

**A ProEthica® Program
Case Study —
A Teacher Educator's Perspective**

The *ProEthica*® Program helps Wilmington University teacher candidates cultivate professional ethics that support educator effectiveness ...

“The biggest shift in teacher preparation in the past few years has been moving from a place of knowledge to one of skills and performance,” observed Michele Brewer, an assistant professor in the Wilmington University School of Education. “That’s why a key focus of the university’s educator preparation program (EPP) is strengthening candidates’ transition from theory to practice,” she said. “We are very practical in the application of our curriculum.”

For this EPP, bridging that transition means finding creative ways to elicit critical candidate beliefs, skills and attitudes that impact student learning, but often don’t emerge until the clinical experience or later — like professional ethics, communication skill, cultural awareness and a commitment to social justice. Using pre- and post-learning interviews, reflection, field activities, observation, one-on-one feedback and a required course, faculty monitor and nurture candidates’ developing dispositions throughout the program. Progress is assessed against benchmarks that suggest where the skills and attitudes should be *prior to* student teaching, as well as during.

The *ProEthica*® Program is central to this effort, Brewer noted. “Ethics is not something you can teach; it needs to be practiced. And the *ProEthica* Program allows our candidates to do that. It allows them to do it in a safe environment, and it allows for rich and robust conversations about the implications of decisions — legally, morally and ethically.”

The online learning program is embedded in a seven-week course on educator ethics, professional conduct and decision making that is required of every teacher track within the EPP, Brewer said. Each week, students complete a *ProEthica* Program module on their own, in concert with readings, participation in online discussion boards and other activities. “Then, in class when we’re face to face, we discuss the *ProEthica* modules,” she explained.

The *ProEthica* Program videos introduce upcoming educators to potential ethical conflicts they are not likely to anticipate, Brewer stated. “Seasoned educators can attest to that. The videos are real, the actors in the videos appear authentic and the discussions are authentic. It’s been incredible. It’s almost as if you are designing teachable moments. You can’t replicate this learning without the *ProEthica* learning modules. They are, I would say, the foundation for what we can do in the classroom.”

During one departmental meeting, Brewer recalled, “our faculty were just raving about the deep discussions and aha moments” the *ProEthica* Program sparks. “The *ProEthica* Program stimulates conversations that can go off in any direction that is important to education and the candidates we’re preparing. There are things on the minds of these young educators that as seasoned educators, we’ve already been through, but they haven’t. To hear what their concerns are, and to be able to address them in the moment, is pretty powerful stuff — especially prior to sending them out into the field to work with K–12 students.”

Here is a closer look at how the *ProEthica* Program is making an impact in this educator preparation program.

The *ProEthica* Program complements a curriculum designed to progressively nurture effective professional dispositions ...

Wilmington University education faculty worked together to develop a curriculum continuum for cultivating professional dispositions in their teacher candidates. “We have a faculty team that works very closely together, and we knew where we wanted our candidates to be prior to student teaching, so we did a backward design,” Brewer recalled. “We’ve developed benchmarks over a continuum with the knowledge that teacher candidates’ dispositions progress over time and are not linear. And we use multiple measures throughout the program to capture and address areas for improvement.”

In the resulting dispositional framework, “ethics is embedded from beginning to end,” she noted. The *ProEthica* Program dovetails well with this intended learning. “It includes all that background, and is grounded in research,” Brewer said. “The videos, resources, self-reflection and connection to the *Model Code of Ethics for Educators*, coupled with rich classroom discussions and activities, enhances and deepens our candidates’ knowledge of the concepts in the modules and allows us to have these guided, authentic conversations.

“We’re not just assessing our candidates,” Brewer said. “We are capturing areas for improvement as well. We’ve embedded reflection into the activities so our candidates reflect on each dispositional measure. What I like best about our framework is that we provide intervention when a teacher candidate is unable to reflect or recognize teaching behaviors that should be addressed.”

The *ProEthica* Program supports real-world understanding of the K–12 workplace ...

Another way Wilmington University bridges the gap between theory and practice is by providing teacher candidates with more exposure to K–12 classrooms. For example, the college requires them to complete preclinical field experiences that focus on service-learning, and offers a full-year student-teaching opportunity.

The *ProEthica* Program enhances this focus on real-world learning, Brewer said. “It brings real life into your classroom. It provides an additional opportunity for us to connect individually with our candidates, and it provides an outlet for our candidates to discuss these difficult scenarios. I don’t know where they would discuss them otherwise.

“As a seasoned educator, you know teachable moments when they happen, but with the *ProEthica* Program, ETS is *designing* them,” she stressed. “They’re constant and consistent. And the bigger value — for us and the way we’re using it — is the extended conversations that happen as a result. It provides our candidates with a lot of insight.”

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The *ProEthica* Program supports a “blended learning” instructional approach ...

In addition to providing content that supports the department’s dispositional framework, the *ProEthica* Program’s online delivery method complements the “blended learning” approach faculty take to teaching the courses in which it is embedded, which are designed to combine digital learning with traditional classroom methods.

“Let’s face it, our learners are digital natives,” Brewer pointed out. Between the *ProEthica* Program’s online delivery and its learner-centered approach, “engagement is really high.”

An added benefit of the delivery method is that candidates can complete the *ProEthica* Program “at home, where they’re comfortable,” Brewer said, then come to school and talk about the *discomfort* inherent in learning about the profession’s ethical vulnerabilities. “That’s why we have them do it before class. At home, they’re able to dive deeper. Then we discuss it.”

The *ProEthica* Program’s engaging and relevant content spurs stakeholder buy-in ...

The *ProEthica* Program’s relevancy, authenticity and unique focus on the subtle way ethical conflicts can arise in the K–12 workplace made stakeholder buy-in a breeze at Wilmington University. Brewer stated: “Everybody was on board.”

Early in the process, “the dean asked if I would run the faculty through the modules, and we all got into a room and went through some of the videos,” she recalled. “And, oh my goodness, the stories that rained from that!”

One video in particular — about a young coach left after school with a student who has no ride home — really set off the discussion, she said. “So many former principals were in the room, and each had a story to tell about how similar scenarios had played out in their schools. I couldn’t get them to be quiet!”

Unlike veteran teachers, who know from years of experience how a decision to drive a student home can go wrong, new teachers can be blindsided — by a student photographing the teacher and posting it on social media, for example. “This is 2017,” Brewer stressed, “and you can’t do that anymore.”

The relevance to the preparation of new teachers did not have to be spelled out for faculty: “It was a no-brainer,” Brewer said, “because we need to make sure that our candidates are ready to go out in the field and work with kids.”

The *ProEthica* Program supports efforts to help candidates think about their decision-making processes ...

When it comes to helping candidates adjust their dispositions, Wilmington University faculty understand they face a significant challenge. “Research over and over again suggests that the biggest thing to change is teacher beliefs. That’s the difficult part,” Brewer explained. “But we do our best to work individually with our candidates, and I think that individualized attention helps.

“I’ll give you an example,” she said. “We had a candidate who fell short in dispositions and ethics.” The need for improvement had arisen during a one-on-one assessment, and came up again during work on the *ProEthica*

Program modules. Consequently, “the student was asked to meet with the director of teacher preparation about some of her behaviors and beliefs.”

This individual attention, combined with viewing and discussing believable scenarios of teachers who walk innocently into situations that can hurt their careers, helped turn the student around. “Surprisingly, after she spoke with the program chair, she thanked him because she wasn’t aware,” Brewer said. “You can’t put a price tag on that. She was not aware that she was coming across that way. I think that’s the key right there: To use the *ProEthica* Program as a formative assessment where you provide remediation and intervention where needed.”

The *ProEthica* Program helps nurture a culture of professionalism ...

What Brewer said she likes most about the *ProEthica* Program is that “it brings to the surface some of the issues that happen in our profession that historically we haven’t talked about, and provides a way to build the profession from within — a way for us to regulate ourselves as educators. And it begins in the teacher prep program. We shouldn’t wait until the candidates get out there.”

The culture at Wilmington University is such that, as Brewer explains, “we share what we do, because we believe that you must build the profession from within. I tell my candidates that in my classes: *Do you share notes with somebody else? No? Well, why not? Don’t we want everybody to learn?* You have to build the profession from within. That’s why we always pay it forward.”

Similarly, when it comes to the *ProEthica* Program, “you can’t investigate these scenarios in isolation. I’d rather have our candidates investigate these scenarios now, with a seasoned educator who can guide those conversations. That’s why we do what we do here — to pay it forward.”

The *ProEthica* Program helps candidates internalize the *Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE)* ...

Brewer finds that the *ProEthica* Program contextualizes the MCEE in a way that helps them better understand it. “You can review a code of ethics over and over again, and more often than not, it’s: *Do this, don’t do that, here are your laws.*”

By contrast, “the *ProEthica* Program offers real-life situations,” she said. “The modules allow you to dive deeper into the issues and talk about different scenarios that provide a context for the code.

“We review the code prior to engaging in the *ProEthica* modules. But when we take a look at it afterwards, it just makes more sense to the candidates,” she said. “It’s kind of like we’re performing a close reading of the MCEE by engaging in *ProEthica*.”

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The *ProEthica* Program helps teacher candidates anticipate how seemingly benign acts can escalate into conflicts ...

Another value Brewer sees in the *ProEthica* Program modules is the way videos end before scenarios reach completion. By teetering on the brink of teacher action, the short films allow her to focus discussion around the “what-if ... ?”

“That’s the question that we seem to get from the candidates,” she said: “What happens if ... ?” At the end of each scenario, “You have choices. You have to consider the *what-ifs*. That drives the discussion in the classroom.”

Returning to the scenario about the young coach left after school with a student who has no ride home, she asks students to consider, “What if I do take her home? What could happen?” If candidates appear naïve about potential worst-case outcomes, “We even take it a step further,” Brewer projects, “and say, ‘*So let’s say you take this girl home. You’re a male teacher and this particular candidate takes a picture of you. You didn’t see her take the picture but it ends up on Facebook®. Now what?*’”

Candidates typically respond with, “Oh — I didn’t think about that,” Brewer said. “The *ProEthica* Program provides many directions for those *what-ifs*.” It enables candidates to think about such things before they are responsible for a classroom of students, she said. “When these candidates come in, they’re all bright-eyed. Then they get to their methods courses, and we throw them in front of a room, and say, “you’re the teacher now. And they’re like, ‘*What?!*’”

“Nobody’s going to be in that classroom with them,” Brewer stressed. “We don’t want our candidates out there in isolation, not knowing what to do when that classroom door closes.”

The *ProEthica* Program is accepted as evidence of Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Standard 3, Component 3.6 and supports the accreditation process ...

Having recently begun a new accreditation cycle, Brewer said the *ProEthica* Program is helping the department document candidates’ achievement of professional standards. “The CAEP standards say that, before the EPP recommends candidates for licensure certification, we have to document [that the candidate has learned] certain expectations of the profession,” Brewer noted. “And one of those is ethics. We like to document that — not right before they go for licensure — but all throughout our program.

“The *ProEthica* Program was used to complement an assessment within our report, and it will certainly be used as evidence in our CAEP report,” Brewer said. “It’s embedded in our framework.”

Candidate work on the *ProEthica* Program — along with pre- and post-learning assessments, and assessments of their dispositions after service learning and other activities, including student teaching — “will all be pulled into evidence” that students have attained the necessary professional dispositions, she said. For example, “one of the CAEP standards says they have to understand the expectations of the profession, including codes of ethics, professional standards of practice, and relevant law and policy.”

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EPP Snapshot Wilmington University:

- A private, nonprofit, open-enrollment institution with flexible scheduling options.
- Student body includes traditional and nontraditional candidates.
- Graduates up to 300 candidates per year for initial licensure.
- Prepares 40 percent of Delaware’s teachers.
- Offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in a range of educational specialties.
- Prepares candidates for licensure in Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.
- Offers one-semester and two-semester options for student teaching.
- Provides small classes taught by current K–12 practitioners with master’s degrees.
- Tracks candidates’ workplace success for five years after graduation.
- Earned a top 3 percent National Council on Teacher Quality rating for its undergraduate elementary education program in 2016. (www.nctq.org/teacherPrep/2016/findings/search.do?programId=1).
- Earned Tier 1 and Tier 2 EPP program rankings from the Delaware Department of Education in 2016 (www.doe.k12.de.us/domain/398).
- Accredited by CAEP and the DDOE.
- Website: www.wilmu.edu
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WilmingtonUniversity>

Read more case studies or get information about the
ProEthica program at www.ets.org/proethica.

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