Standard One: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions

Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other school professionals know and demonstrate the content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicated that candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards.

1. What do candidate assessment data tell the unit about candidates’ meeting professional, state and institutional standards? For programs not nationally/state reviewed, summarize data from key assessments and discuss these results.

The WIU Teacher and Professional Education Programs (TPEP) evaluate how candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards, which are aligned with our conceptual framework (CF), as a routine part of our practice. Candidates in the initial teacher education programs, including those in the state approved Agricultural Education program, progress through a sequence of key unit assessments that occur in relation to three required transition points: admittance into the teacher education program, approval to student teach, and approval for certification. The data is gathered from two types of assessments. The first occurs when candidates complete the three required state certification exams, including the Illinois Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a discipline-specific content test, and the Assessment of Professional Teaching (APT) exam (NCATE Standards 1a & 1c). Candidates must pass the ITBS to be admitted to a program. WIU submits annual Title II reports, which provide evidence of candidates’ knowledge of their respective content areas. Candidates are required to pass a state test of content knowledge to enroll in student teaching; thus, the annual institutional pass rate on content exams is 100%. The passage rate for the APT is also 100%, as this test must be passed prior to certification. The state content test is aligned with Conceptual Framework Standard (CFS) 1 (knowledge of content), while the APT is aligned with CFS 2 (research-based practices) and 3 (planning, assessment, and creating effective learning environments).

The second type occurs when candidates complete required unit assessments that precede each transition point. All unit assessments include a common set of directions and rubrics and are aggregated at both the programmatic and unit levels. The unit assessments include Reflective Paper #1 (RP1), Disposition Check #1 (DC1), Universal Design (UD), Disposition Check #2 (DC2), Reflective Paper #2 (RP2), Disposition Check #3 (DC3), the Western Teacher Work Sample (WTWS), and the WIU Student Teaching Clinical Experience Evaluation (STCEE). All three disposition checks evaluate candidates’ professional behaviors, including “fairness” and “belief that all students can learn” (1g). RP1, DC1, DC2, and DC3 are aligned with CFS 4 (professional dispositions). The UD assessment is aligned with CFS 3 and the WTWS with CFS 2, 3, and 5 (application of professional skills). RPII reflects CFS 2, 3, and 4, while STCEE reflects CFS 5.

Prior to being admitted to the Teacher Education Program (TEP), content-specific faculty evaluate initial candidates on RP1 (1g). Data provide evidence that candidates articulate initial understandings of teaching, learning, and professional dispositions and develop a plan for addressing weaknesses related to dispositions.

Prior to receiving approval to student teach, faculty evaluate initial candidates on DC1, DC2 and the UD assessment (1c). Data provide evidence that candidates demonstrate the unit dispositions and use knowledge of best practices to design instruction for diverse learners, including students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL).
Prior to program completion and approval for certification, faculty evaluate initial candidates on the WTWS (1b-d) and RP2 (1c; 1g). Mentor teachers complete a midterm and final evaluation of candidates on DC3 and the STCEE (1a-d; 1g). Data from the WTWS provide evidence that candidates utilize research-based best practices to positively impact student learning, while the STCEE provides evidence they meet the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTS). Data from RP2 and DC3 indicate that candidates continue to demonstrate the unit dispositions and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as related to IPTS standards. The aggregate of the assessments at the three transition points indicates that candidates meet CF, IPTS, and content-specific standards.

We annually survey our graduates and their supervisors during their first and fifth years following graduation. Data provide evidence that graduates use the IPTS, Technology, Literacy, and Student Learning Standards to positively impact student learning. Supervisors consistently rate graduates as better prepared than the graduates rate themselves.

The Counselor Education program has been accredited by CACREP until January 31, 2017, while CAA has accredited the Speech and Language Impaired program until October 31, 2016. The Principalship program is undergoing a state-wide mandated redesign and has been exempted from SPA review at this time. The alternative Superintendentcy, the Superintendentcy, and the School Psychology programs have been recognized by their respective SPAs. Data obtained from the Educational Leadership programs’ surveys of graduates and their supervisors indicate that graduates use the knowledge and skills reflected in the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards to create a positive learning environment and facilitate student learning. The School Psychology program also gathers data through surveys of their graduates and formalized feedback from alumni and employers. The Reading Specialist has been recognized with conditions and is now creating additional opportunities for candidates to engage in literacy coaching in authentic settings.

Five key assessments are used to evaluate Elementary Education graduate candidates’ development of professional and CF standards: “Assessment and Differentiation of Instruction” course projects (ADI), the area of specialization course assessment (ASC), final reflective paper (FRP), leadership action plan (LAP), and the capstone action research project (ARP). Candidates’ content knowledge (1a) is assessed in the ASC. Pedagogical content knowledge and skills (1b) are assessed in the ASC as candidates demonstrate knowledge of pedagogical theories and their relationship to student learning and the ability to use research-based strategies, including technology. The ADI reflects an understanding of the characteristics and needs of diverse students and appropriate strategies to address those differences. The FRP assesses their understanding of student diversity, how to create a classroom climate supporting diversity, learning theories, and best practices in the content area. The ARP documents the application of learning theory, strategies for addressing student differences, effective instructional practices, and assessment. The FRP and ARP provide evidence of professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills (1c) as candidates reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their practice; consider the impact of the school, family, and community on student learning; connect activities to students’ experiences; and discuss current research and its implications for their practice. The LAP provides data about their ability to assume a leadership role in their school. The ADI and ARP document candidates’ ability to positively impact student learning (1d). The ADI provides evidence of their understanding of theories underlying assessment, while the ARP documents their ability to analyze and use pre-assessment and formative assessment data to guide instructional decision-making. The FRP reflects their understanding of “fairness” and the “belief that all students can learn” (1g).

Five key assessments are used to evaluate Special Education graduate candidates’ development of professional and CF standards: data-driven instructional project (DI), curriculum planning
project (CP), paraeducator project (PA), speech and language related services project (SLS), and capstone action research project (ARP). Knowledge of content (NCATE Standard 1a) is evident in data from the CP, PA, and SLS projects. Pedagogical content knowledge and skills (1b) are evident in the research-based strategies used in the DI, CP, and ARP. In the PA and SLS, technologies are used to support instructional and assessment activities, while the DI and ARP indicate the use of maintenance and generalization strategies. Candidates demonstrate professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills (1c) in the DI and CP as they respond to students’ beliefs, language patterns and family backgrounds and modify learning environments. In the ARP, they analyze current research on teaching, learning, and best practices; analyze the impact of the school, family, and community on student learning; use specific interventions to accommodate students’ strengths and weaknesses; and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their practice. Candidates demonstrate their ability to impact student learning (1d) in the DI and the ARP in which they implement strategies, analyze assessment data, reflect on their instruction and continually modify their practice to ensure optimal student learning. Faculty observe candidates as they complete the ARP and note their use of professional dispositions and commitment to fairness and the enactment of the belief that all students can learn (1g).

2a. Standard on which the unit is moving to the Target Level
   Describe work undertaken to move to the Target Level
   Discuss plans for continuing to improve

   Standard one was selected as the standard toward which the unit is moving to target level. Our efforts with regard to standard one are nascent, but we believe they are critical in assisting us in moving toward our goal of developing empowered educational professionals. Believing it is not possible to move toward a goal unless that goal has been clearly specified first, much of our effort has been focused on clarifying the meaning of an empowered professional as one who is progressing toward classification as an expert in his/her domain.

   Changes in our initial programs in the past two years have enhanced our ability to gather data that documents programs are moving to the target level. Admission requirements have been enhanced by revisions in the RPI, which now requires that candidates discuss their initial understandings of teaching, learning and professional dispositions, and develop an improvement plan for their weaknesses related to these dispositions. RPI is now evaluated by appropriate content-specific faculty.

   Requirements for approval to student teach have been enhanced by adding two dispositions to DC1 and DC2: fairness and the belief that all students can learn. These dispositions reflect the unit’s emphasis on empowerment in its conceptual framework. From 2002-2008, a three dimensional scale (unacceptable, acceptable, and target) was used to evaluate candidates’ dispositions, and specific indicators were not evaluated individually. In Fall 2009, the University Teacher Education Committee (UTEC) approved adding a fourth dimension to the evaluation scale (acceptable with concerns) and evaluating individual indicators.

   A UD assessment was implemented in courses that prepare candidates to teach students with disabilities. We continue to revise this assessment to reflect the 2010 principles of Universal Design. UTEC approved a requirement that candidates pass their discipline-specific content test prior to student teaching. Course content and assignments have been modified to provide candidates greater opportunities to learn and practice competencies needed to positively impact student learning before they complete the WTWS during student teaching.
Requirements for approval for certification have been enhanced by the adoption of common directions and rubrics for the WTWS, which is evaluated by content-specific faculty during student teaching. Previously, programs used different models of the teacher work sample during student teaching. The common WTWS provides consistent evidence throughout the initial programs that candidates impact student learning. In order to successfully complete the WTWS, candidates demonstrate they possess content and pedagogical knowledge, transform knowledge into action, show commitment to professional standards and dispositions, and engage in reflection on their experiences to positively impact and empower student learning.

We revised RP2 to require candidates to discuss examples of their application of each IPTS and unit disposition. They discuss their strengths and weaknesses within the context of the IPTS and/or the dispositions. RP2 continues to be evaluated by content-specific faculty. Fairness and the belief that all students can learn were also added to DC3.

The data from these new and revised key assessments indicate that the unit is moving towards target levels of performance for Standard 1. The UTEC decision that candidates must pass the content test prior to student teaching provides assurance candidates have acquired in-depth knowledge of the content they plan to teach (NCATE Standard 1a). Candidates’ ability to use multiple instructional strategies so that all students can learn (1b) is evidenced in data from the STCEE (Item 27), demonstrating their use of varied instructional strategies and in their performance on the UD assessment Tasks 1-5 where they provide well-designed adaptations for the lesson plan. Candidates appropriately integrate technology in instruction to support student learning (1b) as evidenced by STCEE Item 36 and their detailed discussions of the potential for instructional technologies to positively impact student learning WTWS Task 4.2.

Candidates develop meaningful experiences to facilitate learning for all students (Standard 1c) as evident in the STCEE Item 4, in the WTWS Task 4.5.4 where they create achievable, meaningful, and motivating activities that enable all students to develop a deeper understanding of the content, and in the UD assessment Tasks 1-5 where effective adaptations for the lesson plan are created. To enhance their ability to impact student learning, candidates reflect on their practice and make necessary adjustments (1c) as evidenced in STCEE Item 53 and in WTWS Task 5.2 where they provide a detailed discussion of the impact of changes in their practice on student learning.

Candidates know how students learn and make ideas accessible to them (Standard 1c) as they discuss examples of how the unit reflects an understanding of specific learning theories, the relationship between development and learning, and the use of best practices for their content area in WTWS Task 4.5.1. They consider the school, family, and community contexts in connecting concepts to students’ prior experiences (1c) in WTWS Task 4.4. In STCEE Item 39, they demonstrate their use of information about students’ families, cultures, and communities as a basis to connect students’ experiences with instruction. In WTWS Task 1.1, they provide an in-depth description of community, district, and school factors that may impact student learning.

As they focus on student learning in WTWS Task 7.1.2 and study the effects of their work (Standard 1d), candidates discuss the successes and challenges students experienced and the role of their teaching skills in facilitating student learning. They assess and analyze student learning (1d) as evidenced in the evaluation of their ability to monitor student progress towards instructional goals (STCEE Item 41) and their selection of effective assessments aligned to those goals (Item 42). In WTWS Task 3.3.1, they assess all unit objectives, align items or tasks with instructional objectives, and develop scoring criteria that provide specific information about the extent to which students have already achieved or are prepared to achieve the objectives. Similar skills are exhibited in post-assessment Task 3.3.2. Candidates develop a formative assessment plan and criteria for evaluation to determine how students are progressing toward achieving unit objectives (Task 3.4). They provide detailed examples illustrating students’ successes and difficulties in
meeting objectives (Tasks 6.1.2 & 6.1.3), summarize and interpret post-assessment data (Task 6.2.1 & 6.3.1), and analyze and evaluate student performance and progress toward meeting objectives in light of pre-assessment data (Task 6.2.2). In addition to assessing and analyzing student learning, candidates make appropriate adjustments to instruction (Standard 1d) as exhibited in their ability to use assessment results to improve instruction (STCEE Item 44). In WTWS Task 6.1.4, they describe successful and varied adaptations that helped individual students achieve the unit objectives.

Candidates reflect on their work with students, families, colleagues, and communities in ways that reflect professional dispositions (Standard 1g) in RP2 Task 2 by providing detailed discussions that reflect an understanding and application of each TEP disposition. DC3 provides evidence that candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors that create caring and supportive learning environments (1g) when they demonstrate a friendly and caring manner to others; interact politely and respectfully with students, peers, colleagues, and supervisors; demonstrate empathy and concern for others; acknowledge perspectives of individuals from diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds; appreciate and embrace individual differences; and demonstrate positive attitudes towards diverse cultures and learners.

Data from the STCEE indicates that candidates encourage self-directed learning (Standard 1g) by maintaining a classroom that is supportive and encourages active participation (Item 17) and by creating a learning community where students accept responsibility for their own behavior (Item 18). Candidates recognize when their own professional dispositions need to be adjusted and develop plans to do so (1g) as evidenced in RP1 in the discussion of at least one indicator for each TEP disposition needing improvement (Task 3) and the development of detailed plans for improving them (Task 4).

The data above provide evidence that we continue to take steps to increase target-level performance. We are committed to creating programs and curriculum that are founded upon scientifically-based educational practices. Faculty in initial programs are discussing how to implement the adoption of a contemporary cognitive science theoretical framework and an explicit framework of the phases in the development of expertise in teaching. This specific model, developed by a unit faculty member, delineates eight stages, or phases, leading to expertise. Four stages are focused on initial preparation and four on the developmental phases that come after years of continued effort and practice following entry into the profession. The use of this novice to expert framework will allow us to develop and/or revise a sequence of courses, experiences, and assessments best suited for facilitating the development of expertise in our candidates.

Another activity contributing to our move to the target level is the identification of “big ideas” in professional core, methods, and content courses. It has been posited that we should identify what constitutes a deep understanding of content and highly effective and efficient practice - the kind experts typically display - prior to developing specific curricula. This process involves the identification of the core concepts and principles that constitute the big ideas which are central to a domain, field, or type of expertise. Understanding the big ideas is critical to the development of expertise and successful application of knowledge to confront problems and issues. Instructors of the professional core, methods, and content courses are in the process of identifying the key big ideas essential for candidates to grasp and apply in their practice. Currently, most of the professional core course instructors, particularly those in the Educational and Interdisciplinary Studies (EIS) Department, have completed this step of the process.

These big ideas from professional education, methods, and content-specific courses will be integrated within each program as faculty consider how candidates learn, what constitutes effective teaching and instruction, and how we know that instruction has resulted in learning. To accomplish the goal of empowering candidates to become competent professionals capable of empowering
their own students, faculty will also examine the explicit integration of all experiences, beginning with the professional course sequence candidates typically take through the culminating performance assessments. Completing the following proposed tasks will enable the unit to create more coherent and effective initial programs that reflect a target level of performance: (1) identifying a common theoretical framework, (2) identifying how to create a foundation for facilitating the eventual development of expertise in teaching, (3) identifying the big ideas that candidates should acquire and apply, (4) integrating these core concepts and principles across programs, and (5) sequencing program experiences.

Programs for other school professionals are strengthening the preparation of their candidates. The reading specialist program is creating a new practicum that requires candidates to complete a series of coaching tasks in one or more school settings. This course combined with an existing capstone course in leadership in reading will ensure greater levels of expertise as candidates assume roles as instructional leaders in literacy. The programs in educational leadership were designed to ensure that knowledge and skills acquired by candidates are in alignment with professional, state, and university standards. Program completers consistently score at a very high rate on the Principal and Superintendent tests of the Illinois Certification Testing System.

Candidates in the School Psychology Program receive additional training in advanced statistics and methods through a new course “Research Methods in Applied Settings,” helping them better understand how to use empirical data to support professional practice. They show their understanding of the use of data-based decision-making as they complete practica and their full-time 12 semester hour internship in order to meet the 11 domains of training.

Program completers in the School Counselor Program have higher than average mean scaled scores in the total and subareas of the state content examination. Candidates are trained to follow the American School Counselor National Model for School Counselors that includes foundational concepts, delivery, management, and accountability. The Model provides the mechanism with which school counselors and school counseling teams design, coordinate, implement, manage and evaluate their programs for students’ success.

Candidates in the Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) program are assessed on Knowledge And Skills Assessment (KASA) forms for each course, which correspond with the program standards of CAA/ASHA. No one may graduate with a rating less than 3 on a 5-point scale for the objectives stated in these forms. A remediation process is used when candidates earn a rating of less than 3.

The Elementary Education graduate program implemented a new course “Assessment and Differentiation of Instruction” to better prepare candidates to use assessment to guide their use of research-based instructional strategies to enable all students to learn. Two areas of specialization were revised to strengthen candidates’ knowledge of and proficiency in teaching literacy and all content areas in the self-contained elementary classroom. The revised capstone course focuses more explicitly on documenting the impact of instruction on student learning. Strategies to increase candidates’ ability to engage in action research and models of collaboration and co-teaching in inclusive classrooms will be introduced in required courses. To enhance progress toward target levels, the Special Education Graduate program revised content of the “Career Education and Transition” course to reflect current best practices, revised a prerequisite course to better prepare candidates for conducting action research in the capstone course, and is realigning graduate core courses and assessments with current CEC and Illinois state standards.