

MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM REVIEW

RANK I PROGRAM IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
(for teachers certified to teach P-5 and/or 5-9)

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INTRODUCTION

The graduate programs in education at Morehead State University are based on the conception that the mastery of the discipline of teaching is an on-going, life-long process. The university's role in this process is to provide graduate education programs designed to: 1) extend experienced teachers' knowledge in their chosen area of specialization; 2) increase their understanding of the developmental and learning needs of their students in a pluralistic society; 3) empower teachers through recent trends and research to make good decisions about the experiences of the learners with whom they work. The Rank I Program in Elementary Education encompasses this process as it focuses on extending the learning of teachers certified to work with students enrolled in grades P-9.

Empowering teachers, in compliance with current trends, in educational experiences to lead all learners to have the opportunities to succeed in classrooms is the premise for this program. Within this premise is the operative concept of "all" students; thus, the empowerment is centered on those educational experiences that will lead students to be life-long learners in academic and social arenas.

I. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The central metaphor of the conceptual framework for Morehead State University's teacher education unit is Educator as Architect: Designing Environments Where Students Construct Knowledge and Develop Skills. This metaphor is intended to convey a consistent theme of constructivism that recurs throughout our programs and provides a degree of unity and consistency. That theme is consistently reflected in our Rank 1 program, as may be evident from the titles of core courses. EDF 600 Research Methods in Education attempts to help teachers develop the skills necessary to be critical consumers of educational research, not just perpetuators of current practice or naïve recipients of poor scholarship. EDEL 680 History and Philosophy of Education explore the very nature of epistemology and encourage candidates to formulate their own understandings of the nature of knowledge, learning, and meaning. Indeed, it is here that most of them come to understand the very concept, constructivism. EDEL 685 Collaboration for Teachers certainly ties into the idea of a community of learners rather than stand-alone dispensers of information, an idea which is recurrent in constructivist literature. EDEL 681 Advanced Seminar in Contemporary Educational Thought is designed to allow candidates to explore independently and in a community of learners themes introduced in the earlier History and Philosophy of Education course. The emphasis on candidates exploring topics they find meaningful, and the amount of independent work is consistent with constructivist epistemologies. The final course, the capstone, EDEL 686 Seminar for Experienced Teachers in Grades P – 9, was created as a culminating experience where teachers reflect upon, consolidate, and apply the things they have learned in their programs. In addition to the opportunities to take ownership over individual topics and projects in these core courses, candidates have 12 hours of electives in their programs from which they can further pursue their own professional interests and needs. Again, the recurring emphases upon choices, ownership, application, and reflection are all reflective of the constructivist theme.

II. PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

Graduates of this program must demonstrate substantial growth in the skill and knowledge base of the Experienced Teacher Standards (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999). For the experienced teacher, growth in the profession is a holistic undertaking that cannot be narrowly confined to a single aspect of professional development. Hence, it cannot be realistically said that a single graduate course will lead to mastery of a standard; nor should an effective graduate course narrowly focus on only one of the standards. That said, however, to attain Rank I, the Commonwealth of Kentucky's highest possible rank, it is expected that with completion of this program, teachers will have gained a depth and breadth of knowledge that encourages continual reflective practice within the classroom setting. The matrix on page 5 outlines those courses that place a particular emphasis on specific Experienced Teacher Standards. Within the core content of course, all standards are addressed repeatedly and in-depth. For example, the requirement of two courses in History and Philosophy of Education (EDEL 680 History and Philosophy of Education and EDEL 681 Advanced Seminar in Educational Thought) encourages candidates seeking Rank I certification to explore broad historical and philosophical educational themes and to return to these themes in a deeply reflective way. This combination encourages teachers to make decisions in regard to planning and implementing instruction, creating and maintaining an equitable learning environment, and use of technology that are informed not only by methodological results, but also by critical understandings of the beliefs and expectations of the educational climate they work in. Courses such as EDF 600 Research Methods and EDEL 682 Advanced Curriculum Development provide tools for thoughtfully putting philosophical commitments into practice. As well, candidates have a choice of a variety of elective courses which will enhance practice and understanding of the goals of the Kentucky Experienced Teacher Standards.

Additionally, as the program was designed, the curriculum was centered around the five core propositions established by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. These propositions express that effectiveness, knowledge, skills, dispositions, and commitments to their students are central to affectively enhance learning in the classroom:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.