

**Recommendation for Change of Accreditation Status for  
Western Governors University  
June 2010**

**Overview of this Report**

This agenda item presents a report on the responses of Western Governors University to the stipulations noted in their March 2009 Site Visit. The item includes a recommendation for a change in Western Governors University's accreditation status.

**Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the COA change the accreditation decision for Western Governors University from *Accreditation with Stipulations* to *Accreditation*.

**Background**

In March 2009, a site visit team recommended that the COA grant Accreditation with Stipulations to Western Governors University.

The findings that led to the stipulations were identified in the report as follows:

The institution is generally effective in preparing educators in its general operations apart from the identified areas of concern. The team identified concerns about field placement procedures ensuring that field experiences meet all the common and program standards. The team also identified concerns for addressing content literacy for single subject candidates and some aspects of the preparation for teaching English language learners.

Based upon the findings, two stipulations were noted. Unit and program leadership at Western Governors University addressed each of the two stipulations. Evidence was submitted and, following a staff review of the evidence, a phone conference was held to clarify and confirm the information.

The stipulations and responses to the stipulations are as follows:

1. *That WGU provide systematic documentation of the process and information related to field experiences, including issues of diversity, within one year of the site visit.*
2. *That WGU provide evidence of systematically addressing the issues related to curriculum and fieldwork for the multiple and single subject preparation programs.*

**Information provided by Western Governors University related to the Stipulations:**

**Western Governors University Field Experiences Placement Process**

The field experiences placement process consists of two parts: 1) a pre-clinical experience; and 2) a full-time student teaching practicum. Teacher candidates begin field experiences with pre-clinical experiences that take place during the completion of their Effective Teaching Practices course work. Just prior to the point in their program in which teacher candidates intend to participate in pre-clinical experiences in a school, they apply to the Field Experiences Office. The University provides guidance to the candidate for this placement, if needed, but generally,

the student decides on the school that best fits his or her needs. Placement staff review the application and contact the district and school, if it appears that the placement request is a viable one, to obtain permission from the appropriate school administrator and then complete the district contract, if required. Prior to being cleared to begin pre-clinical experiences, teacher candidates must have district and school permission, a cleared background check, liability insurance, and passing scores on state-required basic skills examinations. Teacher candidates complete assessments based on their pre-clinical experiences. They are required to participate in multiple classrooms at multiple levels. Specifically, elementary candidates participate at multiple grade levels, and secondary candidates participate in multiple, related subjects and grade levels. Upon completion of their pre-clinical experiences, teacher candidates submit a form signed by teachers and the principal, verifying the candidates' pre-clinical activities.

The second part of the field experiences process is the full-time student teaching practicum (demonstration teaching). Demonstration teaching lasts a minimum of 12 weeks; certain programs or districts may require longer. Teacher candidates apply for demonstration teaching as they are completing their last assessments 6-7 months prior to the start of the August/September school term or the January school term. To be eligible to be provisionally accepted to the demonstration teaching cohort, candidates must be on academic track to complete all academic requirements prior to entering demonstration teaching. Candidates must complete an application process, complete all program and content prerequisites, have a background clearance on file, take the Haberman Star Teacher Online Pre-Screener disposition assessment, and pass external Basic Skills and content exams (for most candidates in most states, these are the PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II exams; in California, the CBEST and CSET) before being cleared to enter the classroom for demonstration teaching. Candidates are also required to have professional liability insurance coverage, either through personal insurance or by joining the National Education Association (NEA). Additionally, the Field Experiences Office placement specialist contacts the district and school to obtain permission for the candidate to engage in demonstration teaching at the appropriate grade level(s) and in the appropriate subject(s). Districts and schools must be accredited and are selected based on proximity to the teacher candidate and type of school. The diversity of the district is considered as well at this time in order to ensure that our candidates and our candidates' students have a diverse professional experience.

The school must make available a cooperating teacher (Host Teacher) with five years of teaching experience and with at least two years in the current school. Field Experiences staff ensure that the teacher candidate has permission from the district and school, a current cleared background check, liability insurance, passing state basic skills scores, and passing state content exam scores. The Field Experiences staff also identify an experienced Clinical Supervisor who has either worked for us in the past or has worked in this role in California previously, to support and evaluate the teacher candidate during the demonstration teaching experience. Field experiences staff orient the Host Teacher and the Clinical Supervisor and monitor the teacher candidate's progress throughout the demonstration teaching experience. The Host Teacher is assigned at least six months in advance of the student teaching practicum. He or she must have a credential or license for the subject area and/or grade level being taught, have a minimum of five years teaching experience, be in at least the second year of teaching at the school, and have approval from the district and principal to serve as a Host Teacher. Future placements will follow the same placement process.

## **Issues Related to Curriculum and Fieldwork for the Multiple and Single subject Preparation Programs.**

Western Governors University has made significant progress and has had significant success with curriculum and fieldwork. To set the stage for the formalization of the policy to introduce and require circulation in all elements of our field placements, we instituted curricular changes in our Foundations of Teaching Courses of Study immediately following the articulation of this stipulation. As a result of those changes, we instituted the requirement that for all pre-clinical experiences, elementary candidates would participate at multiple grade levels; similarly, secondary candidates must participate in multiple, related subjects and grade levels. The Course of Study changes have provided the framework that our candidates need to enter pre-clinical experiences where there is a focus on curriculum. Having completed that curricular and field experiences enhancement, we have initiated appropriate changes in our Demonstration Teaching (Student Teaching clinical field experience) process and policy. As a result, secondary candidates in our three subject areas (mathematics, the sciences, and social science) for the most recent cohort have been placed in multiple, related subjects and grade levels 90% of the time during their student teaching practicum field work. The few exceptions have occurred in physics and chemistry and result from placement difficulties in those areas of the curriculum in certain areas of the state. Finally, as our elementary education candidates are completing the pre-clinical component of the field experience in multiple grade levels, we have moved to the formal requirement that those candidates will be required to have multiple grade student teaching experiences.

We have recognized that there is more to do in our full-time student teaching program regarding curriculum and fieldwork both for the multiple and single subject preparation programs. The requirement of multiple grade levels for elementary candidates is in effect now; 100% of our elementary candidates in the January 2011 cohort will have completed the multiple grade level placement requirement in pre-clinical experiences and will be placed in multiple grade levels during the Demonstration Teaching program. For Secondary Education candidates, our goal is to improve the 90% success rate and have 100% Demonstration Teaching placement results in multiple subject areas and grade levels. We believe that the manner in which we have formalized these placement requirements by focusing first on curricular issues, and then on field

### **Addressing Content Literacy for Single Subject Candidates and Preparation for Teaching English Language Learners**

In each of the programs submitted, all candidates proceed through two Professional Studies domains, including the Effective Teaching Practices (ETP) domain. ETP consists of several subdomains including: Instructional Planning and Design; Instructional Presentation & Follow-up and Subject-Specific Teaching Methods (Elementary; Mathematics; Science, or Social Science, depending on program.) It is in the ETP domain where content literacy and teaching ELL students are first addressed. Candidates are assessed on these competencies via performance assessments and competency exams, and later through observations during their Demonstration Teaching experiences. Recall that all program completers pass every assessment prior to graduation. Thus, *all* WGU Teacher Preparation Program completers, both multiple and single subject, have passed assessments covering the following objectives:

- Identify comprehension strategies that increase recall and summarization of texts.
- Describe the differences between reading content area material and literature.
- Identify reasons for using strategies for teaching reading and comprehension within all content areas.
- Identify the principle observable stages in the development of a first and second language.
- Identify how previously obtained linguistic development in a language different from the language of instruction impacts curricular and instructional decisions.
- Identify formative and summative assessment strategies to determine the level of student competence in the use and understanding of language.
- Identify how to help students correct their misunderstanding of language use.
- Identify instructional strategies that increase oral language development and understanding.
- Create a lesson plan that uses content area comprehension strategies. (Assessed during Demonstration Teaching.)
- Ask questions at the appropriate level to match the student's language skills and abilities. (Assessed during Demonstration Teaching.)

Multiple-Subject Candidates also demonstrate their competence by passing assessments covering the following objectives:

- Teach a lesson that requires concept development in a content area. (Assessed during Demonstration Teaching.)
- Integrate literacy and mathematics into content area instruction. (Assessed during Demonstration Teaching.)
- Compare and contrast appropriate beginning reading strategies for native English speakers and English Language Learners.
- Discuss adaptations to a mathematics lesson teaching counting skills to accommodate English Language Learners and students with exceptionalities.

Secondary Math, Science, and Social Science programs all contain the following objective:

- Discuss how to teach English language content-based reading and writing skills to all students.

As can be seen from the objectives listed above, WGU's Teacher Preparation Programs cover the areas of content literacy and teaching ELL students in a variety of ways. One of the many Learning Resources used in the ETP domain is the set of professional development modules designed and delivered by [www.Teachscape.com](http://www.Teachscape.com). This resource is purchased by WGU and supplied free of charge to all students entering the ETP domain. There are several modules to which candidates are directed that address content literacy and preparation to teach ELL students. These include the following: 'Literacy Across the Curriculum: Integrating'; 'English Language Development at High School'; 'English Language Learners: Reading and Writing'; 'Talking about Texts'; and 'Using SDAIE for English Language Learners.' Courses of Study direct students to engage these modules, to reflect upon what they contain, and to then incorporate that knowledge into subsequently designed lesson plans.

**Staff Finding**

After review of the documentation submitted by Western Governors University and a phone conversation to resolve several issues, staff has concluded that the Western Governors University has addressed all standards which were not found to be met during the 2009 accreditation site visit and provided evidence that it has responded to all two stipulations. Therefore, staff recommends that the COA take action to change the accreditation decision for Western Governors University from *Accreditation with Stipulations* to *Accreditation*.