EDUCATION UNIT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**Ursuline Mission**
Ursuline College offers holistic education that transforms students for service, leadership and professional excellence by providing undergraduate and graduate programs that foster lifelong learning and personal wisdom in an environment characterized by:
- Catholic and Ursuline heritage
- Women-centered learning
- Values-based curricula
- Inclusive, global perspective

**Ursuline Vision**
A premier Catholic institution of higher learning that provides transformative experiences and inspires greatness in our graduates.

**Ursuline Philosophy**
Ursuline College helps students achieve their educational and career goals by emphasizing the whole person and providing personalized attention within a liberal arts higher educational environment. While welcoming persons of all faiths, the College is Catholic in its origins, identity, and environment. Instruction and services are based on the dignity of the human person in accordance with the principles of Catholic social teaching.

In the liberal arts tradition, an Ursuline education emphasizes critical thinking; clear and graceful expression; free, mature judgment and choice; and commitment to continued learning. In addition, faithful to the contemplative heritage of the Ursuline congregation, we perceive contemplation and reflection as integral factors in our search for wisdom. Thus, a distinctly Ursuline education emphasizes a strong foundation in the arts and sciences, fosters the student-professor dialectic with its corollary of shared responsibility, respects the learning needs of the individual student, and recognizes the interrelatedness of spiritual vitality and service to the larger community.

Acknowledging that the liberal arts are life arts, Ursuline helps students search for wisdom within the context of theology and philosophy, the fine arts and humanities, and the natural and social sciences. The College's career programs build upon this broad foundation to prepare students to serve the community and their professions with distinction and integrity.

The primary focus of the institution is the academic preparation of students through an emphasis on excellence in teaching and on scholarship that supports teaching. The College seeks for its faculty women and men who are professionally competent, who are committed to developing a learning community, and who can contribute to its distinctively Ursuline character. As a corollary of our emphasis on shared responsibility, the College seeks to foster a climate of collegiality in which all members have the opportunity to influence and to participate in decision-making.

Today we serve students who reflect a wide range of ages, of economic, social and academic
backgrounds, and of religions. We make a special effort to assess and meet the needs of our diverse clientele by providing flexible scheduling and a variety of approaches to learning. Ursuline College also serves the local community by offering programs and facilities for social, cultural and spiritual enrichment.

**Ursuline Purpose**
To help our students succeed and deepen their intellectual and spiritual life.

**Ursuline Core Values**
*Student Focus*
*Spirituality*
*Respect*
*Collaboration*

**Core Curriculum**
*Women's Ways of Knowing: Epistemological Development Goals*
- Silent
- Received
- Subjective
- Procedural
- Constructed

**Core Competencies**
- To communicate effectively
- To interact socially
- To analyze and synthesize
- To solve problems
- To respond to beauty
- To make decisions based on values
- To take responsibility for society

**Education Unit Vision**
The Education Unit strives to graduate teachers and administrators who create high quality value-centered learning environments that foster the growth of all learners in the context of a democratic society. Ursuline’s educational programs provide foundational knowledge from the dialectic of theory and practice that enables each graduate to succeed and grow as a professional reflective practitioner guided by values and the continuous development of her or his voice and vision.

**Education Unit Philosophy**
Our philosophy is grounded in the theoretical traditions of social constructivism, reflective practice, and Catholic education. The Unit draws on pragmatism and existentialism, particularly Christian existentialism, as guiding philosophies from which emerge our four pillars of social justice, spirituality, professionalism, and democratic living. Through these pillars, the Unit strives to complement Ursuline’s emphasis on critical thinking; clear and graceful expression;
free, mature judgment and choice; and a commitment to continued learning and reflective practice.

**Education Unit Mission**
To prepare teachers and administrators who identify and practice social justice, personal spirituality, professionalism, and democratic principles.

**Social Justice:**
We are living in a new century, with growing cultural and linguistic diversity, international communication, and tremendous access to information. It is also an age characterized by enormous inequities and a lack of democratic opportunities for many people. (Nieto, 2000, p. 181)

At Ursuline, we believe that all people should work together to create a just society. We recognize our social responsibility by attending to the dignity of the individual, sharing resources, and advocating for and supporting the rights and opportunities of those who are underserved by society. We believe that we, as educators, are charged to not only work to support the rights of the underserved, but to work with them in ways that enable them to see the possibilities of their own power and become critical agents of their own humanity (Friere, 1970). We believe that educational communities should engage in dialogic conversations that work to provide all students with “a sense of identity, community, and possibility” (Giroux, 1997, para. 2).

We agree with Dewey (1987, Article IV, para. 1) that “…education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.” We believe that we must engage ourselves and our candidates in critical educational inquiry and be open to the unexpected that may produce discoveries that help us bridge gaps among us, that lead to empathy, and that encourage selfless action in support of the emancipation of others. By challenging and expanding the boundaries of traditional educational practices, we seek inclusive learning environments that stimulate thought, reflection, and community. By rethinking traditional teaching practices and challenging policies and practices that undermine liberatory education, we are moving toward a pedagogy that realizes that it is essential to rely on the inherent value that each individual brings to the learning community (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 1994). Ursuline’s commitment to social justice and change is a legacy handed down from St. Angela Merici (1520, trans. 1993), foundress of the Ursuline Sisters, who said, “If according to the times and the needs, it is necessary to make changes or to modify certain rules, do so with prudence and good advice” (p. 62).

**Spirituality**
We believe that each of us is a unique person searching for the meaning of life. Spirituality is the way we seek to gain wisdom, build meaning in our lives, and create connections with self, others, and the Divine and natural worlds. Spirituality enables us to develop a clear vision and determine appropriate action. Embracing the spirituality of St. Angela and mindful of her counsel to pray for enlightenment, direction, and guidance, our candidates are encouraged to ground their interactions and relationships in the Divine through contemplation, conversation and action (Merici, 1520). We encourage our diverse student population to develop an understanding of the “abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than
our own egos – with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the indivisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive” (Wolman, 2001, p. 26).

Democratic Living
We recognize that, as members of a democratic society, our lives are intertwined with those whose realities intersect and travel along the same paths as ours. Our view of democracy reaches beyond the political and into the social and personal. Democratic living is fundamental to a way of life in which all persons can fully develop, allowing space for individual voice, collaboration, reciprocity, and mediation as part of everyday life. It is a “moral ideal requiring expanding opportunities for direct participation” (Carr & Hartnett, 1996, p. 233). We believe and guide our candidates to understand that our privileged status with basic freedoms requires us to act for those whose freedoms have been limited. We maintain that we have the capacity to envision and create a better social order (Dewey, 1897; Greene, 1988).

Professionalism
As professional educators, we believe we have an obligation to approach education with integrity, dignity and wisdom, to act as responsible leaders, and to work continually with the best interests of our candidates in mind. We view learning as a continuous life-long process and believe that reflective practice nurtures this continual growth. We strive to model and teach reflective practice (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001; Gornik, Henderson, & Thomas, 2004; Henderson & Gornik, 2006) that is informed by theory, beliefs and on-going experience to develop habits of mind that encourage an engaged commitment to open-minded and responsible educational practice. Our programs provide classroom and field-based experiences that offer opportunities for collaborative learning, self and group evaluation, and thoughtful responses to learning experiences.

Finally, the liberal arts tradition of Ursuline College provides the impetus for the achievement of a holistic approach to learning. The faculty embraces the belief that knowledge is socially and cognitively constructed (Edgerton, 1996; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Pinar, 2004; Slattery, 2006; Vygotsky, 1986) and that learning strengths are defined by prior experiences (Edgerton, 1996; Pinar, 2004), learning styles and multiple intelligences (Dunn & Dunn, 1992; Gardner, 1983; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Sternberg, 2004). As educators we believe that we must be able to think, plan, instruct, and lead in ways that support our candidates’ construction of knowledge and address their individual learning needs. We believe that a holistic philosophy is supported by an integrated curriculum. Based upon the research of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) and substantiated by more recent studies (Qin, Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Slavin, 1995), the principles of an integrated curriculum address student learning as collaborative, subjective, inductive, and active, recognizing the realities of candidates’ backgrounds and experiences that have encouraged competition, deduction, and received knowing. In the Ursuline Education Unit, innovative and integrated programs are fostered and high academic standards are maintained while attending to the range of abilities and skills of entering candidates.

Unit Goals
From our philosophical groundings, and resting on the four pillars of social justice, spirituality, democratic living, and professionalism, we have developed the following goals:
• To demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the learner who is a person growing in the capacities to gain wisdom, to make free choices and to relate to others with love;
• To promote the dignity and diversity of individuals, families, communities, and the broader global community;
• To demonstrate an understanding of one’s relationship to the spiritual and natural worlds through direct participation in and service to society;
• To model integrity and respect as an expression of their souls and character;
• To utilize knowledge – historical, philosophical, theoretical, psychological, experiential, pedagogical - to inform professional practice;
• To engage in reflective inquiry;
• To accept membership in the education profession as a privilege, responsibility and service to others.

Summary
Planning for student learning based on knowledge of student needs, and selecting teaching strategies that serve to meet those needs (Good & Brophy, 2003; Marzano, 2003) are marks of well-prepared candidates. Additionally, they will be able to differentiate (Tomlinson, 1999) learning experiences so that a variety of students within the same classroom might find their learning experiences appropriately challenging and meaningful.

Candidates must be able to demonstrate how children learn and develop and they will be able to provide learning experiences that support such development. Specifically, they must be able to understand and utilize constructivist practice (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Piaget, 1959; Vygotsky, 1978) to promote understanding and to create experiences that will move fruitfully into future experiences (Dewey, 1938).

Effective assessment of student learning (Stiggins, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) that provides authentic information about student performance directs the planning for student learning. Candidates must be able to plan lessons beginning with this end in mind and will, thereby, allow assessment to drive instruction. They will use assessment for the benefit of students and will be able to help students self-assess in ways that promote their independence in learning.

Candidates will be able to manage the learning environment so that learners remain focused on learning. They will understand the connection between quality instruction and positive student behavior (Good & Brophy, 2003), and they will be able to create authoritative, rather than authoritarian styles (Gill, Achtan, & Algina, 2003) that reflect their respect for learners constructing their own meaning.

Effective relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and community members promotes the best interests of learners (Goleman, 1995; Noddings, 1984, 1998, 2005, 2006). In addition to building their capacity for establishing quality relationships with all stakeholders, candidates will be able to take on larger spheres of influence within the profession so that they might fully advocate for children and youth.
In conclusion, candidates prepared to serve as teachers and administrators in public, parochial, and private school settings, leave Ursuline College with a solid foundation of theory and experiences in practice that support their theoretical understandings. The knowledge base provided in this conceptual framework guides our decisions as courses are developed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of our candidates. In the end, our commitment is to the learner who will ultimately benefit from well prepared candidates.

References


