THE PERCEPTION OF UNIT HEADS TOWARD THE ROLE OF ONLINE ASSESSMENT PRODUCTS IN STANDARDS-BASED ALIGNMENT WITHIN TEACHER EDUCATION UNITS

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In teacher education preparation programs across the United States, many units and programs have opted to utilize the assessment capabilities of products that often times were intended primarily for student portfolio needs. However, with the evolution of some of these products from primarily a portfolio focus to a combination of portfolios and with complex assessment tools, teacher education units have had to determine how to utilize these products in order to meet professional standards. In this present study, 106 teacher education unit heads completed a web-based questionnaire related to the perceptions of unit heads toward the role these products play toward standards-based alignment. Among the findings, results indicated that the satisfaction levels of unit heads were not necessarily more favorable toward one commercial product over another, although unit heads expressed disfavor with many products developed by campus-based instructional technology staffs.

Keywords: Online Assessment Products, Complex Assessment Functions, Standards-Based Alignment, Central Unit

Teacher education unit heads (deans of schools and colleges, department chairpersons, division heads, center directors, and program coordinators) in the United States have faced a common problem over the last decade as they have had to decide how to showcase student work in a way that displays the performance levels of program completers while also providing evidence that professional standards are being met. This has to be done as central units (colleges, schools, and departments of education) and academic programs must provide evidence that they are producing highly qualified teaching candidates in an effective manner. As the recently merged accrediting bodies, National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) have emphasized standards-based alignment of professional programs and teacher education units in higher education (Metzler, 2009; Sariscsany, 2010), the decision-makers in the units have had to figure out the most effective and efficient ways to put a package together to align standards with the work and performance scores of program completers at various transition points (entry gates) of their degree programs. The more successful units and professional programs have accomplished
this complex task with the assistance of an Online Assessment Product (OAP), also called a data management system (DMS) by some, which enables teaching candidates to compile and showcase their work in an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) format (Author, under review; Barrett, 2009; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009; Everhart & McKethan, 2008). An OAP also enables faculty to assess the work and communicate the results to students. The product in addition should be able to aggregate and disaggregate data. The OAP technology also enables teacher education units and programs to align programs with professional standards and to collect formative and summative candidate assessment data each semester even when a program review or accreditation site visit is not in the near future. Academic units and programs have been successful using commercial OAP’s and some units have used products developed by departments of instructional technology, using open source web-based software. With the availability of numerous data management systems which do not have the complex assessment and reporting functions that a few of the OAPs have, it makes decisions more difficult for unit heads and faculty to select which products serve their interests the best. Some units may be satisfied with data management systems that primarily manage data collected from various sources (student artifacts, institutional data, etc...), but others have used similar systems which include more complex assessment functions to aggregate, disaggregate, and report data aligned to standards (Barrett, 2009; Everhart & McKethan, 2009; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009). The online products which can generate both portfolios and comprehensive assessments of portfolio-based artifacts have been referred to in the more recent literature as “online assessment products (OAP)” (Everhart & McKethan, 2008; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009). Hence, the name Online Assessment Product makes more sense than strictly a data management system (DMS). For the purpose of this paper, the assessment products will be referred to as OAPs due to the complex assessment functions of these products which are not available with all data management systems.

The evolution of these assessment systems started a couple of decades ago with institutions that implemented some requirements for students to demonstrate competencies similar to what effective novice teachers should resemble. A common practice in the last couple of decades was for teacher education units in higher education to require teaching candidates to create student portfolios as one of the “gates” for entering teacher education programs and/or completing student teaching requirements. This practice became more refined and aligned with professional standards as accreditation processes have evolved. However, with the onset of digital technology, a proliferation of internet-based products have provided units and academic programs options for the construction of portfolios and a range of possible uses of the portfolios in relation to assessment needs (Butler, 2006; Everhart, 2010; Lorenzo & Ittleson, 2005; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Even with advanced technology enabling users to engage in more complicated processes by these products' primarily for constructing programs continue to use products other than for portfolios and having for portfolios (Ahn, 2004; Ethel, 2008; Pecheon, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Strudler & Wetzel, 2008).

With the onset of accreditation review requirements, it is complex than ever before for the days in teacher education. In the United States is for teacher education programs to engage students to demonstrate competency to what effective novice teachers should resemble. A common practice in the last couple of decades was for teacher education units in higher education to require teaching candidates to create student portfolios as one of the “gates” for entering teacher education programs and/or completing student teaching requirements. This practice became more refined and aligned with professional standards as accreditation processes have evolved. However, with the onset of digital technology, a proliferation of internet-based products have provided units and academic programs options for the construction of portfolios and a range of possible uses of the portfolios in relation to assessment needs (Butler, 2006; Everhart, 2010; Lorenzo & Ittleson, 2005; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Even with advanced technology enabling users to engage in more complicated processes by these products' primarily for constructing programs continue to use products other than for portfolios and having for portfolios (Ahn, 2004; Ethel, 2008; Pecheon, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Strudler & Wetzel, 2008).

As NCATE revised its accreditation standards, they made some units and programs continue to use products other than for portfolios and having for portfolios (Ahn, 2004; Ethel, 2008; Pecheon, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Strudler & Wetzel, 2008).
engage in more complex processes generated by these products which had been used primarily for constructing portfolios, many programs continue to resist using these products other than for constructing portfolios and having faculty assess the portfolios (Ahn, 2004; Everhart & McKethan, 2008; Pecheone, Pigg, Chung, & Souviney, 2005; Sherry & Bartlett, 2005; Strudler & Wetzel, 2005).

With the onset of accreditation and program review requirements that are more complex than ever before, the trend these days in teacher education in the United States is for teacher education units and academic programs to use commercial and/or open-source products constructed by an institution’s staff in Instructional Technology (IT) to assist in a more complex process of standards-based assessment of units and programs in addition to the portfolio requirements (Everhart & Hogarty, 2009; Wetzel & Strudler, 2005). However, some units and programs prefer to engage in the unit and program assessment process in other ways and use the OAPs solely for portfolio purposes. Still others prefer the traditional approach that has been around for years which required students to turn in three-ring notebooks with standards divided within the notebook so that artifacts could be found within individual sections associated with each standard.

As NCATE revised its standards to begin implementation and reviews in 2001, these products were made more accessible to teacher education units by companies positioning themselves to offer more than internet-based portfolio packages (Clark, Ballentine-Linch, & Wood, 2007). When units select an OAP, the selected products should allow units and programs to continue requiring student portfolios, but should also enable clients to go beyond portfolios and assess the work of teacher candidates if so desired, making it possible for users to create, store and document work that would be aligned with the standards (Ma & Rada, 2005; Williams, Davis, Metcalf, & Covington, 2003). If the unit and/or programs decide to use the assessment functions of the OAPs, then after the work has been assessed by faculty, the product should automatically aggregate and disaggregate data to report for reporting to reviewers for accreditation and program report purposes (Everhart, 2010). When commercial companies began to seek teacher education unit as clients a decade ago, several major players emerged at that time that were regularly exhibiting at and sponsoring annual meetings for NCATE, TEAC, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). These companies were LiveText, Chalk and Wire Learning Assessment, Task Stream, and TK20 and have been joined more recently by Desire 2 Learn and Blackboard, which recently added a complex assessment component to their already-popular content management and delivery systems. The common capability of the main companies listed above is that they each produced stand-alone products that could generate portfolios, but also enable clients to assess student artifacts and aggregate results without purchasing other components or partnering with other companies Barrett,
More recently, other companies have developed products that appear to offer many of the necessary portfolio, assessment, and program review components units and institutions seek. According to Barrett (2009), these other products which provide tools for portfolio creation, faculty/program/unit assessment, and/or reporting tools include Foliotek, nuVentive’s TrakDat, and Richer Picture. Today, many more companies have produced products that are assisting academic units and programs in demonstrating how the performance levels of “candidates” prove the units/programs are meeting various standards. Even the developers of these products primarily agree that the ease of implementation is the most important factor to consider as long as the product is able to do what the unit needs it to do (Billings, 2005).

Whether teacher education units and academic programs use products produced by the companies named above, an institutional instructional technology product using open source software, or one of the many other companies currently partnering with higher education clients, it is clear that clients use the products in different ways. Some units/programs use them specifically for student portfolios, while others have evolved to using a variety of assessment strategies for which OAPs are typically able to generate for the clients (Clark, Ballentine-Linch, & Wood, 2007). Of course, it is important that clients have an assessment plan ready before implementation of these products can occur successfully. Still other OAPs are used as the primary assessment system for the units (with importing data from central institutional data packages) and for assessing the performance levels of all students campus-wide in institutions (Everhart & Hogarty, 2009).

Within the literature that is relevant to understanding the processes involved in selecting such a product, Clark, Ballentine-Linch, and Wood (2007) presented their findings related to faculty perceptions and suggestions within the evolution process of a unit moving from simple ePortfolios to a more complex assessment system. These recommendations are in line with the work of Everhart and Hogarty (2009) who suggested units and programs work together to synchronize the program reviews as much as possible within the central unit and to add assessments unique to individual programs to that structure. The authors also indicated that the quality of the assessment system integrated within these products can impact the development of beginning teachers. However, in order to make an informed selection, it is important that unit heads and leaders understand the different ways OAPs are used to meet unit needs and that they also recognize that a need exists for programs and units to determine how to package all of the key required assessments together for accreditation and program report purposes. All of the IT-designed, open-source and commercially-based OAPs should allow units and programs to indicate which professional and accreditation standards are being met and how they are being met. The capabilities of the OAPs in this matter vary though, enabling some units/programs to show completers’ performance juxtaposition of standards results with aggregated data as a function of the age (Everhart, 2007; Everhart, 2009). Others simply list and write which assessments individual standards are associated with, and ask the question for unit heads (deans, coordinators, chairs) then assess, “Are units and programs adhering to the professional academic performance standards effectively?”

The purpose of this study is to determine (a) how online assessments are used in teacher education programs, (b) how unit heads perceive about the alignment of standards in relation to the specific use of OAPs, (c) if the type of OAP (commercial or IT-designed) makes a difference in how unit heads perceive OAPs use in their units, and (d) if online assessments are used in teacher education programs.

Methods

A questionnaire was developed by the investigators in order to answer the following questions about the use of OAPs in relation to the 2001 NCATE standards and performance-based procedures.
units/programs to show program completers’ performance standards as a juxtaposition of standards and assessment results with aggregated and disaggregated data as a function of the entire OAP package (Everhart, 2007; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009). Others simply list the standards and write which assessments demonstrate individual standards are being met. The question for unit heads (deans, directors, coordinators, chairs) then continues to be, “Are units and programs aligned with the professional academic program and/or accreditation standards effectively?”

The purpose of this study was to determine (a) how online assessment products are used in teacher education, (b) what unit heads perceive about the alignment of standards in relation to the specific OAPs being used, and (c) if the type of institution or product (commercial or IT-developed) makes a difference in how unit heads perceive OAPs use in their units?

**Methods**

A questionnaire was developed by the investigators in order to ask unit heads (deans and directors of schools, colleges, and departments of education) across the United States questions about their units’ use of OAPs in relation to the alignment of units’ and programs’ professional standards. The questions (see Figure 1) were intended to identify which of these products were used by different types of institutions, their relevance to the unit assessment systems, and how the products were used since the implementation of the 2001 NCATE standards and accreditation performance-based procedures (Metzler, 2009). Specific information about accreditation visits and results since the implementation of the 2001 standards and procedures were asked as well as questions about the unit heads’ satisfaction levels in regards to product performance. The questions were primarily designed in multiple choice format so that participants could indicate specific answers or related categories that best fits their units’ situations. Two questions allowed for open-ended responses. These questions were related to institutional affiliation and the institutions at which the participants completed their terminal and/or final graduate degrees. Once the questions were analyzed by teacher education experts for content validity purposes, the questionnaire was configured to be delivered and collected by Snap.com survey software. The questionnaires were sent to over 700 unit heads via email. Upon receipt of the email message, the participants could click on the hyperlink within the email message in order to complete and submit the questionnaire electronically. Once completed, the participants submitted the questionnaire by selecting the button at the bottom of the page which delivered the results to the primary investigator’s email account. Although over 700 participants’ email addresses were inserted into the original email which delivered the request and questionnaire hyperlink to potential participants, 96 emails were returned as undeliverable due to incorrect or unavailable email accounts. Most of these were due to unit heads no longer being present at the institutions for which they were listed in the AACTE Directory. After the first
email request for participation was sent out, only 70 unit heads responded. Two weeks later, a second request was sent to account for the vacation time, professional meetings, and other unit head responsibilities that prevented completion of the questionnaire after the first email request had been sent. Following the second request, 36 additional completed questionnaires were returned, bringing the total of completed questionnaires to 106. This means that approximately 17% of the unit heads completed the questionnaire after the two requests were sent via email.

After the results were entered into SPSS statistical software package for analysis, categories were merged to account for related responses and characteristics. One category that was merged was the institutional affiliation question. Because the question allowed for open-ended responses, the investigators categorized each listed institution within the most recent Carnegie. That list was further modified to merge categories and develop a more relevant list according to size of the institution. The list was narrowed to three categories: (a) combination of doctoral and research categories; (b) combination of medium and large institutions that were not included in the doctoral and research categories; and (c) small private or public four-year institutions. Another category that was merged was the list of assessment products. This was due to the fact that a majority of units indicated use of LiveText as the commercial product of choice or an open-source product developed by instructional technology personnel at each institution. That allowed for a merging to include LiveText, IT-designed products, and other commercial products. Other categories merged had to do with how the products were used, combining responses that made sense.

**Findings**

**Analyzing the Research Questions**

The data were analyzed to find out the unit heads' perceptions of standards-based unit alignment in relation to how the products were being used. While interesting trends were found when disaggregating the data across institutional classifications and product types (commercial or IT-designed), a few discrete categories stand out from the results from this study. Results indicate that of the 106 unit heads who responded, three dominant groups emerged. Of the commercial products being used by colleges, schools, and departments of education in this sample, LiveText was used significantly more than the other products. This led to a way of grouping the types of products being used by responding units: (a) those using LiveText; (b) those using the rest of the commercial products; and (c) those using products designed by instructional technology staff on campuses. The majority of the other commercial products category was filled by Task Stream, Chalk and Wire Learning Assessment, and TK20, although some other products were being used by one or two units.

**How online assessment products are used in teacher education?**

The findings indicate that 58.5% of the responding unit heads reported that the online assessment products were used only as portfolios submitted by teachers and assessed by faculty. However, 41.5% of the unit heads reported that the programs were used for program entry and/or exit. The results indicated that the products were used as portfolios, but other assignments were also submitted as well; these units indicated the programs in the product as a major component system. However, a significant difference was found after a Chi Square test of the products were used by the units. For a closer look at how the products are used by the units of heads, see Table 1.

**What role do unit heads play in the alignment and assessment systems in a unit heads' perceptions of standards-based units' alignment in relation to how the products were being used.**

Results revealed that
online assessment products were used as assessment systems in addition to storing artifacts submitted by teaching candidates and assessed by faculty. Only 13.2% of unit heads reported that the products were used only as portfolios required for program entry and/or exit. Another 18.9% indicated that the products were used for portfolios, but other assignments were submitted as well; these unit heads did not indicate the programs in their unit used the product as a major conduit into the assessment system. However, a statistically significant difference was not found following after a Chi Square Analysis of how the products were used by responding units. For a closer look at how products are used by the units of responding unit heads, see Table 1.

What role do unit heads perceive specific GAPs play in the alignment of standards? Results revealed that 62.3% of the unit heads who responded perceived that these products played a partial or major role in aligning the unit and programs with the professional standards. While 36.8% of respondents indicated a major standards alignment role for the products, some units and programs used the products for little or no alignment role (21%). While the Chi Square Analysis did not reveal a significant difference of the alignment role of the products between programs/units ($\chi^2 (6) = 8.610, <.197$), the satisfaction of the responding unit heads by their products was statistically different depending on the type of role the products in the alignment of units and programs to professional standards, $\chi^2 (6) = 10.849, <.006$. That is, unit heads were more satisfied if their products played a major role to aligning to the standards rather than as strictly a portfolio tool or even using it for some isolated assessments.
Is there a difference between the perceptions of unit heads in regard to standards-based alignment using OAPs and the type of institution or product (commercial vs. IT-developed) being used?

The third research question focused on what to expect about standards-alignment and how products were used in relation to the type of institution and products. However, according to the data, institutional type did not play any role in the perceptions of the unit heads in this study. Unit heads who perceived the assessment products to play a major role in aligning the unit to standards were more likely to be satisfied with the product than heads who did not perceive such an alignment role, \( \chi^2 (2) = 11.808, p < .003 \). In fact, 80% of those heads that indicated the product played a major role in aligning the unit to standards also indicated that they were satisfied with the product. Conversely, 48% of unit heads who indicated the products played no major alignment role were dissatisfied with the products. When isolating the less-than-satisfied responses according to how the products were used, it was determined that 80% (24 out of 30) of unit heads who indicated the products played a major role in standards-based alignment were satisfied with the products. However, 48% (15 out of 31) of unit heads who indicated their products did not play a role in standards-based alignment were satisfied.

Additionally, more unit heads were satisfied with commercial products rather than IT-developed products (33% of respondents using IT-developed products were not satisfied with the products), but the differences were not strong enough in relation to the alpha level (set at .05) to be statistically significant, \( \chi^2 (6) = 10.849, p < .093 \). However, it is important to indicate that the chi-square value was very close to showing significance, demonstrating the potential relevance of this finding.

**Discussion**

It is apparent from the findings of this current study that the teacher education units and programs continue to evolve from using traditional methods for documenting evidence of candidates’ clinical teaching success to more complex ways of collecting that information and assessing candidate performance on that process in alignment with professional standards. Rather than using three-ring notebook binders or digital compact discs with sections for professional standards, most teacher education units and programs have moved to online assessment products to collect appropriate candidate information and enable faculty to assess candidate performance for units and programs to demonstrate compliance with professional standards (Barrett, 2009; Everhart & McKethan, 2009; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009). Results from this study indeed confirm the gradual migration from colleges, schools, and departments of education from using these products simply for portfolios for program entry and/or program exit (student teaching portfolios) to a conceptualization of the products’ capabilities for aligning standards through portfolio-based candidate evidence assessed by faculty for aggregation of data in more complex ways than prior to the revision of NCATE standards in 2001. Unit study that almost 60% of these products as assessment systems only 13% of reporting products only as portfolio purposes, a subsequent revision of NCATE standards in 2001. Of the 60% of these products as a potential relevance of this finding.

In regard to the section concerning the heads to how these products align with standards-based alignment and professional standards, responding unit heads with no alignment role or no alignment role in OAPs. This is particularly important to the importance of providing evidence of candidates’ success as well as the ability to assess candidates’ performance through portfolio-based candidate evidence assessed by faculty for aggregation of data efficiently (Barrett, 2009; Everhart, 2009). In this age of performance requirements for confounding issue of deciding not to use these products other than for purposes, a subseq
revision of NCATE’s accreditation standards in 2001. Unit heads reported in this study that almost 60 percent of units used these products as a major piece of their assessment systems in some way. Indeed, only 13% of reporting units still used these products only as portfolios. This may simply mean that units are able to generate data and aggregate it with these products after candidates have submitted their work based on the professional standards.

Because assessment systems are based on the professional standards, this constitutes a major crossed hurdle for units and academic programs that may have previously struggled with aggregating data appropriately (Clark, Ballentine-Linch, & Wood, B., 2007).

In regard to the second research question concerning the perception of unit heads to how these products help with the alignment of units and programs to professional standards, only 21% of responding unit heads indicated that little or no alignment role has been played by OAPs. This is particularly interesting due to the importance portfolios play in the provision of candidate artifacts and data as well as the ability to provide a standards-based assessment of these artifacts upon submission. The capacity to aggregate data efficiently and effectively (Barrett, 2009; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009) in this age of performance-based accreditation requirements further highlights the confounding issue of units and programs deciding not to use these products for anything other than portfolios. In order to uncover the rationales of those who choose not to use these products for assessment purposes, a subsequent investigation is needed which would employ qualitative methods to probe for depth within this issue. One reason that investigators initially believed may help uncover patterns related to this issue is to do with the type and/or size of the institution. However, data generated from the chi-square analysis contradicted this hypothesis that the type of institution made a difference about whether unit heads perceived these products played a major role in standards-based alignment, were used as a major part of the assessment system, or anything else related to the use of these products. However, data did not reveal the type of institution played any role in determining the perceptions of unit heads regarding OAPs and questions related to standards-based alignment of units and programs.

As far as the third research question pertaining to the type of product being used (commercial vs. IT-developed/open source), unit heads preferred the use of commercial products such as LiveText, Chalk and Wire Learning Assessment, Task Stream and TK20 more than those developed by university instructional technology personnel. However, it is noted that there are exceptions to this. There are IT-developed products that are comprehensive, functional in relation to assessment purposes, and satisfactory to unit leaders. According to the data from this study and to comments added to completed questionnaires, commercial products, other than some of the products with few respondents, did not elicit many negative comments while the products developed by IT staff generated such comments by unit heads. The reasons are speculative and should be investigated with subsequent research of a
qualitative nature, but it is possible that problems with assessment products of any type can be attributed to the product's lack of consistency with a pre-conceived assessment plan. That is, units put together assessment teams to guide the process for program and unit assessment and often these teams do not have a satisfactory plan in place before selecting a product. By simply completing an appropriate plan (i.e., assessment system aligned with accreditation demands) prior to configuring an OAP, it is possible to make sure that the product will do what the leadership team wants it to do. Whether the product is commercial or IT-developed, the personnel that configures the product need to be able to follow a written plan to make sure that the necessary product functions are put into place so that the assessments can be collected or imported, assessed, aggregated, used for program improvements. This process should take place in a time line in a formative manner during each academic year regardless of accreditation visits on the horizon or not.

The data reported from the questionnaire indicated that the commercial products mostly elicited at least fairly positive perceptions from respondents. Without more respondents from commercial products other than LiveText, it is impossible to indicate that specific preferences exist between the commercial products. The comments that were indicated on isolated questionnaires did suggest that most of the major products seemed to do what was intended by the assessment team of units. Again, though, it was quite clear that many respondents who use IT-developed products (35% of IT product users) were less than satisfied with the products. This is much higher than the commercial data due to the multiple products included in the commercial data, thus results are shared between products making the unsatisfactory percentage a split result. For example, the percentage of less-than-satisfied respondents who used commercial products other than LiveText was similar to the IT results but most of the unsatisfied responses had to do with one product, while the other two major products typically drew positive comments. In fact, respondents were asked to indicate if they were considering a switch to another product and two of the products (as well as LiveText) were typically listed. It is not the intent of the authors to identify negative comments in this article that are associated to any products specifically, though. The bottom line with satisfaction of the OAP/DMS is this. LiveText was used by many more respondents than the other products. It is the opinion of the authors that with (a) the larger number of product users in the data pool and (b) the ongoing product improvements made by each of the product developers, it is impossible to please everyone, especially when users happen to be involved in an upcoming review. LiveText may have had some unsatisfied customers, but almost 70% of users were satisfied. Task Stream, Chalk and Wire Learning Assessment, and TK20 have relatively large client lists but more LiveText clients responded to the questionnaire than the other products. Because IT-developed products are not associated with any one organization, it is difficult to determine with these data not only were dissatisfaction with the products, but indicate a switch to a commercial product. Future research can isolate heads appear to be unsatisfied with IT-developed products.

Additionally, while the education units and programs for portfolio products the majority of units and programs using the assessment functions products. The data indicate are less than satisfied and who have not embraced the capabilities of these products can enable units and collect student artifacts can allow faculty to assess the for data to be aggregated each other institutional data. Because of this, unit assess area able to use these products to improve and reporting is that is much more time effective than ever before. Programs do not use any but continue to use portfolio a decade ago (three-ring binder). While this process is effective for specific purpose, recording data in Excel or Access without a tool enhance the assessment process or program. The data from the questionnaire indicated that units decided to use these products tools only. Without the use of complex assessment capabilities products, it is probably almost did not notice much of a no
determine with these data why unit heads not only were dissatisfied frequently with the products, but indicated a desire to switch to a commercial product. Perhaps future research can isolate the reasons unit heads appear to be unsatisfied frequently with IT-developed products.

Additionally, while there are teacher education units and programs that use these products for portfolio purposes only, the majority of units and programs have begun using the assessment functions of these products. The data indicate that those who are less than satisfied are typically those who have not embraced the assessment capabilities of these products. These products can enable units and programs to collect student artifacts / assessments and allow faculty to assess them efficiently and for data to be aggregated easily along with other institutional data to be imported. Because of this, unit assessment leaders are able to use these products for program improvement and reporting purposes in a way that is much more time-efficient and effective than ever before. Some units and programs do not use any type of product but continue to use portfolios as they did a decade ago (three-ring binders / CDs). While this process is effective for that specific purpose, recording data in Microsoft Excel or Access without an OAP does not enhance the assessment process of a unit or program. The data from the questionnaire indicated that units and programs decided to use these products as portfolio tools only. Without the use of the other complex assessment capabilities of the products, it is probably that unit leaders did not notice much of a need to continue with the product since it was not used for assessment purposes and the older processes worked fine for them. This may have something to do with negative perceptions of some of the heads. The less-than-satisfied responses of unit heads for how the products were used and the indication of deans, chairs, directors, and coordinators that products sometimes did not play a role in standards-based alignment were satisfied may shed more light on this issue than any of the other results generated in this study. Unit heads who were less-than-satisfied with these products were more than likely leading faculty who only wanted to use the products as portfolios only and thus standards-based alignment may not have been something for which the product was intended.

In conclusion, it appears that units and programs that intend to use products for assessment purposes and to align with professional standards would be satisfied with most of these products. However, if a preconceived assessment plan is not in place before configuring a specific product, it is possible that negative perceptions of these OAPs may be developed. These products offer so many assessment functions that align easily with standards. How the products are used seems to make a difference for teacher education units and programs.
Non-demographic Questions Asked of the Unit Heads

- What portfolio/online assessment product is used in your teacher education unit?
  - LiveText
  - Chalk and Wire Learning Assessment
  - Task Stream
  - TK20
  - Blackboard
  - Other

- What kind of role does the product play in aligning your unit and programs with professional standards?
  - Major role in aligning standards
  - Partial role but unit/programs may not be as strong without OAP small role and unit/programs strong without OAP
  - Little or no role in alignment
  - OAP only for portfolios

- How is the Online Assessment Product used?
  - OAP used for aggregation, student work, and portfolios
  - OAP used only for portfolios, including entrance/exit requirements for student teaching
  - OAP used for portfolios AND assignments but not for primary unit assessment aligned with standards

- What is your satisfaction level with the product you currently use?
  - Extremely pleased and recommend its use
  - Pleased
  - Somewhat
  - Disappointed OAP does not do all we thought
  - Extremely disappointed and considering changing products

- If you are not satisfied with your current product, what other products are you considering, if any?
  - Not considering other products since we are satisfied
  - LiveText
  - Chalk and Wire Learning Assessment
  - Task Stream
  - TK20
  - BlackBoard
  - Open Source Product
  - Other

- When was your latest accreditation visit?
  - Visit was 2009 or is pending

References


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