PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS IN A UNIVERSITY BASED
TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM: UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES TO
FACILITATE MEANINGFUL SUPPORT

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Perceptions of Support for Students in a University Based Teacher Education Program:
Understanding Challenges to Facilitate Meaningful Support

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A significant problem in PK-12 education is teacher retention in the first five years. One avenue for looking at this problem is to uncover the challenges in preparing teachers in education programs. Students enrolled in a university based teacher education program (UBTEP) face specific obstacles such as synthesizing knowledge of their subject and pedagogical practices, navigating a costly and intricate certification process, and managing the emotional and physical aspects of finishing their college degree while learning how to work as a professional. If students are not supported both emotionally and academically as they navigate these obstacles, there may be lasting repercussions as the student moves through the program and into the teaching profession after graduation, including leaving the teaching profession within the first five years. There is a paucity of research on student support in teacher education programs and effects of this support on student outcomes and teacher retention. This case study looked at one teacher preparation program to determine if there are gaps in support for the students from entrance into the program to graduation, including their year of clinical experience, and, if there are gaps, to determine their effects. Participants included current and past students of the research site program, and administration, faculty teachers, and staff of the program. The study examined data collected from focus group interviews with students in the program and
individual interviews with faculty, administration and staff of the program, to better understand teacher readiness impact on teacher retention. The results of this study contribute to the research on developing support mechanisms for students in UBTEPs.
Dedication

I dedicate this to the most important teachers in my life. My mother Holly Anne, without whom I would have never found a voice, and my grandmother Nancy Ruth, who taught me that if you call them all “honey” you never have to worry about forgetting their names.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Background

This study began years before the Covid-19 pandemic, and yet the importance of the discussion in this dissertation has become even more relevant than before. The Covid-19 pandemic has illuminated the incomprehensible stresses that teachers in the United States have been enduring for years. Overcrowded classrooms, a dearth of supplies and support from their districts, outdated materials, and a lack of meaningful professional development opportunities were laid bare in the harsh light of the Zoom classrooms hastily thrown together in the early days of lockdown. Also exposed were the disparities in access to educational supports based on financial class and school setting. Praise rained down on teachers for their noble sacrifices during the first few months as parents were exposed to the great efforts of the teachers to hold everything together as best they could. This praise was, all too expectedly, short lived. As the weeks ran into months, and the new school year rolled around, teachers were once again made into the pariahs of educational failings.

Those who have worked in the education system know that society has had a long-term problem with teachers. To have strong student outcomes, schools need strong teachers. To have strong teachers, teacher education programs need to be able to recruit the best possible candidates and train them well, which includes supporting them through their early years of teaching. However, society has denigrated teaching as a profession, which has made it an unattractive career choice. This has reduced the ability of colleges of education to attract candidates who represent the best of what a teacher can be as well
as reflect the necessary diversity of the changing population of the United States. This lack of respect for teachers has clearly grown into a social justice issue. Students in high poverty areas have more teacher turnover, which results in worse learning outcomes. Changing the perception of society, however, is a Herculean task. How do we change the way a profession is perceived?

One area for exploration is to find ways to create a better system for recruiting and training teachers and continuing to study how best to identify those traits that may indicate one who is well suited to the field. Also of great importance is looking at how we can attract more diversity in the teaching profession in order to meet the needs of a continuously diversifying student population throughout the country. Finally, we need to find ways to prevent teachers from leaving the profession early in their careers. Strengthening this aspect of the education system could have a snowball effect, improving society’s perception of teachers.

My journey to explore this issue began by reflecting on my experience in teacher education. In order to understand my own role as a researcher, as well as to establish the significance of the model of teacher education I have investigated in this study, it is important for me to document my own experiences. This background information provides context for how acutely aware I am of the challenges that new teachers face, as well as the frustrations of the current systems of teacher training. The challenges that students in a teacher education program face are varied, and my experience offers one perception of the issues that plague the teacher education system.

I was enrolled as a student in two teacher education programs. I took courses both as part of a traditional university based graduate education program in California, and
then as a hybrid alternate route teacher in New York City. My first experience was in a traditional university based teacher education program at Chapman University in Orange, CA. Within this program, I was taking classes as a graduate student full-time. As such, had I finished the program, I would not have been teaching in a classroom until after I had finished my classes.

The faculty in this program were enthusiastic, supportive, and engaged. But there was no clear sense of mentorship of students or guidance about how to connect class material to real world teaching. During the time that I was taking classes, there were opportunities for me to engage with the classroom setting, whether it be shadowing a teacher for several weeks or interviewing teachers and students about their school. I remember the faculty being quite supportive of the students getting involved with the teaching experience, but I also remember feeling unsure about how to proceed with that type of endeavor and unclear about where to turn to get guidance. One of the assignments was to create a profile of a local school, and we were encouraged to get out in the neighborhood, interview students, and even meet with their parents. However, there was little in the way of guidance about how to facilitate these types of encounters. I found myself wanting a more dedicated mentor relationship to help me navigate the journey I had embarked on.

The classes I had taken at Chapman sparked my interest in teaching, and especially stoked a passion about working with urban schools. I also knew I wanted to move back to the East coast. Before I had completed my teacher education program at Chapman, I applied and was accepted as a New York City Teaching Fellow. In this program, I was enrolled as a graduate student at CUNY Brooklyn College working
towards an MA in Teaching English. Concurrent to my taking classes, I was required by the program to seek out a position teaching at the high school level. Throughout the time I spent taking classes while teaching full time, I struggled to find the type of support a mentor would provide. I struggled to make sense of the theory that I was learning in my education track classes and how it applied to the students I was teaching. I struggled to connect the graduate level English literature classes to teaching literacy to ninth grade students who had been tracked into a developmental program. I struggled with understanding how I could be successful as a teacher when I felt so uncertain of my own abilities.

Although I had a mentor assigned by the program, the mentoring structure was highly problematic. My mentor, who had been a math teacher, had nearly two dozen other new teachers spread across the city. The best she could offer me were by-weekly meetings where she would either observe a class and send me notes, or meet with me during a prep period to help me with any issues I was having. I felt isolated and adrift. I struggled and my teaching suffered. By the time I connected with experienced teachers, both colleagues and consultants brought in by my principal, who would serve as stronger mentors to me than my program provided mentor, I felt my fate as a failed teacher had already been sealed. I often lament this delay and maintain that the intervention of a strong mentor from the beginning of my teaching career would have made a significant difference in my sense of myself as a teacher, and my choice to end my career as a secondary level language arts teacher.

I see my struggle in those two years as not just the struggle of a new teacher, but also as a student learning about pedagogy, teaching philosophy, lesson planning, and
content. While there were certainly elements of being a new teacher that a mentor could have helped with, much of my insecurity as a teacher came from my struggle of connecting the material in the classes I was taking to the concept of being a teacher. As a result of my experiences, I am led to this question: What is the role mentoring can or should play in the development of teachers as they go through a teacher education program?

Broadening out from my own experience, I am also led to see education as an important social justice issue. Educational disparities are frequently connected to equity. The education field must continue to develop better tools to increase understanding of the needs of diverse students and how best to meet those needs. This includes addressing the needs of neurodivergent students, students from backgrounds of extreme poverty, students facing emotional crises, and students who may excel in alternative learning environments. Education is not a one-size-fits-all profession. The needs of students in a rural environment will inevitably be different than the needs of a student in an urban setting. These variables are all areas to be considered. However, they cannot all be addressed at once.

The research site for this dissertation connects elements of suburban and urban environments. The College is physically located in a more suburban setting, yet it serves a demographic that is a mixture of students from diverse backgrounds. Several of the neighboring school districts are considered urban, which means that many of the students in the program complete their clinical experience in an urban school and may accept teaching positions in urban schools after graduation and certification. This leads to
another important question: is teacher education meeting the needs of teachers by preparing them to teach in an urban setting?

This study will examine the various types of support that students in a traditional four-year undergraduate university based teacher education program have experienced and how it impacts their perception of their readiness to become a teacher.

**Problem Statement**

In this dissertation I examined the ways that university based teacher education programs (UBTEPs) are structured to support the students in the program from entry to exit and identify whether or not there are gaps in support and development of students within the program, specifically as these potential gaps relate to mentoring for students in the program. The results of this study provide evidence about the importance of support for college students enrolled in a teacher education program and make a contribution to the research on new teacher retention and success. Recommendations for future study include discussion of the potential for creating a better system of preparing teachers in order to improve teacher retention in the early years of a teacher’s career. The discussion also addresses the potential for future research into the ways that better teacher preparation can address social justice issues created by high teacher turnover in high needs schools. A notable and troubling gap in the research that is available on teacher preparation is the lack of focus on student support as the students progress through their education program. Therefore, this study suggests ways that students in UBTEPs can be better supported in order to have better success after they graduate and enter the teaching profession.
The researcher conducted a case study of the operation of a traditional university-based teacher education program and its effects on the students enrolled in the program. The emphasis was on how the teacher education program is constructed to support the students from entry to exit within the program. Consideration was also given to New Jersey state requirements for UBTEPs and their effects on this program. In order to improve the experience and outcomes of students in teacher education programs, this study highlighted the concerns and struggles of the students in the program and showed how a mentoring program may help these students. The study examined data collected from interviews with faculty of the program, focus groups with students in the program, and a focus group of recently graduated students who have pursued their teaching career.

**Research Aims and Questions**

The primary goal of this study was to determine how well supported students enrolled in or who have graduated from this UBTEP feel and to determine if there are gaps in the structure of UBTEPs that may lead to a lack of support of students in the programs. For the purposes of this study, support will be defined as programs, workshops, mentoring, and similar interventions enacted by the UBTEP that are not part of the prescribed curriculum and coursework.

At the outset of the research, I was guided by themes and questions that asked for specific data points (Appendix D). Through the process of data collection and analysis, I was able to refine my guiding questions into three significant research questions:

Research Question 1: Is the UBTEP, as its currently organized and implemented, adequately preparing students in a way that allows them to feel ready to begin a teaching career upon completion of the program?
Research Question 2: How do the state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP and what impact does this have on the ability of the program to give students what they need to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

Research Question 3: What are the unique challenges faced by students in a UBTEP and are the supports provided by the UBTEP adequate and impactful for students to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

**Study Implications**

Strong teacher education programs are crucial to the success of new teachers, which in turn leads to stronger classroom teachers and better outcomes for students. The “lessons learned” in this dissertation are about the experiences of students in the UBTEP and how well they felt supported by their program. There is an importance of the students’ perception of support as it pertains to the development of mentoring programs within UBTEPs as a way to encourage teacher retention after graduation. Data on student experiences can be used to inform operation of the UBTEP. Additionally, the perceptions of the faculty as to the support they are able or unable to provide to students will add to a depth of understanding of the successes and challenges that the UBTEP has with providing support to the students. This study adds to the literature and understanding of the experience of students in UBTEPs as it pertains to mentorship and support, thereby opening a discussion about what is working and what needs improvement in these areas with teacher education. This understanding may impact further research into teacher education, teacher recruitment and teacher retention interventions.

**Assumptions and Limitations**
Research on teacher education serves to support the efforts to train highly qualified teachers who will remain in the profession. The end-goal is to provide meaningful learning experiences to students. Hearing from students and faculty in a teacher education program adds meaningful voices to this conversation. Below are the assumptions and limitations of this research.

Assumptions:

1. It was assumed that participants would be honest and candid in sharing their perceptions.
2. It was assumed that student participants would be invested in the improvement of teacher education, even as they are on the cusp of completing their time in the program.
3. It was assumed that alumni participants would objectively reflect on their experience in the program.
4. It was assumed that faculty participants would be knowledgeable of state requirements on teacher education programs.

Limitations:

1. This research was limited in generalizability. The data from this research was based on the experiences of members of one UBTEP. Location and population of the study site are not representative of all UBTEP programs; however, this study provides a starting place for understanding the experiences of students within a UBTEP.
2. This research was limited by sample size. A total of 17 faculty members, 15 current students, and three alumni participated in the study. This small sample
size is not reflective of the numbers of students and faculty enrolled in the program; however, this study provides a starting place for establishing the importance of having these voices as part of the conversation.

3. This research was limited by the timing of the data collection. Interviews were conducted beginning August 2018 and concluded in April 2019. Supports implemented by the College of Education may not have been relevant to the students at this time and therefore the perceptions of support may not match the supports actually offered by the program.

4. This research was limited by researcher bias and personal interest in the research topic. Bias was reduced by making deliberate connections to the research question and objectively analyzing the responses of participants.

5. The design of the study did not allow for comparison to evolving supports implemented in the College of Education between the time of interview and publication.

6. Faculty were recruited from all levels of the program. Those who chose to participate were not necessarily involved in creating or implementing supports or teaching in the clinical courses, and thus may have been unaware of supports that exist in the program.

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter provided background, problem statement, and implications of this research study. Chapter 2 examines the current literature on teacher education research and mentoring in education. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methodology approach of this case study. Chapter 4 gives an overview of the research site and context for
understanding the issues of teacher education discussed in the analysis, including information about New Jersey state requirements for teacher education programs, and testing and assessment. Chapter 5 and 6 discuss the findings, including themes and subthemes that emerged through analysis of the interview data. Chapter 7 offers concluding remarks on the findings and implications of the research, and offers suggestions for future research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

I. Problem: Teacher Retention and Turnover

Establishing Need

The high rates of teacher turnover are a serious problem in American schools, especially those in urban areas, and the reasons that teachers are leaving after only a few years are quite complex. While many teachers stay in the profession for 20 years or more, up to one third of new teachers leave in the first three years, and the overall teacher attrition rate continues to rise, especially in schools that predominately serve students of color (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Institute, 2017; Kopkowski, 2008).

Looking at ways to support teachers both within their preparation program and then in the first years of teaching in order to increase the rates of retention is important research that must be done to better serve the needs of all students as well as create a stronger teacher force overall.

In response to the issue of high teacher turnover in urban schools, especially for new teachers, educational researchers have been attempting to understand the problem of what teachers may be lacking as professionals in the first years. Starting from the preparation that teachers are receiving in their studies to become a teacher, data begins to show that teachers are receiving a mix of information and tools that will help them in their careers (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2012). Further research into the elements of preparation that pre-service teachers are receiving, can make an impact on the retention of teachers.
Research into how to ready teacher candidates for the classroom often looks at the time given to hands-on and real world experiences. The in-class experiences of teacher trainees can reveal that limited time with supervisors can exacerbate their ability to handle the timing of delivering lessons (Adu-Yeboah & Kwaah, 2018). At the same time, frequent feedback within a structured program has been attributed to novice teachers showing a higher level of self-efficacy in the classroom (Trachtman, Koenigsberg, & Berkowitz, 2016). These studies add to discussions about the ways that structured support of teacher trainees and new teachers can impact the efficacy of these individuals in the classroom. In connection to the operation of the teacher education program where students are given feedback from supervisors during their clinical experience, UBTEPs can use data from these and other similar studies to understand how best to support the students in their clinical experience.

The conversation about efficacy of student teachers and new teachers cannot exclude discussions of racial diversity in the teacher work force. In their extensive examination of data from the late 1980s to 2013, Ingersoll et al discussed that while the recruitment of minority teachers into disadvantaged schools has been, on the whole, successful, these teachers have significantly higher turnover rates than White teachers (R. Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2019). Using this data as a starting point, researchers can further examine the link between teacher preparation and racial disparities in recruiting and retaining BIPOC teachers.

One issue at hand in addressing racial disparities in the teacher work force and in teacher education is identifying issues of race in higher education, the home of the traditional teacher preparation program. Finders and Kwame-Ross identify “White Talk
Moves” in their discussion of the ways in which White people “silence and invalidated what Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have to say” about their experiences within higher education (Finders & Kwame-Ross, 2020). Using this material as a starting point, universities can examine the impact of these interactions on the ability of the College of Education to recruit and support a more diverse faculty and student population.

Representation for students from communities of color is another key element to this conversation. Studies looking at the impacts of representation in the teaching community all point to the importance of having teachers who reflect the communities in which the students live (Carver-Thomas, Association, & Institute, 2017; Scott, 2016; Sweatt, 2018). Carver-Thomas has looked at this issue extensively, examining the recruitment and retention of teachers of color, connecting the issues through the potential of creating more Grow Your Own (GYO) programs that are supported in urban areas and have the potential to address institutionalized racism often seen in teacher preparation that leads to poor outcomes for teacher retention (Carver-Thomas & Institute, 2018; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Bianco, Brandehoff, & Gist, 2019). Other studies focus on teacher preparation in historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and the impact of these programs on recruiting teachers from communities of color (Toldson, Pearson, & (SHEEO), 2019). Within this research are frequent calls to create action research studies that begin to implement changes quickly.

Within the realm of education policy, how teachers are being prepared for the classroom is a topic of much debate, centered around the desire to try and understand what preparation will best prepare teachers and help them to stay in the profession. In
looking at math and science teachers specifically, Ingersoll, Merrill and May discovered that while the route a teacher takes (be it a traditional university program or an alternate route program) may not make that big of an impact, the amount of pedagogical training does (R. Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). This study can lead to greater discussion of how to increase and improve the quality of the pedagogical training that pre-service teachers receive before entering the classroom. However, the study does not look at other aspects that might impact a new teacher’s confidence in the classroom.

Along with the examination of how the understanding of teaching practices can improve teacher retention, researchers are examining the way that induction programs can impact retention. Unfortunately, with deregulation of school districts and state regulations, comparing the induction programs themselves as well as the outcomes is difficult. Baines laments that “The move of certification from a tightly controlled, state-regulated, university-based platform to an unregulated, market-driven free-for-all has been swift and unequivocal” noting that this brings chaos and inconsistency into the teacher preparation field (Baines, 2010). Within this chaos, researchers have continued to work towards developing programs that will work to support new teachers. There are researchers who have contributed to this issue by creating comprehensive guides to help school leaders to create induction programs that include mentoring and other components to help stave off the attrition rates of new teachers (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing & California State Dept. of Education, 1997. Brock, 2005 #623). Unfortunately, this is clearly not enough as new teachers continue to leave at consistent rates.
The discussion of mentoring for teachers is not new. For decades, researchers have looked at how mentoring as part of a teacher induction program can improve the outcomes for beginning teachers, with elements including reduced teaching loads and strong support (Huling-Austin, 1992, p. 62). One concern in establishing mentoring programs is understanding what new teachers need in the classroom. An Australian study identifies teaching practicum as an essential element in pre-service teacher training (Zeegers, 2005). The author’s findings indicated that developing a partnership between the teacher and the school community in order to strengthen the teacher’s skills had positive benefits in preparing pre-service teachers. This study reports the results of an investigative study of initial teacher education in Great Britain that looked at 125 teachers to see how they are learning about learning and teaching in the classroom and how best to support this. The researchers hypothesized that teachers “shut down” on interpretation skills when observing as opposed to actively participating in the teaching process. Survey and interviews were collected of English and mathematics teachers and their findings were that without a strong community, new teachers do not feel supported enough to develop their pedagogical approach to differentiated learners. (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003).

**Other Challenges in Teacher Education**

Within the discussion of improving teacher education, other factors can be understood to be important elements to address. In their study, Aldeman et al. addressed the challenges facing the field of teacher preparation. In their report, they recommended a three-part strategy that would work to improve the preparation of teachers. Their recommendations included a federal framework for the evaluation of university based
teacher education programs, the funding through grants of incentive programs for states to hold these teacher education programs accountable, and finally a strategy to streamline and improve financial aid for students in teacher education programs to better attract candidates who would be more likely to go on to be successful, high-quality classroom teachers (Aldeman et al., 2011).

The importance of administrative support for teachers is inextricable to teacher success and retention. In their 2007 study, Wang et al. explored the perceptions of teachers and administrators on recruitment and retention. In this study, participants were drawn from a charter school organization in California. Through qualitative research, the researchers identified several variables to explain a high retention rate. Among those identified was a high quality professional development program and extensive administrative support (Wang, Straubhaar, & Ong, 2020). This study opens up a conversation about how support structures such as these can have an impact not just on new teachers but on those who have been in the field for many years. This would lead back to greater improvements in overall teacher attrition.

Workload is one area in which teachers have expressed dissatisfaction and is one reason that teachers may be leaving the profession. This connects to the devaluation of the teaching profession. Classroom sizes increase, increasing the teacher workload without adjustments in compensation or expectations, leaving both new and seasoned teachers to try to make adjustments. Ujir et al utilized a teaching workload calculation to better understand the impact of workload on teaching quality. Their study found that higher workloads yielded lower-quality teaching (Ujir, Salleh, Marzuki, Hashim, & Alias, 2020). This research should be broadened out into looking at the same workload
calculations for remote teaching, especially as we may be seeing an increase in this after the Covid-19 pandemic forced most teachers into teaching remotely for extended periods of time.

Teacher confidence is an important factor to examine in teacher retention. Raymond-West and Rangel examined the levels of self-efficacy in novice teachers, finding a correlation between higher exposure to literacy teaching skills in coursework and higher levels of self-efficacy in novice reading teachers (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020). There are two important elements to consider in this research. The first is that they looked at both traditionally prepared teachers and those who went through an alternative preparation program. Their research indicated a greater level of self-efficacy in teachers from a traditional preparation program. This may indicate that the traditional program had more opportunity to integrate the reading pedagogy into the coursework. Second, the research examines the connection between meaningful coursework during the preparation program and positive perceptions of success in new teachers. This issue is addressed in this research study in relation to the curriculum of a UBTEP.

Because there are so many factors in teacher retention, collecting data from multiple sources and comparing it is necessary to begin to see more about how to tackle these issues. However, researchers must choose a particular area or element at which to look. For example, education researchers may choose to focus on one particular city for their data collection.

In one example of this, drawing on the Common Core of Data, Civil Rights Data Collection, and other state and federal sources, Pierce et al have reported on the dire situation facing Philadelphia public schools. In their brief, the authors address the Covid-
19 pandemic and its lasting effects on teacher recruitment and retention, particularly looking at persons of color in the teaching field. This research highlights that the time for action is now, as they report that 1,500 additional teachers are needed in the city just to meet the state teacher/student average (Pierce, Shaw-Amoah, Lapp, Action, & (PERC), 2020). Their recommendations include developing an expanded pipeline for teachers of color, advancing teachers’ cultural competency, bolstering induction and mentorship programs, and encouraging teacher collaboration. Other researchers can look at the data collected in Philadelphia and compare them to other cities to begin to build a more generalizable discussion about these topics.

To further understand teacher retention, Collins et al analyzed the retention, movement, and attrition of public school teachers in Tennessee from 2017-2019 (Collins, Schaaf, & Education, 2020). In their study, the researchers looked for patterns that could indicate elements that would be best addressed to reduce attrition and movement of teachers, especially in high-needs areas. They identified supporting efforts for retention of urban teachers as a primary issue to be further investigated. This is another example in which data from one location can be used to further understand other areas of the country.

This dissertation looks specifically at teacher preparation occurring in undergraduate programs situated within a university. Connecting this to research into alternative teacher preparation programs can build a more intricate discussion about the best place for teacher preparation to be housed. An alternative program for teacher preparation was identified and named by Cochran-Smith et al as “new graduate schools of education (nGSEs)” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020). These programs are discussed as a “controversial innovation within the rapidly expanding field of teacher education.” These
programs involved “the relocation of teacher preparation to nGSEs, which are not university based but are state authorized and approved…to prepare teachers, endorse them for initial teacher certification, and grant master’s degrees.” This concept raises some interesting points of discussion. First is the question of evaluating teacher preparation. This is discussed in a great deal of literature (Coggshall, Bivona, Reschly, & National Comprehensive Center for Teacher, 2012; Executive Office of the President, 2002; Ginsberg & Kingston, 2014; Glazerman, Mayer, & Decker, 2006) that attempts to identify ways to evaluate teacher education programs. Through looking at these studies, it is clear that there are no simple answers. This leads to a second question: are alternative programs just as effective as university based programs? Further investigation into this is warranted in order to understand the operation of these programs and the impact they have on teacher retention.

Finally, discussions about how to improve teacher training and teacher retention lead to an examination of what the best practices in the field are, and where we might still be stumbling. Looking at Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann’s writings about “pitfalls of experience” Cross shares vignettes of where these may still be occurring and how the education field can reimagine the preparation of teachers in urban schools (Cross, 2016). This leads to an important question that becomes a primary focus in this dissertation: can mentoring in the teacher education process improve these outcomes?

II. Solution: Mentoring of New Teachers

Mentoring

The literature on mentoring as a general topic encompasses a variety of fields, from business and team development to youth mentoring. In both popular culture and in
academic discourse, the topic of mentoring, specifically as it pertains to individual success and fulfilment, is pervasive. Amazon.com lists over 3,000 titles in the “Mentoring and Coaching category” alone. For the purposes of this research, the literature will be focusing on mentoring within the education fields.

**Mentoring for New Teachers**

The stresses and insecurities in their professional lives that new teachers face in their first years can often be tempered with an empathetic mentor (McCann, 2011). The state of New Jersey recognizes this and has set requirements that new teachers must be paired with a mentor (N.J.A.C. 6A:9C-5 which stipulates the requirements of district mentoring programs). However, as discussed in a study of induction practices, the state does not fund this partnership, meaning that the fees come out of the novice teacher’s salary; neither does the state define what should entail mentor training (Academy for Educational, 2009). These limitations begin to show up as a burden on the mentoring programs as well as the participants, which could impede the effectiveness. This research helps to show the importance for proper support and funding of these programs.

A case study of two school districts in New York state, one suburban and one an alternative school district that served 37 school districts throughout the state, sought to explore the perceptions of the new teachers regarding the mentoring programs that they were participating in (Roff, 2012). Their findings showed an overall positive impact on the new teachers. However, they did find some areas of concern and limitations such as whether or not teachers were being mentored by someone who taught the same subject, and whether the workshops given as part of the program addressed specific concerns of
the new teachers or more general topics. The more specific and relevant the mentoring, the more positive the experience for the new teacher.

By looking at mentoring programs, specific issues begin to emerge. Barrera, Bralee, and Slate worked with teacher mentors of first year teachers in Texas and discovered that the mentors found great value in their work supporting new teachers, but also acknowledged that limited support from administration and a lack of a coherent set of guidelines and training impeded their work. Additionally, the mentors commented that more time for reflection was needed by the new teachers (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010). In contrast to the feeling of lack of administrative support, a study involving data collected from 103 urban principals found strong support for a mentoring program, stating that most of the participants saw the mentor as a helpful supplement to their teachers practice and that most wanted involvement in selecting which teachers would receive mentoring (Ganser & et al., 1994). This support speaks well to the positive reception a well-developed mentoring program can receive from both teachers and administrators.

The mentoring and induction programs that are in place may not be sufficient or may have flaws. Looking at the Ontario New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), Barrett et al. uncovered what they considered to be a “hidden curriculum” of the program and its impact on the teachers. In their study, they found that although mentoring was a primary component of the NTIP, questions were raised about how the mentors were selected, trained, and assigned to the teachers. Particularly, they discuss the concern that mentees and mentors do not develop a natural relationship and that the success of the mentorship may suffer, thereby impacting the teacher’s success (Barrett, Solomon, Singer, Portelli, &
Mujuwamariya, 2009). This study reveals the potential weaknesses that can arise in a mentoring problem. However, despite the weaknesses that may emerge, overall the evidence supports mentoring programs as a positive influence on first year teachers.

**Effects on Teacher Retention**

The next step is to look at how teachers are being supported in those first years of teaching. Induction and mentoring programs for new teachers give teachers a much greater chance of success and provide them with supports that help them to perform better in the classroom (Flanagan & Society for Research on Educational, 2010; Isenberg et al., 2009; Jones & Youngs, 2012; Womack-Wynne et al., 2011). Because not all teachers stay, despite these interventions, some programs move beyond the first year. Supporting teachers over multiple years can give even more assurance of retention (McKenzie, 2010). Looking further into the issue of teacher retention, researchers are attempting to understand not just the rate of teacher turnover but the mechanisms that go into the decisions teachers make (Duncan, 2014; Flanagan & Society for Research on Educational, 2010; Gray, Brauen, & National Center for Education, 2013; Isenberg et al., 2009). Far less frequently, researchers are looking to understand the emotional and philosophical aspects that are related to teacher retention and turnover. By looking at the attitudes of teachers and their perceptions of the quality of their professional life, more delicate facets of the teacher as a whole are beginning to emerge (Duncan, 2014; Gray et al., 2013; Jones & Youngs, 2012).

**Mentoring in College Programs**

As a way to promote increased success and completion rates of college undergraduates, programs incorporating both traditional mentoring (faculty-student) and
peer mentoring (more experienced student-less experienced student) have been instituted in colleges around the country. In a *Research to Practice* brief, Coles looks at a wide range of evidence in support of mentoring as a way to improve college access and success in undergraduate students (Coles & Institute for Higher Education, 2011). In her findings, she discusses that much of the literature looks at informal mentoring but shows positive impacts on student persistence and overall achievement, and that minority students yielded students who were twice as likely to persist and to have higher GPAs. Further research into the connection between mentoring and academic persistence and achievement could add to discussions about using mentoring as a way to improve the achievements of students in teacher education programs.

Collier discusses the positive potential of peer mentoring programs by looking at three characteristics: cost, availability of potential mentors, and development of a common perspective (Collier, 2017). His findings show that the success of peer mentoring programs can be linked to the positive aspects of the three characteristics. This gives evidence to an argument that cost should not be a prohibitive factor, neither should availability of potential mentors. This type of partnership between less and more experienced students could be beneficial to students in a teacher education program who are just learning to understand the profession they are working towards entering.

*Alternative Route Mentoring*

Compounding this problem is the reality that many new teachers are coming from non-traditional programs. These alternative route (AR) teachers must also be supported by a mentor. Without support, AR teachers are often too overwhelmed to be effective.
and Koballa (2007) argue that while the pedagogical component is essential, the mentors must also help teachers with content material.

A case study of alternately certified teachers (ACT) in South Carolina sought to examine the perceived effectiveness of two ACTs over the course of their first year teaching (Pace, 2010). The ACTs participated in an induction program that included mentoring, but the study found that the ACTs perceived the mentoring as minimal, which the researcher discussed as having a negative impact on the perceptions of the new teachers. The importance of this research lies in the value of the perceptions of the new teachers of their mentoring, as well as the need for stronger mentoring programs.

LoCascio, Smeaton, and Waters conducted a study of 53 novice teachers in the state of New Jersey (LoCascio, Smeaton, & Waters, 2016). All of the teachers were participating in the state mandated induction program that involved mentoring and were teaching in a low socioeconomic urban area. What they found was that the induction structure mandated by the state was frequently not adhered to, resulting in a wide range of effectiveness for the novice teachers. However, they also found that these inconsistencies did not show any evidence of impacting whether or not the novice teacher decided to stay after their first year. This leaves several questions for future research such as whether it was the mentoring itself that was problematic, the implementation process, or some other outside factor.

**Mentoring for Student Teachers**

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) conducted a three-year study in which they examined the results of 15 empirical studies of the ways that induction and mentoring programs impact new teachers and found, overall, that induction had a positive effect. For this
study, they define mentoring as “the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools” (R. M. Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) and state that the terms induction and mentoring are often used interchangeably. They detail in their findings the various positive impacts on teacher retention, but also discuss how the structure of the programs themselves can impact the new teachers. Their findings indicate that providing new teachers with an induction program that involves mentoring can have long-term impacts on teacher retention.

While there is much discussion about mentoring for new teachers, we must look to supporting students before this year. Looking at the research on the mentoring support for student teachers is important to see how they are being supported in their first experiences in the classroom as a teacher. In a qualitative study, Jasper and Foster detailed the struggles of a student teacher who nearly left before even entering the program. With the support of mentoring, the student went on to become an effective classroom teacher (Jasper & Foster, 2010).

Fraser and Watson (Fraser, Watson, & Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship, 2014) discuss the struggles of new teachers in depth, and focus on the importance of revolutionizing the way both student teachers and the clinical educators with whom they are working understand the relationship. Ideally, they describe that this would be a stronger mentor/mentee relationship in which the roles would be clearly defined. They also call for an appropriate compensation for mentor teachers, noting that the extra burden can impact the relationship as well. One example they give of a successful mentoring program through a university is of a virtual mentoring program through the
University of Virginia which uses video and teleconferencing to allow well trained mentors to work with student and novice teachers throughout the country.

**Mentoring in Teacher Education**

The research on mentoring in teacher education programs is making promising strides, but there still needs more follow-up to understand the full value of the programs. For example, Catapano looks at a service-learning model for teachers during their field experience year in which the teacher education program created a mentoring program for pre-service teachers to help them better learn to support the families of the children they would be teaching in an urban setting. This mentoring program helped the pre-service teachers see themselves as agents of change in the system, but it is unclear what impact this had on them in the long term (Catapano, 2006).

There is a “transition shock” experienced by new teachers, described by Simon Veenman as “the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life” (Veenman, 1984). This shock is not necessarily a short lived experience and can have ramifications towards the new teacher that can impact whether or not they stay in the profession. More research into whether or not the supports such as mentoring given to students during the teacher education programs would have an impact on lessening this shock, thereby improving retention.

A study of 23 pre-service education students at a large, urban college campus looked at the perceptions of classroom readiness (Salzman, 1995). The students who were all in their second year of coursework were presented with a scenario in which they could immediately accept a full-time teaching job at an urban school. The participants were then asked to justify their choice. This scenario was presented to them at the beginning
and end of the semester. In both cases, a portion of students who rejected the job offer indicated a need for more mentoring as a reason. This number actually increased from n=5 to n=9 from the first to second survey.

**Perceptions of Success: A Case for Mentoring**

The discussion about the positive effect mentors have on teaching is ongoing in educational journals (Haack, 2006; Hanuscin & Lee, 2008; Howell, 1986). However, the studies are often limited to small case studies. As with so many aspects of education, the success of a mentor depends on a wide variety of components, which are not necessarily comparable from group to group, or program to program. Often, studies report findings based on small samples and are limited in their ability to be generalized to other groups. Longitudinal studies of the meaningful and lasting effects on mentors are elusive in the literature. The issue of the effectiveness of mentoring for teacher retention is in great need of attention from educational researchers to move beyond the anecdotal and abbreviated nature of the research.

Although mentoring is important, school climate and leadership often play a more Studies looking at helpfulness and supportiveness of mentors add an additional dimension in that the support of the mentors should be reinforced by a supportive school environment. These studies show the teachers need far more assistance with pedagogical issues and decision making. Additionally, teachers with a mentor perceived that they received significantly higher support than teacher without a mentor (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Wilkinson, 1997). However, this does not paint the entire picture. Wilkinson(1997) finds that teachers with mentors in schools with an unsupportive administration do not fare as well as those in schools with stronger support from principals and other staff.
Likewise, mentors and principals are equally important to new teachers in the induction process (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Without the support of the school as a community, the impact of the mentor-protégé relationship is greatly lessened.

An added bonus, to mentorship programs is the influence on the mentors themselves. Analysis of two separate mentoring programs showed that mentors benefit from the mentor process as well as protégés (Davies, Brady, Rodger, & Wall, 1999; Wollman-Bonilla, 1997). Mentors reported higher self-esteem, greater reflection on their own practice, lessened feeling of isolation, and learning from the protégés. Additional benefits include higher levels of self-confidence, and reduced feelings of isolation. The findings indicate that mentorship practices could extend beyond the mentor-mentee relationship. Taken together studies noted earlier about the tendency of new teachers to emulate their mentors, this would lead to the consideration of an exponential positive effect. Therefore, mentors must be studied as an entity unto themselves.

Bowers and Eberhart found that in their study of mentors and new teachers in Ohio, the mentors were best pulled from experienced teachers of 8-15 years who were looking to add more to their own teaching experience (Bowers & Eberhart, 1988). By utilizing these teachers, the schools were able to help their veteran teachers continue to develop their own teaching while helping new teachers.

How teachers and mentors each perceive the outcomes of their relationship should be of utmost importance in establishing the protocols in a mentorship program. A review of both qualitative and quantitative research studies reveals patterns in the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentors view themselves as helpers to new teachers rather than evaluators (Abell & et al., 1995). This is an important quality to note as it sets up a crucial dynamic
in how the mentor will effectively assist the teacher. Though not an in-depth study, the data from Abell et al. (1995) do indicate that perception is an important part of the puzzle. Mathur, Gehrke, and Kim (2013) found increased levels of satisfaction in pairings involving a high degree of contact between mentor and mentee, with an especially favorable view of in house mentors. Their findings indicate that good mentor-mentee pairings were a key element in the perception of success. Taken together, a pattern begins to emerge about how the relationship between mentors and mentees can be seen as vital to the development of new teachers.

**Mentor Training**

While research supports the positive effects of the mentoring of new teachers (support), there is also some research on what mentor preparation should, or could, look like. To begin with, choosing appropriate mentors and then treating the mentor position as a professional position are key to successful relationships between the mentor and mentee as well as for the strong buy-in from the mentor teachers (Futrell, 1988).

Success of the mentorship programs also depends also on how prepared the mentors are to work with new teachers. Gagen and Bowie (2005) discuss the importance of mentor training, which reinforces the need for research on this important aspect. Studies on mentor training programs tend to be qualitative, relying on video logs, journals, and interviews (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Russell & Russell, 2011) but the evidence strongly favors intensive training for mentors to be as effective as possible. Without training, the support is often lacking in substance and benefit for the new teacher. The creation of these programs is a topic that has little research though much discussion. Scholars argue that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach (Ganser &
Koskela, 1997; Howell, 1986; Solomon, 2009). The greater the support given to a new teacher, the stronger the result will be for that teacher to have success. Perry, Phillips, and Hutchinson (2006) found that student teachers with strong models develop strong skills using self-regulated learning. In their study, student teachers resembled the behaviors of their mentors.

**Deficiencies in Past Literature**

The literature on this research fails to provide an understanding of the teacher’s own perceptions about his or her own experience as a teacher. There are some studies beginning to look at the teachers’ sense of self and their perceptions of themselves, but these are still focused as much on interventions as they are on the teachers (Choy, Wong, Lim, & Chong, 2013; Flanagan & Society for Research on Educational, 2010; Goh, 2013). An understanding of how a teacher experiences the first year as an individual, accounting for but not focusing on outside interventions such as mentoring, is still elusive in the body of research on new teacher experiences. Further work in this area could help uncover areas of weakness in the teacher preparation programs in terms of supporting the development and growth of the student before beginning their teaching career.

Additionally, in the field of evaluating teacher preparation there are considerable challenges and gaps. Beare et al. suggest that developing effective assessments for colleges of education is essential in order to gain validity in terms of understanding what makes a teacher preparation program effective (Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, & Chiero, 2012). With this in mind, adding discussion about factors such as mentoring programs into the conversation on effective teacher preparation is vital.
Another compounding factor is the adoption of edTPA by the state of New Jersey. Although the history is complex, a brief overview of edTPA can be summed up thusly. In September 1998, the California State Legislature passed SB 2042, a step toward comprehensive reform of teacher preparation in California (Hafner & Maxie, 2006). This groundbreaking legislation aligned the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP), Teaching Performance Expectancies (TPEs), and teacher performance assessment (TPA) in order to ensure that all teachers were considered highly prepared as they entered the field. From this emerged the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). From this, the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) developed edTPA as the first nationally available TPA program. The assessment portfolio is submitted by those seeking certification and includes artifacts such as lesson plans, video clips, assessments, and written reflections.

The roll out of edTPA began in the 2016-2017 year as an optional pilot year for UBTEPs to begin learning all the ins and outs of the system. For the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, candidates seeking a Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS) and Certificate of Eligibility (CE) holders must submit their edTPA portfolio but do not need to meet a cut score to satisfy the requirement. However, in the 2019-2020 school year, candidates must meet the cut score set at one standard error of measure below the national recommendation, and beginning in 2020-2021, candidates must meet a cut score determined by the New Jersey standard setting process (edTPA Implementation Timeline in New Jersey). The assessment is complex and can be tricky for student teachers to complete while also managing their first experiences in the classroom. The UBTEPs must be equipped with a support system that will help ensure
graduating students who have completed their clinical experience do not miss out on their licensing due to issues with edTPA. With this in mind, a conversation of mentoring students prior to their clinical year to prepare them for this experience is imperative.

**Figure 1**

*Ingersoll’s Theory of Teacher Development*

| Preservice preparation | Induction | Improved classroom teaching practices and teacher retention | Improved Student learning and growth |

**Conclusion**

Ingersoll’s theory of teacher development (Figure 1) shows a clear pathway from preservice preparation all the way through to improved student learning and growth (R. M. Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). With this in mind, the research on mentoring of those who are entering the teaching field clearly shows that a strong mentoring program that involves a well-trained mentor and a fully supported mentee yields a positive outcome in both the perceived success of the new teacher and the potential for higher retention of new teachers. There is no point in the research thus found that delineates any point that would be considered “too early” to introduce mentoring as a way to improve these outcomes. In fact, looking at the research on mentoring for college students shows that positive impacts in student success can be attributed to a strong mentoring program. This leaves me with the question: why are mentoring programs not being implemented within the university based teacher education programs? These programs, if created, would give students early access to a mentoring relationship that may have a positive impact on their overall success. To further support this endeavor, this research looked to discover the perceptions of students who are currently enrolled in or have recently graduated from a
UBTEP in regards to the support their program offered them to determine if the need for further support exists and if mentoring could fulfill that need.
Chapter Three

Research Methods

Research Objective

This dissertation used a case study to examine one university based teacher education program and examined the support systems that are offered to the students within the operation of the program. Through interviews with faculty, focus groups with current students, and a focus group with recently graduated students, the study explored the operation of the program and the perceptions of students and faculty as to how the program supports the students.

Researcher’s Role

The researcher is an instrument in qualitative methods. My experience as a teacher, the teacher preparation courses I took as a graduate student working towards a secondary certification, my induction program through the NYC Teaching Fellows, and my first year teaching experience, all play a role in my developing understanding of the new teacher experience and influenced my interactions with the participants. My work with teacher candidates at UTEP at Rutgers University-Newark has also influenced the development of my research approaches. My role as researcher was to gather the data through my interactions with students enrolled in or who have graduated from a UBTEP. My perspective of these interactions may have been biased by my own experiences as a former UBTEP student and teacher. I took on an etic role as I was not in the classroom with them nor experiencing the same phenomenon. It became important for me to separate any emotional reactions from empirical data. I do not have any previous relationship with the study site.
Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in this qualitative study:

Research Question 1: Is the UBTEP, as its currently organized and implemented, adequately preparing students in a way that allows them to feel ready to begin a teaching career upon completion of the program?

Research Question 2: How do the state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP and what impact does this have on the ability of the program to give students what they need to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

Research Question 3: What are the unique challenges faced by students in a UBTEP and are the supports provided by the UBTEP adequate and impactful for students to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

Qualitative Methodology

In qualitative inquiry, it is imperative for the researcher to have an understanding of the philosophical assumptions and their implications on the research (Creswell, 2013). There is great importance to understanding the individual experiences of students as they progress through a UBTEP, and consideration must be taken that every individual’s experience is unique. In this study I endeavored to understand the experiences of the students in the distinct setting of the UBTEP. Through discussion, I have explored how the students in this UBTEP feel supported as well as the limitations in support that the UBTEPs offer. As I have asked the participants to help me understand their perceptions of reality, I am aware that these perceptions, which may seem similar, are presented through the biases of the participants. Through analysis of the voices of the participants, I collaborated with the participants to create an understanding of their perceptions.
Study Design

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding about the experiences of students who are enrolled in or have graduated from the study site. The information gathered examined students’ experiences regarding the support they received during their time as a student in the UBTEP and how this impacted their feelings of preparedness for a teaching career. Students also shared their ideas about mentoring. Faculty interviews explored the perceptions of faculty about the challenges students face, what supports the program offers, and their feelings about mentoring. The study also looked at the structure of the UBTEP and the ways support is provided to the students in the program. Additionally, this study explored the New Jersey state policies for UBTEPs and how these requirements impact the operation of the UBTEP and the experience of the students. The method of data collection was interviews of faculty, focus groups of students currently enrolled in the UBTEP, and a focus group of students who have recently graduated from the UBTEP and have continued in a teaching career.

Case Study Theory

In order to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences that are affecting students in this teacher education program, a case study was determined to be an appropriate methodology. This allowed the researcher to develop a detailed and in-depth discussion of the case itself. According to Creswell, the case study should be able to create an understanding for the reader about a case within a bounded system through the use of case themes, multiple sources of information, and description (Creswell, 2013). This study developed an instrumental case as it examines the specific issue of support for students in a teacher education program. The case study methods arose as the result of the
specificity of the questions that are seeking information about the perceptions of students of their experience in the teacher education program and the perceptions of faculty of the supports that are provided to the students.

The selected design is limited by the inability to establish causality. However, this exploratory study examined a previously under-researched topic and thus will inform future studies using more rigorous designs. Questions were worded to avoid problems in conceptualization.

**Research Site**

The research site will be a college of education within a degree granting public liberal arts university in New Jersey. To ensure anonymity of the site and the research participants, the research site will be referred to as Sunnydale University. The detail site is described in detail in Chapter 4.

**Target Population, Sample, and Sampling Methods**

The target population of this study was current and former members of the Sunnydale University College of Education. The sample was stratified into three main groups: currently enrolled students in the UBTEP who have begun clinical experience and/or are considered pre-service; students who graduated or left the UBTEP within the last five years and have pursued a teaching position; faculty, administrators, and staff currently employed in the UBTEP.

To understand the needs of students in regards to support and mentorship, all participants had to have completed one full, traditional school year in the UBTEP. Students who participated in a mentorship program separate from the UBTEP (such as in a First Year Experience program) were eligible to participate regardless of overlap. The
interview and focus group design allowed for the mentoring experiences of these individuals to be accounted for as separate from their experience in the UBTEP. The College of Education was not being evaluated; the perception of the students and faculty as to the support offered by the programs and the impact of this on the student was being measured.

**Recruitment of Study Participants**

Recruitment and data collection began in August 2018 and concluded in April 2019. Through my contacts at the research site I was allowed the opportunity to present my research proposal to potential student participants. These presentations took place over the span of one month and were conducted at the beginning of several classes as well as an information session on a separate topic. The director of the Office of Field Experience and Dean of the College of Education assisted me in sending out an email invitation to current students and alumni inviting them to volunteer to participate in the study. They were given my contact information. The Dean also sent out three email communications to the faculty and staff of the program inviting them to participate in the study along with my contact information. There was no compensation for faculty who participated in the study. Focus group participants were fed a meal of pizza and beverage at the time of the focus group.

**Human Subject Research and Potential Ethical Issues**

I acknowledge that students, faculty, and current teachers may have concerns about security of their positions in connection with the data they have provided. Because of this, anonymity has been given to all participants to minimize potential impact on their status as a student or employee of the program, or as an employee as a teacher.
Prior to the start of data collection, an application was made to the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board as this study includes interaction with individuals, including students of the program was used for the case study. The approval from the Rutgers IRB was then submitted to the research site’s IRB and secondary approval was obtained. The faculty, students, and former students of the program who participate in interviews and focus groups received an Informed Consent agreement that gave clear instructions about the nature of the study and informed them of their status as a voluntary participant, the goals of the study, the type of data that will be collected through their participation, any potential risks or benefits that may be posed by their participation, and their right to withdraw their participation or withhold information, as well as information for contacting the researcher and the IRB should they have questions or concerns. Participants were given the written form prior to participation and were given an appropriate amount of time to review the form prior to signing. Participant confidentiality was protected by assigning aliases to participants, and all information was maintained in a password protected file on a password protected computer.

This study posed minimal risk to the study participants. Student participants were assured that their choice to participate or not will have no impact on their status in the program, and any information they provide will only be used for the research analysis of this dissertation. Faculty were given assurance that participation is voluntary and the choice to participate or not does not affect their position. Participants were informed that they may benefit from participating in the research in so far as the information they give could be used to improve the support programs for students in the education program.
Participants who provided feedback on their experiences were made aware that they may see their suggestions implemented within the program.

**Processes**

Three semi-structured face-to-face focus groups were conducted with a total of 15 current students using a focus group protocol (Appendix A). One semi-structured face-to-face focus group was conducted with three alumni of the program using a focus group protocol (Appendix B). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 17 faculty members using an interview protocol (Appendix C). I asked probing and clarifying questions to obtain a more detailed understanding of the perceptions of each participant.

**Data Collection Strategies**

Interview and focus group data was collected in a face-to-face setting using audio recording and note-taking to capture responses from each individual. Faculty interviews lasted between 12 minutes and 37 minutes. Focus groups lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and 10 minutes. Initial interview and focus group questions are found in Appendices A-C Follow-up interviews were requested on a volunteer basis from the student focus group participants; however, there were no volunteers.

**Analysis and Analytical Methods**

Drawing from Creswell, Remler and Van Ryzin (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011) describe the three steps for qualitative data analysis as:

- Preparing and organizing the data
- Reducing and summarizing the data, possibly through a process of coding
• Presenting the data, in narrative form, figures, and/or tables (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011)

For my research, the interview and focus group data was transcribed using ottr.ai and coded using NVivo in order to look for patterns and themes that work towards the purpose of this paper. I used the following methodology for data analysis:

1. Interviews were auto-transcribed using secure transcription software. I then listened to each interview while reviewing and correcting the transcripts. Transcripts and recordings were then saved to a password protected file and removed from the ottr.ai database.

2. Transcripts were uploaded into NVivo where they were reviewed and coding into thematic categories.

3. The thematic categories were used to group data as responses to the research questions.

4. These groupings were then written up to discuss the perceptions of faculty and analyzed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Throughout this process the research continually reviewed the transcripts for context and clarity to develop a rich discussion of the responses.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

Triangulation was achieved by conducting individual interviews and multiple focus groups. The responses from all participants were consistent with common topics being addressed. As a case study, a thick, rich description of the program is given in Chapter 4 in order for the reader to have a complete understanding of the context of the study. The validity strategy of member checking has been used to increase accuracy of
the description of the program and its components of support. Research participants have been given the opportunity to review the program description, major findings, and themes that have been developed and have had the opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the data prior to finalization of the study. This ensures that no misrepresentations of the views of the participants has occurred.

In a case study, generalization to the field is not an established goal. However, by applying coding and analysis to the interviews and through an in-depth discussion of the program, the reader can make connections to the experiences of other programs as reported in other research. In addition, this research may be used as a springboard for future research that looks at multiple education programs.
Chapter Four

Study Site Description and Context of Teacher Education Requirements

This chapter gives detailed description of the research study site, including a summary of the state requirements for university based teacher education programs (UBTEPs) in New Jersey, and explanations of the exams and assessments that are required by the state. References to these factors are made in Chapters 5 and 6 in the context of statements made by study participants. This chapter gives in-depth information on these factors. The information compiled here was collected through the Sunnydale College of Education website and administrator feedback.

It is important to note that the case study site is a dynamic organization. The details listed here are a “snapshot” of the operation of the study site. The researcher has made every effort to create an accurate depiction, including descriptions of the supports that are offered by the university and college of education. These include administrative outreach, workshops, and access to information. Because student participants were interviewed from Fall 2018 to Spring 2019, some supports may have been implemented at a date later than would have been relevant to these students. Therefore, there may be inconsistencies between what is reported by students and what is presented by the program through the website. Similarly, faculty participants may report being unaware of supports given to students. As noted in the limitations of the study in Chapter 1, faculty participants may not teach in the clinical courses which have additional supports related to the field and are thus unaware of these supports. These discrepancies will be examined in more detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Case Study Site Overview
Table 1

Demographic Breakdown for 2017-2018 Year. Source: Common Data Set available through the university’s website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Degree-Seeking First-Time First-Year</th>
<th>Degree-Seeking Undergraduates (include first-time first-year)</th>
<th>Total Undergraduates (both degree- and non-degree-seeking)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident aliens</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>2776</td>
<td>2784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>1470</td>
<td>1471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>3392</td>
<td>3413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and/or ethnicity unknown</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2039</td>
<td>8710</td>
<td>8838</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The case study site is a college of education within a public liberal arts university in New Jersey. Sunnydale University (a pseudonym) offers Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees, as well as Post-bachelor’s and Post-master’s certificates. For the 2017-2018 year there were a total of 10,252 students, of which 8,838 were undergraduate. The faculty to student ratio for 2017 was 14 to 1. The demographic breakdown for degree-seeking undergraduates is shown in Table 1.

Between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017, a total of 7% of the Bachelor’s degrees conferred fell into the category of Education, a certificate program. According to the school’s 2016 Title II Report Card, which covers the 2014-1015 academic year, the College of Education offered preparation programs in 84 areas. Undergraduate students
can choose to enroll in one of the following programs: a special education track, Early Childhood Education (P-3) with or without Teachers of Students with Disabilities (TSD) endorsement, Elementary Education (K-6) with or without TSD endorsement, Elementary Education (K-6) with Middle School Subject Field Specialization, Secondary Education Subject Field Specific (K-12) with or without TSD endorsement. Students may also opt for a Bilingual Instructional endorsement or English as a Second Language endorsement.

The demographic breakdown of total students enrolled in the program is show in Table 2. Historically, the College of Education descends from a normal school for the preparation of teachers that was founded in the mid-1800s. It has since been incorporated into Sunnydale University. The College of Education is accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and is Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation eligible. In 2013, The Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) and NCATE, the two accrediting bodies for teacher education, merged to form CAEP. Because Sunnydale’s College of Education was already operating under their NCATE accreditation, they filed for their continuing accreditation with CAEP in February of 2020.

Table 2

Demographic Breakdown for the Sunnydale College of Education. Source: 2016 Title II Report Card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor of students enrolled in 2014-2015</th>
<th>Total Number enrolled</th>
<th>Percentage of Total number enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students enrolled</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unduplicated number of males enrolled</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>25.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unduplicated number of females enrolled</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>74.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hispanic/Latino of any race:</th>
<th>104</th>
<th>18.51%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0.00%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>73.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>16.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The College of Education prides itself on transparency in its operations. Program impact data are easily accessible via a link to the COE Public Performance Disclosure (CAEP annual report). From here, the public can access the New Jersey Department of Education report cards on the COE going back to 2015. The website also describes the analysis of program data to meet the requirements of CAEP for accreditation.

The 2016 Title II Report Card indicates that students are initially admitted to the teacher certification program during their junior year. The college does not conditionally admit students, which means that students are not accepted into the program unless they meet all requirements. Undergraduate students must have a minimum GPA of 3.0, with the median GPA of individuals accepted into the program during the 2014-2015 academic year being 3.42. The median GPA of undergraduate students who complete the program (from whom the student participants in this study are drawn) is 3.45. In the postgraduate certification program, the minimum GPA is also 3.0, with the median GPA of individuals accepted into the program at the postgraduate level being 3.24. The median GPA of postgraduate students completing the program in 2014-2015 was 3.9.
In the final year of the program, College of Education students complete a yearlong clinical practice experience (Clinical Practice I and Clinical Practice II), formerly known as student teaching. The staff in the Office of Field Experience (OFE) is responsible for establishing relationships with schools and matching College of Education students with an appropriate placement. Once placed in the school, the student is known as a teacher candidate and works with the classroom teacher of record, called the Clinical Educator (CE). The OFE works with the CE to apprise them of the College of Educations expectations including the CE’s role as a mentor, how to assess the teacher candidate in the classroom, and any and what is expected in the partnership of the CE and teacher candidate. The OFE website provides a Handbook that specifies the requirements of the CE. The handbook is extensive, covering expectations for the clinical experience, and is updated regularly as state requirements change and additional supports are created or updated. Due to changes in terminology, at times the comments from students and faculty may refer to teacher candidates as student teachers, and clinical educators as cooperating teachers.

Clinical experience lasts for one academic year. During this time, students are placed in a school that matches their licensure program. For example, an early childhood education student might be placed in a third grade classroom. The CE is responsible for guiding the teacher candidate from observations into leading lessons over the course of the year. In addition, there is a clinical supervisor who works with both the OFE and CE to help guide and assess the teacher candidate during their clinical experience.
There were 326 students enrolled in a supervised clinical experience during the 2014-2015 school year, with 16 full-time faculty supervising clinical experience, and 91 adjunct faculty supervising clinical experience.

The College of Education website has a vast array of information available to potential and current students enrolled in the program. Contact information is clearly posted and a department directory is easily located from the homepage. Under the Resources page, there is a summary page that students can use to quickly access campus resources such as the writing center or library, networking opportunities, and testing preparation. From this page students can find information about various funding support including local scholarships, national grants, and other potential sources of financial aid. Another important document available on this page is the College of Education Professional Dispositions. This document outlines the important traits of educators. As discussed in later chapter, the professional dispositions component of a teacher candidate is an important element, and this support document on the website is germane to that discussion.

The webpage for the OFE has been designed to support the teacher candidates throughout the clinical experience. On this page, the students are able to find instructions on everything that they will need during the clinical experience to meet all state and program requirements. These supports include video tutorials, templates, and important dates. The OFE staff ensures that the information stays up to date.

The OFE webpage is also designed to support clinical educators and clinical supervisors with resources including checklists, templates, video guides, and contact information. On the OFE calendar of events, clinical educators and clinical supervisors
can find important dates such as orientation sessions and workshops throughout the semester to help them support their teacher candidates.

The OFE has created a digital Clinical Experience Handbook to be used by teacher candidates, clinical educators, and clinical supervisors. This handbook extensively covers the expectations and guidelines for the teacher candidate, clinical educators, and clinical supervisors. As a supplement to the handbook, a series of recorded webinars are available on the website for participants to view for more detailed discussion of the various aspects of the clinical experience.

While completing their clinical year, the students receive evaluations from their clinical supervisors. The Office of Field Experience has created a pre and post observation guided question sheet for the observer to use in providing feedback to the student. This question sheet is based on the edTPA performance outcomes. In this way the observations can be made more meaningful in supporting the student in making adjustments in their teaching that reflect best practices as set out by the edTPA. This question sheet is available to students on the College of Education website.

**New Jersey Department of Education Requirements**

The New Jersey Department of Education is the government entity that oversees various domains relating to education in the state, including prek-12 and higher education. As stated on their website, “The New Jersey Department of Education supports schools, educators and districts to ensure all of New Jersey's 1.4 million students have equitable access to high quality education and achieve academic excellence.” In this capacity, they are responsible for establishing the requirements that Colleges of
Education must meet for operation. They also determine licensure requirements for all teacher candidates.

The curriculum for undergraduate students at Sunnydale University’s College of Education follows New Jersey guidance for education preparation programs (EPPs), which is a set of principles and standards that forms the New Jersey state requirements for licensure and certification. As described above, the NJ DOE mandates national accreditation. Sunnydale COE meets this mandate through their CAEP accreditation, which is publicly available for review. Upon completion of their program, students apply for state licensure through the university. Students are then eligible for a Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS). As defined by the state, “The CEAS is a credential issued to an individual who has completed a teacher preparation program and has met the basic requirements for certification, including academic study and applicable test requirements.” This will allow students to seek out a position teaching in the level and subject of their certification. Within these guidelines, Sunnydale’s College of Education is bound by certain restrictions that can limit how they are able to support students while they are progressing through the program.

This information pertaining to licensure is made readily available through the College of Education’s Office of Educational Enrollment and Certification. Their website is regularly updated with the most current information so that students can be sure that they are completing all requirements on time and are aware of all fees associated with licensure. The licensure requirements and fees are set by the New Jersey Department of Education. The COE has created an information document that is linked on the website and updated regularly. This document clearly outlines the requirements and fees,
including endorsements, so students can anticipate final costs once they have completed the program.

In the state of New Jersey, undergraduate students who intend to complete their teacher education and obtain licensure through a UBTEP must declare a double major at the university in which they are enrolled: one major must be in a liberal arts or sciences area, and the second major is the specific level of education in which the student intends to teach (Early Childhood P-3; Elementary K-6 with Middle School Subject 5-8; or Secondary Education/Subject Field Specialization K-12). The academic area that the student chooses for their liberal arts or sciences major varies depending on the level or subject that the student intends to teach. For example, a student who intends to teach elementary school would declare an Elementary K-6 education major and a subject major such as Earth science. A student who intends to teach high school history might choose political science as their liberal arts major and Secondary Education as their education major. The only programs that do not require a double major at Sunnydale University are physical education and music.

To help students meet this requirement for a double major, Sunnydale University’s College of Education has created a system in which the liberal arts or sciences major must be declared first, even if they know that they will be applying to the College of Education. Students can navigate to the Programs page on the College of Education website, and from here select the licensure they intend to pursue (e.g. Early Childhood P-3, Middle School Subject 5-8, etc.) From here, students can view a list of appropriate academic majors for their licensure. This is to help students choose the best academic major fit for their intended course of study. They may declare their double
major as early as their first semester at Sunnydale University, at which time the student will create a revised major declaration that incorporates both their education major and their liberal arts or sciences major. They may do this as early as their first semester, but will not be able to begin taking education courses until the first semester of their junior year. In order to take education courses, they must have completed 60 credits in their subject major while maintaining a 3.0 cumulative GPA and must have passed a state education Commissioner-approved assessment of basic skills, as per state requirements. This means that students will not take a single education class until they are well immersed in their first major.

The College of Education website has clearly outlined the requirements students must meet to complete their studies. Whether it be a BA in Early Childhood, Elementary Education, or Secondary Education, the website has detailed information conveying a clear picture of the range of expectations they must meet before applying to the program. Each area includes contact information for the appropriate program advisory, a program description, steps to acceptance and continuation in the program, and exit requirements. Testing and GPA requirements are also listed here. This allows prospective students the opportunity to be well prepared for the expectations of the program. Prior to applying to the COE, informational sessions are available to students they can attend to learn more about the education major, how to apply, and what to expect. These are followed up by emails sent out to prospective students, encouraging them to follow up with any questions they may have about the program.

Exams and Assessments for Teacher Candidates
Prior to acceptance into the College of Education, students must take and pass a basic skills exam. This has been required for education students in New Jersey since September 1, 2015. The Praxis Core, which is a basic skills test, is one exam that will meet this requirement. Alternatively, students may use their qualifying SAT, ACT, or GRE exam scores to obtain a waiver for the Praxis Core (discussed below). Prior to beginning clinical experience, students must take and pass the Praxis Subject Assessment (formerly known as Praxis II). Finally, the students must submit and pass the educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) which is a multimedia portfolio showcasing the student’s clinical experience. Each of these exams is described in more detail below.

The Praxis exams are distributed and administered by Educational Testing Service, known simply as ETS, a private nonprofit educational testing and assessment organization. The Praxis CORE evaluates the reading, writing, and mathematics skills of the teacher candidate. It is designed as a basic skills assessment. Praxis Core minimum scores as of September 1, 2015 are reading 150; math 150; writing 162. These scores are determined by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and vary depending on when the exam was taken. To waive the Praxis Core, the student may submit SAT, ACT, or GRE exam scores. The student must have scored in the top third percentile for the year the alternate exam was taken to qualify to waive the Praxis Core. If students choose to take the Praxis Core, the cost, as of June 2020 is $90 per section, or $150 to take all three sections at once.

The Praxis Subject Assessments measure specific knowledge in the subject area that the student will be teaching in. Sunnydale University students do not need to have passed this exam to begin their first semester of clinical practice, but they must have at
least attempted it. Students must, however, pass their Subject Assessment prior to beginning their second semester of clinical practice. The qualifying scores for the Praxis Subject Assessments vary by subject. The cost for the Praxis Subject Assessment exams ranges from $60 to $160.

The educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) is a performance based assessment that has been adopted by New Jersey as a requirement for teacher certification, as of 2016. Originally developed through Stanford University at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity (SCALE) it has since been adopted nationwide and is distributed and administered by Pearson Education, Inc. It is important to note that Fall 2017 was the first cohort of students to be required to complete the edTPA, although their certification was not tied to their score. Beginning with the Fall 2018 cohort, students were required to upload and receive a score, but there was still no set score standard. The students who participated in this study were in the Fall 2018 cohort. The supports described here may not have been implemented or fully developed, impacting the perceptions of support they received during the edTPA process.

The College of Education website has a section dedicated to explaining all parts of the edTPA. The Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support from SCALE are made available to students. This document outlines what support the program is legally allowed or disallowed to provide the students. Teacher candidates can review this document to better understand how the program may be able to support them as they complete their edTPA submissions. A summation of these supports is also posted on the Office of Field Experience page of the website. The OFE has also created a support page for clinical educators and clinical supervisors. This page gives an overview of the edTPA and the
requirements for teacher candidates, as well as providing resources to clinical educators and clinical supervisors to help better support the teacher candidates with whom they are working.

The assessment comprises several documents and recordings of a clinical educator’s practice, including lesson plans and recorded samples of student teaching. As of June 2020, the cost of taking the edTPA is $300, which has remained unchanged since 2017. Students experience a range of challenges when they attempt to take the edTPA. These include cost, technological proficiency, access to a school site that will allow recording, and the requirement that they meet the qualifying score based on a cumulative score of the materials they submit. Beginning in September 2017, the edTPA was rolled out in teacher education programs throughout New Jersey over several years. During the initial roll out period, students received a score but there was no minimum score for licensure. As of the 2020-2021 academic year, the cut score will be determined by New Jersey standard setting process.

One particular support provided by the COE are edTPA Boot Camps. Following the guidelines discussed previously, the OFE has created instructional videos to guide the teacher candidate as they complete their edTPA documentation and upload it to the appropriate system. Live boot camps are also held for students who wish to come in and get hands-on support as they work on their portfolios. These boot camps are based on the Making Good Choices support guide published by SCALE. The support guide gives the teacher candidates all instructions needed for completing the edTPA and is made available on the COE website.

Clinical Practice
Pursuant to the New Jersey state code on clinical experiences, College of Education students are required to complete a year-long Clinical Practice, comprising Clinical Practice I and Clinical Practice II. To begin their clinical experience, students must complete a field experience application in order to be considered teacher candidates. This is facilitated through the Office of Field Experience (OFE). The process for completing the applications is available on the website and includes due dates and links to pertinent documents. The page also has video tutorials for students to assist them in completing the applications. During the clinical experience, teacher candidates work with a clinical educator, (formerly known as a cooperating teacher), and a clinical supervisor. Both of these individuals work with the teacher candidate, completing observations and giving feedback to the teacher candidate.

**Summary of Chapter Four**

This study seeks to understand the experiences of faculty and students of a particular college of education. The information described here will help to contextualize the responses of the participants and connect their responses to the broader issues discussed in this dissertation, as well as offer a foundation for addressing possible disconnects between participant responses and those services provided by the program. The details of the curriculum and operations of the Sunnydale College of Education are given to clarify the challenges that are discussed by the participants. Specific details about the exams and assessments also contextualize the issues that were brought up by faculty and students in interviews and focus groups. The next two chapters will analyze the response of faculty and students.
Chapter Five

Findings on the Struggle to Support Students Amidst Limitations

This study sought to explore the impact of university based teacher education program (UBTEP) structures and state requirements on students’ preparation to begin and sustain a teaching career upon graduation. It utilized qualitative research methods to explore the impact of state requirements on UBTEPs as they attempted to prepare and support students for a long-term teaching career. This is important, as Colleges of Education are complex structures, shaped by their need to fulfill state requirements for teacher preparation while staying true to each program’s curricular priorities and philosophy and adequately preparing teachers. This study explores how students and faculty of one UBTEP (identified here as the Sunnydale University College of Education, a pseudonym) perceive these requirements and how they navigate the complex structure of meeting the requirements of a UBTEP. Just as critically, it also examines the ways in which study participants perceive student support as offered within the program. From the time the data was collected to when it was analyzed and written up in this dissertation, the UBTEP has continued to develop and implement supports for students. The researcher has endeavored to address these changes as part of the analysis in the following chapters.

Three research questions guided this case study: 1.) Is the Sunnydale UBTEP, as its currently organized and implemented, adequately preparing students in a way that allows them to feel ready to begin a teaching career upon completion of the program? 2.) How do state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP and what impact does this have on the ability of the program to give students what they need to feel ready to begin a
teaching career? 3.) What are the unique challenges faced by students in a UBTEP and are the supports provided by the UBTEP adequate and impactful for students to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

This chapter presents study findings that address the first two research questions. As a reminder, data for this study were initially gathered through focus groups and interviews from August 2018 through April 2019. Three focus groups were conducted with a total of 15 current Sunnydale students near the end of their studies and one focus group was conducted with three recent graduates who were already teaching. As such, the student participants may have not participated in or been aware of supports that were created for entering students. The researcher has made every attempt to address these discrepancies when noted as part of the analysis. Individual interviews were conducted with 17 Sunnydale faculty and administrators. As noted in Chapter 1, the perceptions of faculty and administrators who chose to participate in the study may conflict with supports that are offered by the program. For example, a faculty member who teaches introductory courses in the program may not be aware of supports given to students during their clinical experience. When possible, this is noted in the analysis. Each group offered different perceptions of the Sunnydale UBTEP. By listening and re-listening to interview and focus group recordings and reading and coding their transcripts, a range of key themes and subthemes were identified. These themes constitute the framework through which the research questions will be answered. Each research question will be addressed in turn by introducing those themes and subthemes associated with that question.
Research Question 1: Does the Sunnydale UBTEP adequately prepare and support students?

The first research question guiding this study asks, “Is the Sunnydale UBTEP, as it is currently organized and implemented, adequately preparing students in a way that allows them to feel ready to begin a teaching career upon completion of the program?” During data analysis, it became clear that the organization and operations of the UBTEP play a significant role in students’ perceptions of program support. This analysis also revealed that while aspects of the program did not fully meet the perceived needs of Sunnydale UBTEP students, faculty and administration were continually searching for ways to make improvements and meet more student needs. This section examines key areas of the UBTEP operation that impact the way in which the program interacts with students. One theme and four subthemes were identified, all addressing research question one.

Theme 1: Self-reflection on the operations can guide the faculty and administration to successful implementation of the program.

The faculty and administration of the Sunnydale UBTEP regularly evaluate their program to identify ways in which they can improve student preparation and assist the students to begin successful teaching careers. These evaluative processes have identified important challenges to the operation of the program. They have uncovered problems with current UBTEP systems that need attention. This is acknowledged by both faculty and students as an important step in continuing to improve the program. These problems and challenges became clear through interviews with faculty members and administrators and student focus groups. In particular, four subthemes emerged.
Each subtheme identifies a key element of the program that shapes the way the Sunnydale UBTEP operates. Further, each subtheme is analyzed to illustrate how structural features impact student outcomes. These subthemes include reflection as a guiding principle of operation, understanding the connection between diversity and retention, developing the faculty-student connections and identifying challenges with mentoring. They will be examined more closely below.

**Reflection as a Guiding Principle of Operation**

Through individual interviews, members of the faculty and administration identified multiple areas in which they self-reflect on the operation of the College in order to identify how well the program is meeting the needs of students. These programmatic self-reflections are fueled by accreditation reports, student feedback, students’ self-reported motivations for pursuing education degrees, and challenges facing students. One especially important tool for self-reflection is the accreditation report, which is a self-study document created by the College following guidelines set out by the accrediting body.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the College of Education is accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). An administrator who works closely in the development of the CAEP report described the importance of the accreditation process as “[a tool] to help faculty and programs collect data to be analyzed for programmatic improvement.” Here, this administrator points out that while the accreditation process may be utilitarian in that it fulfills a CAEP requirement, it is also one way in which the program is able to be self-reflective and assess which areas are working well and which need more support.
Faculty also use student feedback to inform their best practices. This feedback includes formal surveys conducted by the program, informal discussions with students, and survey data collected from the state. Some faculty assert that the program may be able to achieve greater success in regards to student support and preparation by using student feedback more deliberately to adjust program operations. One faculty member reported that program administrators seek out feedback regarding “…what students are reporting [that] they need or that they struggle with, what would be helpful for them, and building out supports that way.” In looking at these elements, members of the faculty are demonstrating that they are engaged in identifying student needs based directly on students’ own feedback, and that this information can then inform what supports are built into the program. This demonstrates that members of the faculty and administration are invested in centering the program on the needs of the students.

Faculty members who were interviewed for this study affirmed that they and program administrators are working to meet the needs of future teachers, so understanding what brings students into the field of education offers another opportunity for reflection that can improve the operation of the UBTEP. To accomplish this, program leaders must once again look to student feedback. From these conversations, it is clear that the faculty and administration are dedicated to using the feedback from students to build the program.

In focus groups conducted as part of this study, students reported many reasons for choosing a career in education, including positive experiences with teachers, wanting to make a difference, and wanting to have a clear career goal. These students exhibited great excitement and emotion when discussing these reasons, emphasizing the strong commitment they carry with them as they progress through the program. By tapping into
these commitments, UBTEP leaders can identify new program components which could allow them to connect with the students in more meaningful ways. The program currently conducts interviews of incoming students as part of the application process. These early interviews are an important assessment tool to help develop overarching supports for students throughout the program.

In regards to this idea of commitment, faculty members discussed their perceptions that the allure of entering a profession immediately following graduation is part of the core mission of the program and may also be a key factor in inviting students to apply to the program. One faculty member said “It is true that education is one of the only places that you could leave school and know what you are supposed to be doing.” This comment points to the appeal of being able to move directly from college into a profession, but it also hints at the importance of being fully prepared for the profession of teaching at graduation. This path towards professionalism may be a guiding principle for UBTEP faculty, administrators and leaders to follow as they seek to better meet student needs. The program works to support students in this by conducting professional development workshops to help prepare the students for moving directly into their careers after graduation. This includes networking with school district administrators, resume building, job searching, and interview skills. Additionally, the OFE and Career Development hold a job fair each spring. Here, schools and districts set up stations and meet prospective teachers. This support offered by the UBTEP adds strength to the conviction of the faculty and administration to aid students in being able to start their teaching careers immediately after graduation.
The physical location of Sunnydale’s College of Education in relation to the main campus presents another challenge for UBTEP students; adverse student experiences regarding its location present another opportunity for reflection and improvement. Because the building that houses the College of Education is a few miles away from the central campus, faculty members periodically remarked on the challenges this may pose to supporting the needs of students. These challenges include quickly connecting struggling students to academic and health services that are available on the main campus but not at the satellite location.

One faculty member pointed out that “logistically, not being on the main campus can [make it] challenging for them to connect with supports there.” Within these comments, faculty identified specific services such as the library, learning and tutoring centers, the main cafeteria and campus center, and health services. Although the faculty perceive these services as relevant to the students, these issues were not addressed in any focus groups. This may mean that the faculty perceive these as more important to students than they really are. Because the majority of students in the program are commuters, some of these services are not necessarily as utilized by the students as faculty may assume. Additionally, library services are often available online more readily than faculty may realize. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, even more services may be available to students via remote than ever before.

Health services were also addressed as a service to which students may have limited access since it is off the main campus, and which faculty see as a possible challenge for students. A faculty member commented, “I’ve had a couple students who have needed or may have benefited from counseling supports, and connecting them with
the main campus has been challenging.” These comments point to the disadvantage that
the education department has in not being able to fully connect students with important
university-based services. As this was identified by faculty but not students, it is possible
that this is also an issue that faculty perceive as a greater challenge than students do.
Faculty may be unaware of options to help students connect with health services. The
program could address this with more information given to faculty about how to work
with students to connect them to these services.

**Understanding the Connection Between Diversity and Retention**

This study did not specifically address diversity in the UBTEP. However, it was
brought up in interviews and focus groups enough to become relevant to the discussion.
From the comments made by all participants, it is apparent that the issue of diversity is a
factor that plays into important Sunnydale UBTEP decisions, including faculty hiring,
student recruitment, and student retention. In both faculty interviews and student focus
groups, diversity was defined both explicitly and implicitly as encompassing racial
diversity and socioeconomic diversity. At times the term “diversity” was also used more
broadly by study participants to encompass a more general philosophy.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Sunnydale University is an urban university serving a
racially and ethnically diverse population. Identifying and improving diversity is
important to the operation of the Sunnydale College of Education, but feedback from
faculty and administrators indicate that this is an area in which the UBTEP could be
improved. Study participants indicated that more efforts are needed to create a more
diverse community of students and faculty. They identified multiple areas in which
diversity is relevant to the operations of the College.
First, the instructional body of the UBTEP should be more representative. Second, the recruitment and retention of students from diverse background is crucial to the mission of the College. Third, creating a more diverse student population has important implications for the success of graduates of the UBTEP when they begin teaching careers. These factors are discussed in more detail below.

Some Sunnydale UBTEP faculty assert that the College of Education takes the diversity of both the student body and the faculty very seriously, with one faculty member saying, “The college in general is very interested in diversity and supporting diverse students [by] providing role models to them.” This speaks to the college’s efforts to consider the demographics of students when evaluating the makeup of the faculty. According to the University common data sets that are publicly available, 272 faculty members identify as a member of a minority group. Data on the number of College of Education faculty who identify as a member of a minority group was unavailable. However, the perception of the faculty is that the College of Education does not represent the diversity of the university as a whole, which may impact their ability to meet the needs of a diverse student body. In regards to this, one faculty member stated, “I think a lot of white professors are teaching the students and there’s maybe a disconnect with the population of students coming in.” This comment reflected the perceptions of several faculty members that the UBTEP is not providing a diverse faculty to the students. In this way, the program is not serving its diverse student population well. This lack of faculty diversity also impacts the college’s ability to attract and retain students who would expand the program’s diversity.
In fact, faculty participants identified retention of students, particularly racially and socioeconomically diverse students, as an area in which data can help inform better implementation practices. Several faculty members commented that retention is always an issue that can be fruitfully examined, with one faculty member stating that “there’s a question mark about why students leave.” While faculty addressed this gap in understanding, this did not come up in conversations with administration, indicating a possible gap of knowledge between data administrators are collecting about student retention and what faculty are aware of. Connecting faculty to this information, if available, may help faculty members to better connect with students who are at risk of leaving the program. Comprehending how to improve retention is difficult, since each student has their own reasons for choosing to leave the program. The overall feeling of faculty participants was that they want to do better at retaining diverse students, but they are struggling to identify a clear pathway towards more successful efforts.

The cost of entering and progressing through the program may be impacting student recruitment and retention. The costs of licensing exams are made available to students on the College of Education website (as discussed in Chapter 4). Seeing these costs laid out may be a deterrent to potential applicants. This is supported by comments from faculty that one possible reason for low recruitment and retention of students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds is financial. One faculty participant stated that there is a perception within the program that “finances are an issue with regard to students being able to persist in the program toward graduation.” This factor was identified in several interviews. Faculty frequently discussed this issue in relation to
diversity, implying that financial need was frequently experienced by UBTEP students from under-represented populations.

Generally, faculty did not clarify whether they were referring to racial diversity or socioeconomic diversity when they made these statements. However, they did suggest that there is a need for greater financial support of their students due to the costs associated with completing a second major (where relevant; see Chapter 4) and applying for licensure. The majority of faculty participants indicated that program administrators and leaders struggle to find ways to assist their students to meet the unique financial demands that students in non-professional majors do not face. For students from diverse backgrounds, completing a teacher education program can be cost prohibitive, as discussed below in this chapter. The inability to assist students financially clearly curtails the support that UBTEP students can expect from the programs. This is an issue that the administrators are aware of and are continuously exploring avenues for supporting students with financial need. As described in Chapter 4, the College of Education website provides students with resources to supplement their financial aid with grants and scholarships. More exploration into how to ensure faculty are aware of these supports is warranted to reduce this perception of faculty.

And because faculty and administrators both affirmed that the main purpose of the program is ensuring “the success of teacher candidates [seeking to] become highly qualified teachers” the issue of retention extends beyond program students, reaching into the retention of new teachers. Although this study does not specifically examine teacher retention, the operation of the Sunnydale UBTEP should be informed by the number of graduates who begin teaching careers after graduation and by how long they remain in
the profession. A UBTEP that is developing well-prepared teachers should be able to support their efforts by demonstrating that their graduates enter the teaching profession and remain there, in accordance with stated program goals. To meet this goal, the Office of Field Experience and Office of Education Enrollment and Certification both do follow-up outreach to alumni of the program to collect data on whether or not they have remained in the teaching profession. One impediment that was mentioned in interviews is a lack of response to outreach, especially from students who may have moved on from teaching. This is an area in which the program can continue to adapt in order to gather useful data with which to inform the program.

One way in which the program appears to work towards ensuring that their graduates are well prepared and able to persist in their careers is by building relationships with community schools. One faculty participant suggested that “if some of our alums get hired in one of our partnership schools, because they have a built in support, that’s a way for us to continue to support their work.” This relationship-building is discussed further in Chapter 6 in connection to student teaching, but it is a key element of the program’s operations. Because Sunnydale is a university serving a diverse urban community, the diversity of the partner schools should be reflected in both the faculty and student body.

**Developing the Faculty-Student Connections**

In study interviews, faculty members and administrators affirmed that effective program operation relies on their ability to adequately support students. Faculty-student connections fill many important student support needs including bridging the gap between Sunnydale College of Education students and the university, helping students
navigate UBTEP program requirements, demonstrating real care for UBTEP students and building strong connections between program pedagogy and subject material.

As one administrator stated, program faculty and program administrators make an effort to “act as a liaison between the university, the students and the state at the end of their program [in order to] to recommend them for licensure.” This liaison role is a key component of the program’s support for students, as it allows the college to act as both a guide and an advocate for students. Study interviews suggest that the faculty of the College of Education perceive themselves to be working on many levels to build a strong and supportive community for their students in order to fulfill this liaison role. Acting as a liaison begins by connecting with the students in meaningful ways early in their process.

Interviews and focus groups also suggest that building a strong student community is a priority for Sunnydale College of Education faculty and leadership; data suggests that they seek to meet their goals of supporting the students. In study focus groups, students commented that they see how the UBTEP is building these communities. One student commented, “They told me ‘You’re going to be with the same set of people for all your classes, all three semesters. You’ll help each other through.’” Students articulated that they felt positive about this cohort model as a foundation for building up students’ sense of community and support for each other.

However, students also reported that the implementation of this model could be improved. Some students reported that they would like to have a stronger introduction into the education program. The College of Education has been working on building in more early workshops and orientation activities for prospective students, which may
work to meet the needs expressed by these students who were near completion of the program. One student commented that the abrupt transition that commenced after acceptance into the program felt like this: “You get into education, and it’s kind of like bam bam bam.” Other students agreed with the sentiment that jumping into everything at once could feel disorienting and frantic. Instead, students perceived that there needs to be more guidance. Student participants who reported this may have entered the program before current interventions had been implemented. Further feedback on current workshops and orientations is needed to get a fuller picture.

A particular area of guidance would be with the educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). This is a multimedia assessment that students prepare during their clinical experience and is required for licensure in New Jersey. The sections of the edTPA include lesson plan examples, reflection essays, and video recordings of the student teaching, which can bring with it security issues due to having children in the classroom. The cohort of students interviewed was part of the first year of edTPA delivery and thus, student perceptions reflect the early stages of implementation. In the two years since their experience, the program has built in more workshops and resources for the students so they have an easier time completing and submitting edTPA materials. Two students offered suggestions for the program in order to implement a smoother transition with more community building:

The first class you have should be, ‘Okay, this is what’s going to happen over the next two years, you’re going to take these classes, you’re going to have these certain things to do for edTPA, you’re going to have to do practicum.’ They should break it all down for you. Student participant

Break everything down, explain to us what to do in every single class, what you need to have to graduate. Student participant
Student predicted that this kind of detailed outlining, if included from the very beginning, would help to prepare them for the workload they would experience as well as helping them to avoid any feelings of surprise at the certification requirements.

Interviews with administrators in particular suggested that they take this responsibility to heart. One administrator in a student support position said that, “Our office, though small, [recognizes that] we have a mighty task in which we help to orient the students to the requirements of education majors in programs.” This included helping students understand the transition between being a student and being a professional and navigating life issues that sometimes emerged during in the process.

As one faculty member described it, “In general, some have questions about career path, or I will answer questions about technical issues such as permission for a prerequisite. My students also have issues like [taking] a medical leave or having to change their curriculum plan.” This commentary puts into perspective the gravity that some faculty members and administrators assign to ensuring that they are creating a space in which students can be successful.

Faculty participants reported a perception that the faculty as a whole is working towards creating a sense of community for the students. As one faculty member said, “We have a very good faculty for the most part, who are really very caring. And [a caring] staff as well.” This perception that the faculty, overall, is caring speaks to the value they place on supporting their students. This caring approach connects back to the role of being a liaison for Sunnydale UBTEP students. An administrator in the college pointed out that this includes working with the university to ensure that the UBTEP is meeting the needs of the students. This administrator stated that their role is “to work
well with [the] upper administration (of the university) in terms of advocating strongly for resources for the college to be able to do what we need to do well.” This statement highlights that the administration is highly attuned to the work they must do to ensure that they are always supporting the students.

Faculty also reported that they stay connected with each other in order to help keep their students moving forward. As one described, “We have a cohort model. Usually when one student is struggling [in a class] they’re struggling in all [other] classes. So we [the faculty] talk to each other and we try to find ways to support them.” By creating this feedback loop amongst the professors, they can work to ensure that students don’t fall through the cracks and that issues are addressed before they become insurmountable for both the student and the program.

The connection between College of Education faculty members and students may be different than the way in which faculty and students interact and connect in other university departments, both in terms of faculty-student relationships and class engagement. One faculty member explained, “They [the students] prefer the classes in this building…because the professors are more engaging, the classes are more interesting.” This speaks to both the professional development aspect of the program and the older age of Sunnydale College of Education students as they begin their coursework. This creates a more positive experience for the students, adding to their feeling of overall support from the faculty.

These classes are also more focused on specific professional topics that may create a more engaging environment for UBTEP students. Faculty perceptions may indicate that the faculty see the education classes as holding more value for the students.
This perception can be investigated further to expand the understanding of the worth of the classes to the students. As the faculty member added, “It’s a challenge to pay attention and stay awake in their subject level [non-College of Education] classes because the professors, though extremely knowledgeable about their subjects, they just lecture, they’re not teachers.” The perception of this faculty member is that the professors in the College of Education create classes that model good teaching practices rather than simply disseminating knowledge. Because UBTEP professors are teaching their students how to teach, not just giving them material, these professors may be creating more engaging courses. This connection to teaching and using pedagogy in the classroom could lead to a meta-discussion about the act of teaching, further enhancing the value of the courses to the students. While not all education classes may follow this model, it may be worth exploring those that do.

While the pedagogical styles may be more engaging in the education classes, some student participants suggested that they would like to see “a little bit more communication between all the teachers in this department about what they’re all teaching.” Specifically, some students brought up issues in regards to professors’ differing pedagogical foci. While acknowledging that Sunnydale UBTEP professors “are all good at what they do,” some students articulated a concern that “they [the professors] would contradict one another.” Instead of being offered potentially contradictory information, these students saw a need for more oversight to ensure that all of UBTEP professors were giving students the same information “about syntax, or academic language, or what qualifies as certain skills.” Without this clarity, concerned students reported that they are often left feeling that they need to just pick one or the other, not
knowing if one approach is better. Creating more feedback options for students to report these issues could add to the faculty ability to better engage students.

As with any college program, students and faculty sometimes do not work as well together as the department might hope. Students reported conflicts with professors that impacted their outlook about the program and how well it supports them. Persistent conflicts with core class professors can impact student retention. As an example, one student reported that “I had a conflict with a professor and I was forced to retake the course with them.” While students acknowledge that conflicts can happen, they reported that the small number of faculty teaching the core classes in the education department impacted the students’ ability to feel successful when they ran into conflicts with professors. The size of the faculty connects back to the overarching idea that the operation of the program can impact the perceived experiences of the students, which in turn can impact retention in the program.

Another student commented that while there was no specific conflict to report, a professor was not as encouraging as they would have liked. The student said that “the professor told me head on that it was going to be challenging for me [as a history teacher] because I had a political science background, as opposed to coming out of social studies. So I found that to be discouraging.” In these student statements, we can see an opportunity for professional development initiatives to address faculty-student issues that can impact retention and increase student feelings of success.

Transparency is another area in which the Sunnydale UBTEP could improve based on student feedback. Some students said they often felt uninformed as the UBTEP made changes and adjustments. This created a negative perception and reduced the
feeling of community. As one student described it, when changes came along they felt like the administration was coldly pronouncing, “‘we’re going to change’ or ‘we’re going to add a few classes’, or ‘we’re going to take these classes away.’ And tuition keeps going up and up.” This can make it challenging for students to navigate the changing expectations of the college and stay on track. It also reduces the impression that the faculty and administration of the UBTEP have the students’ best interest in mind.

Although the administration works diligently to keep students informed via email and other communication media, the students here are expressing not just an interest in staying informed, but of perhaps being part of the process of implementing any changes.

**Identifying Challenges with Mentoring**

Another area that was addressed in faculty interviews concerns mentoring of students (an in-depth analysis of comments about mentoring will be addressed in Chapter 5). Here I review comments that relate specifically to the implementation of the program and how the faculty see mentorship in the UBTEP. Issues that connect mentoring to the operation of the UBTEP include formal and informal mentoring, mentoring from the clinical supervisor, and limitations to the provision of mentoring to students.

Faculty pointed to several mentorship opportunities for various groups of students as part of the main campus operation as well as within the College of Education. One faculty member commented that “I think there are formal and informal ways of mentoring, and I think faculty do both in and out of the College of Education.” This comment points to the different programs provided by Sunnydale University that support a variety of student groups such as incoming freshmen, students from underrepresented backgrounds (including one specifically targeted toward male students from
underrepresented backgrounds) and honors scholars. Some of these resources have been described in Chapter 4. However, as previously noted, connecting education students with these programs can be challenging for the College of Education due to its off-campus location and that the College of Education students are primarily a commuter population. Additionally, these programs are not specifically geared towards supporting the unique needs of education students.

Faculty members see mentoring within the College of Education as taking various forms and coming from various people. One place that mentoring emerges from is the Office of Field Experience. This office is responsible for coordinating the clinical experience for the students by placing them in a school and acting as a liaison between the students and their clinical supervisor. As one administration member describes it, “By the time the students are in their final year, they have a clinical supervisor who acts more in the role of a mentor.” This administrator went on to explain that the clinical supervisors go through training every year to ensure that they and the Office of Field Experiences have the same expectations for providing students with the tools they need to do well in their clinical year and beyond. This indicates that there are attempts to ensure that students receive individualized support while they are in the field. However, as stated, the mentorship role of these clinical supervisors appears to be assumed rather than explicitly assigned. In the time since this interview was conducted, the program has added more detailed resources such as video on-demand webinars, and has updated the handbook to include the most recent changes to the requirements for teacher candidates and clinical educators (described in Chapter 4) to assist the clinical educator in
understanding their role as more of a mentorship opportunity and increase the
effectiveness of the partnership.

The most commonly discussed impediment to mentoring within the UBTEP is
funding. The funding issue is attributed to a variety of problems as identified by the
faculty. The first problem is the university or institution itself. The faculty do not believe
the university holds mentoring programs in high esteem and is therefore unlikely to
contribute the additional funding to create a mentoring program within the UBTEP. As
one faculty member commented, “Developing support programs for students that rely
upon faculty to serve in mentorship and other capacities is not something that’s prized”
by the university administration, whether it be in terms of program outcome or tenure and
reappointment of faculty. Because of this, mentorship funding from the university can be
difficult to secure, especially in already constrained budget negotiations.

Looking beyond the institution, grants can become a source of funding, but these
are competitive and scarce. One faculty member described a situation in which they
piloted a program for student-to-student mentoring that worked well, but only as long as
they were able to fund it with a grant. “We received a small grant and college students
were paid an hourly salary, and it worked well until the money dried up.” This example
illustrates that even if you can get a program started, sustaining it can be a challenge.

Another challenge for the operation of the UBTEP lies in the difficulty of
recruiting mentors. As one faculty member states, “We have so many teacher candidates,
and we have many overworked professors; I don’t know who would be the mentors.”
Even with pay, faculty participants report that they are already feeling overloaded with
classes and other obligations that, coupled with a lack of support from the university administration, can make the job unappealing.

Faculty concede that the cost and time commitment could be alleviated if the program were structured effectively. As one faculty member commented, “With the price of what I’m imagining, I would see it as more like small group so that they’re targeted discussions around their content areas.” This scenario would allow for less of a time commitment from faculty who meet with students. In this scenario, it would also be important that the mentor is experienced in the subject area of focus, and that the group consists of a single cohort, all at the same level. The administration could also be asked for financial support “with [the] technology to make mentoring possible.” This could include access to remote conferencing software to allow mentors to work with more students via remote access, rather than having to share a physical space for meetings.

**Summary of Theme 1: Self-reflection on the operations can guide the faculty and administration to successful implementation of the program.**

This theme examined the operation and implementation of the Sunnydale University College of Education program through the lens of the program’s ability to meet student needs. Faculty and student participant comments highlighted areas in which the UBTEP is doing a good job of supporting students as well as areas in which the UBTEP can make improvements.

Interviews with the faculty and administration reveal a high degree of self-reflection and openness to student feedback which can be used to help improve the program. While the definition of “diversity” was not clearly articulated by faculty members, it is clear that at least some faculty perceive a more diverse student body would
add an important element to the program. Study participants’ comments about diversity within the program suggest a desire on the part of program faculty and administrators to attend to and improve in this area.

Student retention was also identified as an area that needs continual scrutiny because students’ reasons for leaving the program appear to be wide ranging and at times unclear to some faculty members. Faculty and students commented in detail about the importance of community and faculty-student connections, highlighting the importance of these elements to the successful implementation of the program. Finally, the importance of mentoring was addressed in connection to the UBTEP. This analysis of the interview and focus group data suggests that the program has many of the basic elements to support students successfully, but there are still areas that need to be addressed.

**Research Question 2: How do state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP?**

The second research question guiding this study asks, “How do state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP and what impact does this have on the ability of the program to give students what they need to feel ready to begin a teaching career?” The state of New Jersey imposes requirements on colleges of education. These requirements make up the second major factor that influences the ability of the UBTEP to support its students.

Through analysis of faculty interview and student focus group data, it became clear that the Sunnydale College of Education attempts to conform to the state’s one-size-fits-all requirements while also adjusting, wherever possible, to meet the unique needs of Sunnydale students. In interviews and focus groups, faculty members and students shared
their perspectives about the curriculum requirements, clinical experiences, and testing requirements to which the UBTEP must adhere and the impact of these state requirements on both the operation of the program and the student experience. These perspectives illuminated the impact of state requirements on the UBTEP’s ability to meet the needs of its students. Two themes emerged to answer research question 2. Theme 2 addresses the ways in which state requirements are perceived as limiting the UBTEP’s ability to support students. This theme and its subthemes will be considered below.

Theme 2: State requirements place limitations on the ways the UBTEP can adapt to meet the needs of students.

Faculty participants reported that some state requirements hinder their ability to nurture program students. One faculty member suggested that state regulations may constrain the teacher profession. This individual explained, “I think the state needs to really rethink all of the teacher prep programs. I don’t think we’re doing right by our future teachers with just a lot of these state regulations.” This faculty member worried that UBTEPs throughout the state were being harmed by state regulations. The perception voiced is that the state needs to go back to the drawing board to look more closely at these programs as well as the students who are enrolled in them and reimagine the way in which UBTEPs are allowed to meet the needs of students. This faculty member was concerned that the current system is not supporting students well, due in large part to the state requirements. (See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the state requirements).

Three subthemes regarding state requirements and their impacts emerged from the faculty interviews and student focus groups. These were navigating curriculum and course progression, scaffolding in the clinical experience and meeting testing
requirements. I will begin by highlighting the way in which one faculty member explained the various state requirements and the way they shape College of Education requirements from entrance into the program to completion of teaching certification.

Since they can't start until their junior year, if they don't do well their first two years, and they don't have a 3.0 GPA, they can't enter the program. So that delays any academic progress with it as an education major; they're also required to pass an interview. And if they don't pass the interview, they remediate with them, but some students just decide it's not worth it. Then upon completion of the academic portion of the program...we have to ensure that they pass more PRAXIS exams in addition to the one that they needed to pass to get into the program. And they also have to successfully complete a [3.0] GPA and the edTPA portfolio, which also the state has now required that they need to pass in order to become certified in New Jersey. We have outside entities that are making it very difficult to become a teacher in New Jersey. Faculty participant

This faculty member appeared to be frustrated at what they perceived as the interference of the state government (the “outside entities”) on the UBTEP’s enrollment and educative process. From entrance requirements through completion, student progress is tied to state requirements that the College of Education must then find time and resources to help students to meet. In conversations with other faculty members, the issues of testing and licensure requirements came up repeatedly, indicating the importance of these issues and how much they weighed on the minds of the faculty. The concern expressed by these faculty members showed how the complexity of tracking and maneuvering through the state’s myriad requirements can overtake the UBTEP’s mission of supporting teacher candidates throughout their program. The next section will examine this issue more closely by exploring each subtheme in turn.

Navigating Curriculum and Course Progression

The first subtheme addresses the way in which the UBTEP is structured in order to meet state requirements. In interviews, both faculty members and students pointed out
various state requirements that had a direct impact on the program. One such area is program course requirements. The main factors identified as problematic in this area included time spent in coursework, material covered in courses and when courses could be taken.

As described in Chapter 4, undergraduate students who intend to complete their teacher education and obtain licensure must declare a double major (with few exceptions including Physical Education and Music): a liberal arts or sciences area major and an education major. This was addressed by students during focus groups in which they described their belief that the UBTEP cannot give students the amount of time they need to fully learn the pedagogical practices required in the classroom. One student explained, “[Because] we have to have that other major, it doesn’t give the education program enough time.” This student was affirming that the amount of time students must spend on meeting the requirements of a liberal arts or sciences major takes away time that could be spent on education courses.

Because education courses are more focused on the actual practice of teaching, students express the understandable concern that their content major hinders their ability to get the information they need. Another student agreed, saying “It makes the program feel rushed.” This perception of feeling rushed created feelings of frustration and disappointment in UBTEP students. These students described a conflict between what they actually needed, such as an increase in time spent learning the basics of teaching, and the limited time that the College of Education could actually give them because of the limitations due to state policies.
Students asserted that if queried, faculty members would agree that more time is required in education courses in order to fully cover the material that a teacher education student needs. As one student stated, “We are learning so much, I know even they would agree they would like to have us for longer.” Students expressed confidence that the faculty would support this idea. Students also felt frustrated that faculty did not have the power to bring this kind of request to fruition. Yet again, they pointed out how the UBTEP is limited by the state.

Students pointed out how course content is limited by the number of courses and credits offered by the UPTEP, and how this severely constricts the instruction they receive about common teaching issues. In reference to this concern, one student commented, “They so briefly touch upon things that I think are more like day to day for teachers. They think that we just will get it in our student teaching. And that’s not always the case.” This student participant highlighted the perception that faculty members assume that what is not covered in the class can be picked up during the clinical experience. One such area is classroom management.

Most students agreed that there was very little instruction on how to handle “behavioral issues” in the classroom and that they said they did not feel prepared to do so. A student commented that “they (the classes) don’t teach you the proper implementation of behavior plans.” This discussion about missing pieces of curriculum suggests that students are well aware of the kinds of practical skills they need to be successful. They’re also aware that the program is not training them in some of these skills. It appears that state limitations on coursework are directly and adversely impacting student’s ability to feel fully prepared when they graduate. Unfortunately, the time
restrictions created by the state requirements makes adding these skills into the curriculum very difficult.

State regulations regarding the second major and the number of courses required in each major leave little room for the College of Education to expand the program to include additional instruction, regardless of student requests. Students acknowledged this restriction in an understanding way, but they also expressed frustration at the inflexibility of the state to allow alternatives. In the absence of additional classes, some students stated that they would like to be able to start the education program earlier in their college career. One student offered the suggestion that “If we were able to take at least the easier courses with our general ed courses, something we didn’t need field work for,” that the pace of their education classes could be more thoughtful and students would be able to make better connections between their education and subject major classes. Unfortunately, state guidelines do not allow the university to consider this adaptation, and therefore the UBTEP must continue to delay the start of education classes. This example highlights how the lack of flexibility in state requirements inhibits the UBTEP from meeting the unique needs of its own student population.

Scaffolding in the Clinical Experience

The second subtheme regarding how state requirements limit UBTEP adaptability concerns the clinical experience. During the clinical practice (previously commonly referred to as student teaching) the education student works in a classroom alongside an experienced teacher, identified as the clinical educator. This happens at the end of the student’s UBTEP coursework. As identified in discussion above, the UBTEP has limited time in which to prepare students for their clinical practice. This creates the concern (for
both faculty members and students) that students have not had enough preparation to lead a classroom. Specific aspects of this issue that emerged during interviews and focus groups include time in the field, inability to take coursework during clinical experience and building relationships with partner schools.

Students and faculty members noted that they would like to have more time available in the curriculum for classroom observation before entering a classroom as a teacher candidate. One faculty member commented, “All universities across the United States are insisting that students have more in class time in actual schools, either observing or teaching a little bit or teaching a lot and ultimately ending in the clinical experience.” Here, we see that at least some faculty perceive that education professionals at colleges throughout the country are in agreement about this and may be working towards increasing class time, which is seen as crucial to the success of their students. This increase in class time is considered by some faculty members to be a significant factor in developing better prepared teachers by graduation. However, faculty members are hindered by state requirements limiting the amount of time the college of education can work with students.

Feedback from student focus groups further supports the importance of building more field experience into the program. There were many comments regarding the importance of field work. I’ve highlighted three below.

Being in the field helps you begin to understand why you have to have standards. Student participant

Some of the things that we need to see, like SGOs [student growth objectives], the curriculum, we can’t really dive into in a classroom. We can only really dive into it when we’re out in the field. Student participant
Increase of classroom time watching real teachers teach with different age groups and different socioeconomic groups [is important]. *Student participant*

These students are addressing the ways in which abstract ideas that may be covered in a seminar class become real only when applied to a concrete situation. By incorporating more time for students to work in the field, even as observers, they would be exposed to a variety of teaching methods and experience different issues that might emerge in different groups of children. This could begin as early as the program’s first semester, which would allow students to connect their education coursework with what they see in the classroom.

Another issue brought up by students is that time spent in the classroom during clinical experience, whether observing or teaching, can adversely impact the student’s graduation timeline. One student commented that “we’re not allowed to take other classes during our student teaching,” referring to the year-long clinical practice, which comprises two semesters. The exception to this are the courses that are taken along with the clinical practice year. This means that all other coursework must be completed prior to that final year. Embedded in this point is the concern that students need to move steadily through their coursework in order to be on time for their clinical experience or risk being delayed by an entire year. This would create a ripple effect, delaying their graduation and costing them more time and money.

During the clinical year, the UBTEP is responsible for securing a placement for each student. Efforts are made to foster relationships with local school districts and find clinical educators who will be good role models for students. Because the length of the clinical experience has been expanded to a full year, the UBTEP has the challenge of finding schools willing to take on students. A faculty member commented, “The state
would like to see the teacher candidate with the same clinical educator for the entire year.” While this is not a NJ state requirement, it is highly encouraged as a way to build continuity for the students. It also creates an extra burden on the UBTEP, in that it must find partner schools and clinical educators who are willing to make this commitment.

In ensuring that the UBTEP students are being properly prepared through these community school partnerships, program alumni commented on the importance of ensuring that clinical educators are utilizing those teaching practices that are being taught in their classes. Their perception is that this can reinforce the student’s desire to stay in the profession. As one alum stated, “Getting enough teachers in the field who are actually doing what [the] research says [works]” can greatly influence a student to persist in the field of education, because they are likely to connect what they are learning in their classes to the real world.

**Meeting Testing Requirements**

Testing requirements for students entering a college of education have increased over time, both in the types of tests required and in the minimum scores needed to qualify. Faculty participants and students both expressed frustration related to testing in several areas including the impact of testing on student enrollment, concerns about completing and passing the edTPA which is a recently added assessment for licensure in New Jersey, and the lack of correlation between testing and good teaching.

Several faculty members expressed the idea that increasing test requirements for education students has begun to change the overall makeup of their program’s student body. The Praxis Core is the primary examination referenced in connection to this (see Chapter 4 for more details on basic skills test requirements including Praxis Core). The
perception of some faculty is that the challenge of passing the Praxis Core is having a visible impact on the student population because it creates higher barriers for students of diverse racial backgrounds. This issue was raised by several faculty members who specifically noted that these requirements are creating a gatekeeping effect that keeps out students from non-white backgrounds. I’ve included statements from three such study participants below.

[Student struggles to pass the exam] probably cut [our entrance numbers] in half. And that has probably made our demographics whiter and more female. *Faculty participant*

Many [of those who don’t pass the Core] are students of color or students who are second language learners, and I think 85% of teachers in our country are white and female and [we] definitely need to diversify. *Faculty participant*

We’ve experienced a big decline in our number of students of color in our program since the Core. *Faculty participant*

These faculty members and others are saying that they perceive that the system is not working. They do not believe that it is reaching the most vulnerable students in higher education, who represent those students who are most needed in the education field.

These faculty members are pointing out that current testing requirements may be impacting students of color at a disproportionate rate. This suggests the existence of a significant problem for the Sunnydale UBTEP, as it is an urban school in which the overall student body’s demographic is not reflected in UBTEP entrance rates. These assertions raise significant questions about the state requirements for the College of Education and the value of testing, which may be creating an unintentional gatekeeping effect. Of note here is that while the faculty focused primarily on the Praxis Core exam, few mentioned alternative ways students can meet the basic skills requirements. It is
unknown if faculty are unaware of these or if students opt more frequently for the Praxis Core, making that more of a point of contention.

The perceptions of the faculty are that this issue impacts students in UBTEPs across New Jersey. One faculty member remarked that “They [Sunnydale students] do struggle with the New Jersey DOE requirements for licensure, but I don’t think that is unique to this group of students. It’s across the state.” This indicates a broader issue regarding student preparedness for test material and connects back to an earlier comment from a faculty member about whether or not the state requirements are a benefit or a hindrance to education students and UBTEPs overall.

Another state required assessment is the edTPA which includes a video element that can make completing the assessment difficult for some students. Helping the teacher candidates to implement the edTPA has proven challenging for the UBTEP. As one faculty member remarked, “The edTPA is a big concern, because we can only work in districts that allow us to video tape. So not only do we need a district that allow us to videotape but we also need a clinical educator that’s on board.” This faculty member’s comment aligned with the concerns voiced by other faculty that the UBTEP may not have all of the resources needed to be able to support students in passing the edTPA, but they are trying their hardest to create workarounds wherever possible. As noted above, the UBTEP has already made efforts to create relationships with school districts in which to place their students, and adding in these edTPA challenges increases the struggle.

Finally, some faculty members argued that strong standardized test results do not guarantee a good teacher. As one faculty member put it, “I don’t necessarily think there’s a correlation between passing those tests and being a better teacher.” This comment
points to the many nuanced indicators of good teaching that are not measured by standardized testing. In actuality, the tests may keep potentially good teachers out of the program. As a range of faculty members repeated during multiple interviews, whether or not a student passes these tests “has nothing to do with whether you’d be good in the classroom, good with children.” In this quote, we can see faculty member frustration about the gatekeeping effect of test requirements, and about those good teachers who are being shut out of the program.

**Summary of Theme 2: State requirements place limitations on the ways the UBTEP can adapt to meet the needs of students.**

This theme examined the ways in which state policies place limitations on the Sunnydale UBTEP’s ability to meet the needs of students. As illustrated by the words of those I interviewed, Sunnydale UBTEP faculty and students are keenly aware of the restrictive nature of New Jersey’s state requirements while remaining cognizant of the importance of retaining reasonable standards.

The three key areas addressed by the above subthemes (curriculum and course progression, field experience, and standardized testing) are focal points that emerged in different ways throughout the interviews and focus groups with study participants. These points about the impact of state requirements on the program were frequently voiced by both faculty members and students, indicating widely held concerns crossing both groups. In the next section’s discussion of Theme 3: The state requirements have an impact on the individual student’s perceptions of their ability to begin their career feeling prepared and supported, I will continue highlighting how state requirements impact
student perceptions of support and their ability to feel ready to begin a teaching career at a more individual level.

**Theme 3: The state requirements have an impact on the individual student’s perceptions of their ability to begin their career feeling prepared and supported.**

As noted above, study findings indicate that both faculty participants and students perceive state requirements to have an adverse impact on the Sunnydale UBTEP’s ability to support and prepare students for teaching success. In addition, they revealed that they impose a range of more personal, individual-level challenges to UBTEP students. These challenges will be explored through two additional subthemes: the impact of the double major and licensure requirements and the challenge of managing expenses related to testing and licensure.

**The Impact of the Double Major and Licensure Requirements**

As discussed earlier, New Jersey requires education students (with limited exceptions) to pursue a double major: one in education and one in a specific subject field. This requirement creates multiple challenges for students. First, students must quickly transition from a subject major into a professional major. Second, students can become overwhelmed by trying to meet all the requirements of two separate majors in a condensed span of time. Third, students may struggle to find connections between their subject major and their education major. Fourth, students expressed concerns about a lack of communication between their subject major program and the education program. Fifth, students requested more time for field experiences and classroom observations within their subject majors. The sixth and final challenge posed by the double major requirement
is that the students’ perception of disconnect between their majors influenced the way they perceived the edTPA and licensure requirements.

The first challenge presented by the double major requirement is that students can experience a type of culture shock when they transition from being a student in their subject major to functioning as an education major. While the coursework in the College of Education doesn’t begin until Junior year, students planning to apply for the College of Education are encouraged to do so as early as their first semester in order to begin participating in workshops and orientations. As a faculty member pointed out, “They have to very quickly make a decision that they want to become a college of ed student because there’s so many requirements, and then very quickly go from a student track to a professional track.” That fast pivot from operating like a student to preparing for a profession means that the focus must change. This shift can be challenging for even the most prepared student, and it requires that the UBTEP have support ready to help students make this transition. As described in Chapter 4, the program does being orienting students as early as possible, but it is up to the student to fully engage in these outreach activities.

The challenge can be acerbated if students have not had an opportunity to explore what it means to be a teacher. “I have not seen that a lot of them have exposure to teaching or education prior to starting formally in the program.” Without prior exposure, students may not know what to expect from either their education courses or the fieldwork that they must complete. This links back to the structure of the program, but it also speaks to the question of how the UBTEP can support students while they progress through the program to promote retention and perceptions of support to success.
A second challenge presented by the double major requirement is that students report feeling overwhelmed. One student remarked on this by saying “I wish instead of having a second major, we could just do education.” This succinct statement was echoed by several other students: they would have preferred to concentrate their time and energy on a single education major rather than having to split their focus between two subjects.

Being required to split one’s focus can have an adverse mental impact on students’ feelings of success, especially since course load is increased by the double major. Students said they felt pressure to make sure they had completed all the coursework for their major before even considering registering for education classes. Currently, students are advised to complete classes for their major before entering the program in order to mitigate potential conflicts in scheduling and minimize delays in their progress through the education program. One student commented that this was a shrewd suggestion, saying “They suggested this for good reason. Because you would not want to be taking education courses and then worrying about three sociology classes.” It is clear that UBTEP faculty and administrators understand the challenge of staying on track while balancing two majors.

However, this pressure to finish one major before starting the next adds to the emotional load students must handle while working towards their graduation and career goals. Students and faculty both expressed frustration that state requirements can create such conflict in students’ ability to take courses in the proper sequence or within a reasonable time frame. Some students reported that they had been greatly hampered by the inability to get into required classes that had been closed due to low enrollment, causing them to fall behind and then have to rush to make up the time. As one student
describes the problem, “it would push us into winter or summer or [in being] a whole semester behind.” Another student described an extreme scenario of having to take seven classes in one semester just to catch up. This illustrates the problems that students may face as a result of the state requirements that limit how the UBTEP can organize its curriculum.

A third struggle imposed by the double major requirement is the difficulty of linking their subject major and the education program. As one student described it, “There’s a major disconnect between your first major and the education campus,” indicating that the two do not necessarily blend well. Instead, the students’ perception is that the two majors are very separate entities, each with individualized requirements that do not relate to the other. For students who know early on that they will be adding the education major to their course of study, the time spent working through the subject major can feel like a long period of waiting. One student described it by saying that “it’s like treading water until we got to the education program.” This suggests that when students enroll in their subject major, they are not helped to build a pedagogical link between what they learn in their major and what they learn about becoming a teacher.

A fourth area of concern regarding the double major requirement is the perceived lack of communication between the College of Education and subject major departments. As one student bluntly put it, “I feel like there is no communication” between major departments and the College of Education, especially in scheduling required courses. This impacts when students can take classes, how they complete their required courses and how the curriculum connects with their field work. One student explained that, “[My subject major] had only certain courses offered at certain times, which was really difficult
to maneuver being in the education department as well.” This student and others commented that the lack of communication left them feeling that they had to figure out how to coordinate classes on their own—a serious challenge, as class availability can be limited due to capacity, budget constraints or alternating semester scheduling. This suggests that the UBTEP could be doing more for students as they near completion of their subject major to ensure that they are can finalize their major coursework successfully before entering the education program.

These struggles reflect the difficulties imposed by state requirements and the inability of the University or the UBTEP to adjust courses to compensate. Comments made by student participants suggest that they would like to see the College of Education fight to change current curriculum requirements so that the balance of subject major and education classes shifts. One student recommended that the UBTEP should take this on because “…it’s their responsibility for, say, math education majors, to perhaps lessen the amount of math classes that you need to take and increase the math education classes you need.” While students are aware that the UBTEP is operating under state requirements, they are still dissatisfied by the lack of flexibility they encounter in scheduling classes that are meaningful to their teaching goals.

Another area in which students expressed a desire for improved subject major-education major coordination concerns pedagogical instruction in their subject major. One math student addressed this, saying “We can all agree that there should just be more classes of your major plus education, because there are a lot of math classes, there are a lot of education classes, but there’s only one math education class.” What this student would like to see is classes that address “knowledge of…mathematics and…how to teach
it.” An English major echoed this saying, “I think that in order to give us supports for our major, they would need to open up English courses specific to teachers.” They explained the disconnect in these courses by saying, “They throw literature at you, and they don’t help you discern how to break it down, or how to teach the literature, [or] what strategies you can use with other students.” They went on to describe that in their classes, they would be assigned traditional literature texts, and “it’s always read it, analyze it. But how do I teach somebody to do that?” Including more intentional courses that address not just the material or pedagogy in general, but how to teach these skills, would fill a much-desired gap that concerns students.

A fifth support element that students would like to see built into the program is increased classroom time. As discussed in the Theme #2, state requirements limit the time available to UBTEP students for classroom observation and teaching practice. However, as one student says, “It would have been beneficial if…there wasn’t this other major and we could…have clinical experiences every single year in classrooms, because that’s where we’re learning.” In this study, student participants clearly indicated that they are aware that classroom time can prove more relevant to their growth than the general subject education that they are currently receiving. This time includes both observing other teachers as well as hands on student teaching.

To the UBTEP’s credit, students perceived that they receive a good deal of support as they progress through their education courses. Student comments clarified that College of Education efforts made navigating the coursework easier, increasing retention and supporting program completion rates. Some student statements are noted here:

Everything’s just laid out and seamless. Student participant
I felt supported as far as how to navigate through the program and what classes to take and when to take them to make sure that you graduate on time. *Student participant*

They just broke it down for me that it gave me confidence to keep going. *Student participant*

The responses of these study participants highlight that the students have overall positive experiences progressing through the program.

The sixth and final challenge posed by the double major requirement involves the way in which perceived disconnects between major and education coursework can bleed into student concerns about preparation for the edTPA, one of the final hurdles from the state for licensure. As discussed in Chapter 4, the edTPA is a relatively new addition to the state’s licensure requirements. Students reported negative feelings about the edTPA requirement that didn’t necessarily reflect on the UBTEP. One student stated that, “it took away from my student teaching experience” because there so much classroom time was diverted towards making sure that the elements of the edTPA were being created. This reduced the time available to practice actually leading the classroom. Other students added that the edTPA requirements are limited in scope and don’t necessarily capture the full picture of what is happening for the teacher candidate. One student referred to the types of documents and artifacts submitted to the edTPA portfolio as creating an incomplete or artificial representation of the clinical experience, saying, “That’s not all being a teacher is.” Study findings suggest that the edTPA requirement has left at least some students feeling deflated rather than enthusiastic as they embark on the next chapter of their career.
Both faculty and students also reported that there is a disconnect between what they are taught in their classes, what they are actually doing in the field, and what the edTPA asks them to submit. Faculty acknowledge that “some of (the teacher candidates) were placed in classrooms that… [reflect best practices in education] research, but there were many of them that weren’t.” This was echoed by a student who commented, “Some of the lesson plans are different from what we have to submit to edTPA. What we do in the [classroom during student teaching] is totally different.” These comments suggest that this variability in the clinical experience creates confusion and instability in students’ perceptions of both the support they receive and their preparation for teaching. It can also create turmoil for the UBTEP, which must track which students are meeting the requirements and have clear guidance, and which students need more program intervention to ensure they complete all requirements.

*Managing Expenses Related to Testing and Licensure*

The cost of going through a teacher education program and obtaining a license in New Jersey can be prohibitive, creating another challenge for students who want to pursue an education major. “Teacher preparation is expensive” was a commonly heard statement from both faculty and students. The expense of the process may shut out potential teachers and have a serious impact on students who do choose to go through the program. The faculty acknowledge that “finances are an issue with regard to students being able to persist in the program towards graduation.” Here we see how state requirements impact retention and generate challenges for students seeking to meet these requirements.
These costs are scattered across the education program, but testing is the primary culprit as identified by faculty and students. As a faculty member explained, “It’s not just passing the test and meeting the state and federal cut scores. It’s also affording to take all of those tests which have increased [in cost] probably about 80% in the last four years.” According to another faculty member, “Financial aid doesn’t pay for [testing fees].” Without sufficient financial aid support, students must find ways to pay out of pocket for the exam and licensing fees at the end of the program. Those who need additional financial support to pay for the tests may need to find a paying job in addition to taking classes and completing student teaching. As discussed in Chapter 4, the program provides students with resources and opportunities to apply for additional funding to help mitigate these costs. However, not all students will be eligible or apply for these supports.

For some students, these costs felt unexpected, despite the fact that the program’s website posts this information. One student explained that exam fees are generated towards the end of the program, when students may have already exhausted most of their funding sources: “All of a sudden they had all these charges for us (at the end). And we’re not working now. So what do we do? How do we pay for our license?” In this situation, students may feel that they have spent a good deal of time and money to reach an end point that they cannot now meet. This indicates a possible lack of attention by either the students or administrators in terms of making sure that students are mindful of the final costs as they progress through the program.

Study findings do suggest that the college attempts to support students financially wherever possible. One faculty member reported that the program keeps “a little fund to help pay for some of the tests.” This unofficial aspect of the program is reserved for
students in dire circumstances. As described above, the fund is limited and cannot cover all unforeseen expenses for all students in need of help. Another faculty member acknowledged that they try to alleviate some of the burden imposed by these expenses, stating “In terms of smaller financial issues, we help students pay for their Praxis exams, when they have need. We help students with their edTPA.” These comments suggest that UBTEP faculty and administrators are aware of the financial challenges created by state requirements and that they work to lessen this burden. This speaks to a wider recognition of the specific needs of their students as well.

Un fortunately, several students reported that they were either unaware of the potential for financial support or that an offer of support was not fulfilled. One student stated that “They offer programs to help pay for Praxis or our Chalk and Wire that they said we have to have, and then they never reimbursed us.” Whether is due to oversight or funding, student participants asked for more transparency and honesty about these funding commitments.

**Summary of Theme 3: The state requirements have an impact on the individual student’s perceptions of their ability to begin their career feeling prepared and supported.**

This theme examined the ways in which state requirements burden individual UBTEP students, shape their perceptions of program support and adversely impact their ability to succeed in their academic career and future teaching efforts. Faculty and student statements included in this section highlight the emotional toll created by subject major-education major disconnect and how it can permeate the student teaching experience. This disconnect is created by UBTEP constraints created by state requirements regarding
curriculum and course progression. This theme also examined the financial burdens imposed on students by state testing requirements. While UBTEP faculty members and administrators report working to alleviate this stress for their students, there simply isn’t enough funding to fully support students as they struggle to meet state requirements. This can erect another barrier for students applying to be teachers as well as hampering students’ ability to persist through graduation and licensure.

Chapter Five Summary

Throughout this chapter, the words of the study participants have highlighted several key issues related to the themes that emerged from the interview analysis. First, the faculty and administration identify ongoing challenges that must be addressed for the program to fully support students. In light of this, the faculty and staff continue to find ways to evaluate and reflect on the operation of the program. Second, students and faculty both recognize that state requirements often create obstacles for the program to run in a way that supports the students. Despite these obstacles, the faculty and staff work to build support systems in an attempt to create workarounds for the students. Third, many of the participants shared ways in which the students were personally impacted by the challenge. These issues lead to a discussion of the types of supports that students and faculty see occurring in the program, as well as what they would like to see built into the program in the future. The analysis of these supports are discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Six

Findings on Student Challenges and Support

Once again, this research sought to understand the factors that inhibit a UBTEP from fully supporting its students. It also examined the challenges students face while working towards graduation and preparing for a career in education. The previous chapter explored study findings that answer research question 1, which asks how the organization and implementation of the Sunnydale UBTEP shaped the program’s ability to fully support students. It also introduced study findings that shed light on research question 2, which asks how state requirements impact the ability of the UBTEP to support students.

I now turn to an examination of those findings that address research question 3. This question asks “What are the unique challenges faced by students in a UBTEP and are the supports provided by the UBTEP adequate and impactful for students to feel ready to begin a teaching career?” This chapter will present those study findings that address this research question. Relevant findings pinpointed areas that both faculty and students identified as ripe for improvement. They also identified new, potentially useful elements that the program could work to create. These findings are summarized in Theme 4 and Theme 5, each with its own subthemes.

Theme 4 addresses the unique needs of UBTEP students and explores faculty and student perceptions about whether or not the UBTEP is meeting students’ needs adequately. Theme 5 addresses particular areas in which supports could be improved. Each of these themes and its associated subthemes will be examined in its own section.
Theme 4: The unique needs of education students may not be fully met by the supports given by the program.

Earlier themes illustrated how both UBTEP operation and state requirements can create support challenges for program students. Theme 4 examines the unique issues faced by Sunnydale’s education students. There are 4 subthemes associated with this theme: meeting personal challenges, adapting to demographic challenges, meeting scholarly challenges and fostering professional dispositions. These subthemes were derived from interviews with faculty, student focus groups, and discussions with alumni about their perceptions of the challenges that UBTEP students face that are unique to education students. I then grouped these challenges to explore what the program may or may not be doing to support and prepare the students grappling with them.

Meeting Personal Challenges

While the personal challenges faced by education students may be similar to those faced by other undergraduates, these challenges look different when associated with the responsibilities of completing the education program. This subtheme identifies some of the personal challenges unique to education students and explores their effect on students’ feelings regarding academic success and preparation for the future. These challenges include needing to continue paid work outside of their student responsibilities and the difficulty of balancing outside responsibilities with program responsibilities.

Several students noted that they are strongly urged not to work during their education classes, and especially during the clinical practice, due to the time commitments. In Clinical Practice I, teacher candidates are required to spend 3 full days a week in the P-12 classroom. During Clinical Practice II, the TC must spend 5 full days in
the classroom. Despite this, many of them still have to maintain at least part-time jobs to meet their personal financial needs. This creates stress because students know they are not able to devote as much time as they feel is necessary to their College of Education obligations. One student commented that “The education department forces you into a specific schedule, and then tells you, you cannot work anymore. I thought that was really rough.” Specifically, this student is addressing the class schedule and requirement that students not work an outside job during their clinical experience. Students identified this particular issue in connection to feeling that the UBTEP is unable to give them the financial support they need. Faculty also addressed the problem of students having to work, especially as it pertained to their clinical experience. A faculty member remarks, “I’m working with a student teacher, she works Friday, Saturday and Sunday at CVS.” Despite the requirement students not work, some of them do continue outside jobs out of necessity. This faculty member expressed frustration about the student’s need to work because of the way in which this impedes their ability to really develop the skills they will need after graduation.

Faculty participants acknowledge that by taking a step back and understanding the student as a whole person put the work issue into perspective. Some students reported that they work because they must help support their family, or that their family expects them to work. As one faculty member understands it, “Part of the struggle is kind of balancing these worlds and still pursuing their goals, to become education majors.” This acknowledgment of students’ personal challenges helps faculty to support the student as more than a just someone who is in their class, a number in the program. Another faculty member praised the efforts of students who not only work, but who may already be
involved in education. “I find our students to be hard working. They’re often taking on full-time or part-time employment, sometimes supporting their families. We have many students in our education program who are already working in the education field of being a para [professional aide].” These faculty comments are representative of a broader understanding of students’ drive to succeed, further highlighting the challenges these students face in working towards a career in education.

Splitting time and attention between paid work and course work impacts students’ ability to focus and prioritize. Some comments from faculty members are highlighted here.

The challenge our students [face] is that they have multiple responsibilities in their lives, in terms of working to care for family responsibilities and being in school---that being a student is not always, as much as they [would] like it to be---a place where they focus most of their efforts. *Faculty participant*

They come from situations where work is very important and they must make that car payment [and] pay their rent. Money is an issue, so balancing both academics and financial solvency is important to these kids. *Faculty participant*

In looking at these statements and others from faculty participants, it is clear that the faculty members understand that the stress on the students is immense, and that they are likely doing the best they can with the responsibilities that they must meet both in college and in their personal lives.

Students and faculty both acknowledge that students bear a heavy burden just in terms of how many hours there are in a day, making it challenging to meet program requirements, particularly when student teaching. Put simply by one faculty member, “They don’t have time.” This is reflected in the curriculum and the strain it puts on students, which could impact retention. One student remarked on their exhausting schedule during the clinical experience: “We’re full-time student teaching right now. So,
we’re coming [to school] and we’re going to class at seven o’clock until nine or 10. And some of us live over an hour away.” This illustrates why the program imposes the burden of asking students not to work beyond their program responsibilities. This is an area that the education system overall, not just this specific UBTEP, should study in terms of how to ensure that teacher candidates are able to make the most of their clinical experience.

Faculty members and administrators acknowledge the difficulties presented by this issue. “We’re looking at our scheduling. It would be very difficult for the students in the college to come to a class that begins at eight o’clock at night and ends at 10:40 when they’re getting up at four or five in the morning to be able to get to school at seven.” These time stresses are challenging, and it is difficult for the program to find effective ways to support the students who experience them. Given the curriculum restrictions discussed previously, the program may not be able to offer students enough support to overcome this challenge.

Adapting to Demographic Challenges

As discussed in Chapter 5, diversity was not explicitly addressed in the study. However, it was a topic of interest as part of the interviews and focus groups and has been included due to the imperative nature of the discussion of diversity in education. Because undergraduate education reflects a wide variety of demographics, UBTEP students may face challenges due to factors that include race, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, non-traditional student status, or limitations on physical ability. This subtheme addresses how faculty members and students perceive the impact of these factor on Sunnydale UBTEP students working to complete their education program.
As several faculty members commented, a significant number of the students at Sunnydale University and in the College of Education are first-generation college students (see Chapter 4 for demographic data). One faculty member remarked in reference to these students, “The ones I feel a duty or responsibility to really assist are the ones who are first-generation college students.” Following this, the same faculty participant explained, “College is a new language to them.” This was echoed by another faculty member, who said “Part of what we have to do is help them, maybe more than other students, because they don’t necessarily have a family member who’s done this before.” These comments point to the importance of paying attention to the needs of first-generation students, who may need additional help as they grapple with college or even recognize what they might need. Sunnydale University is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution, a demographic which often has students who fall into this group of first-generation students. The College of Education can potentially utilize University resources to build supports for these students through this designation.

Non-traditional students also experience unique stressors within the program. This group includes students returning to school after full-time work and student-parents who are raising children while attending school. One faculty member described this group as “untraditional students, which means adults who have had families and lived and had careers, and they’re coming back.” A large portion of these students were identified by another faculty member as “women who are coming back to school after having young children [who]…would like to become teachers.” Both of these statements indicate that some faculty perceive that there are education students who have unique demands placed on them, such as child care or other family responsibilities that a traditional
undergraduate student might not have. This awareness can lead to a better understanding of how the UBTEP can create particular supports for these students.

One major obstacle experienced by this demographic is limited access to badly needed childcare. A faculty member explained that “The timing of our courses do not always align with when day care is offered.” Scheduling conflicts like these can impact whether or not a student can enroll in education classes and graduate within the time frame of a traditional student. The cost of childcare can also be an obstacle. Challenges around childcare can lead to retention problems among this group of students. As another faculty member stated, “[The need for childcare] is putting some students from certain populations at risk of not being able to graduate.” This is another area in which the UBTEP is struggling to find ways to adequately support program students. One faculty member identified that for a period of time a daycare was available at the university, but the hours didn’t necessarily match up to the needs of education students. This daycare is not currently in operation.

Transfer students are another group of non-traditional students who report particular problems unique to their situation. Coming to Sunnydale later in their academic trajectory means that students have less familiarity with university supports, including advisement and recommended course sequencing. This can be due to a lack of orientation from the University as well as missing out on early workshops and orientations offered by the College of Education. In the education program specifically, students may end up taking classes off-cycle, which means they cannot build on the material from previous classes in the same way that other students can. One student explained, “I didn’t do the first semester of the education program because I combined the first and second semester,
so I was thrown into the second semester where you start writing lesson plans. I [didn’t]t know how to write a lesson plan, but [other students said] ‘I learned it last semester.’” In this instance, the student was taking two classes concurrently that were intended to be sequential. Another student noted that they “really only had one semester before we were thrown into the field.” Taking classes off cycle may also result in the student beginning fieldwork without adequate preparation due to the unusual timing.

Faculty participants empathized with these challenges and identified ways in which they try to meet these challenges and help students navigate the education program. One faculty member explained that “We do the best we can to work around our students’ lives, knowing that we’re looking at our students as a whole person, not just somebody who’s paying tuition every semester.” This suggests that at least some faculty are aware of the stresses students face beyond coursework. It indicates that some program faculty members work to ensure that their students are seen as more than just a number in the classroom.

This approach was also addressed by a faculty member who described it in more detail. “I think of my teacher candidates, my students, many of [whom] are first-generation college students. I view my role [as] helping them navigate through college, and for many of them to enter middle-class jobs and be prepared for that.” This highlights a faculty member’s desire to adapt to the unique nature of education students, and the importance placed on preparing them for careers beyond graduation.

Some student participants appeared to recognize this “whole person orientation” among faculty members and program administration; they independently articulated the feeling that they were looked at in this way by faculty members. One student’s comment
that, “They [faculty members] have a lot of empathy” resonated with other comments made by student participants about the ways in which they saw faculty members caring about them. One student described a difficult personal situation resulting in a leave of absence. About this, the student said, “They did help support me when it came to issues revolving my personal life bleeding into my academic life.” In this circumstance, the student felt that education program faculty and administration were helpful and understanding about life situations impacting students’ educational success. By way of comparison, many student participants said that in their major departments such as sociology, history, English, or math, faculty members did not do this. In this way, students reported that, on the whole, they do feel that they are being supported by the faculty and administration of the education program in that they offer students guidance, caring and empathy.

**Meeting Scholarly Challenges**

As previously discussed, UBTEP students are impacted by program operation and state requirements. These do impact students’ feelings about their academic success and preparedness for a teaching career as they go through the program. This subtheme identifies some of the scholarly challenges that UBTEP students reported facing. These challenges include applying to the College of Education, fulfilling testing requirements and building connections between liberal arts courses and the College of Education.

Getting into the program was identified as a scholarly challenge by both faculty and student participants. Program faculty appear to recognize the admission process as a stress point requiring further support for students. Several faculty members brought up
the sometimes challenging process of applying to the College of Education, with comments such as:

Getting through the initial hurdles for initial certification to do the education major, that basic skills testing is a hurdle. I think it’s a point of anxiety for many. *Faculty participant*

The paperwork, the acceptance to the College of Education, which is separate from being accepted to the college, [that] process is really off putting. *Faculty participant*

Some faculty members perceive that students who have already gone through the stress of filling out college applications may feel quite overburdened when faced with another round of applications. Also, the second major, which was heavily discussed in the previous chapter, was once again identified as a challenge for students in that they need to both complete their classes and maintain a 3.0 GPA in order to be eligible for the Sunnydale College of Education. These requirements may be a hindrance to whether or not students choose to apply.

Faculty identified testing as another stressful element of the education program that has been discussed in detail earlier. It is worth noting again, however, that this is a stress that is unique to education students. While other students must take exams as part of their programs, education students face an enforced career change if they fail these tests. As one faculty member stated, “…students of education have additional challenges or opportunities, which range from having to take many standardized tests either to get into the program, stay in the program, or exit.” So we see that throughout the education student’s experience, the specter of testing adds continual stress. Students must learn to balance their classwork and their home lives while always preparing for another test that will determine their fate. The UBTEP faculty members interviewed for this study appear
to understand that this is an issue that the program must address by creating supports not only help students pass these exams, but to alleviate the stress they place on the student. Supports provided by the College of Education to this end are discussed in Chapter 4. This is an area that highlights where some faculty may not be aware of the academic support for exams the program provides.

Students also reported struggling to connect the material taught in their subject majors with the curriculum for the College of Education. This was covered in detail in discussion of the state-required double major in the previous chapter. Faculty members and students emphasized that this is also a unique challenge for education students, who need greater levels of support from the program in order to navigate how to bridge the gap between content material from their major and pedagogical practice.

For example, some felt that the material they learned in the English and math departments don’t pertain to their education curriculum. These students reported feeling discouraged by this and look to the UBTEP for help in resolving this feeling, only to find that their education classes did not alleviate their frustration. One student describes the math major curriculum as “…so rigorous and abstract, totally different than how to teach in high school.” And yet the student also explained that the education classes only scratched the surface in terms of bringing all of this knowledge back to teaching a high school math curriculum. This illustrates how subject major coursework fails to translate into knowledge that can be disseminated while teaching K-12, as well as how the state limitations on education courses keep the program from being able to expand in order to meet this need. As another student explained, “Your major departments didn’t really have any support necessarily geared towards your teaching career. I wish they would have.”
Student participants asserted that better communication between the College of Education and subject major programs could potentially address this.

**Fostering Professional Dispositions**

Unlike many programs, the UBTEP seeks to prepare students for a professional position in education after graduation. While other professional programs for undergraduate students do exist, this study focuses on the experiences of education students. This subtheme examines some of the professional challenges identified by faculty and student participants that impact education students’ feelings of preparedness to begin a teaching career upon graduation. These include facing negative perceptions of the teaching field, logging enough field work time and creating a professional persona.

Faculty participants discussed how a generally negative perception of educators among the general public acts as a stressor for education students, limits enrollment and reduces student retention. Some of the comments from faculty include the following:

There’s still a negative perception that all educators are facing, and we’re seeing that in our numbers and enrollment. *Faculty participant*

The creativity of teaching and the innovativeness of teaching, and the joy of teaching in terms of what individual teachers bring to the classroom is not always something that students feel. *Faculty participant*

They’re entering [a] professional field that is demoralized, that is devalued. *Faculty participant*

The perception of faculty participants is that this negative perception in society impacts the number of students who apply and enroll in the college. This negative perception also has an impact on education students as they go through their clinical year, graduate, and begin their profession. Some faculty members expressed dismay at being unable to protect their students from this negative perception.
A frequently discussed problem amongst the focus group students concerned their feelings of unpreparedness as they entered their classrooms towards the end of their time in the UBTEP. One student blurted out, “there’s so much stuff that you have to learn once you’re on the job,” a concern echoed by other students. Students reported feeling unmoored when they began their clinical experience; they did not feel adequately prepared for the realities of the classroom. Students expressed the desire for better real-world preparation, with one student commenting, “I would want to learn what we need to be a teacher.” These students sensed that if they had a stronger concept of what was actually needed they would feel more supported when they entered the classroom and begin teaching.

The alumni focus group yielded some well-informed perspectives about aspects of this problem. They spoke to the idea that so much is learned in the field that it may be nearly impossible to be fully prepared for what to expect. One participant commented, “Four years later, I feel like I’m still learning.” This comment points out that after so much time in the job, teachers are still building understanding and strengthening their skills. This may inform the program’s messaging to the students about the struggles they can expect during their first years in the classroom.

Both alumni and faculty members articulated the idea that the program may not be fully preparing students to embrace a professional disposition. This refers to the ability of the student to adopt a teacher persona and see themselves in the role of teacher as opposed to the role of student. As an alumnus explained, “There’s just so much that I don’t think (a class) can explain, you just have to experience [it], like going to meetings and being professional and even talking to parents sometimes as a young teacher.” This
alumnus points out that undergraduate education students may struggle to adopt a professional demeanor and the program is not adequately helping them develop this. Faculty also expressed concerns that students might not be prepared for how to navigate of the relationship with a supervisor as opposed to a student/instructor role. A faculty member commented that, “I think the students are kind of surprised…when they begin teaching in their undergraduate program, they have to accommodate the clinical supervisor, they have to accommodate the university professor and they have to accommodate the classroom teacher.” Faculty perceived students as struggling to adjust to these different relationships which can impact their ability to feel successful as they complete the program.

Failure to help students develop a professional disposition was also perceived by faculty as another factor impacting retention. As a faculty member described it, “Teachers do a lot, and I don’t necessarily think that when students come into a teacher ed program they understand the extent of their responsibilities.” Another faculty member further commented that, “They’re coming in very fresh without a clear understanding of what it means to be a teacher, and I think that is an important piece of maybe why they’re not sticking around.” By working to help students develop an understanding of the reality of what it means to be a teacher, some faculty members hope to improve retention.

To develop these supports, the faculty look for ways to broaden students’ concepts of being a teacher, as noted here: “[It’s important to] help them to see the value of what they’re doing with the perspective of teaching as a continuum.” One faculty member described this as “introducing students to the field of education, and not just in a philosophical sense, but in a very practical sense.” This comment points to an
understanding that education students need to understand that teaching is more than lesson planning and delivery of instruction. The UBTEP faculty acknowledge that students need more guidance in understanding that being a teacher has complexity. This is an area that the UBTEP faculty and administration can look to develop further within the curriculum. This is also addressed through professional development seminars and workshops provided by the program.

**Summary of Theme 4: The unique needs of education students may not be fully met by the supports given by the program.**

This theme examined the unique challenges that face education students in a UBTEP and the perceptions of faculty and students about whether the program is able to meet these needs in a way that leaves students feeling adequately supported and prepared to begin a teaching career. As seen in study participants’ excerpts, education students face many challenges that can be made worse without adequate support from the program. While faculty members acknowledge these challenges, the program is not always equipped or able to make adjustments in order to provide students with needed supports. The specific areas of challenges addressed here (personal, demographic, scholarly, and professional) point to many opportunities to build better supports. In Theme 5, I will focus more closely on faculty and student suggestions about how the UBTEP can make improvements that better support their students.

**Theme 5: Program supports are meeting some student needs, but they can be improved.**

Theme 5 concludes the data analysis chapter by discussing the supports offered by the program and noting where faculty and students note that improvements could be
made. In discussing these supports, study participants commented about their perceptions of the effectiveness of different kinds of support and offered specific suggestions about potential improvements. This led to a discussion of the role of mentoring in creating a supportive program for students and how such a program could be implemented. The subthemes associated with this theme include embracing professionalism, strengthening support for testing and assessment, being part of a community, connecting the coursework to pedagogical practices, building connections during the clinical experience, and the importance of mentoring.

In general, students reported that they felt “nurtured” by the program. One student said that it is “hard to compare the education program to others [referring to non-education university programs] because, I don’t want to say that we’re babied, but we’re well taken care of.” While elaborating on this point, another student explained, “Once you’re in the education program, they take you under their wing and show you whatever you have to do, and they give you the resources that you need.” This generally positive perception was shared by most of the students who participated in this study. While they had many suggestions for improvements, it is important to recognize that these students articulated a strong sense of satisfaction about the Sunnydale UBTEP as a whole.

As discussed previously, education students must meet a series of requirements to enter the UBTEP, complete their required coursework, and obtain a teaching license after graduation. The UBTEP shoulders the responsibility of helping students navigate these requirements. This section will detail the supports that the program has currently put in place as well as suggestions from students and faculty about what the UBTEP can do to
create new ones that help the students feel successful while in the program and as they begin their teaching careers.

*Embracing Professionalism*

As previously addressed, students struggle to adapt to a professional disposition. Interview data suggests that the college seeks to acclimate students into the education track and teach them what being an educator means. They do so through workshops, advising, working directly with students in an administrative capacity, and keeping an open channel of communication with the students.

One program support is a workshop for applicants to the College of Education, designed to help students begin to understand what they can expect from the UBTEP. Faculty members describe the workshop as a support “to help get them acclimated to the skill sets of a teacher to see if that’s something that they’re interested in,” and “help them learn all of the hidden items that happen in a teacher ed curriculum.” The workshop makes an attempt to initiate feelings of support among students by giving them tools and information they need in order to move forward. To further formalize this workshop, an administrator reported that the college is building a new zero-credit course for students in their junior year that would implement the goals of this workshop in a more in-depth setting. The development of new curriculum support is a challenge for the UBTEP due to restrictions on flexibility created by state requirements, but program administrators see this as an important addition to the program, so they have created this workaround to address some of the unmet needs of their students.

In interviews, faculty participants recognized that the transition from student to professional educator can be a struggle for undergraduates. They reported that the college
works to support students through this transition by “trying to do a little work on advising in terms of professionalism.” One faculty member described it this way, “We’re doing a lot of work with professional dispositions. While not academic advising, it’s kind of like professional advice.” This support comes in the forms of workshops and one-on-one student advising. The role of advisors is discussed later in this chapter.

One faculty member described this kind of advising by saying, “I view my job…[as] preparing teacher candidates, to be able to work with students in the classroom, and feel prepared for not only working with students, educating students, but also all of the reforms that we know are going to hit them…to teach them how to be flexible and maintain integrity, but at the same time, keep their jobs.” Overall, faculty participants reported feeling a responsibility for engaging with students in the ways described above and see this support as important to retention.

Faculty members also commented on professional development supports that are already in place in the College of Education. As one faculty member reported, “Our college is okay with supporting students to attend conferences and [engage in] professional development, giving them professional development opportunities.” Of course, supplying adequate funding for professional development support is always an issue. While many faculty members expressed a desire to be able to take more students to professional conferences to help them build professional dispositions, they find this to be a challenge that needs more attention.

Student participants reported that finding resources and contacts for support through the program was reasonably simple. Specifically, the students comment that on Blackboard, “there’s so many references listed” that “you don’t have to go and research
everything. Everything was just there. [They] want to make it easy for us to find the
names, phone numbers, and email of whoever we needed to contact.” While seemingly
simplistic, this support was a key element in enabling students to feel confident and
positive as they began to work through the program.

However, students reported a lack of communication among faculty members,
which led to generalized feelings of inadequate support. Students reported receiving
contradictory information from different professors at times. A specific example of this
addressed conflicts with field experience protocols and expectations. One student
expressed feeling support from the Director of Field Experience while lamenting the lack
of clarity from others. “I feel like the only one who knows what they’re talking about is
the director and everyone else is still playing catch up and trying to figure out what we
need in general.” This student articulated the feeling that College of Education faculty
they are working with during their clinical year often lack the most up-to-date
information and therefore do not always disseminate correct information to students. This
leads to confusion and the feeling that students are not being equally supported by all
faculty, jeopardizing their clinical success. This can be seen throughout the analysis
where discrepancies between faculty perceptions of support and what supports are given
by the program exist.

**Strengthening Support for Testing and Assessments**

Faculty and student participants pointed out that the UBTEP must continue to
work diligently to support students in taking the Praxis Core, the Praxis subject exams,
and the edTPA. In response to discussion about how the program is helping students, one
faculty member said, “The state has mandated many types of assessments, so we’ve
created different types of mechanisms to help students jump over these obstacles.” This faculty member and others, perceive that the program is creating support systems to help the students to prepare for and complete these assessments. As one administrator reported, “We put in a lot of supports for students, all kinds of boot camps [for test prep] and edTPA upload parties, and just all kind of things to help them through the process.” The perception of the faculty and administration is that they are putting in a good deal of effort to create these supports for students but that the students may still be struggling.

Faculty members acknowledged that they are mindful of the financial struggles of their students and they specifically identified efforts to create free or subsidized supports for them. One administrator gave details about these supports:

One nice example is our Praxis lending library. Though small, it is available for students to borrow workbooks [and] study guides for free for up to two weeks. The deans have supported free Praxis workshops, free Praxis boot camps. Just trying to provide some free incentives for students to start thinking about studying, preparing for these things from early on, and to give them some nice supports along the way. Faculty participant

Although the program may face challenges in finding funding to create and continue these programs, overall, faculty participants reported a positive perception of the program’s ability to offer accessible supports that would help students succeed at required exams.

The edTPA requirement presents unique problems for students and this was discussed in depth during the focus groups. The process of completing the edTPA is discussed in detail in Chapter 4---please refer to this chapter for more details. Study findings suggest that from the faculty perspective, the college is doing its best to try to establish a support system for students. As one administrator explained, “We have [two] edTPA boot camps. They learn about edTPA in small bites.” This attempt at introducing
the students to the edTPA gradually throughout their coursework in the UBTEP was acknowledged by student participants but was not always seen as effective. One student commented on the early intervention of information as feeling overwhelming, saying, “They were beating into us constantly the edTPA, from the very beginning.” Another student commented about how course professors would address the edTPA saying, “The only way I see that the education [classes] support it [the edTPA] is that they’ll take an objective from the edTPA and make us write a paper on it.” These comments, along with others about the way in which students are inundated with information throughout their classes, suggests that students don’t necessarily perceive the value of learning about the edTPA so early because they are still quite disconnected from the reality of the assessment, both in terms of time and content. Students reported feeling confused about the assessment and said that the work they did in their classes about its various elements did not, in the end, make the completion of the assessment any easier.

Student participants reported feeling the faculty were too unfamiliar with the edTPA material which led to confusion for the students. Students commented on the lack of knowledge some faculty have regarding the assessment, possibly because it is a recent addition to the state’s licensure requirements. They said that edTPA-related assignments created to try to help students often missed the mark or were not actually aligned with it. One stated that, “since it’s a new thing, they don’t know too much about it. Our seminar instructor had no experience with [edTPA]. So [seminar] was even less supportive.” This speaks to the need for faculty to stay up to date on licensure requirements and how they are being implemented. Together, these comments suggest that students see the UBTEP working to develop current supportive structures, but that
they also leave classes feeling unprepared to complete the requirements despite these efforts. These comments also speak to the perception of student participants that classes try to shoehorn in support tools without building authentic connections to the material.

**Building Community**

Both faculty and student participants identified community building as important to creating a supportive program. Participants reported on efforts by the program to build community that included student cohorts, faculty-led events, peer-to-peer relationship building projects, and an emphasis on creating strong faculty-student relationships. As one faculty member described it, “One of our hurdles, I guess you could say, is to connect with [the students] from early on to build that rapport and that sense of community. I think we’re doing that through workshops, mandatory events, and the students are just loving them.” The perception of this faculty member was that the college supports were being well received by students. The faculty member went on to offer a caveat about this, however, saying, “[These supports are] not an inherent part of our program.” By this the faculty member meant that these supports that were being developed and made available to the students were not part of the university curriculum or state standards. Instead, they were created by the College of Education based on their perceptions of what students want and need. This demonstrates one of the ways that the UBTEP manipulates their offerings to meet both the state requirements and needs of the students.

One of the strongest supports that student participants identified was peer-to-peer relationships. One student even attributed her success to “collaborating with other students in the class, making it more like a village-type situation rather than just me.”
Students would like to build these connections by providing support for incoming students. One student described a possible situation in which “Instead of seminar where we talked about edTPA, it would have been really cool if we could have talked to the incoming education department students [and at which we could] reflect on our own practices.” In this way, students could remind themselves of where they were when they started and use their sense of the program to help develop support for incoming students while supporting their own growth. This type of connection could also lend itself to an organic development of mentoring relationships between peers as discussed further on in this chapter.

Peer-to-peer guidance could also be used to help students by connecting them with those who have already passed the exams. A faculty member noted, “We created a program where students who pass the Praxis [Subject Assessment] will then mentor students who are studying for it.” This could create a better sense of community, an idea that was addressed in Theme 1: Self-reflection on the operation can guide the faculty and administration to successful implementation of the program. In general, faculty participants reported that they recognize that it is important for students to connect with others who have recently gone through the same processes. This emphasizes the role of mentoring, which will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Faculty and student participants both identified faculty-student relationships as an important and valuable support in building community. Faculty participants, overall, felt that their relationships with the students were positive and supportive. A faculty member described this in detail: “I think that’s a strength of the program here. We have a closer relationship, not just as teacher and student.” Another administrator said, “I’ve developed
relationships with the students similar to the relationships I had with teachers who I worked with as a principal.” This suggests that faculty view these relationships as helping to build the professional dispositions of the students.

Overall, student participants reported feeling positively towards their education professors and perceiving their professors as generally supportive both in terms of class material and personal relationships. One student commented, “When they give you assignments, for the most part, they are relevant.” Student participants reported that making the connection between classwork and real world practice helped them feel confident and prepared. Another student shared an appreciation for those professors who really understood what they were going through, especially during their clinical experiences. “We’ve had classes with professors who would say, ‘Listen, I was going to do a lesson today, but you guys seem stressed out. Let’s air everything out.’ and we would just have like a class therapy session.” This interpersonal community building between faculty members and students was reported as a positive experience, helping students feel better prepared and supported by the program, key elements for retention.

This carried over to how student participants interacted with the professors in classes, with the clinical year seminar class being highlighted specifically. Students felt that the seminar’s instructors were flexible and aware of what the students needed at any given moment. At times, clinical students needed to discuss the particular problems that they encountered, and students appreciated it when faculty would “allow you to be open about it.” Students also reported a high level of responsiveness from clinical teachers. In one instance, a student stated “You could be working on an assignment at three in the morning, send an email, and you [would] have a good chance of getting an email back.”
This particular example may seem extraordinary or hyperbolic, but some students
strongly felt that they could access support from particular professors when they needed
it.

Several faculty participants agreed that they perceive faculty as a whole are
focused on the importance of support. “The faculty are very student oriented. They worry
about the students more than the students sometimes worry about themselves.” This
suggests that faculty members see themselves and their colleagues as being quite
concerned about the support that the students receive. One faculty member described how
they need to be available to help students who are struggling to stay in the program, in
tune with the importance of retention. “I’ve had a number of students in my office who
are just about to drop out, and [I had to] figure out how to develop in them, that sort of
persistence with them.” In this instance, the faculty member had to support the student in
a way that allows that student to be successful while also helping keep the college
successful in terms of student retention.

**Connecting Coursework to Pedagogy**

As previously mentioned, students do not always think their coursework and their
practices in the field are well aligned. One student said “I felt like a lot of the assignments
that we were doing weren’t necessarily assignments that were helping us in the
classroom, but they were assignment that were helping our school.” This perception was
bolstered by another student who explained that there isn’t enough coverage of real-world
problems in the classroom. For example, multiple students said they do not feel they have
the background to handle ethical or legal dilemmas adequately in the field. “They weren’t
clear [about] what made an ethical dilemma. What are the procedures? What should we
know? What should we look for? What should we ask for? I think that would have been a really excellent class, like a law class.” This disconnect left some student participants feeling unprepared for the classroom while also feeling under-supported during coursework.

Lesson planning was another area in which students identified a highly variable level of support. One student described spending hours working on lesson plans, feeling terribly lost. One of this student’s professors even suggested “that maybe I’m not in the right career.” Fortunately, the student found “another professor who sat with me for an hour and guided me, and I spoke with my supervisor, and she also sat with me and guided me.” While the first encounter was acknowledged as a less frequent experience with professors, it did shake this student’s confidence enough to question the time and energy spent in the program. However, the foundation of support that the program builds for the students allowed the student the confidence needed to seek out a more appropriately supportive advisor.

Another student commented that creating lesson plans for class felt artificial. “I never knew if I was doing it right, I never knew if it was effective, because it wasn’t in a real situation.” In this case the feedback the student received was more about following a template rather than mastering the content of the lesson. This was further supported by another student who said “In the beginning of student teaching, I struggled so hard with lesson planning, because throughout my courses, I had to do maybe two lesson plans in a class.” This suggests that lesson plan instruction needs to include more of a connection to real world teaching, and that students need more support with lesson planning while they are in their clinical year. The student in this study reported feeling the expectation from
the clinical seminar instructor was that they had learned about lesson planning in earlier courses, and that this skill did not need to be revisited and reinforced during clinical.

Student participants reported a need for greater instruction on special education issues for students who are neither enrolled in a specific special education track nor opting for a Teacher of Students with Disabilities (TSD) certification (discussed in Chapter 4). One student described the instruction they received in the program as being too shallow, saying, “We’re looking at IEPs [individual education plans], but we’re glancing at them. And we’re glancing at case studies. And now we have to make a transition plan for a student and we don’t really understand what that means.” However, students working towards a certification said that the special education program was especially strong at preparing students for what they need to know in order to succeed. One student volunteered, “I’ll give the special education department a lot of props, because I feel like they’ve really prepared us with lesson plans.” Another student earning a certification in special education, reported they felt that special education students got “a lot of experience with students’ IEPs and transition plans and case studies.” These comments from students suggest that students who are not opting into TSD certifications or focusing on special education are missing an important piece for teaching students with disabilities, which they will invariably encounter in their classroom as teachers.

**Building Connections During the Clinical Experience**

During the clinical experience, the students rely on the UBTEP to support them. The flow of support for students is described in more detail in Chapter 4, and is summarized here. The support begins in the Office of Field Experience (OFE), where the staff work to connect the students to a clinical educator (CE) in a partner school. The CEs
are guided by the clinical supervisors, who are also assigned by the OFE. The clinical supervisors are also there to support students, but in a less immediate way. As a faculty member describes, “[It’s] the clinical supervisors who go out and observe teacher candidates and guide them through clinical as advisors.” So while students get feedback that directly informs their progress from the clinical supervisor, the CE is there to help the student interpret their feedback and make practical adjustments. In this web of support, we see an interconnectedness between different individuals who all work together to create a strong supportive network for the students.

The Office of Field Experience staff provide key support for the students during their clinical year. Both students and faculty expressed feelings that this office works diligently and effectively to support the students. One faculty member familiar with the work said that the director of this office had created a smooth operation in which clinical educators could work effectively with students. The students also pointed to the Director of Field Experience as being a strong support person for them. One student participant remarked, “She’s on top of pretty much everything.” Another commented, “You email her any time of day, she writes back. She’s awesome.” This person was highly regarded. I have included one student comment that encapsulated the feelings of many of this study’s student participants here:

She is on top of the situation with cooperating teachers. She makes sure they have all the materials they need; she does webinars for them so that they understand our assessment systems. They know when they’re working with our students, that at some point there this release of responsibility so that the students take on more responsibility for the class and they kind of get eased into it. *Student participant*

It appears that the College of Education has installed a director to lead the clinical experience whom the students perceive as unusually helpful. While this is positive, it
highlights the fact that few others were described as being this supportive. This suggests that more can be done to create a strong support system that students can rely on throughout the College of Education faculty and administration.

As an urban university, the College of Education works to build partnerships with local school districts in order to generate placement opportunities for both the clinical year and, potentially, for new teachers after graduation. One faculty member proclaimed, “I think we have such a rich connection to the local Pre K through 12 schools. We have a really robust professional development network, which is a formal agreement between us and the p through 12 schools.” These partnerships are used in various ways. “We have students who go into our partnership schools, and it may be just for an observation, maybe for a class visit.” By building this system of schools in which there is already a strong relationship between the faculty of the partnership school and the faculty of the College of Education, the UBTEP can provide a unique support to its students by giving them a well vetted place to learn their craft.

The clinical educator (CE) is seen by all participants as one of the most significant supports for students during their clinical year. They are critical in supporting students as they complete the program and the paperwork required for certification. The CE is described as “a linchpin” and “a critical component” by faculty members. As one faculty member described it, “That person [the CE] is going to play a very pivotal role in helping students identify their educational philosophies.” The perception of faculty and student participants in this study was that the CEs are “very dedicated, very interested” and see their role of CE “as giving back to the profession.”
Student participants indicated that a strong relationship with a CE can strongly enhance feelings of support during the clinical year. One student commented that a good CE will treat a teacher candidate “as a co-teacher in the classroom, not like an assistant” while still being mindful “that [teacher candidate] is going to ask [the clinical educator] a bunch of questions. They’re not coming into this with a whole tool belt of ideas.” Instead, the CE will recognize that their role is to develop this student into a professional. A supportive CE helps to smooth the transition between being a student to being a teacher and fill in any gaps in program support around building professional disposition. Faculty participants also acknowledge the importance of the CE. One faculty member stated, “The cooperating teachers mean more to them than I think their professors in the classroom.” Acknowledging this relationship suggests that some faculty members understand how these relationships can impact their students.

In contrast, a poor relationship with a CE can leave a student feeling unsupported by the UBTEP and unsure of their future as a teacher. Clinical students may struggle when they encounter discrepancies between their education program curriculum and the policies of their clinical educator or the school in which they are placed. A student describes it this way, “We have to adapt to what our professors are saying and we have to think what our cooperating teacher wants us to do.” This reflects previously noted student concerns about the disconnect between what is learned in their classes and they are actually teaching in the pk-12 classrooms.

Another crucial support person during the clinical year is the clinical supervisor. One student said, “my supervisor spent a lot of time sending me research and brainstorming ideas. For me that was huge, because now [during the clinical year] it’s
real life and at least I’m getting the support I need in the classroom.” This clinical supervisor made sure the student had a range of resources available and stood ready to help the student solve various problems. This can be especially important when handling differentiation, or creating lessons that can be taught to different students at different levels. A student commented about their clinical supervisor, “She’s given me so many supports in terms of differentiation and working with students with IEPs. She had a lot of knowledge of alternative research-based plans and ideas.” Here the student sees support not just in terms of resources provided, but in having ongoing access to someone with more knowledge and experience. Student participants appeared acutely aware of the importance of support from people familiar with current theories and research.

To ensure that this kind of support is available, students explained that it is important for the clinical supervisor to be in the same subject as the teacher candidate. One student remarked, “I’ve been paired with supervisors that aren’t even in my field, so it doesn’t make sense.” If the supervisor does not have extensive knowledge of the student’s subject, they are less able to support the student with clear guidance. Students expressed feelings of anxiety related to how well their supervisor could support them in the field, noting that this person would be evaluating them and they wanted to be sure they were being evaluated fairly.

**The Importance of Mentoring**

Faculty and student participants affirmed that mentoring occurs in the program at limited levels, and that more robust mentorship support would benefit students. In interviews and focus groups, faculty members and students described how the program has incorporated aspects of mentoring, and how effective they perceived it to be. They
also made suggestions about what they would like to see in terms of mentorship-based support. In describing this subtheme, I share comments from these discussions about mentorship and analyze them in context of what the UBTEP could offer to students.

When asked what would make a good mentor, the one word that emerged most frequently was “guide.” One student said, “I just think of the word guidance” while another said “It’s somebody that will guide you, be there for you. And just support you to be better.” This idea of guidance appears to inform perceptions of mentors ranging from supervisors to colleagues and CE[s] who act as guides during the clinical experience. As one student said, “Teaching is collaborative. So [the ideal is] to have someone who’s willing to share that and guide you, [but also] let you do your own ideas.” In this way, the mentor acts as guide who not only shows students the best way forward, but who also helps students or new teachers reflect on how they did and build up that practice of reflective learning.

Both current students and alumni discussed the potential for creating a mentorship program for current students. This could be a way to establish mentoring relationships that would then extend beyond graduation. One alumnus commented, “someone could be your mentor during your last year while you’re doing student teaching, and then that person could continue to mentor you as you are in your first year of teaching.” This extended mentorship spanning the transition from student to teacher could increase teacher retention and reduce the number of teachers who leave the profession in the first few years. The mentor could offer students a trusted partnership that develops over time. This could be something developed as part of the program or as an extension of the state-required mentor for first year teachers.
Student participants expressed the opinion that a multi-year mentorship relationship would be a positive addition to the program, and took it even further to describe a mentoring program that matched students with a mentor early in the program course. One student said “it would be beneficial if they gave us a mentor at the very beginning of our transition into education who could help us with that, and [help us] navigate through all of our semesters.” Other students agreed with the utility of having a mentor from the beginning to see them through the program and guide them as they worked their way through the challenges discussed earlier.

Some students and faculty supported the creation of a graduate mentorship program. In this approach, students would be mentored by an alumni of the program. One alumni member described the benefits of this as “…previous students from Sunnydale, within say a two to five-year range, would be beneficial because they just went through the program but also have a few years of teaching under their belt.” An informal version of a mentoring program was suggested by a current student, who said “Graduates who are out in the field, they would give[out] a phone number to help those students that are in the program now.” This could be a sort of life-line for newer students, who would know there was someone they could call who could understand their perspective. Faculty members considered this a possibility, with one commenting that “It would be great for graduates of our program, a few years after they’ve fine-tuned their skills, to come back and be mentors.” Real-world knowledge combined with an understanding of the UBTEP program would make these graduates ideal mentors.

Peer-to-peer mentors offered another possibility. One faculty member commented that “when you’re closer in age, it sometimes could have more of a benefit” as opposed to
working with someone from a different generation. Another faculty member commented on the relatability of peers, saying, “They’re going through the same process, so they understand.” In this scenario, students could be paired with others perhaps a year ahead of them in the program. This would allow students to have someone to connect with who had gone through the same course or had the same professor quite recently. This mentor answers questions or gives advice about how to handle a problem.

Faculty had positive perceptions of the value of mentoring for both support and retention, while acknowledging that the UBTEP’s current mentorship options were not as fully formed as they could be. As one faculty member stated, “I think if we had a better structure in terms of mentorship, we could make great inroads in terms of student retention and persistence through the program.” The implication is that there is some mentoring happening within the program, although it may not be formal. In fact, it might not even be called mentorship.

An example of this informal mentoring was offered during a student focus group: “sometimes (mentoring) could be through relationships that develop either in a course, through a club or an organization where students and faculty members are doing research together. Those kinds of things.” In this form, the student seeks out a mentoring relationship with a professor they know. A faculty member had a similar comment, saying that “if it’s something that they’re seeking, to touch base with a faculty member on an informal basis, I think that would work better than having a formal mentoring program.” Several faculty members and students agreed that these informal, more spontaneous mentorship relationships added to positive perceptions of the program.
Advising was a second example of non-structured mentoring already occurring in the program. Many faculty members expressed the belief that the roles of advisor and mentor overlap. There were many comments suggesting that advisors were “not just giving them a course permit but mentor[ship] as well.” In terms of defining what an ideal advisor/mentor should do, one person said, “The ideal role of an advisor is someone that is able to know an individual student well enough to understand [the needs of each student] as best they can.” Getting to know students individually, however, can be a challenge when there are so many students and so few advisors.

Ultimately, it is important for an advisor to be able to guide the teacher education student through the program, both academically and as an individual. One faculty member described it this way: “I see the role of the advisor is making a relationship with the teacher candidate and guiding them and providing advice through the entire program so that the teacher candidate can successfully complete the program in a timely fashion.” This involves helping the student to balance their academic major and education majors, fulfill all of their testing requirements, complete all their coursework and file all their paperwork on time in order to graduate and become certified after graduation.

Student advisement can offer useful support, but faculty members identified factors that keep advisement from becoming robust mentorship. Faculty members who do advisement often have a large caseload of students, with one faculty member stating that they advise 46 students in a single semester. This is far too many students to be able to create a mentoring relationship with all of them. Other factors limiting advisement are budget cuts and the designation of faculty hours. As one faculty member explained, “We used to get one credit for advising students. And it was determined that that was not
economically good for the university.” This lack of funding and support from the university keeps the program from being able to use an advising program as a backdoor for mentoring students.

As previously suggested, professionals in the field who work with clinical students are often viewed as mentors to the clinical students. One faculty member said, “Our clinical educator, our cooperating teachers, and our university supervisors are certainly mentors to our candidates.” Faculty members perceive these professionals to be of great benefit to students. But some faculty participants held a firm stance that mentorship begins in the college classroom. “First and foremost the faculty and the staff at the university or within the college mentor [the students].” These faculty supports are then reinforced in the field: “You [also] have your clinical supervisors who mentor them through an enormous amount of clinical work.”

For the program to build a meaningful mentorship program, students and faculty participants assert that the program needs to be “organic,” meaning that it grows from the wants and needs of the students, faculty participate enthusiastically, and the program as a whole is a positive support for students rather than being a burden on both students and faculty members. Mentoring needs to be a natural interaction, not a forced one. If faculty members and students are being directed to participate without fully buying in, the resulting relationships will be artificial. As one faculty member commented, “I think if [students] are required to do it, it won’t be successful.” For students to benefit from mentoring, both students and faculty must be invested in the process.

Student participants also suggested another way of creating an organic mentorship program: give mentees a choice of mentor. While reflecting on an experience with a
state-mandated mentor, one alumni commented, “I wish you had a choice in mentor.”

Another student also addressed this, saying, “I think there is a big difference between...somebody that you’re placed with [versus] somebody who you actually want to help you, more of like a friend to guide you.” In order for the mentee to achieve this friendship, he or she would want to have a say in who their mentor would be.

Ensuring that the mentor works in the same field as the student or teacher is also crucial. As one student said, “I would suggest that people get paired with somebody that has worked in the subject and field that we’re in, so they could guide us in the field and subject area to give us ideas, support, guidance and tools we can use.” Without the appropriate background knowledge of the subject matter, the mentoring of a clinical teacher or new teacher would not be as effective.

The match between mentor and mentee might be more effective if cultural connections are considered. A student described an experience with working with a mentor who had a similar background to her saying, “There’s a faculty member who understood what I’m going through, who understood my struggle in specific areas. That is, that might be culturally specific.” This student had connected with a faculty member who can understand the challenges this student is facing at a deeper level due to a shared culture. Faculty members also recognize the importance of this kind of concordance. One faculty member commented that it is important that a consideration be given to “a mentoring or matching with faculty members who have similar experiences because of their ethnic groups or ethnic backgrounds and their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.” This further emphasize the benefits that cultural connections between the mentor and mentee can provide.
Summary of Theme 5: Program supports are meeting some student needs, but they can be improved.

This theme represents the culminating analysis of faculty, student and alumni interviews and focus groups. After examining program limitations, Theme 5 examined those areas of support that students and faculty members identified as potentially addressing the needs of students. The supports they identified were seen as needing further development or implementation; in some cases, these were discussed in depth.

Faculty and students identified that building professional dispositions is a central concern for students to feel successful. Supporting students with testing and assessments was a problem that was identified with regularity by the participants. Students do not always feel that current supports are adequate, and the program is limited in what it can do to support students while adhering to state requirements. However, students and faculty members see community building as generally working well, even though the curriculum sometimes falls short of meeting the needs of students. Finally, this theme discussed those aspects of mentoring that would be most helpful to students, along with suggestions from faculty and students about what would make a good UBTEP mentoring program. Students would like to see a mentoring program that is meaningful and tied to their growth as a professional. They identified peer mentoring as a possible route to encourage community in the program. Another suggestion from students was that the mentor should be familiar with the Sunnydale program as well as the school where the students are doing their student teaching. Faculty also suggested that the mentoring should be meaningful by having a program that the students and faculty are both fully invested in. Participants all supported that mentoring should be an activity that students
and faculty both participate in voluntarily. As previously shown, analysis of faculty interview and student focus group data reveals that the Sunnydale College of Education provides many supports to the students. However, it also suggests that the practical impact of these supports can vary greatly---they do not always succeed in helping students feel successful as they progress through the program and prepare for teaching careers. By continuing to listen to feedback from students, alumni, and their own faculty members, the Sunnydale UBTEP can continue to build support for a stronger student body.

While the participants had positive comments about the ways the College of Education is supporting students, they all felt that more could be done to help students feel successful and persist in their first years of teaching. The study participants all identified mentoring as a key support that would be beneficial to the students in the College of Education. Their responses described ways that mentoring could be beneficial to the areas that students struggle with. These included balancing school and personal responsibilities, developing a professional persona, building community as a student and as a teacher, and connecting the coursework to the student teaching experience. The implications of these results will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
Chapter Seven

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The Research Problem and Research Questions

Research Problem

This dissertation began from a broad inquiry into how teacher education students are being supported by their programs. Through the data, I have discovered that the problem expands beyond the program operations and into issues of diversity in education and social justice for students and teachers, as well as the need for greater societal support of the teaching profession. To have strong schools that meet the needs of an ever-diversifying student population, we need a strong teaching force of diverse educators. Each cohort of College of Education graduates should be representative of the demographics of our student population and graduate from their program feeling well-prepared and supported by mentors and peers as they begin their first years in the classroom. To meet these needs, we need to improve how we are training teachers.

This study examined the ways that a University Based Teacher Education Program is working to meet the challenges faced by the students in the program. The research evolved from studies discussing the problem of teacher retention (Kopkowski, 2008) and the importance of more depth of understanding of teacher education (Aldeman et al., 2011; Edwards & Protheroe, 2003). Following a case-study approach, faculty, administrators, current students, and recent alumni of a New Jersey College of Education were interviewed to gain an understanding of the perceived challenges that students face as they go through this particular teacher education program, and the ways that the operation of the program do and do not meet the needs of the students. The study also
examined the perceptions of faculty and students on ways that New Jersey Department of Education requirements impact the ability of the program to create and sustain supports for students as they enter, move through, and exit the program. In all, 17 faculty and administrators were individually interviewed, while 15 current students and three alumni participated in a total of four focus groups. The qualitative aims of the study were to identify what the participants perceived as challenges particular to education students, how the individuals viewed the operation of the College of Education, and their perceptions of the challenges imposed on the UBTEP by state requirements.

The dissertation findings highlight that state requirements hinder the UBTEP from being able to fully meet the needs of students, and the UBTEP must create supports for the student that either circumvent or add to the state requirements. This supports theories about state control of education (Baines, 2010; Brock, Grady, & Marilyn, 2005; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing & California State Dept. of Education, 1997) Through these efforts, the data show that success is happening in spite of the structure and through these unofficial workarounds, but there are still areas where students are not feeling adequately supported and prepared for teaching after graduation. Finally, the data suggest that both students and faculty support the creation and implementation of a more structured mentoring program, although there are many varied suggestions about what that could look like.

**Research Questions**

At the outset of this study, my research questions covered a broad inquiry into the operations of the UBTEP and the experience of the students within the program. What was discovered during analysis of the data is that unintended and unexpected
consequences for the students and the program emerged as key points of discussion. This allowed me to revise the broad scope of questions into these three guiding questions: 1) Is the UBTEP, as its currently organized and implemented, adequately preparing students in a way that allows them to feel ready to begin a teaching career upon completion of the program? 2) How do the state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP and what impact does this have on the ability of the program to give students what they need to feel ready to begin a teaching career? 3) What are the unique challenges faced by students in a UBTEP and are the supports provided by the UBTEP adequate and impactful for students to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

As previously noted, individual in-person, semi-structured interviews of faculty and administrators of the Sunnydale College of Education were collected, as well as semi-structured focus groups of current students and recent graduates of the program. The interviews were then coded and analyzed to create themes that work to answer each of the research questions.

This chapter will explore the results of the study and discuss the implications of these results for each research question in turn. It will explain the importance of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of the data. It will then discuss the connections of these themes and subthemes to the broader discussions in the literature and the implications of these findings for Sunnydale’s College of Education, UBTEPs more generally, policymakers in teacher education, and for future research.

**Question 1: Is the UBTEP, as its currently organized and implemented, adequately preparing students in a way that allows them to feel ready to begin a teaching career upon completion of the program?**
With respect to research question 1, the Sunnydale College of Education is viewed by the faculty and students overall as providing students with the necessary coursework and knowledge to enter a teaching career. This is in agreement with data showing that teachers are receiving information and tools that help them in their careers (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2012). The responses of the participants made clear that the organization and operations of the UBTEP play a significant role in students’ perceptions of program support. Student responses indicated that aspects of the program did not fully meet the needs of Sunnydale UBTEP students. However, faculty and administration responses indicated that they were continually searching for ways to make improvements and meet more student needs. From these responses, a theme emerged that responded to the first question. **Theme 1: Self-reflection on the operations can guide the faculty and administration to successful implementation of the program.** The participants’ perceptions were that the faculty and administration are very open to using student feedback as a tool to reflect on the operation of the program and are motivated to continue to adapt and improve the student experience in the program.

Within this theme, this issue of diversity began to emerge as a significant factor. Because this study was not looking at diversity specifically, this was a surprising result that became an important point of discussion which can be best explored through further study. Participants viewed diversity in the program as an issue that is not being addressed as fully as it could be. It was noted that there was some reluctance by participants to clearly define “diversity” although the responses indicated that the primary areas of intended interests were racial diversity among both the student and faculty bodies, and economic diversity in the student populations. From this the subtheme Understanding the
Connection Between Diversity and Retention emerged. Faculty addressed that the make-up of the faculty body is primarily White, which is not representative of the student population of Sunnydale University. There was speculation that this may be a hindrance in attracting more students from non-White demographics. This reflection on diversity could help the UBTEP improve their hiring practices to include more diverse faculty members as well as make adjustments to recruitment to improve diversity among the student bodies. More research into the impact of this on student recruitment would need to be done to confirm if this would be a best practice to implement.

When asked about the relationships between students and faculty, responses were mixed but overall showed approval for the faculty efforts to support students. Students primarily had suggestions for improving these relationships that the College of Education could look to in reflection. These responses led to the subtheme Developing the Faculty-Student Connections. Both student and faculty participants expressed the importance of a strong community within the College of Education. Elements identified by participants as working to foster these connections within the program included the role of the administration as advocate for the student, having faculty and administrators that exhibit a caring attitude towards the students, and using a cohort model to create a feeling of community for the students. The student and faculty responses did not always agree. While faculty felt that they were working together to support students, the students felt that the faculty were not always on the same page when addressing the needs of the students. Students reported feeling that the curriculum and dissemination of important information had too many gaps in consistency. This discrepancy in perceptions may indicate the need to include student voices in any program evaluation discussions.
All participants identified mentoring as a support that would be welcome in the UBTEP. The responses from participants can be understood to argue for the College of Education to put more emphasis on finding resources to develop a mentoring program. These responses formed the subtheme Identifying the Challenges with Mentoring. Faculty commented primarily on issues of funding and recruitment of mentors as hindrances to creating these programs. All faculty agreed that mentors should be paid for their time, but finding funding sources for this is challenging. Faculty also identified that there is little financial support from the University to develop such a program. Faculty also argued that the best mentor candidates are the faculty members themselves, and there was little incentive for tenure promotion to give that time up, even with financial incentive. Overall, the responses indicate that of the College of Education does not have the resources in place to implement a mentoring program within its operations at this time, even though participants felt it was a needed support.

**Question 2: How do the state requirements inform the structure of the UBTEP and what impact does this have on the ability of the program to give students what they need to feel ready to begin a teaching career?**

In respect to research question 2, the data suggest that the state requirements create significant barriers to the UBTEP’s attempts to support students. As a UBTEP, the Sunnydale College of Education must meet the requirements set forth by the New Jersey Department of Education. Sunnydale’s College of Education attempts to conform to the state’s one-size-fits-all requirements while also adjusting, wherever possible, to meet the unique needs of Sunnydale students. The challenges uncovered in this study reflect assumptions that state regulation can negatively impact education programs (Baines,
Participant responses pointed to several ways that the state requirements create challenges for the operation of the program, thereby impeding the operation of the program to fully support students. When asked about these challenges, participants identified limitations which emerged as **Theme 2: State requirements place limitations on the ways the UBTEP can adapt to meet the needs of students.** When asked to detail these limitations, participants identified challenges with the curriculum, the clinical experience, and testing.

The responses from participants collected under the subtheme Navigating Curriculum and Course Progression highlight the curriculum requirements as a challenge created by state requirements. Participants shared that the state requirements for the double major and course work were a significant burden and challenge to the students. The double major increases the overall amount of coursework students need to complete, while also potentially creating delays in their progression through the program. Students especially expressed that they would prefer to be able to major in education, with the subject major either eliminated or reduced. Students reported feeling frustrated, which in turn impacted their feelings towards the program.

The faculty and students also discussed that the time allowed to complete all courses within the education program creates a feeling of inadequate preparation on the part of the students. This supports the literature that discusses the route a teacher takes may not make that big of an impact, but the amount of pedagogical training does (R. Ingersoll et al., 2012; R. Ingersoll & Strong, 2012). State policies limit the number of education courses that can be offered by the UBTEP, which faculty and students felt was too few. The students reported feeling rushed in the education courses. Faculty also
acknowledged that there is much more material they would like to provide the students but are unable to because of the limited time they have with the students. Given these two issues together, it can be hypothesized that students would feel more prepared if they had more education courses.

State policies also impact the amount of time students spend in the classroom. Faculty acknowledge that the overall time has increased, but students reported that they still would like more time to observe in a classroom before taking over as primary teacher. These comments lead to the subtheme Scaffolding the Clinical Experience. The clinical experience is the culmination of the students’ entire program, yet students report feeling underprepared for the numerous challenges that come along with this experience. A prevailing comment from both faculty and students again reflects that they would like to have more time in the education classes to better prepare for this experience. Research into the early experiences of teachers supports the need for more hands on learning in the classroom to ensure strong preparation for new teachers (Huling-Austin, 1992; Zeegers, 2005). The limitations created by the state policies in curriculum therefore have a trickle-down effect, permeating into the experiential elements of the program.

The final subtheme to emerge from the responses of participants highlights the challenge of Meeting Testing Requirements. Faculty expressed concerns that the state requirements for testing were limiting their ability to recruit students from diverse backgrounds, another moment in the analysis where diversity emerged as a leading issue. This study does not address the issues of bias in standardized testing, but further research into the impact of this on recruitment of diverse students for UBTEPs is warranted based on the comments by faculty.
The recent addition of the edTPA was discussed extensively by participants as problematic for the program. Student comments addressed that the faculty do not all have a clear understanding of the requirements, and administrators also identified this as a problem. In order to better support students with this assessment, all faculty need to have a better understanding of the elements of the portfolio that students submit. Based on the responses of participants, a recommendation would be to have more supports for faculty to understand the edTPA requirements, which would in turn help the students have more support in developing their artifacts for the portfolio.

Separate from the impact on the program, the state policies create personal issues for some students. These are discussed as Theme 3: The state requirements have an impact on the individual student’s perceptions of their ability to begin their career feeling prepared and supported. In their focus groups, students were candid about the ways that they are both emotionally and financially impacted by the state requirements.

Students spoke at length about The Impact of the Double Major and Licensure requirements, which was collected as the first subtheme in this discussion. They identified six major concerns under this subtheme. These included a quick transition from a subject major into the education major, becoming overwhelmed by trying to meet all the requirements of two separate majors in a short time, struggling to find connections between their subject major and their education major coursework, a lack of communication between their subject major program and the education program, wanting more time for field experiences and classroom observations and finally the students’ perception of disconnect between their two majors influenced the way they perceived the edTPA and licensure requirements. Altogether, the responses from students about these
problems point to a real struggle for the students to feel supported as they move between the two majors.

While Theme 2 addressed the challenges of the faculty and administration to design supports for students for testing and assessment, students also shared the personal impact these have on them. These were discussed under the subtheme Managing Expenses Related to Testing and Licensure. Students identified that the costs of the tests can be prohibitive to some students, and they saw this as having a poor impact on who can actually go into teaching. Students lamented that there were too few financial supports for students in the College of Education to help pay for the tests and assessments. They also addressed that the costs for licensure were not as transparent from the beginning as they would have liked. It is unclear as to why students felt unaware of the costs as these are made available to them through the College of Education website. These expenses and the impact on the students are discussed further under question 3.

Students and faculty both recognize that state requirements often create obstacles for the program to run in a way that supports the students. Both groups are also cognizant of the personal impact this has on the students. The Sunnydale College of Education has faculty and administration that are working to create workarounds for the students, and the students do acknowledge this. These discussions lead to a recommendation that the state should be using feedback from the UBTEPs to inform their policies and perhaps to begin to look to see how they can create statewide programs to better support students within these requirements.
Question 3: What are the unique challenges faced by students in a UBTEP and are the supports provided by the UBTEP adequate and impactful for students to feel ready to begin a teaching career?

In respect to research question 3, participants were asked to share their thoughts on what challenges education students face that sets them apart from all other students. The faculty and student answers to these questions were gathered as Theme 4: The unique needs of education students may not be fully met by the supports given by the program. It is acknowledged that students in other majors might face similar problems. However, when combined with the state requirements for teaching licensure such as the double major and costly assessments, several areas stood out as being particularly challenging for education students.

Student participants expressed that the time commitment of being an education student reverberated through many areas of their life and financial challenges were identified most frequently as an area where they felt they struggled more than other students. This was addressed under the subtheme Financial and Time Challenges of Education Students. Faculty surmised that students often had to help support their families financially. This assumption was supported by comments from students about family and financial obligations. This creates extra stress on the students to juggle their personal responsibilities, coursework, and meeting the inflexible state requirements discussed in question 2. Study participants discussed that the course hour requirements for education students are higher than those for other students due to the added element of classroom observation, and that during the clinical experience, the hours are even longer. When the additional workload of an outside job is added in, some students find
the time commitment to be almost unworkable. The faculty addressed that they are often at a loss on how to help the students balance this time, and the students felt that they were not always able to meet course obligations. Altogether this can have a negative impact on the persistence of students in the program. Finding ways to better financially support students is of significant importance in this respect and warrants further study.

Yet again, addressing diversity emerged in this discussion as an area that participants deemed crucial to a more successful College of Education, although as indicated in question 1 the topic is often discussed in context of other issues rather than as an overt comment. Participants expressed that certain groups of students may need additional support as education students. The subtheme Meeting Demographic Challenges emerged as a discussion of the different types of students who are in the College of Education. The groups identified by the participants included first generation students, non-traditional or returning students, and transfer students. Referencing the extra responsibilities of education students, faculty and students expressed concern that these groups of students might more easily fall through the cracks if there are not supports to reach them specifically. Some focus group participants self-identified as falling into these groups and did in fact express that they felt that their experience was even more challenging than peers who were more traditional. The message from the office of the dean that is published on the website speaks to these issues specifically. The statement affirms the College of Education’s recognition of the diversity of the faculty and student body, while also establishing a commitment to continue to work towards increased diversity, including supporting students from immigrant families.
statement also reinforces the college’s pledge to continue to ensure that they are preparing teachers to meet the needs of all students.

Study participants were deeply concerned by the impact of the state requirements on the students. This was addressed by the subtheme Meeting Scholarly Challenges. Both faculty and students identified that because the College of Education cannot develop as many supports as needed, students are often left feeling overwhelmed and insecure about their ability to succeed. While the double major created time management issues, it also left the students struggling to connect the subject content with their education curriculum. The students felt pressure to navigate this on their own because the faculty of the College of Education is not able to address this in a meaningful way. This relates back to both the operation of the program as addressed by question 1 and the limited time afforded by state policy discussed in question 2.

Faculty participants were particularly concerned about whether or not the program was adequately helping their students to develop the professional persona of a classroom teacher as addressed in the subtheme Fostering Professional Dispositions. Addressing the negative perception of educators among the general public, faculty expressed that the College of Education may not be doing as good a job as they could at making sure students truly understand the reality of being a teacher, at an emotional level. Students also expressed feeling unsure if they were really ready to take on the role of a professional educator after they had completed all requirements. Significantly, alumni participants reflected on their first years out of the program and confirmed that they were not adequately prepared for the reality of being a full time classroom teacher, while also admitting that it may be impossible to be fully prepared right out of the gate. This is a
challenge that none of the participants could easily make suggestions for overcoming. What it did lead to was a discussion of the importance of support, particularly in the form of mentoring, for students in the College of Education.

In the interviews and focus groups, study participants shared their thoughts on the supports that the College of Education is providing to address the challenges discussed in the previous four themes. They also shared their visions of what supports for students could look like. These comments were set forth in **Theme 5: Program supports are meeting some student needs, but they can be improved.** In looking back to the efforts of the UBTEP to use self-reflection as a way to develop the program, the suggestions made by faculty and students about support could be a useful tool to identify the most pressing areas to make improvements.

The faculty and administration use workshops, advising, working directly with students in an administrative capacity, and keeping an open channel of communication with the students to help students to understand their future as a teacher. This was discussed in the subtheme Embracing Professionalism. Faculty perceptions of these support were more favorable than student responses. However, students did feel overall that these supports led to a feeling of overall caring from the administration. The area of greatest concern for students within these discussions was the communication among faculty members. This concern speaks to the importance of a unified delivery of information within the program.

As was previously discussed, the testing and assessments for education students create challenges that faculty and students would like to see addressed as discussed in the subtheme Developing Support for Testing and Assessments. Financial challenges for
students were on the minds of all participants, and while there have been, at times, financial assistance by the program, this is something that the College of Education has little capability of overcoming at this time. Beyond this, students expressed frustration that the faculty are not as fully up to date on the assessments, particularly the edTPA, which leaves them feeling that their licensure could be in jeopardy. Because this assessment is so new, the College of Education is looking at how to refine their workshops to help students best meet this requirement. In the period since this data was collected, the college has, in fact, implemented a wide range of supports, including webinars, upload parties, and workshops to support students and faculty in becoming more familiar with edTPA requirements.

Another subtheme that emerged from participant discussion was Building Community. Faculty and students shared where they felt that community building was working well and where it could be improved. Peer-to-peer relationships were highly prized by the students. The UBTEP could capitalize on this by facilitating stronger peer connections within the cohort model that is already received well by both students and faculty. Students also felt that the faculty-student relationships were meaningful towards the students feeling supported within their classes. These relationships could potentially be strengthened by more structured mentoring programs.

Students identified feeling disappointed at the assignments in some courses that they did not feel adequately prepared them for the classroom. This is examined in the subtheme Connecting Coursework to Pedagogy. Students reported that the practice pieces such as writing lesson plans or looking at case studies did not reinforce a sense of understanding of what these issues would look like in the real world. The Special
Education courses were singled out by students as being the most educative for students about what they needed to know and could potentially serve as a model for other areas.

Study participants identified the clinical experience as a crucial time for students to put into practice all they have been learning. The subtheme Building Connections During the Clinical Experience addresses the elements of the clinical experience most crucial to creating support for the students. Faculty participants commented that the efforts by the Office of Field Experience to build relationships with neighboring schools was central to how well they can support students in the field. Students also stressed that the OFE gave them a sense of security during this year. Perhaps more importantly, however, was the relationship between the teacher candidate and the clinical educator. This relationship was reported by students as an almost “make or break” connection. Students with a supportive CE were more likely to report a positive feeling about their sense of success in their clinical experience. Because students spoke so fervently about this connection, it is recommended that the College of Education look carefully at these relationships.

In line with community building which has been discussed previously in this chapter, mentoring was identified as a potentially game changing component for the College of Education. Mentoring for new teachers is discussed in length in the literature review. Looking at studies that support mentoring for educators can help to understand what role mentoring might have for students in the UBTEP (Flanagan & Society for Research on Educational, 2010; Isenberg et al., 2009; Jones & Youngs, 2012; Womack-Wynne et al., 2011). The comments by faculty and students in the subtheme The Importance of Mentoring illustrate the interest in mentoring to be a significant part of the
program. Mentoring was seen as already occurring through advising and student-faculty relationships. Even more importantly, a strong relationship between the teacher candidate and their clinical educator was seen as a mentorship relationship. But because this was not guaranteed, students and faculty expressed that a more structured mentoring program within the College of Education could work to support students throughout their time in the UBTEP. The important take-aways from the comments are that the relationships should be natural, not forced, that students should be able to seek out a mentor that works well with them, and that faculty should be compensated for their time.

Study participants felt that the faculty and administration of the Sunnydale College of Education are working hard to give the students the best supports. Within the limitations caused by state policies, the program operations are regularly evaluated to ensure that student success is the priority. The voices of students in the program are important to the development of these supports. Putting attention towards developing a mentoring program for current students would be a benefit to the program as a whole.

**Implications of Findings**

In education, student outcomes are the driving factor at every level. The student participants that I spoke with all affirmed that they are pursuing teaching because they want to make a difference to their students. The best way for them to do that is to be well prepared to enter the teaching profession. For this dissertation, my aim was to understand how these students are being supported so they can succeed in their career goals. Through analysis of their discussion, I found that diversity and the importance of improving social perceptions of the teaching profession are also critical indicators for the success of new teachers, and as such, they were included in the discussion of the data.
In discussion of research question 1, the data suggests that this UBTEP is following the right path in using student feedback as a tool for self-reflection. There does appear to be a challenge associated with getting support from the university. This disconnect between the university and the College of Education can have far-reaching implications as to what supports the program can create to best serve the needs of students. This leads to the issue of diversity. The university has a commitment to support diversity, and the need for increased diversity among the faculty and student body of the College of Education has been well established. The two entities should work together to ensure that the program has all necessary means to improve their ability to meet this goal.

In discussion of research question 2, the most significant implications are for the enactment of state policies that work with the UBTEP and the students rather than hinder the operation of the programs and cause extra burdens on the students. The UBTEP has no control over what the state policies are, and can only operate within the confines of the state requirements. It becomes then necessary for the UBTEP to become an advocate based on the experiences of their students. The responses from participants about the state requirements illuminate several areas that the state can work to better meet the needs of students. The double major is one such area. Testing and assessment is another area that would be served well by long-term research. A particular issue that was addressed by faculty was the idea that the assessments do not necessarily reflect how well a person will do as a teacher. This warrants examination.

In discussion of research question 3, student challenges were addressed in connection to supports that students receive from the program. Using the data from students and faculty about these challenges, the UBTEP can address areas where students
might need extra support. This discussion also illustrated that both faculty and students identify mentoring as a favorable support, although what it would look like is open for much interpretation. The students could be better served with a strong, well-coordinated mentorship program while in the UBTEP.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this dissertation lead to the following recommendations for future research. First, the importance of the relationship between a university and a UBTEP is clearly paramount in the ability of the UBTEP to fully commit to supporting their students. Further research into the relationships between UBTEPs and their home universities could work to identify weaknesses in these relationships and suggest ways for the UBTEPs to be better supported by the university. This type of research would help the university and the UBTEP to better understand how they can work together to ensure that they are creating supportive programs that allow students to succeed and persist in their education careers after graduation.

Second, the issue of coursework and pedagogical instruction emerged as crucial elements for education students and pervaded all three research questions. The curriculum design of the education program impacted the operation of the program, was identified as an issue that is related heavily to state requirements, and was indicated as a source of concern for student success overall. It is recommended that a comprehensive comparison study looking at different state requirements for education majors be conducted: it should focus on building connections between coursework and persistence of teachers in the first years. Specifically, identifying whether the NJ system of requiring a double major is more or less effective than other states that might have the requirement
of an education major. Additional data could be collected to compare undergraduate certification and graduate certification programs and the impact on new teachers.

Third, further research studies looking at the challenges specific to education students could work to benefit UBTEPs in terms of recruitment and retention. Several questions emerged from this study that could be addressed in this area. Are there economic issues that keep students from applying or persisting? What are the implications of diversity in an education program? Are there other personal challenges facing students that a UBTEP can address to improve recruitment and retention? Uncovering answers to these questions could lead to improvements in support for students, increased diversity, and improved experiences for students in a UBTEP.

Finally, a long-term action research study is recommended to move closer towards developing a mentor program for students in the UBTEP. More research into what this might look like could be conducted to develop a stronger sense of how to build such a program. Data from this study indicate that faculty and students would like to see long-term mentor relationships that are built organically and allow students to have a reliable support through their first years as a teacher. Piloting a program that establishes mentoring for students from entry in the program through their first year in the profession would give a better idea of how well this support might work to create better prepared teachers. Would having a mentor change the overall outcome for the teacher? Would mentoring help students feel more confident in their teaching? Working to answer these guiding questions could lead to a better understanding of how to best support new teachers, allowing them to persist in their careers.

Conclusion
In conclusion, I want to thank the faculty, students and alumni for the crucial role they played in this research study. Because of their participation, we now have a greater understanding of the challenges that students in an education program face, how the program is working to support students in these challenges, and what students and faculty see as the potential for mentoring of students in an education program. I send my best wishes to all participants for success in all future endeavors.
References


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Appendix A:

Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Focus Group of Current Students

1. Please state your year and your major as an introduction to the group
2. What interested you to go into teaching?
3. What drew you to this school?
4. Are you aware of other options for going into teaching?
5. What interested you in your Liberal Arts major?
6. What kinds of support do you get from your major department?
7. Does any of this support relate to education/teaching?
8. Is there anything that you would like them to do that they don’t do?
9. Is there anything that they do that you don’t think is necessary?
10. What kinds of support do you get from the education department?
11. Do you know who to contact about different questions you might have?
12. Have you encountered any challenges in curriculum while in education classes?
   1. How did you handle them?
13. Is there anything that you would like them to do that they don’t do?
14. Is there anything that they do that you don’t think is necessary?
15. What do you think of when you hear “mentor” or “mentoring program?”
16. Have you ever participated in a mentoring program at the university and/or the education program? If yes, what was it like?
17. Do you have any other thoughts about mentoring?
18. If there were a mentoring program in the education program, what would you want it to include?
Appendix B:

Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Focus Group of Former Students

1. Please state your major, and when you graduated.

2. Are you teaching now? If so, what and where? If not, what are you doing?

3. What interested you in becoming a teacher?

4. What drew you to this education program?

5. In what ways were you supported by the program as a student?

6. Did you face any particular challenges while going through the program?
   
   1. How did you handle them?

7. Is there anything the program did that you think was unnecessary?

8. Is there anything you would have liked them to do differently?

9. Have you had a mentor or participated in a mentoring program in your teacher education program and/or once you became a teacher? If yes, what would you like to share about it.

10. If the education program instituted a mentoring program, what do you think it might look like?
Appendix C:

Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Faculty

1. What is your position (administrative, faculty, or staff; not title)?

2. What do you see as your role here?

3. What challenges do you think students here face?

4. What challenges do students in education programs face?

5. Have you ever participated in a mentoring program, either as a mentee or mentor?

6. Does this program have a mentoring program? If so, please describe it?

7. If not, if this program were to institute a mentoring program, what do you think it would look like?

8. What are the limitations you face in developing support programs for students?
Appendix D:

Guiding themes and questions of inquiry

Theme 1: The structure of the UBTEP as it relates to supporting the students. This theme will focus on how the teacher education program is designed and implemented. This theme is driven by the overarching question:

- What is the program structure of the university based teacher education program?
  - Are students supported by the program? If so, how?
  - What is the faculty perception of the importance of support for students?
  - What are the state requirements for the UBTEP?
- What are the program outcomes?
  - What is the retention and graduation rate of students who enter the program?
  - At what rate are graduates of the program entering the teaching profession?
  - At what rate are graduates of the program remaining in the teaching profession?
  - What is the program doing to maintain or improve these rates?

Theme 2: The student experience in a UBTEP. This theme will focus on the experience of the students as they go through the teacher education program of the research site. This theme is driven by the overarching question:

- What is the experience of students in a UBTEP?
  - Are there stresses that are unique to students in a UBTEP? If so, what are they?
○ Do students in UBTEPs feel supported by their program? In what ways?
○ Do students in UBTEPs feel they could be better supported by their program? In what ways?
○ What do students think support in their program should look like?
○ What do students think about the role of support in their program?

Theme 3: Mentoring and teacher education. This theme will look at the issue of having mentoring for teacher education students as they progress through their program.

○ What does it mean for mentoring of teacher education students to be effective?
○ What does an effective mentoring program for teacher education students look like?
○ What kinds of mentoring programs for teacher education students are being developed and implemented for the general population of students in universities?
  ▪ What is the research used to justify the structure of these programs for teacher education students?
  ▪ What does the design of these programs for teacher education students look like?
○ What kinds of mentoring programs are being developed and implemented for the students in other university based schools and programs, such as nursing, business, criminal justice, pre-law, etc.?
  ▪ What is the research used to justify these programs?
  ▪ What does the design of these programs look like?
What kinds of mentoring programs are being developed and implemented for the students in UBTEP programs?

- What is the research behind these programs?
- What does the design of these programs look like?

Can a mentoring program help students in a teacher education program feel more confident when they move to the classroom?

What are some of the mentoring programs for new teachers?

- Can these be applied to teacher education programs?

What are the budget constraints for developing and implementing mentoring programs in universities?