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YSU education college earns national re-accreditation

Rigorous, agonizing, nerve-racking...

Phil Ginnetti and Mary Lou DiPillo have experienced it all since taking the lead in seeking re-accreditation for Youngstown State University's Beeghly College of Education.

"It took two years of our lives," Ginnetti, dean of the 2,500-student college, said about the examination of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. "It was so grueling."

"They don't leave a stone unturned," said DiPillo, associate dean. "This is the high-stakes test for education schools."

And YSU's Beeghly College of Education has passed with flying colors.

The NCATE accreditation board, consisting of some of the nation's top educators, voted this fall to grant a seven-year re-accreditation for YSU, a stamp of approval that Ginnetti and DiPillo said puts YSU's undergraduate and graduate education programs among the top in the nation.

"We are elated for our students and our faculty because it gives that added little confidence to everyone in the college that we're doing things right," said Ginnetti, who took over the college's top spot in July 2002.

"It's always nice to have someone else tell you that you're doing a good job."

The accreditation, held by less than 60 percent of teacher-education programs nationwide, is nothing new to YSU, dating back to 1967. But NCATE upped its standards in 2000, making the re-accreditation process much more difficult.

"They demand so much more than they did in the past," Ginnetti said.

To make the process even more critical this time around, the state of Ohio three years ago started mandating that all 13 public universities in the Buckeye state receive NCATE accreditation. In addition, the new federal No Child Left Behind law requires that, among other things, teaching candidates graduate from accredited programs.

"It could've shut us down," DiPillo said. "If you don't get this accreditation, you're done."

DiPillo, former chair of the teacher education department at YSU, led the accreditation process, organizing committees to address each of the six intensified NCATE standards, including student knowledge and skills, field experiences, diversity, faculty qualifications and performance.

The committees were chaired by faculty members Richard McEwing, Chuck Vergon, Kenneth Miller, Dora Bailey and Robert Levin. Faculty member Howard Puilman took on the added job of information systems coordinator, collecting, entering and analyzing data for the college. Faculty member Randy Hoover was responsible for updating and revising the conceptual framework.

"Everyone – I mean everyone – in the college was involved in some way," DiPillo said.

In April 2003, an eight-member NCATE assessment team – consisting of deans, teachers, superintendents and other education leaders from California to Florida – converged on the college. They reviewed samples of student work; interviewed students, faculty and university administrators, as well as area school teachers, principals and superintendents; and they visited schools where YSU students are working as student-teachers.

"They reviewed every piece of information in the college," Ginnetti said. "They hold your life in their hands. They're extremely thorough."

The NCATE team gave the university a preliminary thumbs-up before leaving, but the final approval didn't come until this fall when the accreditation board took the final vote. On Nov. 3, the board officially notified President David C. Sweet.

"We feel we have accomplished the world," Ginnetti said.

"It's very rewarding," DiPillo added.

As a result of the process, Ginnetti said the college has systems in place that he said he hopes will make the next re-accreditation not so arduous.

"What we do now is take what we've learned and we work to continue to improve our program," he said, noting that nearly 90 percent of teachers in schools in Mahoning County were educated at YSU. In Trumbull County, nearly eight out of 10 school teachers went through the YSU program.

"You see how important it is for us to produce good teachers," he said. "This re-accreditation proves that that is, in fact, what we do."

-30-

The Beeghly College of Education at Youngstown State University is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20036; phone (202) 466-7496. This accreditation covers initial teacher preparation programs and advanced educator preparation programs. NCATE is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher

Education Accreditation to accredit programs for the preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel.

[Back](#)

[Top](#)



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