

The Conceptual Framework

Background

In 1991 the College began implementing an innovative review mechanism designed to assure program quality throughout the College. As part of the Curriculum Design Unit Assurance Seminars, faculty developed and revised conceptual frameworks for their program areas. In Fall 2002, a faculty committee was formed to develop a conceptual framework for the College. The committee, with input from other faculty and members of the professional community, created a framework that delineated the College's mission as building a better future for individuals, our state, our nation, and the world; acknowledged the vital role that education plays in supporting society today and in the future; and emphasized the preparation of competent, committed, and reflective professionals. The framework also highlighted issues of diversity, collaboration, technology, and lifelong learning.

The initial version of the College's conceptual framework was completed in Spring 2003. At the same time, we adopted the keystone, the topmost stone of an arch, as our College logo and a visual reminder of our mission. The keystone is the building block that supports and holds an arch together just as education supports the gateway of opportunity and holds intact the promise of a better future for individuals and society.

In 2004-2005, we revisited the conceptual framework, subjecting it to ongoing evaluation and refinement. The process involved widespread input from faculty, program candidates, and professional partners. Resulting changes to the framework included the development of an intellectual philosophy; greater attention to how the mission, philosophy, purpose, and goals are interrelated; increased emphasis on the transformative nature of our work; and development of proficiencies including dispositions.

The current revision of the conceptual framework establishes what we stand for as a college while embracing, preserving, and protecting the unique contributions of our different programs. The framework provides a foundation for ongoing efforts related to systemic, data-driven, and continuous improvement of our teaching, research, and outreach. It is an inclusive framework that represents all programs within the College. We continue to strive for coherence within our work by consistently applying this framework to decisions related to programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, faculty scholarship and service, and unit accountability.

Continued evaluation and refinement of the framework will be embedded in redesigned Curriculum Design Unit Assurance Seminars (CDUAS). The revision of this process will include inviting College faculty to reflect on the dynamic nature of their teaching, research, and outreach programs; to comment on the evolving nature of knowledge and standards within their fields; and to suggest revisions to the College's current conceptual framework. The process also will allow new faculty members to join the conversation and infuse fresh perspectives. In addition, program candidates will be invited to contribute to the College's evolving conceptual framework as they respond to questions posed in college-wide key assessments and complete program evaluation surveys. Also, members of the professional community will add their voices in advisory groups.

Shared Vision

Mission and Vision

The mission of the College of Education is to build a better future for individuals, our state, our nation, and our world. We fulfill our mission by preparing competent, committed, and reflective professionals as we engage in outstanding teaching, cutting-edge research, and meaningful outreach.

We believe that education is the keystone of opportunity and equity in a richly diverse, increasingly technological, and ever-changing world. It is the critical building block that enables individuals and societies to flourish in a global community.

Our mission challenges us to prepare *competent* teachers, administrators, counselors, and other intervening professionals who create meaningful learning opportunities for children, youth, and adults including those from diverse backgrounds and those with exceptional needs; *committed* professionals who make reasoned decisions grounded in thoughtfully-constructed values related to professional ethics, collaboration, diversity, and intellectual vitality; and *reflective* professionals who review and analyze their own practices as they participate in the ongoing learning and continuous improvement required of their professions.

Our mission compels us to continue seeking new and innovative ways for improving the learning experiences of the people we serve as well as the ways we prepare educational and human services professionals. Through *outstanding teaching*, we aim to prepare service-oriented professionals who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to foster the physical, social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development of diverse individuals. Through *cutting-edge research*, we seek to advance the ever-evolving knowledge base that informs our professional practices. Through *meaningful outreach*, we aspire to serve individuals and groups beyond the University walls. We acknowledge that we are at our best when our efforts create a seamless integration of teaching, research, and outreach and when our work represents collaborations with educational, government, business, and civic partners.

Consistent with Auburn University's land-grant traditions, we assign our highest priority to working with the citizens of Alabama. However, we also work toward improving the learning opportunities and the futures of citizens in the Southeast region, the nation, and the global community.

Our vision is one of transformation: We strive to be and prepare agents of change. We seek to establish and work collaboratively within socially-responsive learning communities that value the mosaic of a diverse society. Our vision includes engaging in the continuous learning necessitated by a rapidly-advancing world, identifying and addressing critical issues related to the education of all people, and using technology to broaden and support learning opportunities. It is a vision of change that embraces the inclusive, collaborative, and technological aspects of our mission. It is a vision that will establish us as a college representing educational advocacy and innovation in the 21st century.

Intellectual Philosophy

The unique contributions of the College's different programs enhance our ability to respond to the diverse and complex needs of the people we serve, but our collective efforts are grounded in an overarching belief system that articulates what we understand and value about learning and ways to support learning. We view the following tenets about learning as fundamental to the development of all individuals; we hold the tenets about the support of learning as basic to the practices of all educational and human services professionals. Our philosophy integrates multiple theories and approaches to learning; it is consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of institutional, state, and professional standards.

Learning is . . .

1. Active and personal; it . . .
 - proceeds from the vantage point of the learner in that it is filtered through an individual's prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs as well as the individual's physical, social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development; builds on, extends, integrates, and transforms what is known and believed.
 - includes learning content and learning to reason about content (e.g., inquiry, problem solving, critical analysis, synthesis, and evaluation).
 - involves taking risks by exploring new questions, new solutions, and new perspectives.
2. Collaborative and social; it is . . .
 - influenced by conversations with others and the degree to which these conversations promote open-mindedness, reasoned thinking, and active engagement of all members.
 - grounded in learning communities seeking to better understand and respect the complexity and diversity of the world and solving practical problems through sharing, valuing, and exploring different perspectives.
 - governed by responsible and ethical actions that demonstrate social responsibility, promote dignity of all people, and protect the integrity of the learning process.
3. Ever-evolving; it progresses toward . . .
 - more complex and integrated conceptualizations including relationships among concepts and multiple perspectives.
 - more creative and reasoned uses of knowledge including identifying and solving problems as well as generating new knowledge.
 - greater discernment of thought including development of ethical and moral reasoning; understanding of how personal experiences influence what is known and believed; and recognition of bias, illogical arguments, overgeneralizations, and unjustified conclusions.

Learning is supported when

4. Learning communities are safe, stimulating, and enriched with diversity; professionals facilitate collaborations that . . .
 - ensure dignity of all by advocating for and embracing the rights and responsibilities of individuals as well as groups.
 - feature high levels of thinking and thoughtful exploration of informed ideas.
 - draw on the rich resources of diverse people and value the reciprocal nature of learning.

5. Decisions about teaching and other professional practices are reasoned and purposeful; professionals . . .
 - match what is being learned with appropriate, evidence-based approaches to learning (e.g., thoughtful selection of materials, instructional strategies, experiences, and assessments).
 - consider how to help individuals understand content and engage in high levels of thinking as they reason about content.
 - provide learning opportunities that promote physical, social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development.

6. Teaching and other professional practices are enacted in proactive, flexible, and self-regulating ways; professionals . . .
 - draw on in-depth content, pedagogical content, and professional knowledge in thoughtful, integrated, and creative ways.
 - vary roles such as informing, modeling, probing, facilitating, and coaching to foster thoughtfulness and independence.
 - monitor the effects of their professional practices on all individuals and make adjustments as needed.

Purpose

The unifying purpose across all departments and programs in the College is the development of competent, committed, and reflective professionals--professionals who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to activate the transformative, inclusive, collaborative, and technological aspects of the College's mission and its intellectual philosophy. Our mission and our philosophy provide the grounding for how we define the key characteristics that we aim to develop in our program candidates and strive to model in our own work.

Competent. Competent professionals demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed to facilitate the learning of the individuals they serve. Their competence enables them to model and promote active, collaborative, and ongoing learning. Their efforts are enhanced by their abilities to foster learning communities that are safe, stimulating, and enriched with diversity; engage in reasoned and purposeful decision making; and implement their professional practices in proactive, flexible, and self-regulating ways. We recognize that the development of professional competence is linked to levels of preparation and experience. We also acknowledge that competence continues to develop over the course of an entire career.

Committed. Committed professionals make reasoned decisions based on thoughtfully-constructed values. As a College, we strive to nurture values that support the learning of all people, honor diversity, protect the integrity of learning, and expand the scholarship of our professions. We view these values as professional dispositions, and we define them as filters for responsible decision making. Our College emphasizes the conscious development of commitments related to professional responsibilities and ethics, collaboration, diversity, and intellectual vitality.

Reflective. We choose to frame reflection as a critical and pervasive habit of mind that permeates and fuels the ongoing expansion of competence and the continued development of reasoned commitments. Reflective professionals subject their own competencies and commitments to continuous scrutiny as they systematically monitor the impact of their professional practices on the individuals they serve and make adjustments as needed. Thoughtful reflection emphasizes reviewing and analyzing past practices in ways that influence and improve future practices. This stance inspires self-initiated professional growth and results in increased capacities for addressing the complexities and dilemmas situated within the work of educational and human services professionals.

Proficiencies

Based on our evolving shared vision, we delineated 15 proficiencies representing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that we expect of all College graduates and that we as College faculty continue to strive for in our own professional journeys. We conclude that more expert professionals when compared to more novice professionals do not have different kinds of proficiencies but exhibit proficiencies at greater levels of sophistication. For example, more expert professionals exhibit more highly-developed understandings, enhanced capacities for integrating their understandings and their actions on behalf of learners in flexible and adaptive ways, and greater leadership in professional learning communities.

We organize our 15 proficiencies using the three key attributes delineated in our conceptual framework: competent, committed, and reflective professionals. The first ten proficiencies focus on *competencies* (knowledge and skills). The next four proficiencies focus on *commitments* (dispositions). The final proficiency targets *reflection*.

To make the proficiencies inclusive of all program candidates and College faculty, we use the phrase “professional practices” to encompass the varied work of teachers, administrators, and counselors in school settings; educational and human services professionals in non-school settings; and College faculty engaged in teaching, research, and outreach. We also purposefully use words such as “individual(s)” or “learner(s)” rather than “student(s)” to acknowledge that the people whom faculty and program candidates serve include pre-school children, K-12 students, adults with special learning needs, clients in counseling contexts, individuals in need of fitness-related support, program candidates, and all practicing professionals including College and University faculty.

The proficiencies listed on the next page provide a foundation for ongoing efforts in developing an integrated and comprehensive assessment system. Refinement of this system focuses on reviewing and supporting the progress of program candidates as well as the scholarship of College faculty. We have developed more detailed descriptions of these proficiencies for candidates in preparation programs for teachers and other professional school personnel.¹ As we continue working toward greater coherence in our work, we need to consider developing descriptions of these 15 proficiencies for candidates in programs that prepare educational and human services professionals for non-school contexts as well as descriptions that articulate our expectations for College faculty.

¹ See the COE document entitled “Candidate Proficiencies for Teachers and Other Professional School Personnel.” The descriptions in this document are grounded in the College’s conceptual framework and aligned with standards set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and the Teacher Certification Chapter and Teacher Education Chapter of the Administrative Code for the State of Alabama.

Competent Professionals

1. Understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the content they teach or practice.
2. Create learning experiences that make the content they teach or practice meaningful for individuals.
3. Understand how individuals differ in their approaches to learning and create instruction or implement other professional practices adapted to this diversity.
4. Use knowledge of how individuals learn and develop to provide educational opportunities that support intellectual, social, and personal development.
5. Understand and use a variety of evidence-based professional practices in reasoned and flexible ways to encourage individual development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
6. Use an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
7. Use knowledge of effective verbal and non-verbal communication to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in learning environments.
8. Plan professional practices based upon knowledge of subject matter, individuals, the community, and identified goals.
9. Understand and use formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure continuous progress toward identified goals.
10. Use technology in appropriate ways.

Committed Professionals

11. Engage in responsible and ethical professional practices.
12. Contribute to collaborative learning communities.
13. Demonstrate a commitment to diversity.
14. Model and nurture intellectual vitality.

Reflective Professionals

15. Analyze past practices to stimulate ongoing improvement of future practices.