Overview and Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework establishes the shared vision for a unit’s efforts in preparing educators to work effectively in P-12 schools. It provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. The conceptual framework is knowledge based, articulated, shared, coherent, consistent with the unit and institutional mission, and continuously evaluated.

1. What are the institution’s historical context and unique characteristics?

Founded in 1899 in rural West Central Illinois, the Western Illinois State Normal School was established to address teacher preparation in the state’s grammar schools, particularly in the semi-rural areas of West Central Illinois. The faculty and students of Western were eager to meet this need, and the institution soon became known for its well-rounded, deeply committed graduates, a tradition that continues. The name was changed to Western Illinois State Teachers College in 1921 and then to Western Illinois University (WIU) in 1957. The institutional mission expanded to include programs that prepared high school teachers, the state’s earliest and most successful extension program, a multi-faceted graduate school, and liberal arts programs. Today WIU is comprised of four distinguished colleges that include Arts and Sciences, Business and Technology, Education and Human Services, and Fine Arts and Communication. Western has earned and maintains a reputation for expanding public access to affordable, high quality degree programs and fostering student involvement in University activities. Western is now a leading university with a residential campus in Macomb, a commuter campus in the Quad Cities, and extension and distance learning programs. WIU has been nationally recognized for recruiting and retaining first generation, low-income and minority students. With an outstanding, diverse faculty and staff committed to multicultural and international education, WIU offers undergraduate and graduate programs of study to more than 12,500 students from Illinois, across the nation, and around the world. (adapted from 2010-11 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 4).

2. What is the institution’s mission?

Our vision is that Western Illinois University will be the leader in educational quality, opportunity, and affordability among its peers. Our mission supports the enactment of our values and the creation of a synergy between instruction, research, creativity and service in order to prepare and support a socially responsible, diverse student, faculty, and staff population to become leaders in the global society. Our values focus on academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth, and social responsibility. Academic excellence requires a commitment to a dynamic teaching-learning process in a challenging, supportive learning community. Our diverse faculty challenge students and themselves to think critically and creatively and to actively engage in learning and research. Educational opportunity is offered to those who show promise and a willingness to work toward achieving Western’s shared educational goals. Personal growth is fostered in an environment that celebrates diversity in thought and perspective while promoting wellness, ethical decision-making and personal responsibility. Social responsibility requires a commitment to equity, social justice and diversity while maintaining the highest standards of integrity as Western seeks to impact economic,
educational, cultural, environmental, and community development in the region, nation and the world. (adapted from 2010-11 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 5-6).

3. What is the professional education unit at your institution and what is its relationship to others units at the institution that are involved in the preparation of professional educators?

Western’s Teacher and Professional Education Program (Unit) membership includes candidates, faculty, administrators and staff from four colleges, the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business and Technology, the College of Education and Human Services, and the College of Fine Arts and Communication. The Dean of the College of Education and Human Services serves as head of the Unit and is assisted by the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate and Teacher Education, the Director of Advising/Certification Officer, the Field and Clinical Coordinator, and the Department Chairs and program designees for the Teacher and Professional Preparation programs.

The governing body of the unit is the University Teacher Education Committee (UTEC). UTEC exercises direct oversight of all policies related to, and the implementation of, preparation programs for teachers and other school personnel. UTEC has the authority and responsibility for setting and achieving professional education goals in the institution; establishing policies for governance, programs, student admission, continuation and certification; designating responsibility for program decision-making; and developing and maintaining appropriate relationships both within the institution and external to it. All program changes that affect teacher and advanced certification must be approved by UTEC. Its membership is designed to represent the breadth of the Teacher and Professional Education Programs. UTEC includes representatives from Western’s four colleges, the certification office, candidates, and local and regional public school administrators and teachers (adapted from the UTEC Operating Paper).

4. What are the basic tenets of the conceptual framework and how has the conceptual framework changed since the previous visit?

The vision, mission, and values of Western’s Teacher and Professional Education Programs Conceptual Framework define not only the qualities we seek to develop in our candidates but also reflect our ideals and philosophy. Our vision at Western is that our graduates will be empowered educational professionals deeply committed to continuous learning and the empowerment of all learners. Our mission is to empower candidates to become educational practitioners who engage in informed action that is grounded in knowledge and reflection; who are deeply committed to the highest standards of professional practice; who are able to adapt to emerging social, economic, and cultural landscapes; who are skilled in the use of technological tools that promote teaching and learning; and who are committed to empowering all learners. Our values encompass Knowledge, Action, Reflection, Commitment, and Empowerment. Our unit embraces a commitment to the creation of a professional community wherein candidates develop the capability, confidence, efficacy, and sense of authority, enabling them to create a community that positively transforms the lives and actions of all learners and engages them in attaining their full potential. Our philosophy is grounded in the pragmatism of Dewey and his philosophy of thought, communication and action towards public interests (Garrison, 2009; Hanson, 2008; Hickman, 2007).
With a focus on the empowerment of all learners, our conceptual framework has evolved to one that integrates the values of knowledge, reflection, action and commitment. Our former conceptual framework, although certainly focused on important components of preparing quality teacher candidates, tended to emphasize knowledge of teaching, learners, content, and professional skills and dispositions, tempered by application and reflection, as the critical elements in preparing future teachers. The revised framework continues to include knowledge and reflection as essential components in teacher preparation. It has evolved to emphasize that knowledge, combined with a strong commitment to students and the profession, must be transformed into action. This commitment to action empowers candidates to transform the lives of their future students in ways that will also empower them as learners. The revised framework forms the foundation for the integration of knowledge, skills and dispositions in the preparation of candidates and educational professionals that enables them to meet the challenges of providing a 21st century education and positively impacting student learning (TPEP Conceptual Framework).