Standard Four: Diversity

The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates can demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity. Experiences provided for candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P-12 school faculty, candidates, and students in P-12 schools.

1. How does the unit prepare candidates to work effectively with all students?

The Unit has identified six proficiencies related to diversity that address the knowledge, skills, and dispositions candidates need to empower learners in their classrooms (NCATE Standard 4a). Candidates demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and individual differences, adapt instruction and assessments, connect classroom activities to students’ backgrounds and experiences, incorporate multiple perspectives into their professional behavior, contribute to the classroom and/or school environment, and communicate in a culturally responsive and respectful manner. Candidates are expected to apply these proficiencies in their instruction or work with students, reflect on the extent to which they use the proficiencies effectively, and demonstrate a commitment to continual improvement in their ability to address the diverse needs of each student.

All initial candidates complete EIS 302 (Multicultural and Social Foundations of Education), which explores multicultural education, cultural and linguistic diversity, race and ethnicity, cultural frames of reference, social class, sexual orientation, gender issues, religious beliefs, and social change (Standard 4a). In SPED 310 (The Exceptional Individual), candidates acquire knowledge of characteristics of individuals with diverse cognitive, physical, behavioral, learning, and communication needs; the identification of students with exceptional needs; methods for accessing technology, services, and resources; and laws, rules and ethical considerations. As candidates complete the online modules focusing on English Language Learners (ELL), they develop an understanding of linguistic, legal, and academic needs of students. The modules also address proficiency standards, identification and assessment, and other programmatic issues. Skills in adapting instruction for individual differences, including the use of principles of Universal Design, are developed in SPED 390 (Classroom Adaptations), MUS 334 (Music for the Exceptional Child), and KIN 393 (Adapted Physical Education). In methods courses, candidates further their understanding of ways to adapt content specific instruction.

In response to concerns raised in our last NCATE visit, candidates now complete an observation in a diverse school setting that assists them in understanding contextual factors that influence schooling and the nature of social interactions that transpire in diverse classrooms in EIS 302 (Standard 4a). The unit now maintains a database (Table 10) to track the diversity of each school site.

The unit formally assesses initial candidates’ acquisition of diversity proficiencies using three Disposition Checks (DC), the Universal Design Assessment, the Student Teaching Clinical Experience Evaluation (STCEE), and the Western Teacher Work Sample (WTWS; Standard 4a). These data indicate that candidates are developing diversity proficiencies. Faculty and mentor teachers share their evaluations with candidates and use this information to improve courses,
experiences, and programs. Specific evidence that candidates are committed to fairness and the belief that all students can learn is found in Reflective Paper I and II. Mentor teachers assess these dispositions during student teaching through DC3 and the STCEE.

Programs for other school professionals also focus on the development of diversity proficiencies (Standard 4a). The Communication Science and Disorders program prepares candidates to meet the needs of diverse students through the Code of Ethics and Standards for Clinical Competencies in two required courses. Counselor Education infuses diversity proficiencies by aligning courses with CACREP standards and offering a course focusing on diversity. A course in the School Psychology program introduces ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, and disability differences. Curriculum, school-based experiences, and the internship prepare Educational Leadership candidates to work with students and their parents, including those who are IEP-eligible, impoverished, second language learners, and from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Candidates in the graduate Reading program develop proficiencies for meeting the needs of struggling readers and culturally and linguistically diverse students through coursework and two practica.

Diversity proficiencies are integrated throughout the Special Education graduate program, preparing candidates to work with students with exceptional needs, as well as families, coworkers, support personnel and community members (Standard 4a). A required course in the Elementary Education graduate program introduces the characteristics of students with cultural, economic, language, and ability differences and develops skills in differentiating instruction. An elective course, Language Arts for Diverse Learners, is also offered.

Experiences with university and school faculty from different cultural/ethnic and gender groups contribute to candidates’ understanding of the benefits of incorporating multiple perspectives into instruction (Standard 4b). The percent of university minority faculty members increased from 14% in 2003 to 19% in 2010. In 2003, 38% of faculty were female. This increased to 44% in 2010. Professional education faculty use their own experiences and understanding of effective strategies for working with diverse students, including English Language Learners and students with exceptionalities, as they teach candidates in their courses. The university offers training in the use of Universal Design. Faculty participate in workshops, such as the annual Dealing with Differences Institute, to enhance their understanding of the contributions and importance of diverse individuals and groups. During field and clinical experiences, candidates observe the skills and strategies their mentor teachers use to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Since our last NCATE visit, the institution has demonstrated its commitment to increasing the diversity of its faculty by initiating the Dual Career Recruitment and Retention Program in order to attract and recruit an "excellent faculty representative of the diverse and global society" (Standard 4b). Programs such as the Minority Dissertation Fellowships, Minority Visiting Professors, and Minority Post-Doctoral candidates also increase the diversity of faculty. COEHS search committees identify publications likely to be accessed by traditionally underrepresented groups and identify groups, organizations, and individuals that could assist in recruiting diverse candidates.

Candidates engage in experiences with diverse peers (Standard 4c). The percent of minority students increased from 10.9% in 2003 to 19.6% in 2010. In Fall 2010, 50.4% of the student population was male and 49.6% was female. Participation in campus organizations and events provides opportunities for candidates to work with diverse peers to understand and address issues related to diversity. Candidates have opportunities to participate in Students Helping Honduras,
Habitat for Humanity, Feminist Action Alliance, Cultural Expressions, WAVE (volunteers who seek to improve the quality of life of diverse populations), Make a Difference Day (working with adults with special needs, older citizens, Head Start and others), and Alternative Spring Break (providing assistance in another community).

WIU is committed to recruiting and retaining a diverse student body (Standard 4c). Admissions staff attend key state and national events, including the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Conference/College Fair and the National Hispanic College Fair. To recruit minority candidates from Illinois, the staff attends the Joliet Junior College Cinco de Mayo celebration, the Illinois Institute of Technology Minority Math and Science Fair, and the Golden Apple Award program. A Minority Student Orientation Program and construction of the Multicultural Center facilitate retention of diverse candidates. The Department of Educational Leadership offers tuition waivers for minority candidates through the Diversity Partners Program.

During field and clinical experiences, candidates observe and teach male and female students from varied socioeconomic and ethnic/racial groups and discuss their ability to meet diverse student needs in journal reflections, reflective papers, the WTWS, and in conversations with their mentor teachers and university supervisors (Standard 4d). Concerns about and strategies for overcoming challenges in meeting diverse needs are shared as student teachers, their mentor teachers, and the university supervisor participate in a weekly three-way written discussions. Candidates in the advanced level and other school professional programs complete field experiences, practica, and internships in their own schools or at sites arranged by the program. The nature of these experiences strengthens their ability to work with diverse learners.

2. Briefly summarize the most significant changes related to Standard 4 that have led to continuous improvement.

As evident in Goal 8 (Promote Social Responsibility) of Higher Values in Higher Education 2008-2018, WIU is committed to “equity, social justice and diversity.” To help fulfill our commitment that candidates “acquire competencies they need to communicate and interact effectively within a culturally diverse world,” beginning in Fall 2011, all WIU students must fulfill a foreign language/global issues graduation requirement. Candidates can complete an intermediate level foreign language course or demonstrate equivalent proficiency, a study abroad experience, a general education global issues course, or a discipline specific global issues course.

Opportunities for candidates to engage in campus experiences highlighting diversity range from attending entertainment events sponsored by the Bureau of Cultural Affairs to attending Visiting Lecturers’ presentations related to issues of diversity. Additionally, in the past few years, with the assistance of the Illinois Association for Cultural Diversity, WIU has brought nationally recognized scholars such as Gary Orfield, Joel Springs, Antonia Darder, Maulana Karenga, Margarita Calderón, and Tim Wise to campus. University faculty also provide presentations that highlight issues related to diversity, including lectures such as Access & Equity: Educating Children of African Descent in Jamaica & Bermuda.

The institution continues its efforts to recruit and retain a diverse student population. The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education recognized WIU as one of the 13 “best practices” institutions nationally for the recruitment and retention of first generation, low-income, and minority students and exceeding the national graduation rate for first generation and low-income students. WIU is also recognized by the “College Access and Opportunity Guide” as one of only two public universities in Illinois best supporting students from disadvantaged
socioeconomic backgrounds. In Fall 2008, WIU-QC and Black Hawk College implemented a plan to recruit and retain students from underrepresented groups who begin their education at a community college and transfer to WIU. Some programs in COEHS are working with Elgin Community College to create a smooth transition to WIU through an “at-a-glance” guide for coursework at both institutions. Of the total student population at ECC, 45% are minorities. The single largest minority group is Hispanic, representing 32% of the total population. In Spring 2011, faculty from COEHS visited four Historically Black institutions to recruit graduate students.

We continually engage in efforts to improve candidates’ proficiencies related to diversity and to enhance their experiences with diverse faculty, peers, and P-12 students. For example, Dr. J.Q. Adams and Dr. Jim La Prad were members of the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) Teaching Diverse Students Initiative (TDSi) Pilot College Partners development team. Both assisted in workgroup meetings in Washington DC and Chicago and site development webinars in the production of a multimedia web-based resource that “focuses on helping teachers and school leaders enhance their professional skills, understandings, and dispositions in order to improve the learning opportunities of racially and ethnically diverse students.”

Recognizing the need to provide consistent and in-depth information related to the characteristics and needs of English Language Learners, faculty created five online modules to help candidates increase their knowledge and skills so that they can effectively teach linguistically diverse P-12 students. The common directions for the WTWS ask candidates to discuss the diversity of their placement, the implications of that diversity for their instructional plans and assessments, and to reflect on the effectiveness of the accommodations implemented for diverse learners. Reflective Paper I and II were revised and now require candidates to discuss how they demonstrate their belief in fairness and that all students can learn, as well as their plans for addressing weaknesses related to these two fundamental principles of diversity.

The Illinois Professional Teaching Standards have been significantly revised and focus on student diversity and differentiation to a much greater extent. In Spring 2011, program, professional education, and field experience and clinical faculty began identifying elements of their courses and experiences that address these new standards. Once this task is completed, faculty will identify the elements of the new standards not currently addressed. New courses, content, and experiences may be developed to address these deficiencies, particularly in differentiating instruction. We anticipate realigning Reflective Papers I and I, the WTWS and STCEE with the new IPTS. In Fall 2011, the 2010 revised Principles of Universal Design will be introduced in SPED 390, MUS 334, and KIN 393 courses, enabling candidates to more fully understand and develop skills in applying strategies for accommodating students with a range of cultural and individual needs.

A section has been added to the STCEE form asking mentor teachers to identify the nature of the diversity of students in their classrooms. Previously, this information was only available at the school or district level on the Illinois Interactive Report Card website. This information will enable the Unit to determine the diversity of the candidates’ experience at the classroom level.

Programs for other school professionals are undertaking efforts to increase candidates’ effectiveness in working with diverse students. Candidates in the Educational Leadership internship must directly assist in special education or disciplinary staffing, team meetings, and diagnostic sessions and use research to develop procedures that provide struggling students with opportunities for extra support. Candidates for the Principalship program also must take EIS 607, “Implications of Diversity for Educational Leaders.” Candidates and a faculty member in School
Psychology presented “LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) Youth Who Are Bullied: What Every School Psychologist Should Know” at a state conference to increase awareness of the implications of LGBTQ youth who are bullied in schools, including risk factors, modalities of bullying, outcomes, interventions and prevention methods, and resources for support. The supervisors of the Macomb graduate Reading practica have recruited tutees from diverse linguistic backgrounds to provide greater opportunities for candidates to work with English Language Learners.

The Special Education Graduate Program is creating a new course, “Methods for Students with Autism Spectrum and Communication Disorders,” to help candidates develop skills in teaching this exceptional group of learners. The graduate program in Elementary Education plans to add a focus on Response to Intervention in their program to enhance the ability of candidates to meet the diverse needs of students in their classrooms.

Results from a survey conducted in Fall 2010 indicate that teacher education faculty were most likely to have worked with students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities and least likely to have worked in urban settings or with English Language learners. Faculty will be encouraged to complete the comprehensive ELL modules and to use this information in the courses they teach.