Rockford College
Rockford, Illinois

2010 UNDERGRADUATE ELEMENTARY Teacher Preparation Program Design  D+

While strong reading preparation and relatively strong mathematics preparation enhance the design of this preparation program for elementary teachers, other critical elements are in need of improvement. Specifically, the institution does not play the pivotal role it should in selection of cooperating teachers for student teachers and the institution fails to ensure that teacher candidates receive the liberal arts education that best equips them to teach the Illinois K-9 curriculum. Elementary Teacher Production (2009): 94

Summary of Ratings

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Selectivity

1. Selective admissions. *The institution admits teacher candidates with strong academic records as determined by objective measures used typically for admission to undergraduate or graduate programs.*

The standards for admission into either the institution or its teacher preparation program should select undergraduate teacher candidates from only the top half of the college population and select graduate teacher candidates with a similar standard as measured by an admissions test commonly used for entry into graduate studies. At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the institution should encourage the applications of strong candidates by waiving content course requirements for candidates with advanced standing.

Because Rockford College is only rated as “selective” in its admissions by U.S. News and World Report, NCTQ also checked the entrance criteria for admission into its Education Department. Because the department’s requirements only conform to the state’s minimal requirement that applicants pass a basic skills test, it meets only a small part of the standard. Candidates will be admitted who are well below the 50th percentile of the college-going population, meaning they are unlikely to be able to meet the academic demands of teaching.

Ratings: ★ Strong design ★ Meets standard ★ Nearly meets standard ★ Partly meets standard ★ Meets a small part of standard ○ Fails to meet standard ? Data insufficient for a final rating NA Not applicable NR Not rated

www.nctq.org/edschoolreports
2. Serious coursework. The institution ensures that coursework has a seriousness of purpose, reflecting college-level work.

Coursework assignments should require mastery of course content, not mimic the educational experience of children as if the teacher candidates were themselves the ages of the children they will one day teach.

The institution meets this standard because all but a very small portion of assignments reflect a seriousness of purpose and require mastery of course content.

3. Exit exams. When state standards as measured by licensing exams appear inadequate, the institution elects to set a higher standard for program completion.

If the state does not require a rigorous licensure test that measures candidates’ knowledge of every subject taught, institutions must fill the vacuum.

The institution does not meet this standard because it relies only on the state’s elementary generalist test to determine if its elementary teacher candidates possess adequate knowledge of reading instruction, as well as content knowledge in four core subject areas. This test is wholly inadequate, both because of its low level of rigor and its lack of separate cut-scores for each subject. Recognizing that the state is responsible for setting an inadequate state-wide standard, nothing prevents the institution from independently requiring that its graduates pass rigorous assessments in reading instruction and each of four core subject areas.

Preparation for the 21st Century Classroom

4. Understanding diversity. The institution exposes teacher candidates to the history, culture and language of the principal minority and ethnic groups residing in the state.

Teaching students in the nation’s diverse classrooms requires more than cultural awareness – it also requires an understanding of the impact that culture can have on student learning.

5. Learning standards. Where relevant, the institution incorporates the state’s student learning standards into the preparation program.

State learning standards represent what all students are expected to know and be able to do. Teacher candidates should have exposure to these standards so they are prepared to develop appropriate lesson plans when they enter the classroom.

The institution meets the standard because most of the courses reviewed that address teaching strategies have one or more assignments requiring teacher candidates to plan instruction around the K-9 Illinois State Learning Standards.

6. English language learners. The curriculum required by the institution acknowledges the challenges teachers will face in meeting the instructional needs of English language learners.

Teachers must be prepared for classroom settings that are likely to include diverse populations speaking several different languages. The institution meets only a small part of the standard because only one of the reviewed non-reading courses addressing teaching strategies requires one or more assignments requiring that teacher candidates plan instruction addressing the needs of English language learners.

7. Education issues. The institution exposes teacher candidates to the most critical education issues of the day, notably the achievement gap.

Teachers need to understand the background and context for policy actions in education so that they can contribute to solutions. Because this standard is still in a pilot phase, the findings should only be viewed as exploratory. This standard is not rated, nor does it factor into overall program or institutional ratings. We note that four courses include coverage of education policy challenges.
8. Integrating technology. The institution ensures that applications of technology are integrated into the pedagogy associated with specific content areas.

Technology needs to be more than a hook to grab students’ attention – it needs to be an integral component of the delivery of instruction, customized to specific subject matter.

The institution fails to meet the standard because none of the reviewed courses addressing teaching strategies contains assignments requiring teacher candidates to plan instruction with technology applications.

9. This standard pertains to instruction on the use of assistive technology. It was not evaluated because it is not relevant to elementary teacher preparation.

10. Global perspective. The institution values the importance of a global perspective, imparting an understanding of the world, its history and its cultures to all students enrolled in the institution, including teacher candidates.

The world has shrunk. Recognition of that fact should pervade the campus.

Because this standard is still in a developmental phase, we do not provide an institutional rating and our findings should only be viewed as exploratory. We note that teacher candidates must take at least three credit hours in a non-Western or Third-World Culture course, and language requirements only apply to B.A. candidates. Several education-focused study abroad programs are offered, but we did not find a significant proportion of foreign students in the institution’s student body.

Practice Teaching

11. Training model. The institution has a strong clinical model with some level of commitment to training students in high-needs, high-functioning schools.

The institution should demonstrate that it supports the nation’s goal of educational equity. Because this standard is still in a pilot phase, the findings should only be viewed as exploratory. This standard is not rated, nor does it factor into overall program or institutional ratings. Our analysis of student teacher placement practices found differences based on a limited sample of partner schools. A map with information on this institution’s placement practices is posted on the website for Ed School Essentials: A Report on Teacher Education in Illinois (www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois/standards/11Findings.jsp). The map allows easy comparison of Rockford College’s placement practices with those of education schools in its vicinity.

12. Early field work. The institution exposes teacher candidates to field work early on in their preparation.

Early exposure to the classroom helps teacher candidates develop a realistic perspective on the profession and decide on their suitability for it when the stakes are low.

The institution meets the standard because field work is required by the fall semester of the junior year.

13. Full-time student teaching. The institution designs a full-time student teaching experience.

Student teaching should allow a full immersion absent the distraction of other coursework obligations. The institution meets the standard, ensuring that all teacher candidates can fully dedicate themselves to the important task and challenge of apprentice teaching without the distraction of additional coursework.
14. **Aligned student teaching.** The institution designs student teaching to have a local experience of sufficient length.

Student teaching should be long enough to ensure that the teacher candidate can witness the different demands of teaching as the school year evolves. A local experience allows alignment with the design of the preparation program and the instructional expectations teacher candidates will experience as Illinois teachers.

The institution meets the standard because its teacher candidates have student teaching experiences of sufficient length that have the potential to be well-aligned with both the design of their preparation program and with the instructional expectations they will experience as licensed Illinois teachers.

15. **Student teaching placements.** The institution carefully screens and qualifies expert cooperating teachers from its partner schools.

The best cooperating teacher is both an exceptionally effective instructor and a strong mentor of adults. The institution fails to meet the standard because information provided by the institution or information provided by interviews of school principals indicate that it does not assert its critical role in the selection of a cooperating teacher who demonstrates the ability to increase student learning and to mentor an adult.

16. **Back-up degree.** The institution sets degree requirements that make it practical for any candidate who may be unsuccessful in student teaching to still qualify in relatively short order for a college degree.

Teacher candidates should develop some expertise outside of their professional studies, not only to enrich their own academic experience, but also to serve as a fallback major in the event that the student teaching experience is unsuccessful. The institution meets only a small part of this standard because there are insufficient requirements for a concentration, with the result that a teacher candidate would face at least a year’s work to graduate under an alternative degree.

**Professional Training**

17. **Classroom assessments.** The institution provides a thorough overview of all types of classroom assessments, including how to analyze student data.

Appreciating the role of data and assessment in the classroom and how it can drive good instruction not only improves teaching, but it also makes it less likely for teacher candidates to perceive accountability measures as punitive.

The institution only partially meets the standard because it does not address two of the four key topics: standardized tests and applying data to improve instruction.

18. **This standard pertains to instruction on the use of assessment in special education.** It was not evaluated because it is not relevant to elementary teacher preparation.

19. **Cognitive psychology.** The institution requires teacher candidates to understand key principles from cognitive psychology that address how children learn and develop, omitting those principles that do not have a scientific basis.

Teachers need to learn about real and useful cognitive science, not bogus cognitive science such as “learning styles.” Because this standard is still in a pilot phase, the findings should only be viewed as exploratory. This standard is not rated, nor does it factor into overall program or institutional ratings. We note that the highest proportion of course time the program devotes to the critical topics of how students gain and retain factual knowledge, skills and conceptual understanding is the equivalent of only about 50 percent of one course.
20. Classroom management. The institution imparts methods in classroom management targeted to the grade levels at which the candidate intends to teach. Teacher candidates will be better able to establish a productive classroom environment if they learn a coherent management approach that is targeted to the grade levels at which the candidate intends to teach, not a grab-bag of techniques. The institution only partially meets this standard. While it has established a coherent design for instruction on classroom management, it is not targeted to the elementary grade levels at which the candidates intend to teach.

21. Special education. The institution provides an orientation to special education targeted to the grade levels at which the candidate intends to teach. All classroom teachers need to understand the basics of special education, including its legal framework and a working knowledge of instructional strategies for students with high-incidence disabilities. The institution only partially meets this standard. While it has established a coherent design for delivering special education instruction, it does not target the coursework to the candidates’ relevant grade levels.

22. Preparation efficiency. The institution offers an efficient program of study, as indicated by the required credit hours needed for completion. With no evidence that an excess of professional coursework requirements produces better teachers, it is sensible to keep requirements within reasonable bounds that won’t deter talented individuals contemplating a career in teaching. The institution meets the standard. The number of semester hours necessary to complete the professional sequence is within acceptable bounds. The program requires 29 hours of professional coursework (not including student teaching).

23. Course frequency. The institution offers all required courses at least once each year to make it possible to complete the program in a timely fashion. Programs that cannot be completed on time create a disincentive to pursue the teaching profession. The institution fully meets this standard because it offers all required courses each year.

Program Evaluation

24. Graduate outcomes. The institution tracks graduate outcomes such as employment and retention. The institution fully meets this standard. Documents obtained from the institution indicate that the institution regularly collects data regarding its graduates’ retention rates and job performance.

25. Graduates’ effectiveness. The institution fully utilizes any available data provided by the state or school districts to measure the effectiveness of its teacher graduates in order to make program improvements. Mirroring a similar commitment now found in K-12 education, higher education institutions must embrace data-driven decision making and accountability in preparing teachers. The institution fails to meet this standard. Documents obtained from the institution indicated that the institution does not regularly collect data regarding the academic performance of its graduates’ students.
Faculty

26. Faculty expertise. The institution mirrors the scholarship practiced in other fields by not expecting faculty members to teach multiple disparate disciplines.

Only the most extreme examples of unsuitable assignments are noted here, such as one instructor teaching courses in the history of education, human learning and secondary biology methods. The institution meets the standard because it appears to respect the scholarship of its faculty, not assigning instructors to teach coursework in disparate fields of study, such as, foundations of education, methods and educational psychology.

Preparation Specific to Elementary Teacher Candidates

27. Broad subject preparation. The institution requires that elementary teacher candidates receive a broad liberal arts education appropriately focused on the background knowledge relevant to elementary grades.

Because they cannot teach what they do not know, teacher candidates need to have a solid grasp of literature and composition, American and world history, geography, science, and art and music history. The institution does not meet this standard because neither the institution nor its teacher preparation program ensures sufficient coverage in the content elementary teachers need (including world/American literature, children’s literature, world history, world cultures, art history, and music history).

28a. Reading instruction. The institution prepares elementary teacher candidates in the essential components of effective reading instruction.

The research-based content proven to be necessary for teaching all children to read should be clearly evident in course materials such as lecture topics, assignments and textbooks. The institution meets the standard because its coursework covers all five of the components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies. All required textbooks address effective reading instruction.

28b. Reading instruction. The institution ensures that all coursework adheres to the essential components of effective reading instruction.

All of an institution’s required reading courses – not just some courses – should impart the research-based content that is necessary for teaching all children to read. The standard does not apply to only one reading course.

29. Elementary math. The institution provides adequate preparation in the specific mathematics content needed by elementary teachers.

Teacher candidates, even those who excel in math, generally require three semesters of coursework in order to progress from a procedural to a conceptual understanding of the essential mathematics topics taught in the elementary grades. The institution does not fully meet this standard because it simply does not require a sufficient number of courses to allow for adequate coverage of the essential topics.

30. Math methods. The institution provides appropriate preparation in elementary mathematics methods.

Mathematics-specific pedagogy is a significant part of teacher training in countries whose children outperform our own. The institution only partially meets the standard because the course designed to address teaching strategies for elementary mathematics does not address the topic in sufficient depth.
31. **Other methods.** The institution provides appropriate preparation in methods in elementary science, social studies and language arts/writing.

Teacher candidates must learn successful strategies for teaching core subjects, including the typical progression of student knowledge and common student misconceptions. The institution only partially meets the standard because the amount of required coursework specifically addressing teaching strategies in social studies, language arts/writing and science is insufficient.

32. **Middle school preparation.** The institution requires rigorous academic coursework of its middle school teacher candidates.

Middle school students deserve better than watered-down content delivered by teachers whose preparation is weak. The institution meets only a small part of this standard because all certification areas are insufficiently rigorous in their design. The institution should not qualify middle school teachers without requiring either a major in their certification areas or, in the case of the sciences and social sciences, a combination of courses equivalent to a major that includes at least a minor in one discipline.

33-39. These standards pertain to the preparation of secondary and special education teachers. They were not evaluated because they are not relevant to elementary teacher preparation.