Wyoming School Administrators’ Perceptions Study
2017

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to investigate Wyoming (WY) K-12 administrators’ perceptions of University of Wyoming (UW) College of Education (COE) graduates’ preparedness to enter the profession.

Research Questions
The study was guided by the following research questions:
1. How to principals describe UW graduates’ preparedness to design and deliver curriculum?
2. How do principals describe UW graduates’ preparedness to manage students and classrooms?
3. How do principals describe UW graduates’ knowledge of the most pertinent educational models and theories?
4. How do principals describe UW graduates’ preparedness to collaborate with colleagues and other school professionals?
5. How do principals describe UW graduates’ preparedness to be valuable members of a professional learning community?
6. How do principals describe UW graduates’ preparedness to conduct, implement, and utilize assessment of student learning?
7. How do principals describe UW graduates’ preparedness to communicate and work with parents?

Method
To gain an in-depth understanding of WY principals’ perspectives about UW COE graduates and their preparedness for schools, an overall qualitative design was employed. Data sources for this study included: an online Qualtrics survey and individual telephone interviews.

Participants, selection, and recruitment. All currently employed and practicing principals and school administrators in all WY school districts (N = 163) were invited to participate in this study. Participants were identified using TEI and UW DOE databases and resources. All principals meeting the selection criteria were sent an email with a description of the project, its relationship to TEI, and an invitation to participate with a link to the online survey.

Survey. An initial online survey (using Qualtrics) was distributed to each participant meeting the selection criteria (See Appendix A). A total 71 of 163 individuals accessed the survey; of those 53
completed all the items of the Qualtrics survey, yielding a 32.52 percent response rate. The survey consisted of questions regarding demographic information as well as forced choice items designed to gain initial perspectives on their perceptions of UW graduates relative to the seven research questions. Open-ended questions were included to provide participants the opportunity to share additional thoughts and to elaborate on their responses to the forced-choice items. The concluding questions on the survey asked participants about their willingness to participate in an individual telephone interview as well as their contact information should they indicate willingness to do so.

Survey items and completion were piloted prior to distribution and appropriate modifications were made in order to ensure proper wording of items and time required to complete the survey. The online survey was created, distributed, and was open late February 2017 through early March 2017. 16 of administrators completed the survey.

**Individual telephone interviews.** Nine WY administrators expressed their willingness to give an individual telephone interview. Each administrator was contacted individually via email or telephone in order to set-up a time for the interview at the principal’s convenience. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and followed an interview guide (See Appendix B). Interview questions were created and modified following initial analysis of the Qualtrics survey responses (both forced choice and open-ended) so as to design questions that enriched the data set and provided deeper understandings of the emergent trends in the participants’ perceptions relative to the purpose of the study and the research questions. In addition, these questions were created with a Constructivist (Crotty, 1998) perspective so as to gather specific data relative to how the principals have constructed their beliefs and perceptions through their experiences and interactions with UW and UW graduates.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and frequency counts were identified in the survey data and survey data results were used within the overall qualitative frame for the study and as a way to enhance further data collection measures. Open-ended responses from the online survey and individual interview transcripts were analyzed inductively following protocol identified by Merriam (2009) and employing elements of grounded theory; specifically, constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data was coded in order to identify emergent themes following a process of open coding, axial coding, categorization, and theme development. Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through the use of multiple researchers (3), an audit trail, and negative case analysis.
Results

Survey data

Results from the survey indicate UW COE graduates demonstrate varying levels of preparedness. Table 1 presents WY Administrators perceptions of graduates’ levels of preparedness with respect to seven different elements:

Table 1: WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the following knowledge and skill sets expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Set</th>
<th>Not Prepared %</th>
<th>Somewhat Prepared %</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared %</th>
<th>Well Prepared %</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design and deliver curriculum</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>28.85</td>
<td>57.69</td>
<td>9.62</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom and student management</td>
<td>17.31</td>
<td>30.77</td>
<td>42.31</td>
<td>9.62</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of pertinent educational models and theories</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>34.62</td>
<td>42.31</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with colleagues and other school professionals</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>34.62</td>
<td>44.23</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as a valuable member of a PLC</td>
<td>13.46</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>40.38</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting/implementing/utilizing assessment of student learning</td>
<td>13.46</td>
<td>44.23</td>
<td>34.62</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating and working with parents/families</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>48.08</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey data indicate that WY administrators perceive UW COE graduates to be adequately prepared to design and deliver curriculum (57.69%). A more even distribution was seen across the rate of preparedness for managing students and classrooms. Figure 1 below provides the results of how administrators view the novice teachers’ preparedness for managing students and classrooms.
Figure 1: WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the knowledge and skills to design and deliver curriculum, as expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level.

Administrators indicated that a rate of preparedness for this particular expectancy as 17.31 percent were not prepared, 34.62 percent were somewhat prepared, 42.31 percent were adequately prepared and 9.62 percent well prepared.

Figure 2: WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the knowledge and skills to manage students and classrooms, as expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level.

Knowledge of the most pertinent educational models and theories, as well as collaboration with
colleagues and other school professionals, provide very similar results. 42.31 percent of the WY administrators who participated in this study believe the UW COE graduate was adequately prepared when examining their knowledge of the most pertinent educational models and theories. Likewise, 44.23 percent indicated the graduates as adequately prepared for the skill of collaborating with colleagues and other school professionals. When examining the survey data for both of these knowledge and skill sets, 34.62 percent of administrators believe the graduates are somewhat prepared and 15.38 percent indicated that they were well prepared. Figure 3 and 4 below provides the survey results of these particular skill and knowledge sets:

**Figure 3:** WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the knowledge and skills related to the most pertinent educational models and theories, as expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level.

**Figure 4:** WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the knowledge and skills to collaborate with colleagues and other school professionals, as expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level.
Administrators participating in this study described the preparedness of UW graduates to serve as valuable members of a PLC as: 13.47 percent not prepared, 38.46 percent somewhat prepared, 40.23 percent adequately prepared, and 7.69 percent well prepared.

Figure 5: WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the knowledge and skills to serve as a valuable member of a professional learning community, as expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level.

Administrators’ perceptions of UW COE graduates’ preparedness to conduct, implement, and utilize assessment of student learning was similar: 13.46 percent indicated not prepared, 44.23 percent indicate somewhat prepared, 34.62 percent adequately prepared, and 7.69 percent well prepared.

Finally, when examining data regarding the graduates’ ability to communicate and work with parent and families, the rate of preparedness indicated 5.77 percent not prepared, 48.08 percent somewhat
prepared, 38.46 percent adequately prepared, and 7.69 percent well prepared. Taken together, results from the survey data indicate that WY administrators perceive UW COE graduates lack the necessary preparedness in the following skill sets: (a) managing students and classrooms, (b) serving as a valuable member of a professional learning community, and (c) conducting, implementing, and utilizing assessment in regards to student learning.

![Graph showing preparedness levels of University of Wyoming COE graduates](image)

**Figure 7:** WY School Administrators’ perceptions of the preparedness level of UW COE graduates with the knowledge and skills to communicate and work with parents/families, as expected of novice educators, reported by percentage (%) of administrator responses for each level.

**Interview Data**

Interview questions were created and modified following initial analysis of the survey data in order to gain additional insights into survey responses and emerging trends. 16 WY administrators indicated their willingness to participate in an individual telephone interview and were emailed with an invitation to schedule the interview with the lead researcher. Of these, nine administrators completed individual interview. It should be noted that every attempt was made to secure interviews with all 16 administrators using multiple methods of communication on numerous occasions over a one-month period.

Findings from the individual telephone interviews revealed three themes regarding UW COE graduates’ preparation and preparedness for the classroom: (1) the need for more practical experiences, (2) a lack of knowledge and skills regarding assessment, and (3) the need for more experiences with PLCs.

**Need for more practical experiences.** The first and most dominant theme to emerge from the data (both interview and survey data) was the perceived deficiency of practical experiences. Six of the nine administrators interviewed expressed the need for more practical experiences prior to student teaching
as a necessity in improving the preparedness of UW COE graduates. For example, Bobby simply stated, “You’ve got to get them in the classroom.” As another example, Sam stated, “I think if we can get them out there and actually experience the job more, that would be a great bonus to them.” Bobby went on to comment that “…and I think so often we say, well this is the way it’s going to be in the real world, but they have to live in that real world.” Increasing the amount and number of practical experiences would provide pre-service teachers more exposure to and experiences with a classroom setting in the position as the teacher. Further, the administrators described the lack of practical experiences in which they occupy the role of teacher (rather than simply observing) as one of the explanations as to why some UW COE graduates struggle with specific areas of the job as new teachers.

Lack of knowledge and skills regarding assessment. The second theme to emerge from the data was the perception that UW COE graduates demonstrate a lack of knowledge and skills regarding assessment. All nine administrators interviewed expressed this view in the individual interview. Specifically, the administrators perceive UW COE graduates to be unfamiliar with the most pertinent assessment instruments, lack the knowledge of how to create and utilize informal assessment to gain insights about their students and then use this information to guide subsequent planning and instruction. The following quote from Travis embodies the expressions of many:

They are not familiar with the different types of assessments that can be used. They do not have experience with taking that data, looking at students by standards...and [asking] what you should do?...what kind of library do you have?... what resources do you have?...what options would you use to help students who are not getting it?

Similarly, Susan stated, “I think that they still have a bit of a foggy idea that assessment doesn’t have to be formal.” And, Ben expressed that, “I don’t think they understand how assessment is a reflection on their teaching.”

Need more experiences with PLCs. Six of the nine administrators described UW COE had limited experience with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Travis simply stated, “they don’t have any experience with that.” During Steve’s interview, he stated, “I think that the students’ knowledge of understanding professional learning communities is very limited and it’s very superficial.” Later he mentioned, “I think sometimes they don’t necessarily know which questions to ask.” Providing pre-service teachers the opportunity to actively participate in PLCs during teacher preparation would enhance their knowledge and confidence in this context allowing them to become more active members in this process upon entry into the profession. Many of the administrators interviewed indicated this would enhance PSTs preparedness. Specifically, Ben mentioned, “they do need to be taught [about PLCs]. They need to know what their roles are in that collaboration they need to know how to deal with conflict in a positive way.”
Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate WY K-12 administrators’ perceptions of UW College of Education graduates’ preparedness to enter the profession. Based on findings presented here, this committee provides the following recommendations to the Trustees Education Initiative for implementation in the UW COE: (a) embed practical experience in existing courses, (b) improve in knowledge and skills related to assessment, and (c) the creation of PLCs within the pre-service teacher’s respective cohorts.

Embed practical experiences in existing courses. The first recommendation for UW COE is to provide more opportunities for the pre-service teachers to gain practical experience prior to student teaching. One way to accomplish this is to embed experiences within existing courses. The development of pre-service teachers during a teacher education program should provide ample opportunity for practical experience, in conjunction with theory. These practical experiences should provide the pre-service teachers with the ability to experience the role of teacher independently (in a developmentally appropriate fashion) through planning, leading instruction, classroom management, creating and performing informal assessments, and utilizing assessment data to inform subsequent instructional decisions. Gaining additional practical experience can help PSTs develop a true sense of how a classroom operates and improve knowledge and skills surrounding classroom management. Pre-service teachers must have practice with developing routines, establishing rules, managing time, organization of students, as well as providing instruction and conducting, implementing, and utilizing assessment. Allowing the pre-service teachers opportunities to gain hands-on experiences with this prior to student teaching will only contribute to the professional success of the preparation with the identified knowledge areas and skill sets of focus for this study.

Assessment. Based on results from this study, it is suggested that UW COE enhance both the quantity and quality of assessment experiences throughout every stage of teacher education programs. WY administrators in this study reported a number of concerns regarding the graduate’s preparedness to conduct, implement, and utilize appropriate assessments to optimize student learning. One recommendation is the creation and implementation of a course dedicated to assessment. Providing a course strictly focused on assessment may provide PSTs with an enhanced understanding of various types of assessment and how to properly create, conduct, implement, and utilize these tools. Providing assessment opportunities in the teacher education program will only improve pre-service teacher’s abilities to properly evaluate, measure, and document academic learning, student progress, acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Developing an assessment course can support future novice educators through credit hours focused on
providing instruction and practical experience of assessment in teacher education. If a course of this nature already exists, it warrants revision as findings from this study illustrate that UW COE graduates are not demonstrating the requisite knowledge and skills in this area. In addition to a specific course dedicated to assessment, assessment exercises and experiences should be embedded in every practical experience over the duration of the teacher preparation program. Opportunities to engage in assessment during practical experiences teaching will strengthen PSTs knowledge of how to conduct and implement specific assessments properly and utilize the different assessments to improve teaching.

Create PLCs within pre-service teacher cohorts. Findings from this study suggest that UW COE graduates need more experience with PLCs. It is recommended that UW COE create and embed a PLC model within PST cohorts so as to attempt to replicate this model within the context of the teacher education program. Through the creation of experiences with PLCs within their cohort, students will gain a more in-depth understanding of what this embodies and how to become an effective member within this community. In addition, creating PLCs within PST cohorts may enhance their ability to engage, share, and provide to extend classroom practices throughout the educational community. Many administrators recommend providing students experience with collecting student data, creating common assessments, collaborate about student learning. This idea can be introduced through the production of different PLCs that pre-service teachers must engage in as they move along their program. The CoE graduates would greatly benefit from having opportunities to engage in experiences that act as a network of teachers, colleagues, and other professionals within the community. Perhaps creating PLCs within the pre-service teacher cohorts will increase inquiry and understanding of the characteristics that administrators look for with novice educators.

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Researchers

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Appendix A
Overview

University of Wyoming Trustees Education Initiative
Survey of Wyoming School Administrators

The University of Wyoming (UW) Trustees Education Initiative (TEI) was created to elevate the UW College of Education to the status of a preeminent college in professional educator preparation.

This brief survey is part of a TEI study to gather insights from Wyoming school administrators regarding their perspectives on their experiences with student teachers and graduates from the University of Wyoming College of Education.

The brief survey seeks your perspectives regarding your perceptions of your work with UW College of Education graduates. Further, the survey seeks participants for a follow-up study conducted by phone interview.

Please email questions or concerns to
Trustees Education Initiative Executive Director Rebecca Watts at rwatts3@uwyo.edu

Please use the "Next" and Back" buttons at the bottom of each screen to navigate through the survey.

Survey Questions

Please rate the preparedness of University of Wyoming College of Education graduates for the following knowledge and skill sets expected of novice educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Prepared</th>
<th>Somewhat Prepared</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Well Prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design and deliver curriculum</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manage students and classrooms</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of the most pertinent educational models and theories:</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration with colleagues and other school professionals:</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serving as a valuable member of a professional learning community:</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conducting, implementing, and utilizing assessment of student learning:</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicating and working with parents/families:</strong></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics
Please use the dropdown box to select the Wyoming school district where you have had the most experience working with University of Wyoming College of Education graduates:

Please use the dropdown box to select the instructional level at which you have had the most experience working with University of Wyoming College of Education graduates:

Comments
Please provide any comments you would like to share regarding the preparedness as University of Wyoming College of Education novice educators:

Study Participants
We are seeking participants to participate in follow-up phone interviews to gather further insights.

NOTE: Please do NOT provide the information requested below if you are NOT interested in participating in a follow-up interview.

If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview which would be audio recorded and transcribed, please:

1. fill in the blanks below;
2. download and complete the electronic consent form; and
3. email the completed consent form to rwatts3@uwyo.edu.

Name
Email Address
Phone Number
Appendix B

Baseline Individual Interviews: Principal Interview Questions

Based on your experience over the last four years with University of Wyoming College of Education Student Teachers and Graduates:

1. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ preparedness to design and deliver curriculum.
2. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ preparedness to manage students and classrooms.
3. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ knowledge and ability to apply current, evidence-based, pertinent educational models and theories based on your experience with UW student teachers and graduates.
4. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ ability to collaborate with colleagues and other school professionals based on your experience with UW student teachers and graduates.
5. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ preparedness be valuable members of a professional learning community.
6. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ preparedness conduct, implement, and utilize assessment of student learning.
7. Please describe UW student teachers’ and graduates’ preparedness to communicate and work with parents.
8. Do you perceive UW graduates to be different in any way (good or bad) from graduates of other teacher education programs?
9. Do you perceive UW graduates’ preparedness in the previously discussed areas to vary based on subject area endorsement/certification?
10. If you could say one thing about UW graduates, what would you say?
11. Please describe any other perspectives you have regarding UW student teachers’ and graduates.