

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK Executive Summary

The conceptual framework of the College of Education is grounded in the Vincentian tradition (service to those most in need) upheld by the founding fathers of Niagara University. Niagara University educates its students and enriches their lives through programs in the liberal arts and through career preparation, informed by the Catholic and Vincentian traditions.

### Mission of the College of Education

It is the mission of the College of Education to prepare educational and mental health leaders, who demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to serve others and who further the values and practices of their respective professions. We seek to inspire our candidates in the Vincentian tradition; and to foster core **professional dispositions of professional commitment and responsibility (fairness), professional relationships (includes belief that all children can learn), and critical thinking and reflective practice.**

As a faculty, we are committed to developing programs with courses, clinical experiences, and assessments based on three complimentary dimensions: constructivism, process-product framework, and reflective practice. The knowledge base underpinning these dimensions includes current research, theory and practice in the profession, as well as on-going scholarship by members of the faculty of education. The dimensions are represented through the visual of a garden.



### College of Education Conceptual Framework

*The conceptual framework for the program embraces three dimensions: constructivism, process product framework, and reflective practice. These three, complimentary dimensions are represented by the analogy of a garden. In this analogy, the learning environment takes the form of the garden. The gardeners represent the role of leaders, teachers and counselors; and the students the yield that, through care and nourishment, are provided the opportunity to bloom and flourish. This visual representation was created to depict the conceptual framework.*

## **1. Student-Centering Through Constructivist Practice**

Grounded in Dewey's progressive educational philosophy, predicated on the learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, and furthered through the research of such modern leaders as Darling-Hammond (2001), Shulman (2005), Gardner (2006), Perkins (2009), and Danielson (2007), this dimension is based on the belief that knowledge is created and developed by learners and is influenced by the experiences, values, and multiple identities (e.g., race, class, culture, gender, nationality, exceptionality, language of individuals.) This perspective drives us to place the prior knowledge and experiences of students at the core of our instructional practice and facilitate their development through meaningful exploration. Constructivist practice invites candidates to be active participants in their own development and to view knowledge--in theory and in practice--as fluid social constructions that are made and re-made through reflective interactions with social, cultural, and natural phenomena (Dansforth & Smith, 2005; Foote, Vermette, & Battaglia, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Marlowe & Page, 1998; Vermette, 2009).

## **2. A Process-Product Framework**

Throughout our programs, we emphasize that education, counseling and leadership are most effective when they acknowledge the interdependence of process and product. With this individualized framework for growth, there are multiple paths to effective practice and we encourage educators, educational leaders and counselors to continuously examine and implement a wide range of research-based best practices. This dimension toward examining the interplay of practice and outcome transforms earlier behaviorist methodology and has been advocated by Good and Brophy (2003, 2008) in the many editions of their text Looking in Classrooms, as well as by Darling-Hammond (2001) in her work on teacher-testing and performance-based assessment.

## **3. Reflective Practice**

Self-assessment, peer-assessment, and critical examination of the efficacy of one's own practice are essential dispositions for all professionals (Feimann-Nemser, 1990). We believe that reflective practice can be taught in the context of courses that view students as knowledge producers in search of meaning (Palmer, 1983). Pedagogy that poses problems rather than transmits content encourages reflective thinking and doing (Miller, 1993). Educators and mental health professionals must be reflective and metacognitive themselves in order to encourage these practices in those they serve (Eby, Herrell, & Hicks, 2002; Egan, 2007; Henderson, 1996; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). We also believe that interaction with current and future practitioners both extends and promotes such reflection.

Faculty members in the College seek to extend and promote these dimensions through modeling related pedagogical practices and instilling in our candidates a desire to promote such practices in their professional lives. As indicated on [the Conceptual Framework: Alignment to Assessment System](#), these dimensions are assessed for candidates and faculty in terms of curriculum, instruction and teaching, field and clinical experiences, modeling effective practice in teaching and research, and though follow-up surveys.

## **Goals to Implement the Conceptual Framework**

Extending from the mission of the University and the College of Education's theoretical dimensions described above, the goals of the College of Education provide direction for the unit, its faculty, programs, and candidates. The five overarching goals of the College of Education are as follows:

1. The College of Education will demonstrate its commitment to a diverse, inclusive, multicultural, and international society through its personnel, candidates, curriculum, and clinical experiences.
2. The professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators within the College of Education will be substantive and ongoing with the aim of continuously promoting the quality of programs and extending the current contributions of the faculty and professional staff.
3. All programs within the College of Education will be based on high standards consistent with our own values, and those of accreditation and review bodies; and will be consistently revised and developed to meet the needs of the counseling and education communities.
4. Candidates and graduates from the College of Education's programs will demonstrate the professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions of outstanding practitioners as defined by our values and those of accreditation and review bodies.
5. The College of Education, in accordance with the mission of the University, will demonstrate its commitment to expanding professional partnerships and service endeavors to address the needs of the broader community.

## **Candidate Proficiencies**

The conceptual framework provides the context for developing and assessing candidate proficiencies based on professional, state, and institutional standards. The program statements and knowledge bases, delineated below, guide the curriculum and assessment strategies within each program.

## **Educational Leadership Program**

The educational leadership programs in the College of Education are founded on a commitment to developing practitioners in the Vincentian tradition. Graduates of these programs are expected to demonstrate indicators of the professional dispositions in the core areas of professional commitment and responsibility, professional relationships, and critical thinking and reflective practice. Additionally, we expect candidates within these programs to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions recognized by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC).

**Counseling and School Psychology Programs**

The counselor preparation programs and the school psychology program in the College of Education are founded on a commitment to developing practitioners and leaders in the Vincentian tradition. Graduates of these programs are expected to demonstrate indicators of professional dispositions in the core areas of professional commitment and responsibility, professional relationships, and critical thinking and reflective practice. Additionally, candidates are expected to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and ethical standards as set forth by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) for counseling and those of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) for school psychology.

**Teacher Education Programs**

The teacher preparation programs in the College of Education are founded on a commitment to developing instructional leaders in the Vincentian tradition. Graduates of these programs are expected to demonstrate indicators of professional dispositions in the core areas of professional commitment and responsibility, professional relationships, and critical thinking and reflective practice.

Candidates in all teacher education programs must demonstrate competency in each of the standards associated with the nationally recognized associations aligned with the areas of certification they seek. As aligned with the overall principals of the standards of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC standards) and of the standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), these professional standards include:

<b>Certification Area</b>	<b>National Association</b>
Birth to Grade 2	National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
Grades 1-6	Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)
Science Grades 5-12 (biology or chemistry)	National Science Teachers Association (NSTA)
Social Studies Grades 5-12	National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
English Grades 5-12	National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
Foreign Language Grades 5-12	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
Mathematics Grades 5-12	National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)
TESOL Birth – Grade 12	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
Special Education Grades 1-6 or 7-12	Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

Reading Specialist Birth – Grade 6 or Grades 5-12	International Reading Association (IRA)
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**Commitment to Diversity**

The conceptual framework reflects the College’s commitment to preparing candidates to support learning for all students. It also provides a conceptual understanding of how knowledge, dispositions, and skills related to diversity are integrated across the curriculum, instruction, field experience, clinical practice, assessment, and evaluation.

Framed within the mission of the University and the overarching commitment to serving those most in need (Vincentian mission), the first goal of the College of Education states that “the commitment of the College to a diverse, inclusive, multicultural, and international society will be demonstrated through its personnel, candidates, curriculum and clinical experiences.” Indicators of performance are measured and reported/discussed annually.

Faculty in the College of Education adopted the knowledge base and indicators of candidate performance related to diversity as informed by culturally relevant pedagogy (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Assessment measures for each program are based on the indicators of culturally relevant pedagogy and align with national standards for the program.

**Commitment to Technology**

The conceptual framework reflects the College’s commitment to preparing candidates who are able to use educational technology to help all students learn. It also provides a conceptual understanding of how knowledge, skills and dispositions related to educational and information technology are integrated throughout the curriculum, instruction, field experience, clinical practice, assessment and evaluation.

The commitment to technology is noted across facilities (state-of-the-art technology in the Academic Complex and teaching studio), in candidate proficiencies, and in professional development priorities related to instructional technology for faculty. Candidates are expected to demonstrate the application of technology as noted in program standards, using the ISTE standards to inform their application and assessment of instructional technology.

**Assessment System**

The conceptual framework serves as the foundation for the College of Education’s Assessment System. The Assessment System is a carefully designed and functional system for collecting, maintaining, analyzing, reporting, and using meaningful information for planning, decision-making and continuous improvement. The assessment system is aligned with the conceptual framework of the College, includes data related to multiple points of assessment, reflects the involvement of the professional community, and ensures the integration of assessment information and data with other University assessments. Specific steps are taken to establish fairness, accuracy, and consistency in these assessment procedures and unit operations.

In keeping with the conceptual framework, each program has identified 6 – 8 assessments that provide multiple indicators of candidate performance on each of the approved program standards. All programs have clear transition points (admission, entry to clinical practice, exit from clinical practice, completion of program, and follow-up) that serve as a roadmap for success for candidates and an accountability framework for the unit.

Data are analyzed by faculty annually to improve the operation of the Unit, its programs and the performance of its graduates. The assessment system focuses on the use of data for continuous improvement with an organizational structure and annual timelines for the promulgation of data, discussion of performance, and consideration of appropriate changes or revisions.