

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*The conceptual framework of the College of Education (“the Unit”), as described in the following pages, establishes the shared vision for the College of Education at Niagara University in preparing educational leaders, teachers, counselors and school psychologists to work in Pre-k – 12 schools. The framework, developed with and shared through our educational partnerships, distinguishes the graduates of Niagara University and its programs. The conceptual framework is knowledge-based, shared, consistent with the University and College mission, and continuously evaluated.*

- *Shared Vision*
- *Candidate Proficiencies (including dispositions) Aligned with Professional, State, and Institutional Standards*
- *Commitment to Diversity*
- *Commitment to Technology*
- *Assessment System*

### Shared Vision

The conceptual framework of the College of Education is grounded in the Catholic and Vincentian tradition upheld by the founding fathers of Niagara University. The mission and enabling goals of the University are included in the framework as follows:

#### **University Mission**

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.

- As a university, Niagara prepares its students for positions of responsibility in the professions and in the broader society. Through teaching, research and service in programs of study at the baccalaureate and graduate levels, Niagara seeks to develop within its students a passion for learning.
- The university's commitment to the Catholic faith provides perspective in the search for truth and meaning. Catholic doctrine and its moral code inspire respect for the God-given dignity of every person and all faith traditions. Students experience the vision and reality of a gospel-based, value-centered education.
- As a Vincentian university, Niagara draws inspiration from St. Vincent de Paul, who organized his contemporaries to respond compassionately to people's basic needs. Continuing this tradition, Niagara seeks to inspire its students to serve all members of society, especially the poor and oppressed, in local communities and in the larger world.

- Overall, through its curricular and extracurricular programs, Niagara University seeks to develop the whole person, mind, body, heart and soul, for the benefit of one's personal and professional life.

### **College of Education Vision and Mission Statement**

The shared vision of the College of Education focuses on excellence (high quality), transforming the community through education (cutting edge), opportunity that is global and diverse, reciprocal and collaborative partnerships, and learner and community-focused instruction (student/family). This vision provides guiding principles for the mission, goals, and standards for the Unit and its programs.

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 complementary 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. This visual representation was created by the members of the faculty of education as the logo depicting the conceptual framework.



### ***College of Education Conceptual Framework***

*The conceptual framework for the program embraces three dimensions: constructivism, process product framework, and reflective practice. These three, complementary 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 by the members of the faculty of education as the logo depicting 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 and counseling 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 through follow-up surveys.

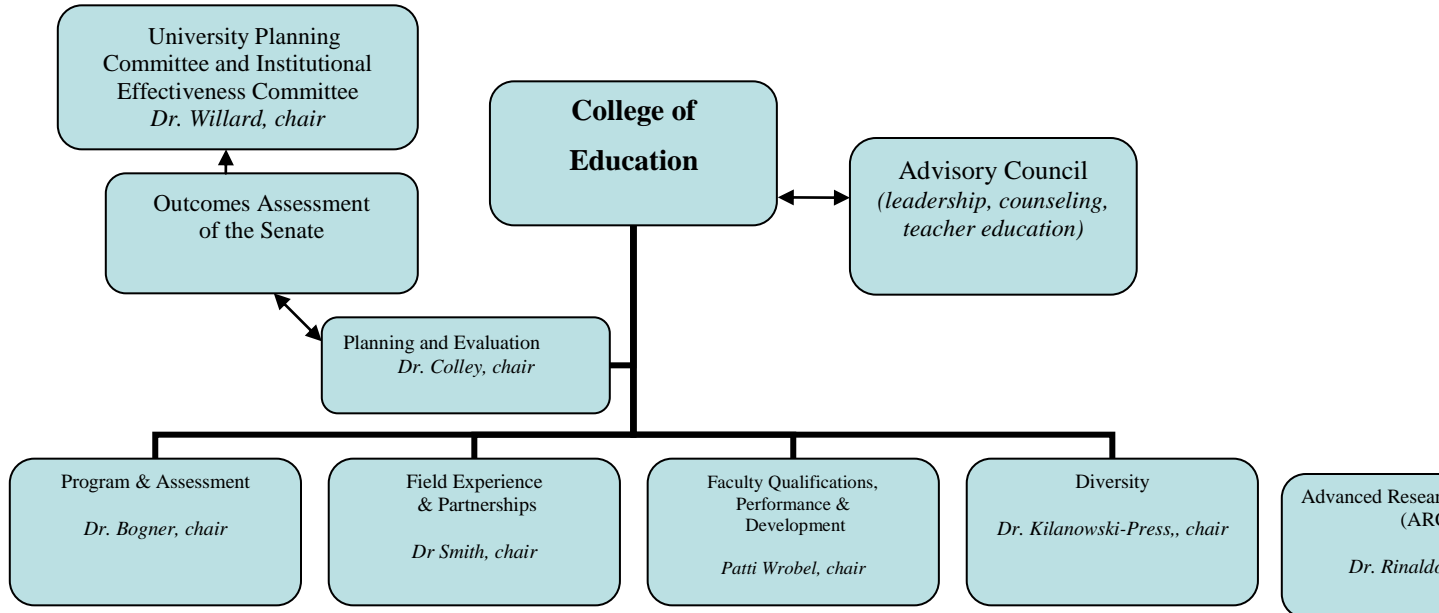
### **College of Education Strategic Goals, 2004 - 2011**

Extending from the mission of the University and the College of Education's and theoretical orientation described above, the goals of the College of Education provide direction for the unit, its faculty, programs, and candidates. These goals are integrated into the [Niagara University Strategic Plan, 2008-2011](#), with specific funding aligned with identified objectives and actions. The Dean of the College of Education and members of the faculty serve on the University-wide Planning Committee – the committee which formulates and reviews the initiatives of the University's strategic plan.

The five overarching goals of the College of Education include the unit's commitment to diversity, strong partnerships with the educational community, the preparation of teachers, counselors and leaders who help all children learn, the review and development of programs that meet high national standards, the integration of technology, and the extension of faculty contributions. These goals are continually assessed and translate into [the College of Education's Strategic Plan](#) of action, which guides the College's future directions:

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.

These strategic goals are assigned specific objectives and implementation measures in each program area (i.e., teacher education, counseling and school psychology, educational leadership) and are aligned with the NCATE Unit Standards. The College of Education works directly with the leadership of the University to ensure the coordination of assessment information and data. The Committee structure, depicted below, has been established to ensure this coordination and on-going integration of assessment into the operation of the College. The Unit committee structure is specifically organized as the mechanism for reporting progress and recommending program (and planning) improvements. The structure supports the alignment of planning and assessment at both the University and Unit level.



The standing committees of the Unit are College Planning and Evaluation (Unit –based); Program and Assessment; Field Experiences and Partnerships; Diversity; Faculty Qualifications and Professional Development, and the Advanced Research Committee. The [Standing Committees of the College Committees](#) have formal charges that are aligned with NCATE Unit Standards and the College of Education strategic goals. Chairs of the Committees are appointed to a two-year term, with all members of the faculty serving on one of the Committees.

### Candidate Proficiencies Aligned with Professional, State and Institutional Standards

The conceptual framework provides the context for developing and assessing candidate proficiencies based on professional, state, and institutional standards. The third goal of the College of Education states that “all programs 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.” The program statements and assessment models illustrate the manner in

which candidate and program assessment and evaluation on these standards will be performed.

Faculty has adopted program statements that translate the conceptual framework of the Unit into actionable initiatives within the program areas of teacher education, counseling, school psychology, and educational leadership. The program statements and knowledge bases, delineated below, guide the curriculum and assessment strategies within each program.

### **Educational Leadership Program Statement**

The educational leadership programs in the College of Education are founded on a commitment to developing practitioners who, in the Vincentian tradition, foster human learning, development, spiritual well being, and emotional stability in their respective institutions. 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). The ELCC standards were prepared by members representing the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

### **Counseling and School Psychology Program Statement**

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 field who, in the Vincentian tradition, individually and systemically foster human growth and development, and spiritual and emotional well being within a culturally diverse context. 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 Program Statement**

The teacher preparation programs in the College of Education are founded on a commitment to developing instructional leaders who, in the Vincentian tradition, individually and systemically foster human learning, development, spiritual well being, and emotional stability in each of the students they encounter. 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)

### **Commitment to Diversity**

The conceptual framework reflects the unit's commitment to preparing candidates to support learning for all students and 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.” This goal is also reflected in the University’s strategic plan in

Goal 1, Objective F which states that “Niagara University will become a more diverse institution, and prepare students to succeed in an increasingly diverse global society”. Indicators of performance are measured at the Unit level and reported/discussed annually. These indicators include the diversity of candidates, diversity of placements (high needs – field experiences, teaching assistantships, student teaching, internships), diversity of full-time faculty/supervisors and of part-time faculty and supervisors), diversity of P-12 students and cooperating/associate teachers, and international experiences of candidates and faculty.

In 2005, faculty in the College of Education adopted [the Framework for Standards and Assessment of Diversity](#) to set forth the knowledge base and indicators of candidate performance related to diversity as informed by culturally relevant pedagogy (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Assessment measures were delineated for each program area based on the indicators of culturally relevant pedagogy that align with national standards for the program. Data are collected and analyzed to determine the strength of candidate performance related to teaching/learning with P-12 students from diverse backgrounds.

### **Commitment to Technology**

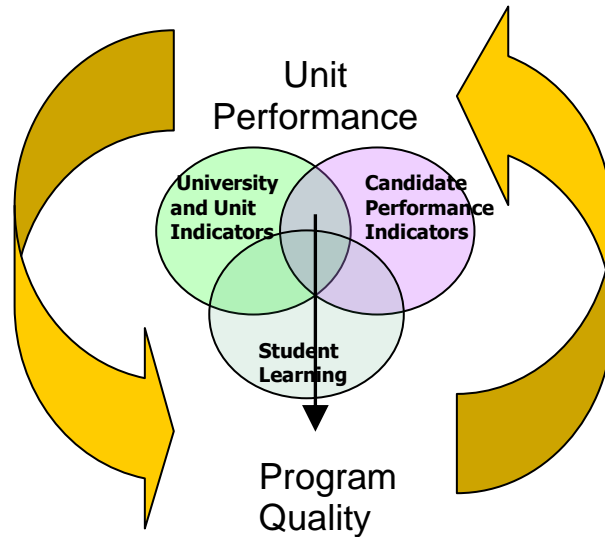
The conceptual framework reflects the unit's commitment to preparing candidates who are able to use educational technology to help all students learn. It also provides a conceptual understanding of how knowledge, skills and dispositions related to educational and information technology are integrated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

The commitment to technology is noted across the goals of the College – from facilities (state-of-the-art technology in the Academic Complex and teaching studio) to 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 Unit’s [Assessment System](#). The Assessment System is a carefully designed and functional system for collecting, organizing, maintaining, analyzing and utilizing meaningful information that is readily available for the purpose of decision making and planning, and strengthening the unit and programs (see Figure 1). Specifically, the system has been developed for (a) measuring progress (Unit standards, strategic plan goals, federal and state standards) for accreditation and evaluation, (b) identifying strengths and issues, and (c) internal planning, analysis and advocacy (plan for the Unit generally, program areas specifically), and (d) continuous improvement and strengthening of performance (unit, candidates, programs, faculty). The components of the system and the continuous process for reporting, discussion, and using data for planning and continuous improvement are clearly detailed in the [Assessment System](#).

Figure 1. Unit and Program Assessment



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.

The Assessment System:

- Represents the coordination of data and accountability measures (university-wide coordination with enrollment management, institutional research, information technology, fiscal management, career development);
- Is a comprehensive system that aligns the Unit strategic plan, NCATE Unit standards, standards of the State Education Department and Ministry of Education in Ontario, Title II, and university annual reporting requirements;
- Reflects the capability of addressing multiple demands for data (current and over time); and
- Examines validity and utility of the data produced and makes modifications in assessments and data reporting, as necessary

Items from unit-wide assessment instruments have been aligned with indicators of the University mission, unit goals and the theoretical dimensions of the conceptual framework. The alignment of the assessment system to the conceptual framework is depicted in the [the Conceptual Framework: Alignment to Assessment System](#).

Program-level knowledge, skills, and dispositions are aligned with the approved professional standards and have been developed and confirmed by faculty for each program area (teacher education, counseling and school psychology, educational leadership). Each program area has identified 6 – 8 assessments that provide multiple indicators of candidate performance on each of the approved program standards.

All programs within the unit 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. Transition points at the advanced level are unique to each program; therefore, may vary across the unit. At the initial level, transition points vary by level of the degree (baccalaureate preparation as compared with the initial preparation at the Master's level).

The Planning and Evaluation Committee of the Unit serves as the overall mechanism to review progress and recommend changes as indicated by the data. The charge of the Committee is to provide leadership for quality across the Unit through planning and assessment for the College of Education. Specific committees of the Unit have been charged to collect, analyze, and report on specific standards. These Committees are Program and Assessment; Field Experiences and Partnerships; Diversity; Faculty Qualifications and Professional Development and the Advanced Research Committee. Candidate, faculty, and unit assessment data are regularly shared for the purpose of improvement based on the data.

Data on unit operations and candidate performance 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 and discussion of performance ([Assessment System](#)).

### *Changes and Revisions to the Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework was initially developed in the early 1990's in concert with the professional community and continues to be reviewed and updated. Changes include the following:

1. In 2006, a significant revision was made to change the candidate dispositions, with the delineation of observable indicators for each program, and the establishment of a reliable evaluation methodology. The faculty adopted three core dispositions of professional commitment and responsibility (includes the belief that all children can learn), professional relationships, and critical thinking and reflective practice (includes fairness) with observable behaviors delineated for each program area. The faculty voted to adopt the instrumentation and procedural methodology that had been researched by the faculty (Rinaldo et.al). The assessment of dispositions has subsequently been threaded throughout programs in coursework, assessments, and field experiences.

3. Programs were further aligned to the national standards of the specialized professional associations (SPA). While programs in the Unit were framed on the INTASC and NPBTS standards, further alignment to the specific professional standards took place across programs.
4. Updated research-based references were added to the framework and additional members of the faculty added to this knowledge-base through their scholarship. This work has resulted in education faculty leadership of the University Committee on College Teaching and Learning.
5. The academic sector of the University, adopted an active, integrated vision for teaching and learning. This vision, grounded in the philosophical tenets of the conceptual framework of the College of Education, extended the influence of the faculty of education across the campus.
6. A new strategic plan for the Unit was approved by the faculty (2004). The 2004-2010 strategic plan includes the revised dispositions, goals, and new objectives/measures. The strategic goals were amended, most notably goal #5, to add focus on service (underserved communities), partnerships that improve student learning, and technology.