



Fitness to Teach and Exit Policy for UTRGV Educator Preparation Program

All individuals who apply for admission to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) Educator Preparation Program (EPP) must be able to demonstrate essential abilities and dispositions. In addition to these essential abilities and dispositions, all candidates for a recommendation to the State of Texas for teaching certification are expected to demonstrate that they are prepared to teach children and youth. This preparation results from the successful completion of university coursework and demonstrating professionalism, ethical behavior and other characteristics and behaviors adopted as standards for this profession.

A. Essential Abilities

The ability to perform the following functions, with or without reasonable accommodations, is required:

- a. **Observation:** Teacher candidates must be able to accurately observe demonstrations and students close at hand and at a distance to learn skills and to gather their student's data.
- b. **Communication:** Teacher candidates must be able communicate in English orally and in writing. They also must be able to read and comprehend written material.
An individual with a disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must initiate a request by contacting the Office of Student Accessibility Services. Accommodations will be provided in accordance with University policy, UTRGV Handbook of Operating Procedures, ADM 03-200 (see <https://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-03-200.pdf>)
- c. **Psychomotor Skills:** Teacher candidates must exhibit motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum placements

- d. **Intellectual and Cognitive Abilities:** Teacher candidates must be able to measure, calculate, reason, analyze, synthesize, integrate, and apply information.
- e. **Behavioral and Social Attributes:** Teacher candidates must possess the emotional health required to fully use their intellectual abilities, such as exercising sound judgment, and developing mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with others such as their students, parents, and colleagues. Educator candidates must possess the ability to function effectively under stress, adapt to changing environments, and display flexibility.
- f. **Application of Ethical Standards:** Teacher candidates must demonstrate professional demeanor and behavior and must perform in an ethical manner in dealings with others.

B. Fitness to Teach Criteria

Each student is responsible for knowing and complying with the requirements and standards of the University and any particular to their program. This includes the *Regents' Rules and Regulations*, the *UTRGV Handbook of Operating Procedures* the UTRGV catalog, and other program policies, procedures and criteria, including those addressed in this document which incorporates the UTRGV Professional Dispositions Inventory (PDI) and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators, Title 19, Texas Administrative Code, Rule 247.2.

At admission to the Education Preparation Program (EPP), all teacher candidates will receive a copy of this document and other related forms which may also be obtained in the Office of Educator Preparation and Accountability (OEPA), or online. The information will be explained during pre-admission coursework and presented once admitted to the program at the New Teacher Orientation. These criteria apply to all teacher candidates pursuing elementary, secondary, and all level teacher certification programs.

a. **Communication Skills:** The teacher candidate demonstrates written and oral skills expected of an education professional that shows the ability to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.

- a) **Written:** Writes clearly, uses correct grammar and spelling. Demonstrates professional level skills in written English to understand content presented in the program and to adequately complete all written assignments, as specified by faculty.
- b) **Oral:** Communicates effectively with other students, faculty, staff, and professionals. Expresses ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrates a willingness and an ability to listen to others. Demonstrates professional level skills in spoken English to understand content presented in the program, to adequately complete all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of field placement experiences, as specified by faculty.
- c) **Electronic communication:** Refrains from inappropriate communication with a student including electronic communications by cell phone, text messaging, email, instant messaging, blogging, tweeting, and other social network communications.

b. **Personal and Professional Requirements:**

- a) A teacher candidate does not reveal confidential information concerning students unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.
- b) Teacher candidates demonstrate interpersonal skills that are required for successful professional teaching. These skills include:
 - an openness to accepting and testing the results of unfamiliar ways of teaching;
 - the ability to accept and act upon reasonable criticism;
 - the ability to understand others' perspectives about teaching;
 - the ability to separate personal and professional issues when in the classroom or completing course work;

- the ability to work collegially with parents, teachers, staff, and administrators in school settings and elsewhere;
 - the disposition to act always for the benefit of all students.
- c) Teacher candidates do not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with their students, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways.
- d) Teacher candidates demonstrate positive personal hygiene habits.
- e) Teacher candidates dress appropriately for their professional contexts.
- f) Teacher candidates adhere to the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators
- g) Teacher candidates demonstrate professional behavior both in and out of the classroom or school setting.

c. Cultural and Social Attitudes and Behavior:

- a) Teacher candidates exhibit respect for superiors, peers, and children and youth in all settings.
- b) Teacher candidates understand and appreciate the value of diversity and look beyond self in interactions with others; respect differences of race, ethnicity, religion, and social class, national allegiance, and cultural heritage. Teacher candidates do not impose personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on others.
- c) Teacher candidates exhibit acceptance of and provide accommodations for exceptional learners.
- d) Teacher candidates are able to work productively with their peers.
- e) Teacher candidates are able to speak in a manner appropriate to the context of the classroom.
- f) Teacher candidates must display positive attitudes toward faculty, colleagues, and students.
- g) Teacher candidates demonstrate positive social skills in professional and social interactions with faculty, colleagues, parents, and students.

C. Professional Dispositions Inventory (PDI)

Domain I: Learner Development and Diversity

1. Respects and accounts for students'/learners' individual differences.
2. Respects and accounts for students'/learners' cultural differences.
3. Respects and promotes students'/learners' linguistic diversity.
4. Works to be inclusive of diverse ethnic groups.
5. Works to be inclusive of gender.
6. Works to be inclusive of sexual orientation.
7. Demonstrates culturally responsive practices.
8. Demonstrates linguistically responsive practices.

Domain II: Critical Thinking and Reflective Practice

9. Engages in critical thinking.
10. Demonstrates ability to solve problems.
11. Is self-assessing.
12. Is reflective.
13. Is open to new ideas.

Domain III: Professionalism

14. Maintains high expectations for self.
15. Seeks opportunities for continued professional development.
16. Maintains appropriate personal appearance for the professional context.
17. Meets attendance requirements.
18. Is punctual.
19. Demonstrates professional interpersonal skills with all stakeholders.
20. Displays enthusiasm for working collegially.
21. Demonstrates enthusiasm toward teaching.
22. Accepts constructive criticism.

- 23. Separates personal and professional issues.
- 24. Works productively as a team member.

Domain IV: Ethical Practice

- 25. Demonstrates understanding of and compliance with laws and policies.
- 26. Maintains privacy and confidentiality unless disclosure is required by law.
- 27. Demonstrates academic honesty.

For example, does one's own work, gives appropriate credit when using the ideas of others, and provides proper citation of source materials. Also refer to institutional policy HOP STU 02-100 Student Conduct and Discipline regarding scholastic dishonesty and cheating.

Domain V: Communication and Learning Environments

- 28. Communicates effectively with all stakeholders orally.
- 29. Communicates effectively with all stakeholders in writing.

Domain VI: Content and Instruction

- 30. Prepares lessons, materials and assessments that meet individual student needs within discipline specific contexts.
- 31. Implements lessons, materials and assessments that meet individual student needs within discipline specific contexts.
- 32. Uses innovative technology to promote learning.
- 33. Is passionate toward learning the content being taught.
- 34. Uses modeling and demonstrating of concepts and/or methods for students/learners.

D. Admission to Teacher Certification Program and Completion of Clinical Teaching at UTRGV

Students must be in good standing at UTRGV. Students seeking admission to the Teacher Education Program who have ever been referred to UTRGV's Student Life and Dean of Students Office may have those referrals and the outcomes of those referrals considered by CEP Educator Preparation Faculty Committee in determining whether to grant admission to the Program. Students requesting admission to the program who have cases pending with the Student Life and Dean of Students Office will not be admitted until the case has been fully adjudicated.

- a. **Conditions for Completion of Clinical Teaching:** Successful completion of clinical teaching/internship is a condition for meeting teacher certification requirements. Teacher candidates may attempt clinical teaching/internship a maximum of two times. If teacher candidates do not successfully complete the second clinical teaching experience, they will not be eligible to enroll in clinical teaching a third time. The teacher candidate may appeal to the CEP Educator Preparation Committee to be reinstated only in the case of documented extenuating circumstances.

E. Assessment of Professional Dispositions and Dispositional Review Procedures

- a. Assessment of professional dispositions will be conducted and collected at various transition points through the teacher preparation program. Periodic monitoring of dispositions will allow the College of Education and P-16 Integration (CEP) to identify teacher candidates who may have some difficulties that raise concerns about the candidate's chances for successfully finishing the program. Through this process, it is critical to note that should dispositional issues or concerns arise in any course or field settings not identified in specifically designated courses, full-time, part-time faculty and staff members should follow the same process as identified in the following sections.
- b. Dispositional Concern(s) Review Procedures. Professional Dispositions are evaluated by faculty and professional staff of the College of Education such as the Director of

Field Experiences, and the Associate Dean. The dispositions have been identified as essential characteristics of a highly qualified professional. The key indicators of and proficiencies related to professional dispositions are assessed at three major transition points for initial programs: (1) Admission to Teacher Education Program, (2) Education Program Courses, and at the (3) Conclusion of Clinical Teaching.

- c. *A Dispositions Concerns Report and Growth Action Plan* may be completed when a concern arises during key transition points by faculty and professional staff and at any time other than the three transition points.
- d. Probationary Status. Teacher candidates are placed on probationary status following a dispositional review. They will remain on probationary status until they have successfully completed a growth action plan or until a decision to revoke candidacy has been made. If a teacher candidate successfully completes a growth action plan and yet additional Fitness to Teach referrals arise, the student's full program history will be reviewed by the department chair to determine the teacher candidate's status in the program. All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to participate in the process.

F. Disposition Assessment Process for Teacher Candidates

1. Upon acceptance to the program, students need to be apprised of the dispositions of good professional behavior that the college expects them to exemplify in their behavior.
2. Students will electronically sign the form and retain one copy for their own records. Tk20 will house the signed acknowledgement forms.
3. Instructors are to be provided with copies of the Professional Dispositions Inventory (PDI) at the beginning of the year. Throughout the year, they should keep a record of student behavior that deviates from dispositions detailed in the disposition inventory, and they should complete *Dispositions Concerns Report and Growth Action Plan* to the respective department chair upon occurrence. This report will indicate that the instructor has met and discussed the dispositional concern(s) with the teacher candidate and has drafted a growth action plan in concert with the teacher candidate. If the teacher candidate is enrolled in Clinical Teaching, the *Clinical Teaching Dispositions Concerns Report and Growth Action Plan* will be used instead. This form is to be

completed by the university supervisor in concert with the cooperating teacher as a result of a three-way conference with the clinical teacher at the school site.

4. At mid-semester, instructors in transition point courses are to complete in Tk20 the rating of each student's Professional Dispositions Inventory (PDI).
5. The chair of each department will receive a report generated through Tk20 the rating of each student's Dispositions on the Inventory. Students who score below an acceptable level, a "1" or a "2", will be flagged. If a concern arises at a time other than at the transition point, then the chair will receive an official *Dispositions Concerns Report and Growth Action Plan* from faculty/professional staff.
6. From the Tk20, students who receive a score below the acceptable range on any dispositional item are flagged:
 - a. If this is a first determination of a concern, the student will receive a letter from the chair of the department notifying the student that a dispositional concern has been filed identifying the area(s) of concern.
 - b. Student is contacted to schedule a meeting within 14 business days of notification with faculty/staff, chair, and program director.
 - c. Disposition meeting takes place with student, faculty/staff, and chair and or program director. (If more than one faculty or staff member submits a report on the same student, the meeting occurs together).
 - d. Together an action plan/reflective paper to address dispositions is developed to correct the behavior, signed by all present. A copy of this letter and paper will be placed in the student's file.
 - e. If the action plan that was agreed upon is not followed by the student or deemed ineffective, then additional department-level meetings may take place with reiteration of the existing or new action plan developed.
 - f. Recurring or more serious dispositional concerns as determined at the department level by faculty/staff, and or administrators, will be referred to the CEP Education Preparation Faculty Committee Chair who will schedule a meeting to address these concerns with the committee.
 - g. The committee will determine whether the matter should be referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR). If it is not referred to SRR, the

committee will offer the student the opportunity to respond to the deficiencies. If, after the student's response, the committee determines that the student should not continue in the program, the committee will advise the student regarding exiting the program. The committee's recommendation will be provided to the student in writing. A student who disputes an academic decision of the committee may pursue an academic appeal to the department chair and Dean in accordance with the Academic Appeals process in the University Catalog.