**The University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

 **Conceptual Framework**

UNCG is guided by the belief that our work must ensure

**Accessibility to Life’s Opportunities through Teaching, Learning and Caring**

To achieve this overarching goal, we focus on

**Leadership**

**Professional Knowledge**

**Professional Practice**

**Educational Environment**

**Data-driven Decision Making**

**Professional Growth**

**Executive Summary**

The mission of professional education at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro is to ensure “Access to Opportunities through Teaching, Learning and Caring.” This requires excellence in all our programs through alignment to state and national standards; explicit connections between research, theory and practice; candidates’ acquisition of the knowledge, skills and dispositions of their disciplines; detailed evaluation of our candidates’ continual professional growth; collaboration among stakeholders; ongoing self-study; and an overriding commitment to fostering beliefs and actions that promote education for all. Toward these ends, our Unit and programs focus on six areas: leadership, professional knowledge, professional practice, educational environments, data-informed decision making, and professional growth to support the learning of all children in the context of 21st century complexity and dynamic change.

**Introduction**

At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and across the nation, professional education has evolved. Our early preparation programs were housed in a campus-based lab school in which faculty provided daily instruction in pedagogical methods as prospective teachers participated in extensive internships. In the mid-20th century, we moved to partnerships in which university faculty, public school professionals and other stakeholders collaboratively prepared our candidates in the content, pedagogy and practica of their disciplines. Today, our emphasis on providing quality methods instruction and extended internships continues at the same time that we recognize that the development of professional excellence involves rich, multi-faceted experiences within the public school and deep understandings of the realities of 21st century educational expectations to prepare all students for college, career and life.

Our programs have evolved from preparing only new teachers at the undergraduate level to graduate education programs that include career changers moving into the classroom, experienced teachers at every grade level and many content areas, administrators, media coordinators, social workers, and school counselors. Faculty members have increasingly relied on research to improve our understanding of quality teaching. We recognize that there is a growing knowledge base that should guide professional preparation programs and practice, and we both use that knowledge base in our coursework and practica, and we contribute to it through thoughtful, targeted and collaborative research activities. As we seek to build new foundations on existing traditions, we have never lost sight of the need to prepare educators for the multiple and changing demands of our society and to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to support the learning of all students.

We face important challenges in preparing undergraduate and graduate candidates for 21st century expectations. To meet these challenges, our candidates must be committed to equitable, inclusive practice that values the diversity among students. They must develop leadership skills to advocate for students and schools. To be responsive to the needs of all students, they must be deeply grounded in the knowledge base of their disciplines and skilled in translating that knowledge into practice that meets State and national standards. They must be skilled in collecting and analyzing student outcome data and in using that data to inform their professional decisions. They must be skilled and committed to reflective practice in which data guide their professional growth. They must understand the social, political and professional contexts of education, including the increasing emphasis placed by national and state governments on data-based accountability practices; research traditions that influence our understanding of what we must do to provide excellent education opportunities; and the evolving role of technologies that influence learning within and outside traditional school settings. Most importantly, at every level, educators must realize how 21st century expectations extend well beyond what is measured by high-stakes accountability tests to include those social, personal, academic, and ethical understandings necessary for all students to experience the transformational power of education and prepare for 21st century citizenship.

**History of the Conceptual Framework**

Since its inception, the UNCG Conceptual Framework has been subject to a dynamic process of continual review and revision. Grounded in current research, it provides unit-wide consistency in vision and practice, a framework for connections between theory and practice, and a springboard for examination of the ways in which programs adapt and change in order to maintain relevancy to current educational practice.

In 1990, the UNCG Teachers Academy developed the unit's original conceptual framework, "Philosophy to Guide the Education of Teachers and School Personnel at UNCG." This conceptual framework defined the Unit’s mission and served as a guide to the development of all professional education programs at UNCG. During the next ten years, programs at UNCG were introduced, eliminated or restructured, and in the process, conversations about the currency of the conceptual framework took place across all program areas. In spring 2000, the NCATE draft standards served as the basis for further analysis. After extensive study and development, in a process that included University faculty, students, staff and public school partners, a new conceptual framework was adopted in 2001.

The revised conceptual framework retained the core of the 1990 philosophical statement at the same time that it was greatly expanded to reflect the unit’s shared vision that B-12 educators must be “Caring, Collaborative and Competent.” This goal was achieved through:

* a knowledge-base grounded in current research literature
* coherency among all programmatic components
* consistency with the University mission and UNC Teacher Education Deans'

Council Vision, and

* a set of institutional expectations that are aligned with professional and State standards.

All programs aligned their own missions with the unit’s conceptual framework and ensured that students and faculty knew and actualized its values.

In the years after the development of UNCG’s 2001 Conceptual Framework, University and school partners met repeatedly to discuss potential revisions. While they continued to find that the Conceptual Framework was a strong and appropriate guide to our professional programs, they found areas that required more intensive application of the Conceptual Framework values. In particular, they emphasized the need to increase the clarity of our definitions, instruction and assessment relative to diversity and dispositions. With these and a few other minor revisions, the 2001 Conceptual Framework continued to be appropriate for UNCG’s mission and its goal of meeting State and national standards.

**Program Self-Study and Revision – 2006-2010**

In 2006-07, the North Carolina State Board of Education developed new standards for teachers and administrators, as well as new procedures for program review. In response, UNCG programs, with their school partners, undertook extensive self-study and curriculum development to ensure that their candidates were prepared with the appropriate content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions to become effective educators. The programs identified coursework and field experiences related to leadership, professional knowledge and practice, inclusive and supportive environments, data-informed decision making, and professional reflection and growth.

**A major emphasis of the new programs was the preparation of B-12 students for 21st century demands. To prepare “globally competitive students,” as noted in the State Board of Education goals, greater emphasis was placed on problem solving and critical thinking; multiple literacies, including technology competencies; and attention to diversity.**

In spring 2009, 22 undergraduate initial licensure programs and four graduate-level programs were submitted to the State Department of Public Instruction and received approval. The following year, masters-level programs in teaching areas that had not previously been approved were submitted for State review. Programs that were not required to undergo revision, such as School Counseling, School Social Work and School Media, nonetheless reviewed and changed their programs in alignment with discipline standards. All of the revised programs have been implemented.

While UNCG already had a rich history of self-study, the State mandate provided additional impetus for deep reflection at the Unit and program levels and was one of several major impetuses for review of the conceptual framework.

**School of Education: New Organizational Structure**

In January 2011, Dean Wixson joined the School of Education and directed that the Unit undertake a thorough description and analysis of its work (see Exhibits – surveys, faculty assembly minutes, faculty council minutes). This self-study resulted in a number of organizational changes that enhanced support of faculty, staff and students. The portfolios of some administrators were changed, with a new Associate Dean for Assessment and Research and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Services. The Dean appointed a new Director of the Teachers Academy, Director of Assessment, Assistant Dean and several department chairs. Moreover, all of the work related to advising, application processing and licensure moved to the new Office of Student Services, and the Teachers Academy, previously responsible for many of these activities, retained its responsibilities for policy, communication across the Unit, and partnership with external stakeholders.

At the same time, the Dean appointed an Assessment Committee that undertook the review of all aspects of the assessment system of the Unit and individual programs in a multi-step process that included the identification of 1) the standards that programs address, starting with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, NCATE and CAEP standards, and the North Carolina Race to the Top report card guidelines (see Exhibit-Standards Crosswalk); 2) the assessments that the Unit undertakes for internal program review and external accountability, and all data sources that inform those assessments (see Exhibit- Report List, Report List Summary); and 3) the intersection, or crosswalk, of the standards, assessments and data sources. Standards for non-teaching areas were subsequently included in the crosswalk analyses so that, ultimately, all programs participated in this review process (see Exhibits: minutes from Program Assessment Meetings).

It became clear to the Assessment Committee that, while a strong assessment system was in place, it would benefit from a clear and consistent description of its structure. The close review of the intersection of standards, assessments and data sources led to the identification of six foci – broad areas that inform expectations for student outcomes and therefore areas that require continual assessment. They are leadership, professional knowledge, professional practice and pedagogy, educational environment, data-driven decision making and professional growth. In order to ensure continual and consistent self-study, assessment questions for each focus area were identified. They addressed how well students met the expectations of each focus area and how well students’ development in each area was supported by their programs; that is, they addressed candidate outcomes and structural support (see Exhibit: Questions and Data Sources). The foci and assessment questions are consistent across all programs. While programs were encouraged to adapt them as appropriate, the overall structure of the focus areas and the assessment questions were found to be appropriate for all teaching and non-teaching areas, with few modifications (see Exhibits: Program Questions and Data Sources). All programs now use student portfolios, field observations, disposition assessments, and surveys of stakeholders to gather quantitative and qualitative data for continual self-study that is responsive to the focus area questions.

While the new foci were not fundamentally different from earlier perspectives, they incorporated new ways of approaching and assessing professional education. As with earlier conceptual frameworks, they were affirming of knowledge and pedagogy based in research; consistency across programs, the Unit and the University; and alignment with State and national standards. However, they were more closely connected to 21st century **realities**, not the least of which was the need for greater attention to knowledge and practice related to diversity, technology, higher order thinking and leadership. This shift was important if UNCG was to prepare its candidates and B-12 students for college, career and life. With this shift, then, came additional impetus for new study of the UNCG’s conceptual framework.

In fall 2011, a subcommittee of faculty and staff developed draft statements to guide the study of the conceptual framework. The mission statements of the University, the Teachers Academy (the policy and governance body for all professional education programs) and departments within the Unit were studied. Faculty reviewed the professional literature, as well as State and national standards. Finally, a subcommittee developed a draft conceptual framework that was consistent with the six foci identified in the earlier assessment committee review. The draft conceptual framework was studied by the Council of Program Coordinators of the Teachers Academy, which includes representatives of all professional education programs at UNCG. Revisions followed and, in spring 2013, the newly developed Conceptual Framework was adopted by the Unit.

While the text of the UNCG Conceptual Framework was adopted in 2013, the essence of the CF had been in place since self-study began in 2008, first with the revision of the programs and then, in 2011, with the review and re-organization of the Unit, the adoption of the six professional education foci, and the review and revision of the assessment system.

**Alignment of the Conceptual Framework with the University Vision and Mission**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s vision and mission statement are inclusive of the work of all units on campus. They describe a university that is focused on collaborative and intentional preparation for the 21st century:

**The UNCG Vision and Mission Statement**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro will redefine the public research university for the twenty-first century as an inclusive, collaborative, and responsive institution making a difference in the lives of students and the communities it serves.

UNCG is

* a learner-centered, accessible, and inclusive community fostering intellectual inquiry to prepare students for meaningful lives and engaged citizenship;
* an institution offering classes on campus, off campus, and online for degree-seeking students and life-long learners;
* a doctorate-granting research university where collaborative scholarship and creative activity enhance quality of life across the life span;
* a source of innovation and leadership meeting social, economic, and environmental challenges in the Piedmont Triad, North Carolina, and beyond; and
* a global university integrating intercultural and international experiences and perspectives into learning, discovery, and service.

 [The UNCG Vision and Mission Statement](http://uncgtomorrow.uncg.edu/mission/)

In alignment with UNCG’s vision and mission, the work of professional education focuses on leadership in the University, B-12 and academic communities; rigorous academic content and professional preparation; a commitment to inclusiveness on campus and in the field; and an understanding that students must be prepared to grow professionally throughout their careers.

Both UNCG’s Vision for Teaching and Learning and its philosophy for the General Education Program reinforce these University priorities and are, again, consistent with the foci of the licensure programs.

**UNCG’s Vision for Teaching and Learning**

UNCG embraces student learning as its highest priority and provides exemplary learning environments. The University establishes a diverse community of learning in which individual differences are valued and interactions are encouraged in an atmosphere of mutual respect…

UNCG graduates should be ready to continue as lifelong learners and to face the challenges that will confront them as responsible citizens of the state, the nation and the world.

[Vision for Teaching and Learning](http://web.uncg.edu/reg/Bulletin/Current/Intro/VisionTeachLearn.aspx)

A UNCG graduate should combine specialized education in a major with the skills, knowledge, and understanding necessary to be a lifelong learner, an ethical and independent decision maker, a critical and creative thinker, a clear and effective communicator, and a responsible citizen.

[[Philosophy of UNCG’s General Education Program](http://web.uncg.edu/reg/Bulletin/Current/UnivReq/GECProgram.aspx)](http://web.uncg.edu/reg/Bulletin/Current/UnivReq/GECProgram.aspx)

**Alignment with the Teachers Academy Mission**

Each of the six professional foci described above is also aligned with the mission of the Teachers Academy, the umbrella organization that addresses policy and communication for all professional education programs at UNCG. The foci, alone and together, support and promote the Teachers Academy’s commitment to “Access to Life’s Opportunities through Teaching, Learning and Caring.” Our candidates are knowledgeable about their disciplines and professional practice, are committed to and act on positive professional dispositions, understand the importance of data that informs their practice and growth, and use all of these skills in the interest of leading in their fields. Our faculty are committed to excellence in teaching, learning and caring that, in turn, results in candidates who teach, learn and care at the highest levels.

**Teachers Academy Mission**

The mission of professional education at UNCG is to ensure “Access to Life’s Opportunities through Teaching, Learning and Caring.” To this end, UNCG prepares and supports the professional development of educators who work in diverse settings. This mission is carried out in an environment that nurtures the active engagement of all participants, values individual as well as cultural diversity, and recognizes the importance of reflection and integration of theory and practice. UNCG's professional education programs are guided by shared commitments to the preparation of education professionals who have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to

* be leaders in their fields, schools or agencies, and communities
* create and support safe and inclusive educational environments that provide equity of access to learning for all students
* use the research base, assessment data and critical reflections to inform their professional decision making
* continually acquire professional knowledge and contribute to the professional knowledge base, and
* act with professional integrity, ethical deliberation and a commitment to collaborative practice in dealing with students and colleagues

**Alignment with NCATE, State and Disciplinary Standards**

Finally, each of the six professional foci described above is directly aligned with State and national goals. North Carolina professional standards for school teachers, administrators, counselors, social workers, and media specialists require that professionals in each field demonstrate their proficiency in leadership, knowledge and practice. In turn, these standards are consistent with NCATE standards. UNCG candidates develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and dispositions that ultimately support the learning of all children in a context of 21st century dynamic change and complexity.

**Professional Focus I: Leadership**

***Our Commitments.*** UNCG recognizes the critical importance of preparing all professional educators to be leaders who will have a positive influence in schools, agencies, the community and professional disciplines. Our graduates use their knowledge and skills in a variety of leadership roles, serving as teacher leaders, administrators, counselors, social workers, media and technology coordinators, scholars and researchers. These leaders are prepared to use effective practices and are encouraged to model ethical behaviors consistent with the standards of their professional organizations (e.g., American Association of School Administrators, American Association of School Librarians, Council for Exceptional Children, Council on Social Work Education, National Association for the Education of Young Children, and National Council for Teachers of Mathematics). They are self-reflective and collaborative lifelong learners who seek and promote practice that benefits all children. Moreover, our programs are committed to reflection, advocacy and action that lead to school improvement in all areas that impact student learning and growth.

***Our Understandings.*** Educational leaders recognize the importance of working effectively with school professionals, families, and the community to accomplish rigorous, responsive, and challenging educational opportunities for *every* student (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). A growing body of literature emphasizes the importance of collaborative forms of leadership for improving schools and achieving equitable educational outcomes for all students. Contemporary discussions of leadership, including distributed (Elmore, 2004; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Spillane, 2006) and participative (Murphy, 2005) approaches, suggest a new professionalism that is “collaborative, not autonomous; open rather than closed; outward-looking rather than insular, and authoritative, but not controlling” (Fullan, 2007, p. 297). All educators have an important role in leadership as they “individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 287-288).

In collaborative cultures, teachers, principals, other education professionals and community members work together to set school goals, and these shared goals help to “focus efforts and mobilize resources in agreed-upon directions” (Fullan, 2007, p. 143). They use a range of approaches (e.g., reading groups, team analyses of student progress, and professional learning communities) to create the conditions for both professional growth and school improvement (Murphy, 2005). They have a sense of responsibility for all students and work individually and together to ensure that students with varied needs and backgrounds (e.g., disability, cultural, language, racial, and socioeconomic) have access to equitable learning opportunities.

Further, leadership should be transformative; it should involve innovation, reform and advocacy that results in opportunity and achievement for all students. As such, transformational educational leadership “begins with questions of social justice and democracy, critiques inequitable practices, and addresses both individual and public good” (Shields, 2010, p. 558). It “involves one’s engaging in self-reflection, systematically analyzing schools, and then confronting inequities regarding race, class, gender, language, ability, and/or sexual orientation” (Cooper, 2009, p. 696).

***Our Practices.*** At UNCG, our developing leaders have opportunities in their coursework and field experiences to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to interact effectively and productively with others. Throughout their programs, they practice interpersonal, decision-making and problem-solving skills by working closely with professionals, students and families in a range of school and community settings and receive feedback about their progress. They are encouraged to participate as members of professional organizations and to communicate with policy-makers about the priorities and needs in their fields. All initial licensure teacher candidates demonstrate leadership through a major school or agency improvement leadership project. Candidates in advanced licensure programs demonstrate leadership skills through course or capstone projects, such as developing preventative and developmentally appropriate counseling programs; interacting with State-level policy makers; and developing school-based projects that improve student academic performance, help teachers develop professional learning communities, or engage community stakeholders in practices that allow schools to function democratically .

**Professional Focus II: Professional Knowledge**

***Our Commitments.*** Content knowledge is a key element required to build the capacity of the graduates of UNCG’s preparation programs to be effective professionals. Undergraduates are grounded in the arts and sciences, literacy and global perspectives. They must have acceptable grade point averages and appropriate coursework, including majors or concentrations in their subject areas for middle grades and secondary education candidates, before being admitted to professional education. Graduate students must demonstrate prerequisite content knowledge and academic ability through documentation of previous degrees and GRE scores. They continue to deepen and broaden their knowledge as they move through their programs. Moreover, our candidates must demonstrate not just mastery of an information base, but understandings about how their disciplines acquire, process and apply knowledge. UNCG is committed to preparing professionals who have broad understandings, discipline-specific knowledge and skills, and the ability to use their knowledge to make sound professional decisions.

***Our Understandings.*** The research on thinking and learning indicates that content knowledge encompasses a deep foundation of factual knowledge, understanding of how that knowledge fits in the conceptual framework of the field of study, and an internal organization of that knowledge that facilitates retrieval and application of knowledge (National Research Council, 2010, pg. 73). This includes an understanding of individual development and the role that culture, language, class, exceptionalities, and race or ethnicity play in learning.

Content knowledge first gained prominence as a critical factor in professional preparation programs in the mid-1980s with the work of Lee Shulman and his colleagues (Shulman, 1986; 1987). In characterizing subject matter knowledge, Shulman argued “teachers must not only be capable of defining for students the accepted truths in a domain. They must also be able to explain why a particular proposition is deemed warranted, why it is worth knowing, and how it relates to other propositions” (1986, p.9). Shulman and his colleagues also noted that as subject matter expertise is acquired, education professionals are also acquiring knowledge *about* the subject, and dispositions *toward* the subject. It is this set of knowledge and dispositions that has a significant impact on professional practice and learning.

Knowledge *about* a subject differs by subject matter, but may include the relative validity and centrality of different ideas or perspectives, the major disagreements within the field (past and present), how claims are justified and validated, what is entailed in doing and engaging in the discourse of the field. Dispositions toward a subject refer to acquired preferences for particular topics and activities, propensities to pursue certain questions and kinds of study and to avoid others. At the same time, students develop conceptions of themselves as good at particular subjects and not at others. These proclivities toward subject matter develop with increased expertise, whether or not they are explicit goals of that subject matter instruction.

In 2000, the National Research Council (NRC) published its landmark report on advances in the science of learning entitled *How People Learn*. This report concluded that “To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application” (NRC, 2000, p. 16). *How People Learn* describes the critical distinction between novices and experts in any context and how the development of expertise is gradual. With continued learning in any field—technology, physics, or American literature—individuals gradually accumulate “extensive knowledge that affects what they notice and how they organize, represent, and interpret information” and this accumulation, in turn, “affects their ability to remember, reason, and solve problems” (NRC, 2000, p. 19).

*How People Learn* was followed by *How Students Learn* (NRC, 2005)*,* which focused on instruction in the classroom. This report explained that experts do not just know more facts in a given area than non-experts; they also have a framework for understanding and applying what they know. *How Students Learn* described the essential linkage between factual knowledge and conceptual frameworks, termed learning with understanding—“competent performance is built on neither factual nor conceptual understanding alone; the concepts take on meaning in the knowledge-rich contexts in which they are applied” (p. 6). This work suggests that content knowledge, defined as a body of conceptual and factual knowledge, is an essential basis for effective preparation in a given field. But, as these reports make clear, having expertise, or deep content knowledge, is not a sufficient foundation by itself for effective teaching—necessary but not sufficient.

Non-teaching areas align with the same basic principles. Whether they are school counselors, media specialist or other school-based professions, candidates must know the history, philosophy, research and trends of their disciplines and the educational system at large. They must have deep understandings about their roles and the ways in which they can apply their knowledge to support students and other school professionals.

***Our Practices.*** At the undergraduate level, candidates for teacher education and School Social Work must complete 36-49 semester hours (depending on the major) of general education studies, which include coursework from the humanities and sciences, along with reading and writing intensive courses. All demonstrate their readiness for professional education programs by earning a minimum 2.5 GPA on a 4-point scale, or higher in many programs, and teacher candidates also earn North Carolina passing scores on the Praxis I before they can be admitted to professional education. Subsequently, they take coursework, including methods courses and student teaching (or internships, in the case of School Social Work candidates) that deepens their content knowledge and prepares them to transmit and use this knowledge. Candidates for an initial and/or advanced license at the master’s level take advanced content courses along with their professional education coursework. Progress throughout candidates’ programs is monitored; all candidates must maintain the minimum program-required GPA and proceed through their programs in a timely fashion. Before being recommended for licensure, they must demonstrate mastery of their content through program-required grade point averages, capstone courses or performances, professional portfolios, field-work, comprehensive exams and/or standardized tests.

**Professional Focus III: Professional Practice**

***Our Commitments.*** UNCG recognizes that the education professions are comprised of both art and science (Berliner, 1986; Marzano, 2007) – aptitudes, beliefs, and broad understandings on one hand and research-based knowledge and skills on the other. Further, UNCG is committed to the idea that both the art and science of teaching develop over time. Candidates build their professional knowledge and skills on a foundation of knowledge, thinking and communication developed in their general education coursework and content majors. During their professional education programs, they deepen their discipline-specific content knowledge and, for teachers, their pedagogical content knowledge to support B-12 students’ learning. It is UNCG’s responsibility to provide professional education programs that have, at their core, sequenced and scaffolded opportunities for candidates to develop as professionals.

***Our Understandings.*** Teacher candidates must have command of the content that they will teach. Mastery of the depth and breadth of one’s field provides the foundation upon which good instruction is built (Grossman, Schoenfeld & Lee, 2005; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). However, pedagogical content knowledge and quality instruction comprise the complex, multi-faceted scaffold that promotes student achievement. Teachers must have the ability to deconstruct their knowledge of content to understand the process by which it is gradually comprehended and mastered by the learner. They must have a deep grounding in the content of their teaching areas, along with the pedagogical knowledge and skills to communicate that knowledge in teaching (Bransford, et al., 2005; Bruner, 1960/77; Shulman, 1986; Shulman, 1987). Moreover, teacher candidates grow as a result of practice and reflection. This intentional, self-analytic process supports their becoming adaptive practitioners who communicate appropriately with learners about the content of the disciplines. They become responsive to the learning needs of their students or, as Bransford and his colleagues describe, they become able to “examine teaching *in the light of [students’] learning*” (Bransford, et al., 2005, p. 79.). They are able to apply knowledge about assessment, pedagogical design, instruction and, specifically, about using and teaching technology; meeting the diverse needs of students, including English language learners and children with learning and physical need; and helping students to become critical and creative thinkers. Similarly, candidates in other school-based professions must continuously study their fields. They must be critical consumers of the expert literature, seeking out current research and best practices; staying abreast of emerging technologies, multiple literacies, and other 21st century skills; and using that information to inform their work with students and colleagues (American Association of School Librarians, 2009). They must have the ability to assess and interpret the needs of students and schools and use their knowledge to inform their responses to those needs.

Pedagogical and professional content knowledge develops over time. As teacher candidates grapple with instruction, assessment, and student performance during their field work, both their understanding of the content of their disciplines and their ability to make that information accessible to students grows (Grossman, et al., 2005). Candidates in non-teaching areas similarly refine their skills as they work with students, schools and other stakeholders. All candidates must study the research that supports their fields, from educational psychology, child and adolescent development, learning theories and literacy instruction to culturally responsive pedagogy, organizational theory, school law, and discipline-specific theory and practice. However, it is in applying this information, particularly in clinical settings, that they deepen their understandings and skills (LePage, et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005).

***Our practices***. Candidates’ professional dispositions are assessed repeatedly during their education programs. They are expected to improve in areas that they and the faculty identify as requiring growth. Similarly, UNCG is committed to a developmental model that ensures sequenced, scaffolded experiences in which candidates develop and practice the knowledge and skills that are required for their professions. Teacher candidates develop complex instructional design skills, using research-based models to design unit and lesson plans that are aligned with Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards. Candidates differentiate instruction to meet individual and group needs, with attention to English learners, students with diverse cultural backgrounds, and students with special needs. They spend extensive time in the field, with clinical experiences beginning in their sophomore or junior year. School counselors, social workers, media coordinators and administrators also participate in practica throughout their programs. In fact, many of the candidates in non-teaching areas and all candidates in advanced teaching programs are employees of school districts while studying at UNCG. Throughout their programs, candidates not only receive feedback from faculty, teachers and other field-based supervisors and instructors; they also reflect on their performance and dispositions. They are assessed repeatedly during their programs and, only when they develop the required competencies in a broad range of professional areas, as demonstrated through portfolios, capstone performance, standardized state examinations, grade point averages, and/or clinical performances, are they recommended for licensure.

**Professional Focus IV: Educational Environment**

***Our Commitments*.** Today’s students come to school with a diverse set of sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, abilities, nationalities, religions, economic resources, and sexual orientation. We believe that our programs must prepare educational professionals who can create safe, supportive and inclusive environments in which all students enjoy unfettered access to educational programs and services. We further believe that we have an obligation to provide not only access to educational institutions but also to equitable learning environments. To do so, our candidates need more than knowledge; they need experiences and the opportunity to reflect critically on their experiences so they “know who they want to become (i.e., self-knowledge) and [how to be both] proactive and skilled in navigating places for themselves as [professionals] (i.e., agency)” (Fairbanks, et al., 2010, p. 167). Our goals are formidable but the stakes for children are higher.

***Our Understandings*.** We define diversity as including race, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities, exceptionalities, and sexual orientation, in addition to religion, educational background, language, geographical location, family income, and parental status (Ladson-Billings, 2001; LAS, 2004). It is an inclusive definition—not limited to race or gender, rather one that encompasses the broad spectrum of people who make up our world and our educational institutions. The understanding, knowledge, and skills necessary to create such environments have been most closely associated with culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) argue, culturally responsive pedagogy should prepare educational professionals to advocate and take action and to “work hard to ‘make it right’ for all children, not just those perceived to be more privileged than others” (p. 79). We draw on these ideas in our programs not only with respect to race or ethnicity but also to students with disabilities or other exceptionalities, the increasing numbers of students who speak a language other than English, and the myriad immigrants and refugees who enter schools each year.

In order to understand and teach diverse learners effectively, our students must learn about culture and its role in educational settings. As Ladson-Billings (2006) argues, professional education needs to incorporate opportunities for candidates to examine themselves as cultural beings and “to recognize the cultural underpinnings of their own beliefs, attitudes, and practices” in order to “become more open to the power of culture to shape the learning and experiences of the students” (p. 109). By critically reflecting on the way their own culture shapes who they are and what they know, candidates may also understand the value of knowledge of who children are, how they perceive themselves, and how the world receives them” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 79).

Creating inclusive environments requires above all that educational professionals hold high standards for all learners and provide the support and guidance necessary to achieve these standards (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). They must know learners’ talents and their struggles, nurturing them in the pursuit of common goals. Key to this effort, educational professionals require the knowledge and skill to differentiate instruction and other interactions with students across a variety of dimensions, but most commonly across identified disabilities, language, and race or ethnicity. Whether it is through the materials they use, the curriculum they create, the kinds of relationships they cultivate, or collaboration with educational professionals across disciplines, differentiation helps ensure that students are valued and supported (Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992).

***Our Practices*.** To do so, UNCG’s professional education programs aim to “make differences ordinary” (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007, p. 168) through the combination of conceptual learning and extensive field experiences. Our candidates’ preparation includes opportunities to study, observe, and engage diverse learners, faculty and families in a variety of settings. They reflect on these experiences, their responses to these experiences, and the impact of these experiences on their professional identities and practices. All candidates take courses about diversity and learn to differentiate their practice based on individual and group characteristics. Finally, coursework and assignments completed in the field are coordinated, so that students’ are able not only to understand and appreciate differences, but to apply their knowledge and dispositions in real world contexts. For example, teacher education candidates study cultural and education diversity, engage in self-study and case studies of learners, and ultimately apply what they learn in the field, developing instructional plans that are responsive to learners’ diverse needs. Advanced licensure programs not only study cultural, social and education diversity in depth, they also use their knowledge and skills to create culturally responsive programs and to advocate for the diverse interests of their students. To ensure that candidates are prepared to create and support equitable and safe educational environments that enhance student learning, all programs require portfolio artifacts, course assignments and/or capstone projects, along with assessments of professional dispositions.

**Professional Focus V: Data-driven Decision Making**

***Our Commitments*.** The skillful collection, analysis and use of assessment data is critical to candidates’ professional practice and, ultimately, to B-12 student achievement and school improvement. Our candidates must be able to identify and select assessment measures that are appropriate to their disciplines, particular instruction, and to student and school needs. They must know how to use data to track student progress and make informed modifications to instruction, curricula, resources, student support and the school organization itself. They must value practice that is undergirded with clear, objective and well interpreted data. During coursework and practica, then, UNCG candidates must have repeated opportunities to work with data from various assessment measures – standardized and locally constructed, summative and formative. They must come to understand that consistent and thoughtful use of data can increase students’ learning and development, students’ engagement across multiple contexts, the function of schools, and their own reflective practice.

***Our Understandings*.** An increased reliance, over the past twenty-five years, on the use of high stakes assessments to identify effective schools and educators has greatly influenced how school professionals are prepared and what they do in the field (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Firestone et al, 2004; Popham, 2001). At the classroom and curriculum levels, these high-stakes assessments provide vital information about achievement, particularly as it relates to previously marginalized subgroups, but they also encourage a simplistic view of student learning in which the dominant instructional approach may focus on a “teach to the test” mentality (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Menken, 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Resnick, 2010). Researchers increasingly have criticized this approach because it narrows the curriculum to test-defined content; suppresses teacher’s creativity; fragments instruction such that non-tested content areas receive minimal, if any, emphasis; and decreases students’ opportunities to direct their own learning by making teacher-directed lessons and content coverage the primary instructional goals (Au, 2007). As we move from a focus on the mastery of discrete facts to a more complex view of learning and development, in which educators are required to prepare all students to meet 21st century goals, professional preparation programs have had to reassess how they prepare educational leaders (Black & Wiliam, 1998; English, Papa, Mullen, & Creighton, 2012). Instead of attempting to increase achievement by matching instruction to the structure and format of mandated formal tests, educators must make instructional decisions based on a complex array of students’ cognitive, social, and personal behaviors (Miller & Duffy, 2006; Resnick, 2010). They must use both summative and formative assessments to track student growth to adapt the curriculum based on the diversity of students’ progress, needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds. They must use assessment data to *inform* rather than to simply *drive* their instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Haberman, 1991). Similarly, other school based professionals must have the skills to collect, analyze and use data to inform school, district and community agency decisions (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010). Administrators, school counselors, school social workers and media specialists must use assessments data to identify gaps in student achievement, respond to individual students’ needs, and develop procedures and ensure resources that support student learning. Overall, all professionals must understand how data-driven decisions help them respond to the goals of achieving excellence and equity for every student as they prepare to be college and career ready (American School Counselor Association, 2012; American Association of School Librarians, 2009; Blankenstein, Houston, & Cole, 2010; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Earl & Katz, 2006; Goldring & Berends, 2009; Miller & Duffy, 2006; Miller, Duffy, Rohr, Gasparello, & Mercier, 2005; NOSCA, 2012).

***Our Practices*.** At UNCG, we prepare our pre-service teachers and other professionals to use an approach whereby assessment informs practice, decision making, institutional improvement and professional growth. Candidates learn to balance information from formal tests (such as benchmarks and summative assessments) with that obtained from informal formative assessments. They learn that assessment data can result in complex, fine-grained understandings about students’ learning and professional performance. They use data in the field to promote students’ learning through changes in instruction, curricula, student support and counseling, and the organization and function of the school and district.

To these ends, all candidates learn about and demonstrate their ability to use assessment in their practice. Initial licensure teaching candidates take coursework in assessment, apply that information in field placements, and conduct a multi-faceted “Student Impact” study for which they collect extensive assessment data and use their data analyses to differentiate instruction. Undergraduate School Social Work Students conduct a “Single Subject Assessment.” Graduate-level candidates take measurement and research courses that extend their understandings of assessment and provide opportunities for them to conduct school-based research. They demonstrate their understanding and effective use of data-driven decision making in capstone performances and/or final portfolios. They develop the understandings and skills necessary to use data to inform decisions not only about curriculum, resources and students’ preparation for college and career, but also about the social and emotional needs of students, the school environment, the effectiveness of faculty and staff, and the engagement of families and community. Ultimately, all candidates learn to use data to inform their work with children, their decisions about school structure, function and improvement, and their leadership on behalf of children and schools.

**Professional Focus VI: Professional Growth**

***Our Commitments.*** We believe that educators will grow professionally and ensure excellence for all students by using data to inform professional practice, engaging in reflection, identifying needed areas for further development, and actively pursuing new avenues for professional learning. In addition, we believe that professional growth must include the pursuit of broader cultural and linguistic experiences, collaboration with others toward mutual and reciprocal goals, and a commitment to equitable access and outcomes for all members of the community. These are at the heart of professional growth at UNCG.

***Our Understandings.*** Educational scholars such as Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2006), Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, and Demers (2008), and Villegas and Lucas (2002), who write about the preparation of education professionals for the 21st century, support our on-going focus on addressing issues of diversity, technology, leadership, and reflective practice. They further support our goal that future generations of educators and leaders prepared at UNCG will be ready for career-long growth as education professionals through

· reflection and action that leads to self-awareness and new understandings of practice,

· participation in professional development and professional organizations,

· pursuit of broader cultural and linguistic experiences,

· collaboration with others toward mutual and reciprocal goals, and

· commitment to equitable access and outcomes for all members of the community.

***Our Practices.*** Toward these ends professional licensure programs at UNCG requires students to actively demonstrate professional growth by engaging in, for example, some form of school and community**-**based service learning, mentoring, tutoring, or volunteering. Programs also promote opportunities for continual professional growth by engaging candidates in high-quality professional development, becoming active in professional organizations, and participating in various kinds of face-to-face and online professional learning communities. Because we believe that reflection and action lead to self-awareness, new understandings of practice, and increased professionalism, all candidates develop and implement at least one leadership project that is driven by analysis of the context and needs of schools and/or organizations, examination of school improvement plans when appropriate, identification of a leadership focus, collaboration with stakeholders including families and community, study related to the leadership focus, and assessment of impact.

Such experiences are enhanced by opportunities for candidates to reflect on their leadership roles and solidify the value these experiences have for their professional growth. Evidence of professional growth is evaluated as part of our unit-wide assessment system through Evidence 6 of the Initial Licensure Teaching Portfolio, Evidence 2 of the Advanced Masters’ Teaching Portfolio, and field-based capstone performances in master’s level non-teaching programs. Professional growth is also evaluated in our unit-wide Candidates Dispositions Assessment Process rubric, used at a minimum of three times throughout the program for initial licensure teaching candidates, and through disposition assessments and professional growth plans in advanced licensure programs.

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