CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

College of Education Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the College of Education was initially developed in 1992. It has been reviewed and revised several times over the past. The conceptual framework for basic and advanced professional preparation programs at the University of Nevada, Reno is organized around four themes. The college prepares educators who possess a lifelong love of learning; a strong fund of knowledge; reflect on educational practices; and value democracy and multiculturalism. Although the term “conceptual framework” implies a fixed structure, this framework is viewed as being dynamic and one in which professional educators must immerse themselves. The framework changes as the paradigms held by science, art, and technology shift.

The four themes of the conceptual framework are described as follows:

**Love of Learning.** Knowledge is not a fixed set of truths which are handed down. Therefore, educators must be open to discovery and derive pleasure as the mind extends life themes into new realms of meaning. Learning is intrinsically rewarding, combining the cognitive with the affective. Mastery, curiosity, and the desire to know become animating forces in the intellectual life of a learner. Because of a love of learning and desire to meet the needs and desires of students, educators must seek to build a growing repertoire of knowledge, as well as professional skills.

**Strong Fund of Knowledge.** Educator’s intellectual resources and dispositions largely determine their capacity to engage students’ minds and hearts in learning. Therefore, a strong fund of subject matter knowledge is essential in professional preparation. Educators must possess knowledge of, knowledge about, and a positive disposition toward subject matter. Educators must also possess a strong fund of pedagogical knowledge in order to adequately represent subject matter to students, or to translate knowledge into classroom curricular events. Pedagogical content knowledge represents a blending or melding of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, his or her own special form of professional understanding. To maximize the use of pedagogical knowledge, educators must possess a rich knowledge base
about learners; including knowledge about physical, cognitive, and affective development and the role of a student’s experiential background in the learning process. Educators must also possess a strong fund of curricular knowledge including different views of curriculum and ensuing consequences for the role of the educator; some conception of curricular planning processes and the knowledge necessary to carry it out; and the realities of curricular decision making. Educators must be able to link subject matter with pedagogy as they shape experiences that enable students to develop and learn.

**Reflective Practice.** Educators should be able to make sound judgments and choices in selecting particular approaches and adapting them in ways that are consistent with their goals and that serve the best interests of their students. Educators who become experts at their craft have learned how to reflect systematically and develop strategies for learning from their experiences. Such an ability will depend on the acquisition of a reflective attitude toward teaching. Reflective teaching should be thought of as a general professional disposition, regardless of the philosophical framework out of which one works. Reflective practice informs decision-making, which is a key element in the instructional process, and is essential to effective participation in an educational setting.

**Democracy and Multiculturalism.** We live in a pluralistic society that reflects a rich and diverse mixture of cultures and experiences. Consequently, schools should provide learning opportunities that give all students access to forms of social, political, and economic power. The purpose of educational institutions should be to give voice to the diversity of its people, as well as represent dominant values and positions. This must be done within a critical framework that supports open forums for discussion and debate, as well as moving toward forms of schooling that are empowering in intent and are rooted in forms of social justice and community. Representation of the diversity of thinking that is reflective of a multicultural society is mandatory within educational institutions that support multiculturalism. Open access to information is of critical importance within a multicultural democratic community.
Relationship of Conceptual Framework to Performance Assessment Standards

The four themes of the conceptual framework – love of learning, strong fund of knowledge, reflective practice, and democracy and multiculturalism - have become the institutional standards from which the unit assesses its candidates. The adopted standards for teacher preparation programs in Nevada are the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards. The INTASC Standards have been reviewed by University of Nevada, Reno College of Education faculty and stakeholders and were combined into five domains that are referred to as the “domains of professional competence”. The domains have been woven into the existing conceptual framework and are the basis for assessment of initial level candidates. The five domains of professional competence are:
• **Knowledge of Students and Learning Environments** – The candidate understands how children learn and develop as well as how they differ in their approaches to learning. The candidate demonstrates that they can actively and appropriately support the learning of children with a variety of learning and behavioral characteristics.

• **Knowledge of Subject Matter and Planning** – The candidate has knowledge of the discipline(s) and his/her ability to design and develop learning experiences that allow students to learn in meaningful ways. The candidate selects instructional strategies and materials that are appropriate for curriculum goals and the learning context.

• **Delivery and Management of Instruction** – The candidate demonstrates his/her ability to use a variety of instructional materials and approaches to deliver instruction effectively. The candidate can demonstrate use of group and individual motivation, as well as effective verbal and nonverbal communication to create positive and effective learning.

• **Knowledge and Use of Assessment** – The candidate has the knowledge and ability to use formal and informal assessment strategies to plan, evaluate, and strengthen instruction. The candidate demonstrates a positive impact on student learning.

• **Professionalism** – The candidate demonstrates potential as a professional educator. Reflections demonstrate thoughtful analysis, active inquiry, and appropriate goals for learning and development. The candidate presents a Performance Assessment Portfolio that is professional in all aspects, including writing mechanics, presentation, and appearance.

Considering the unit’s existing conceptual framework and the adopted Domains of Professional Competence, the unit’s model for teacher education is depicted as shown in Figure 1. The five Domains of Professional Competence are framed by the four themes of the College of Education Conceptual Framework. Professionalism is at the center of the model because of its importance in all that a prospective educator must do.
Conceptual Framework and Assessment Model

Advanced programs in the unit have either adopted various standards of professional specialty associations or modified the domains of professional competence as the basis of their candidate assessment process.

The unit’s conceptual framework is just that – the philosophical foundation for what we do. Operationalizing this framework requires specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Faculty began objectifying the conceptual framework by examining the INTASC standards, the domains of professional competence, and the standards of other professional specialty associations. The analysis revealed that the four themes of the conceptual framework are imbedded within the standards used in the various programs. In other words, as the Domains of Professional Competence and other standards used by various programs are met, the institutional standards of the conceptual framework are also met.