DISSERTATIONS IN BRIEF

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS BY WKU EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DOCTORAL PROGRAM GRADUATES

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP STYLE AND TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION

BY JOSEPH KIRK BIGGERSTAFF

Chair: Marge Maxwell
Committee: Nedra Atwell, Janet Applin
Defense Date: February 20, 2012

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teacher perceptions of elementary school principal leadership style and teacher job satisfaction. The study also investigated differences in teachers' perceptions of elementary school principal leadership style and teacher job satisfaction based on teachers' demographics (i.e., age, grade level taught, education level, teaching experience). Additionally, an examination of the significant factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction as identified by the elementary teachers was explored.

This correlational study with a quantitative, non-experimental design utilized two surveys to measure elementary teacher perceptions of principal leadership style (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire [MLQ]) and teacher job satisfaction (Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire [MSQ]). Demographic information from each teacher was also collected. Participants included 179 certified elementary teachers (kindergarten through grade 5) from six different rural elementary schools in six different school districts across south central Kentucky.

Results from the Pearson Correlation indicated that all five transformational leadership style dimensions and one transactional leadership dimension derived from the MLQ were statistically significant at the .0001 level and showed positive, moderate correlations with teacher job satisfaction. Results from ANOVA testing indicated significant differences existed between teacher age and education level groups with regard to teacher perceptions of elementary school principal leadership style. Results revealed that younger teachers (ages 21-30) tended to

rate their principal higher in the two transactional leadership components of contingent reward and management-by-exception (active). Older teachers (ages 31-40, ages 41 and above), however, rated their principal lower in these same dimensions. Furthermore, the study's results reported significant differences between grade level taught groups (kindergarten-grade 5 and special area teachers) with respect to teacher job satisfaction. Results demonstrated that special area teachers (i.e., art, music, library, computers, special education, etc.) rated their intrinsic job satisfaction level significantly higher than kindergarten through grade 5 teachers. Stepwise multiple regression analyses also showed that teachers identified significant factors that contributed to teacher job satisfaction. Intrinsic motivators included areas related to creativity, social service, and independence, while extrinsic motivators included the areas of supervision and compensation. General job satisfaction factors identified included the areas of responsibility and recognition.

SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVES: THEIR IMPACT ON TEACHER BURNOUT AND PERCEPTIONS OF EFFICACY

BY W. WESLEY COTTONGIM

Chair: William Schlinker
Committee: Jie Zhang, Mary Evans
Defense Date: April 9, 2012

This study involving 2,478 teachers from south central Kentucky sought to determine the impact school improvement initiatives have on a teacher. More specifically, it explored how experiencing school improvement initiatives affect the measured levels of burnout and self-efficacy of a teacher.

Participants (n = 2,478) of this study came from school districts within the south central region of Kentucky. The participating districts were selected due to varying sizes of enrollments and the number of employed teachers. Participants were invited to participate in this study via an email invitation. Two previously published instruments were used. Participants were first asked

to provide background information. This background information included the participant indicating the grade level of which they taught, years of experience, and an approximation of the number of school improvement initiatives they had implemented over the last three years. The instrument was a combined instrument of Seidman's Teacher Burnout Scale (1986) and Bandura's Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (2006).

Results of the study indicated that the number of school improvement initiatives a teacher experiences does not necessarily prove to be an antecedent of lower levels of self-efficacy. Results did indicate that experiencing school improvement initiatives have an impact on burnout levels of beginning teachers as well as teachers approaching retirement. Most correlation coefficients were weak overall, but there were significant correlations between some subscales and particular groups of participants. A qualitative aspect of research was implemented to determine trends in the particular types of initiatives that educators of different levels experience. Most teachers (other than middle school teachers) indicated that they most often implemented initiatives that were adopted at the district level.

The findings of this research will be helpful to school administrators as well as an asset to existing research on burnout and self-efficacy. This research will assist in providing conclusive evidence to the effect initiatives have on teachers. Furthermore, the study will assist administrators when considering the adoption of future school improvement programs.

COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, COLLEGE READINESS, AND PERCEPTION BETWEEN STUDENTS FROM TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE GATTON ACADEMY

BY TIM GOTT

Chair: Janet Tassell
Committee: Fred Carter, Jerald Thomas
Defense Date: March 22, 2012

Secondary education in the United States has been evolving from the early days of Latin grammar schools to the present broad spectrum of high school structures. This study focuses on one of the latest types of high school models – specialized secondary schools. In particular, the intent of this study was to assess whether high ability students in one such program, the

Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science, demonstrate between-group differences from their high ability peers in traditional high schools in the areas of academic achievement, college readiness, and perceptions on the high school experience.

To determine whether these differences exist, data were collected from 41 students in the Gatton Academy and 267 students from 4 local high schools. The data included PLAN and ACT scores, grade point averages, responses on the Student Strengths Inventory, and the Student Perception Survey. Three phases of analysis were conducted utilizing descriptive statistics and independent t-tests that revealed some statistically significant results: differences in social comfort, relationships with peers and teachers, and perception of meaningfulness of classes. These results indicate some social and emotional issues that might need to be addressed institutionally to provide a balanced and healthy academic environment.

This study was limited by the size of the sample and its geographic narrowness. Additionally, an issue regarding the disparity of how grade point average is calculated complicated the assessment of academic achievement. Due to these limitations, further research is warranted to address these limitations by expanding the study nationally and utilizing unweighted grade point averages. Likewise, additional longitudinal research would be beneficial to see if differences occur between these two types of programs concerning college and career pathways.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE PRESIDENT'S ROLE IN FUNDRAISING

BY ROBERT L. JACKSON

Chair: Randall Capps
Committee: Constantine Curris, Sally Ray
Defense Date: February 27, 2012

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine America's 272 public comprehensive universities and the president's role in fundraising in order to better understand this unique group. In addition, this study examined the president's background, training, duties, and specific involvement in the fundraising process. Also, this study

reviewed what background and training would have been helpful prior to and during a presidency in preparation for these duties and responsibilities.

Previous studies stated that presidents ranked fundraising as the number one area where they were least prepared when they assumed their new role. In addition, many university presidents reported that up to 50% of their time is spent on institutional advancement duties, which include fundraising.

Public universities, which educate nearly 80% of all college students in America, are going through a period of great change as they struggle to balance their budgets as states further reduce higher education appropriations. Specifically, state appropriations for public universities are at their lowest point in 30 years, having declined by about one-third since 1980, and there is no end in sight to this funding dilemma.

Furthermore, although academic fundraising has occurred for centuries, this new decline in state support for public comprehensive universities has caused presidents to turn to alumni, friends, corporations, and foundations for private funds with new and increased fundraising efforts to make up for lost state appropriations. This alteration in the funding model during the past several years has changed the primary duties of university presidents. Many are unprepared and ill-equipped for these new fundraising duties, which are seemingly mandatory as a part of their daily duties.

This study used both descriptive and exploratory methodologies in its design and utilized survey results, face-to-face and phone interviews, a review of available literature, and an analysis of secondary sources of data from previous research studies.

The American public comprehensive university is faced with many funding challenges today, and never has there been a time when more pressure is being placed on the institution's president to be successful in fundraising. This exploratory and descriptive study reports specific findings and provides a base in which to develop new research in order to assist comprehensive university presidents with these new fundraising duties and responsibilities.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND POSITION IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

BY LINDA BREWER KELLER

Chair: Ric Keaster
Committee: Kyong Chon, Robert Reber, Bud Schlinker
Defense Date: March 26, 2012

Organizational commitment has been linked to important employee behaviors and perceptions, including turnover, intent to turnover, absenteeism, and job satisfaction. In spite of its important outcomes, the formation of commitment is not well documented and research concerning antecedents has provided inconsistent results. Little of this research has involved the postsecondary education field and characteristics unique to it. This study investigated the relationship between employee position and organizational commitment in the postsecondary education setting. The model of organizational commitment utilized was the three-component concept developed by Meyer and Allen (1997), composed of affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

Research participants were 2,914 university employees. Using an online survey, participants responded to personal and position-related items and the organizational commitment assessment. The personal variables included were gender, age, and education level. The position-related variables were position as faculty, staff, or administration; full or part-time employment; tenure status; salaried or hourly pay status; years of employment at the university; retirement plan participation; and campus location. The survey also included a free-response item that asked participants why they responded as they did to the commitment items.

As demonstrated by analysis of variance, position had a significant influence on affective, continuance, and normative commitment. For each commitment component, staff had significantly higher commitment than faculty. A difference was also found between staff and administration for continuance commitment. Hierarchical regression analysis for the personal and position variables yielded significant results for each of the commitment components as well. The block of position variables demonstrated a significant relationship with affective and normative commitment. The blocks of position and personal variables were significantly related to

continuance commitment. The study findings concerning the lower organizational commitment of faculty, combined with the body of research demonstrating the outcomes associated with organizational commitment, should indicate to institutional leaders the need to be aware of and focus on organizational commitment as an important employee attitude.

EVALUATION OF ELECTRONIC ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS AND THEIR ABILITY TO MEET NCATE STANDARD 2

BY ANTHONY KIRCHNER

Chair: Tony Norman
Committee: Kyong Chon, William Schlinker
Defense Date: March 23, 2012

The pressures relating to accountability and data collection, not only from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) but also from other national organizations, continue to increase the demand for educator preparation programs to systematically collect, analyze, and report on the success of their students and their programs. Many educator preparation programs have turned to electronic assessment systems (EASs) to help ease the data collection burden, to allow for the collection, aggregation, disaggregation, and reporting of data for programmatic improvement, as well as to meet the needs of the accreditation process.

The purpose of this study was to explore what types (commercial, in-house, or hybrid) of EASs are currently being used, how important the system components were at the time of system selection, how satisfied the NCATE coordinator or the person most familiar with the system was with the components of the system, and how well they perceive their EAS was able to meet the data collection requirements of NCATE Standard 2. An electronic survey was developed by the researcher and sent to 775 NCATE Coordinators or equivalent as identified from the institution's website with 225 participants completing the survey for a response rate of 31%.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to report the data. Results showed that all of the system components identified were considered to be important and in general the respondents were satisfied with the performance of those components. Further analysis did reveal a lower level of satisfaction with the system components when compared to the importance of those same components.

Exploration of the ability of systems to meet the data collection requirements of NCATE Standard 2 showed that most respondents indicated their system was capable of meeting those data collection requirements. Further analysis based on the specific type of system, commercial, in-house, or hybrid, did reveal differences in the ability to systematically collect data, faculty access to the data, the ability to aggregate data, the ability to collect multiple assessments, and the costs associated with the systems.

PERCEPTIONS OF KENTUCKY EDUCATORS CONCERNING THE KENTUCKY STATE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AS AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF STUDENT LEARNING

BY BENNY C. LILE

Chair: Fred Carter
Committee: Kyong Chon; Lisa Murley, Jerry Ralston
Defense Date: March 13, 2012

While educational testing has been in place since the one room school house, it was not until the 1990s that accountability began to accompany assessment programs. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, virtually every public school district in the United States of America that desired to continue to receive Title 1 funding found themselves tied to rigorous assessment and accountability systems. This focus on accountability has impacted every school, district, and state as they have sought to implement and deal with the consequences it has wrought. As the 50 states have sought to deal with federal mandates, other countries are seeking better alternatives for national testing systems as well.

Countless data have been collected and articles written over the past decade concerning the impact and subsequent ramifications of NCLB. This study sought to bring to the discussion a missing factor, that being the voice of practitioners. Amidst the volumes of information, there is a void of hard evidence from the field.

The research sought to answer five questions: (1) What are the

perceptions of Kentucky educators concerning the results of the Kentucky Core Content for Assessment (KCCT) as an accurate reflection of student learning of Mathematics and Reading in specific areas (e.g., student learning, content taught, and instructional guidance)?; (2) What are the perceptions of Kentucky educators concerning the difficulty of the KCCT for students of different academic ability levels?; (3) What are the perceptions of Kentucky educators concerning the accuracy of student performance classification for the results of the KCCT?; (4) What are the perceptions of Kentucky educators in regard to the KCCT results being an accurate reflection in relation to student ability for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sub-groups of Special Education, Free/Reduced Lunch, and English as a Second Language (ESL)?; and (5) What are the perceptions of Kentucky educators concerning the accuracy of the KCCT, as opposed to other national measures?

Results indicate reservations exist concerning the accuracy of results of the Kentucky assessment system. Further study is warranted to determine the underlying causation of perceptions of Kentucky educators.

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS ON TEACHER EFFICACY, JOB SATISFACTION, AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

BY CHRIS M. MUELLER

Chair: William Schlinker
Committee: Kyong Chon, Janet Tassell
Defense Date: April 5, 2012

The method selected to prepare and certify teachers continues to be a widely debated issue. Advocates for alternative certification (AC) contend that allowing content specialists from fields outside of education into the classroom will help meet the demand for teachers in hard-to-fill areas like math, science, and special education. Proponents of traditional teacher certification (TC) programs maintain that placing individuals without strong backgrounds in teaching methods, learning strategies, and child development will impede student achievement.

This study compared the levels of teacher efficacy, job performance and job satisfaction of teachers between AC (N = 164) and TC (N = 960) in 32 school districts in south central and western Kentucky. Teachers self-assessed on items related to teacher efficacy, job performance, and job satisfaction. Additionally, this study compared principals' (N = 106) ratings of teachers' job performance based on teachers' selected route to certification.

Results from the teacher responses indicated no difference in the levels of teacher efficacy, job performance, and job satisfaction between the two teacher groups. The demographic data of teacher age and teaching experience did produce some predictive value on job performance and satisfaction. However, the principals' ratings of teacher job performance produced significant levels of difference between teachers with alternative and traditional certification, especially in the areas of classroom management skills and instructional planning.

Implications for alternative certification are that there must be sustained effort to ensure that teaching candidates have the necessary skills in classroom management and instructional planning prior to completion of an alternative certification program. An unanticipated implication was the emergence of an apparent divide between teachers' perceptions of their job performances contrasted with the perception of job performance as defined by a building principal. It is essential that administrators, especially at the building level, accurately communicate their expectations regarding effective teaching. Vague generalities and "catch phrases" regarding quality teaching will not help teachers improve their teaching and student learning. Regardless of the method selected to achieve teacher certification, principals must articulate what good teaching is and what it looks like in practice.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN GRADUATE ONLINE EDUCATION: CONTRIBUTION OF INTERACTION

BY JO SHACKELFORD

Chair: Marge Maxwell
Committee: Jim Berger, Lauren Bland, Nedra Atwell
Defense Date: February 20, 2012

This non-experimental quantitative descriptive study was designed to determine which types of learner-learner and learner-instructor interaction are most predictive of student sense of community in online graduate courses at a regional comprehensive university. Surveys were used to measure

sense of community and to collect perceptions of frequency and importance of nine learner-learner interactions and seven learner-instructor interactions from participating students (N = 381) within online courses in which they were enrolled. Student demographic information included age, gender, experience with online learning, number of face-to-face class meetings, and employment status.

Results indicated that learner–learner interactions that were most predictive of sense of community were introductions, collaborative group projects, contributing personal experiences, entire class online discussions, and exchanging resources. Learner-instructor interactions that were most predictive of sense of community were instructor modeling, support and encouragement, facilitating discussions, multiple modes of communication, and required participation. Experience with online learning was contributive to sense of community.

Additional analyses identified which interaction types offer the highest yield to the instructor who seeks to efficiently facilitate sense of community. Results were presented using a matrix that placed interaction types into low frequency/low importance, low frequency/high importance, high frequency/low importance, or high frequency/high importance quadrants. The interaction items offering the highest yield were exchanging resources and instructor modeling. Implications for practice were provided to guide online instructors in facilitating the development of sense of community in online courses.

A UNIVERSITY-WIDE STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM: COMPARATIVE VIEW ON STUDENT SUCCESS

BY KEVIN THOMAS

Chair: Barbara Burch
Committee: Dean Kahler, Pamela Petty
Defense Date: March 20, 2012

Student support programs occur throughout the country in various forms at colleges and universities. The STEPS program at Western Kentucky University provides support to students who are required by state mandate to enroll in developmental or supplemental education courses. This program tracks the individual interventions utilized by students such as tutoring,

intrusive advising, and supplemental education seminars. Through an analysis of retention and graduation data, this study compared the success of STEPS participants to eligible students who are non-participants of the program. The study also compared the STEPS participant population with eligible students within other four-year public Commonwealth of Kentucky institutions with regard to student retention success. Eligibility for the STEPS program is determined by the use of the ACT and SAT standardized tests. Students, through the process of a chi square analysis for significance, were found to have had various levels of significance with retention and graduation when comparisons between STEPS participants and nonparticipants were made through the fall 2006 and 2009 semesters. Significance was found for three of the four years of the STEPS program when compared to eligible students within the other four-year public Commonwealth of Kentucky institutions.

AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS IMPACTING K-12 TECHNOLOGY-INFUSED LESSON DESIGN

BY WESLEY WADDLE

Chair: William Schlinker
Committee: Kyong Chon, Martha Day, Marge Maxwell
Defense Date: February 21, 2012

Public education in the 21st Century can be characterized as being in a period of unparalleled change, including the adoption of Common Core State Standards, increased public accountability, and renewed emphasis on the educational needs of every student. Simultaneously, as public education seeks to address these demands, the digital divide between traditional classroom instruction and learning needs of 21st Century students continues to grow, despite considerable fiscal investments in educational technology.

This study examined two questions: What teacher-related factors positively impact the level of technology-infused lesson design? and To what degree does the use of an instructional framework to guide lesson design and provide feedback impact the level of technology-infused lesson design over time? The HEAT framework (Moersch, 2002) was used to guide and measure technology-infused lesson design among K-12 classroom teachers in a rural south central Kentucky school district. The HEAT framework addressed Higher-order thinking, Engagement of students, Authentic learning, and

Technology use. In addition to a quarterly review of lesson plans from 151 teachers during the selected school year, a survey of teachers provided quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions.

Analysis indicated that teacher-related factors that are commonly examined in relation to technology integration, such as age, years experience, educational level, content area, grade level, and level of training, do not significantly impact the level of technology-infused lesson design. Among the factors considered in the study, the confidence level of teachers as users of technology was the only factor that significantly impacted the level of lesson design. Analysis further indicated that the implementation of the HEAT framework to guide lesson design and provide feedback to teachers significantly increased the level of technology-infused lesson design, most notably within the areas of higher-order thinking, engagement of students, and authentic instruction.

The results indicated the need to examine which specific factors influence the confidence level of teachers as users of technology, as well as to focus technology integration efforts on leadership and behavioral factors. Moreover, the results indicated that technology integration should occur as part of a comprehensive plan to improve student learning.