of potential need for our students. This analysis will use data from the practice exams, student program plan sheets, and performance data from previous test-takers from our programs (provided by Pearson, and broken down by sub-categories).
   c. Students who have successfully taken and passed the Pearson tests will be invited for short interviews with faculty to discuss their test preparation strategies and their experiences taking the tests. Those interested will be invited to participate as co-presenters during the summer workshops. Students will be paid for their participation.
   d. An electronic survey regarding test preparation strategies, anxiety, and experiences will be disseminated to all second-semester seniors in the school of education. Data from this survey will be analyzed to determine areas of need for workshop presentations.
   e. Members of the entire team, representing groups from across campus and academic and non-academic units will meet to discuss data from the interviews and surveys.
   f. Dates for workshops will be determined and advertised to students through the Academic Advising Office, the Office of Student Teaching and Clinical Practice, and posted in student newsletters and other outlets.
2. **Summer 2015:**
   
a. Three five-day workshops will be offered to students through on campus, online, and/or hybrid formats. Content covered during the workshops will include:
   
i. Guest presentations from successful past test-takers. Student presenters will be provided food, and paid a modest stipend for participation in the program.
   
ii. Strategies for taking standardized assessments, including a timeline for optimal scheduling in relation to required coursework in the various programs.
   
iii. Strategies for recognizing and managing test anxiety. Guest lecturers on anxiety issues will be provided a $150 honorarium per presentation, with no more than one presentation per workshop.
   
iv. Review of specific content necessary for the test, which in some cases, may have been taken by the students several years ago.
   
v. Simulated practice tests and discussion of responses.

b. Students will be provided test-taking materials, food and motivational materials for test preparation.

c. Scholarships for test registration will be awarded in the amount of $100 to up to five student attendees per workshop. Awards will be distributed based on financial need, number of attempts taking the test previously, and other relevant criteria as determined by the faculty in the School of Education.

d. Each workshop will conclude with a survey regarding its impact.

3. **Fall 2015**
   
a. Follow-up surveys of final-semester seniors regarding test preparation and experiences.
   
b. Members of the entire team, representing groups from across campus and academic and non-academic units will meet again to discuss data from the interviews and surveys, and to make recommendations for the workshop sessions in AY2.

4. **Spring 2016**
   
a. The process begins again.

We believe that successful implementation of these test-taking workshops will have a direct, positive impact on the students who opt to enroll in them. We also believe that, through the work being done by the faculty to become more familiar with the test, there will be an indirect (and thus, more difficult to isolate and measure) impact on the general student body, as subtle adjustments are made to the curricula in the short-term. We believe that between 30 and 60 students could participate in these workshops.
Table 2. Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Funded through</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty salary for development and delivery of workshops (Three faculty members).</td>
<td>$1,000 + benefits @ 25.31%</td>
<td>$3759.30</td>
<td>School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test vouchers for faculty and students</td>
<td>$29.95 each (up to 70)</td>
<td>$2096.50</td>
<td>Vision 2020 grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for participants during each workshop</td>
<td>$250 per workshop</td>
<td>$750.00</td>
<td>Vision 2020 grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipends for student participation in workshop delivery and/or development (up to 10 students)</td>
<td>$25 for interviews</td>
<td>$250.00</td>
<td>Vision 2020 grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and duplication costs for assessment materials</td>
<td>$30 per workshop</td>
<td>$105.00</td>
<td>Vision 2020 grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorarium for guest speaker on test anxiety</td>
<td>$150 per session (one session per workshop + benefits @ 25.31%)</td>
<td>$563.91</td>
<td>Vision 2020 grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships for test registration</td>
<td>$100 per student (up to 12 students)</td>
<td>$1200.00</td>
<td>Vision 2020 grant</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total cost for SOS program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$8724.71</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Vision 2020 Grant request</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$4965.41</strong></td>
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Fiscal Sustainability

We anticipate that this program will result in increased retention of students enrolled in Education programs, and lead to more successful completion rates. As a program that will be jointly funded through the School of Education and the grant, as proposed, we believe that this is a fiscally responsible approach that indicates the level of commitment held by both the School and the University. We believe that the workshops are a short-term solution that will be complemented by our long-term efforts to more effectively align our curriculum with the expectations on the Pearson Content tests. As such, we envision that we will run the workshops for the next two summers, to give the programs time to catch up to the assessments. Thus, it is possible that a similar proposal will be submitted for AY2, should our request this year be awarded. After the second year, however, we will re-evaluate the need for such intense test preparation workshops, with the expectation that they may no longer be needed.

References