Program Guidebook

Master of Science, Curriculum and Instruction

The Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction is a competency-based program and represents a path for K-12 educators and corporate trainers wishing to advance their knowledge and skills in the application of sound, empirically-based principles of education to their instructional setting: curriculum content and pedagogy. Intended to be practical, real-world, and application-based, the program revolves around four primary themes: Design, Evaluation, Problem-solving, and Instructional Leadership. These four pillars are the foundations of a sound, empirically based education that meet the needs of educational leaders in the 21st century. The principal competencies of this program area focus on knowledge, skills, and abilities in curriculum, instruction, and research fundamentals.
Understanding the Competency-Based Approach

Practically speaking, what does it mean when we say that WGU’s programs are competency-based? Unlike traditional universities, WGU does not award degrees based on credit hours or on a certain set of required courses. Instead, you will earn your degree by demonstrating your skills, knowledge, and understanding of important concepts through a series of carefully designed courses.

Progress through your degree program is governed not by classes but by satisfactory completion of the required courses that demonstrate your mastery of the competencies. Of course, you will need to engage in learning experiences as you brush up on competencies or develop knowledge and skills in areas in which you may be weak. For this learning and development, WGU has a rich array of learning resources in which you may engage under the direction of your student mentor. You will work closely with your mentor to schedule your program for completing the courses. You will also work closely with additional faculty members as you proceed through courses of study that are designed to lead you through the content you must master in order to pass the assessment(s) for each course.

The benefit of this competency-based system is that it makes it possible for people who are knowledgeable about a particular subject to make accelerated progress toward completing a WGU degree, even if they lack college experience. You may have gained skills and knowledge of a subject while on the job, accumulated wisdom through years of life experience, or, indeed, taken a course on a particular subject. WGU will award your degree based on the skills and knowledge that you possess and can demonstrate—not the number of credits hours on your transcript.

Accreditation

Western Governors University is the only university in the history of American higher education to have earned accreditation from four regional accrediting commissions. WGU’s accreditation was awarded by (1) the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, (2) the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, (3) the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and (4) the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The university’s accreditation status is now managed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). The WGU Teachers College is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The nursing programs are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The Health Information Management program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM).

The Degree Plan

The focus of your program is your personalized Degree Plan. The Degree Plan is a detailed blueprint of the courses you will need to complete in order to earn your degree. The Degree Plan also lays out the accompanying learning resources and assessments that compose your program. The list of courses in the Degree Plan is often referred to as the standard path. The amount of time it takes to complete your program depends on both the amount of new information you need to learn and the amount of time you plan to devote each week to study.
Students will vary widely in the specific skills and information they need to learn. For example, some students may be highly knowledgeable in a particular subject matter and would not need to engage in new learning opportunities. Other students may find that portions of the program require them to learn new information and that they may need to take an online class or participate in a study module to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to pass the program competencies in that area. Some individuals may be able to devote as little as 15–20 hours per week to the program, while others may need to devote more time. For this reason, you will complete preassessments to help your mentor form a profile of your prior knowledge and experience for use in creating your personalized Degree Plan.

**WGU’s Mentoring Approach**

The mentoring approach is a powerful component of the WGU educational experience. When you enroll at WGU, you will begin interacting with your student mentor, course mentors, and other support staff. Your student mentor will meet with you on a regular basis and take an active role and a personal interest in your success. Your student mentor will be your point of contact throughout your program and will be available to communicate with you via e-mail or phone. Your mentor will help you set weekly study goals, guide you to learning materials, help you understand what to expect in courses, and motivate you to work hard to complete your program. When you have questions or concerns, your mentor will help you resolve them.

As you work on each course, you will also be assigned course mentors. These course mentors are content experts who can discuss your learning for the course, help you find answers to content questions, and help you navigate the course successfully. Your course mentors are available to meet with you individually to provide personal support. You can also communicate with them by posting in the online learning community and participating in live discussion sessions such as webinars and cohorts.

Working closely with your own personal mentoring team will help you engage in the learning process and be a successful student while at WGU.

**Connecting with Other Mentors and Fellow Students**

As you proceed through your Degree Plan, you will have direct contact with multiple faculty members. These communications can take a variety of forms, including participation in one-on-one discussions, chats in the learning communities, and live cohort and webinar opportunities. As a WGU student, you will have access to your own personal myWGU Student Portal, which will provide a gateway to your courses of study, learning resources, and learning communities where you will have interactions with faculty and other students.

The resources in each course are specifically designed to support you as you develop competencies in preparation for your assessments through the utilization of reading materials, videos, tutorials, cohort opportunities, community discussions, and live discussions that are guided by content experts. You will access your program community during your orientation course to network with peers who are enrolled in your program and to receive continued support through professional enrichment and program-specific chats, blogs, and discussions. WGU also provides Student Services Associates to help you and your mentor solve any special problems that may arise.
Orientation

The WGU orientation course focuses on acquainting you with WGU’s competency-based model, distance education, technology, and other resources and tools available for students. You will also utilize WGU program and course communities, participate in activities, and get to know other students at WGU. The orientation course must be completed before you can start your first term at WGU.

Transferability of Prior College Coursework

Because WGU is a competency-based institution, it does not award degrees based on credits but rather on demonstration of competency. However, if you have completed college coursework at another accredited institution, or if you have completed industry certifications, you may have your transcripts and certifications evaluated to determine if you are eligible to receive some transfer credit. The guidelines for determining what credits will be granted varies based on the degree program. Students entering graduate programs must have their undergraduate degree verified before being admitted to WGU. To review more information in regards to transfer guidelines based on the different degree programs, you may visit the Student Handbook found at the link below and search for “Transfer Credit Evaluation.” Within the Teachers College, there may be additional courses to meet state requirements.

Click here for the Student Handbook

WGU does not waive any requirements based on a student’s professional experience and does not perform a "résumé review" or "portfolio review" that will automatically waive any degree requirements. Degree requirements and transferability rules are subject to change in order to keep the degree content relevant and current.

Remember, WGU’s competency-based approach lets you take advantage of your knowledge and skills, regardless of how you obtained them. Even when you do not directly receive credit, the knowledge you possess may help you accelerate the time it takes to complete your degree program.

Continuous Enrollment, On Time Progress, and Satisfactory Academic Progress

WGU is a “continuous enrollment” institution, which means you will be automatically enrolled in each of your new terms while you are at WGU. Each term is six months long. Longer terms and continuous enrollment allow you to focus on your studies without the hassle of unnatural breaks between terms that you would experience at a more traditional university. At the end of every six-month term, you and your student mentor will review the progress you have made and revise your Degree Plan for your next six-month term.

WGU requires that students make measurable progress toward the completion of their degree programs every term. We call this “On-Time Progress,” denoting that you are on track and making progress toward on-time graduation. As full-time students, graduate students must enroll in at least eight (8) competency units each term, and undergraduate students must enroll in at least twelve (12) competency units each term. Completing at least these minimum enrollments is essential to On-Time Progress and serves as a baseline from which you may accelerate your program. We measure your progress based on the courses you are able to pass, not on your accumulation of credit hours or course grades. Every time
you pass a course you are demonstrating that you have mastered skills and knowledge in your degree program. For comparison to traditional grading systems, passing a course means you have demonstrated competency equivalent to a “B” grade or better.

WGU assigns competency units to each course in order to track your progress through the program. A competency unit is equivalent to one semester credit of learning. Some courses may be assigned 3 competency units while others may be as large as 12 competency units.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is particularly important to students on financial aid because you must achieve SAP in order to maintain eligibility for financial aid. We will measure your SAP quantitatively by reviewing the number of competency units you have completed each term. In order to remain in good academic standing, you must complete at least 66.67% of the units you attempt over the length of your program—including any courses you add to your term to accelerate your progress. Additionally, during your first term at WGU you must pass at least 3 competency units in order to remain eligible for financial aid. We know that SAP is complex, so please contact a financial aid counselor should you have additional questions. *Please note: The Endorsement Preparation Program in Educational Leadership is not eligible for federal financial aid.

Courses

Your Degree Plan includes courses needed to complete your program. To obtain your degree, you will be required to demonstrate your skills and knowledge by completing the assessment(s) for each course. In general there are two types of assessments: performance assessments and objective assessments. Performance assessments contain, in most cases, multiple scored tasks such as projects, essays, and research papers. Objective assessments include multiple-choice items, multiple-selection items, matching, short answer, drag-and-drop, and point-and-click item types, as well as case study and video-based items. Certifications verified through third parties may also be included in your program. More detailed information about each assessment is provided in each course of study.

External Content & Basic Skills Exams

Western Governors University requires that candidates pass the state-mandated content exam that aligns with their WGU program in addition to a basic skills exam (initial licensure programs only). Specific information regarding required content and basic skills exams required for each program and state can be found in the WGU Student Handbook. In many cases, it is the candidates’ responsibility to register and pay for the required exams and submit their official passing score reports to WGU.

State Licensure Requirements

Many states have specific licensure requirements that are not part of WGU programs that you will have to fulfill in addition to the degree requirements of your program. These state licensure requirements might include, but are not limited to: subject-specific licensure exams, state-specific teacher performance assessments, course work related to state history, basic skills exams, and background clearances. The WGU Student Handbook outlines the credentialing requirements of each state. Teacher candidates should consult the applicable section to become familiar with their state’s expectations regarding licensure.
Learning Resources

WGU works with many different educational partners, including enterprises, publishers, training companies, and higher educational institutions, to provide high-quality and effective learning resources that match the competencies you’re developing. These vary in type, and may be combined to create the best learning experience for your course. A learning resource can be an e-textbook, online module, study guide, simulation, virtual lab, tutorial, or a combination of these. The cost of most learning resources are included in your tuition and Learning Resource Fee. They can be accessed or enrolled for through your courses. Some degree-specific resources are not covered by your tuition, and you will need to cover those costs separately. WGU also provides a robust library to help you obtain additional learning resources, as needed.

Mobile Compatibility:

The following article provides additional details about the current state of mobile compatibility for learning resources at WGU. It includes a list that can be referenced to determine the mobile friendliness of all core course materials used in a program.

Student Handbook article: Can I use my mobile device for learning resources?

Standard Path

As previously mentioned, competency units (CUs) have been assigned to each course in order to measure your academic progress. If you are an undergraduate student, you will be expected to enroll in a minimum of 12 competency units each term. Graduate students are expected to enroll in a minimum of 8 competency units each term. A standard plan for a student for this program who entered WGU without any transfer units would look similar to the one on the following page. Your personal progress can be faster, but your pace will be determined by the extent of your transfer units, your time commitment, and your determination to proceed at a faster rate.
## Standard Path for Master of Science, Curriculum and Instruction

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### Changes to Curriculum

WGU publishes an Institutional Catalog, which describes the academic requirements of each degree program. Although students are required to complete the program version current at the time of their enrollment, WGU may modify requirements and course offerings within that version of the program to maintain the currency and relevance of WGU’s competencies and programs. As these changes are implemented, WGU will ensure that the length of the student’s degree program (i.e., total competency unit requirements) will not increase and that competency units already earned will be applied to the updated program version. When program requirements are updated, students readmitting after withdrawal from the university will be expected to re-enter into the most current catalog version of the program.
Areas of Study for Master of Science, Curriculum and Instruction

The following section includes the areas of study in the program, with their associated courses. Your specific learning resources and level of instructional support will vary based on the individual competencies you bring to the program and your confidence in developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities required in each area of the degree. The Degree Plan and learning resources are dynamic, so you need to review your Degree Plan and seek the advice of your mentor regarding the resources before you purchase them.

Curriculum and Instruction

Introduction to Curriculum Theory

For over 200 years, educators in the United States have debated the purpose of education. Should education be for enlightenment or to prepare students for the life of work? Should education be for many or for a select few? These questions continue to be debated today. Through curriculum theory and reflection, educators have an educational framework by which to understand how theory and one’s philosophical views can impact the design, development, and implementation of curriculum and instruction. With this in mind, Introduction to Curriculum Theory focuses on exploring and applying an understanding of Scholar Academic, Social Efficiency, Learner Centered, and Social Reconstruction ideologies in various instructional settings and on the development on one’s own curriculum philosophy.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate evaluates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Scholar Academic Ideology, especially as it is applied to the learning environment.
- The graduate evaluates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Social Reconstruction Ideology, especially as it is applied to learning environment.
- The graduate develops a personal philosophy of curriculum that draws upon the tenets of one or more of the philosophies of curriculum.
- The graduate evaluates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the learner-centered ideology, especially as it is applied to the learning environment.
- The graduate creates a proposal for curriculum development that includes a definition of and justification for a specific curriculum ideology appropriate for the educational context being addressed.
- The graduate evaluates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the social efficiency ideology, especially as it is applied to the learning environment.

Learning Theories

Learning Theories focuses on the complexity of the current learning environment and how behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and personal learning philosophy can assist in the development of appropriate curriculum and instruction.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Behaviorism as a learning theory, including its contribution to the profession of education.
- The graduate performs a self-assessment of his or her own beliefs regarding how learning occurs, evaluating the impact on the effective design and delivery of instruction.
- The graduate evaluates specific instruction in terms of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the learning theory underlying its design.
- The graduate evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Constructivism as a learning theory, including its contribution to the profession of education.
- The graduate evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Cognitivism as a learning theory, including its contribution to
Educational Psychology
Educational Psychology examines the latest findings in child and adolescent development and provides educators the opportunity to apply educational psychology to various instructional settings. Students will explore the areas of applied educational psychology to teaching, cognitive development, social development, and cultural development. They will design, develop, modify, and evaluate curriculum and instruction in various educational settings according to child/adolescent development.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate develops instructional strategies using empirically-based learner-centered approaches.
- The graduate critiques the various theories of human development, characterizing their similarities, differences, strengths, shortcomings, and appropriateness for the learning environment.
- The graduate employs sound, empirically-based instructional strategies that account for learner diversity.
- The graduate integrates theories of child and adolescent development into instructional methodologies used in the learning environment.
- The graduate evaluates curriculum based on its alignment with behavioral and developmental theories.

Curriculum Design
Curriculum Design focuses on exploring curriculum design theory, educational standards, and design frameworks for what to teach. Together these topics will provide educators with the ability to take principles of curriculum design theory and related models and apply them when developing, designing, and modifying curriculum to meet learning needs in their instructional setting.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate develops strategies for modifying curriculum in response to predicted and unpredicted challenges in the delivery of instruction.
- The graduate employs empirically-based curriculum design strategies that address issues of learner motivation, achievement, and individual learning styles and preferences.
- The graduate evaluates various curriculum design theories as the basis for curriculum and instructional design in the learning environment.
- The graduate develops appropriate and effective strategies for the creation of curriculum that aligns with national, state, and local standards.

Curriculum Evaluation
Curriculum Evaluation focuses on exploring evaluation systems and student data to determine the effectiveness of curriculum. It also focuses on differentiating curriculum based on student data.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate recommends changes to curriculum that effectively address a wide variety of issues or challenges.
- The graduate develops strategies for the implementation of recommended changes to curriculum that ensure maximum effectiveness.
- The graduate critiques various curriculum evaluation methods, assessing their strengths, weaknesses, effectiveness, and applications.
- The graduate evaluates the effectiveness of curriculum based on intended outcomes, adherence to curriculum and instructional design principles, and appropriateness for the context for which the curriculum was developed.
- The graduate evaluates the result of modifications to curriculum and instruction to determine the effectiveness and
Assessment for Student Learning
Assessment for Student Learning focuses on developing the knowledge and skills to identify, develop, and design instrument tools for evaluating student learning. It also explores the use of objective and performance-based, formative, and summative assessments and their results in the evaluation of curriculum and instruction for student learning.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate evaluates the results of formative assessments to gauge student learning and adjust curriculum and/or instruction to meet individual learner needs.
- The graduate evaluates the results of objective assessments to gauge student learning and adjust curriculum and/or instruction to meet individual learner needs.
- The graduate evaluates the results of performance assessments to gauge student learning and adjust curriculum and/or instruction to meet individual learner needs.
- The graduate evaluates the results of summative assessments to gauge student learning and adjust curriculum and/or instruction to meet individual learner needs.

Differentiated Instruction
Differentiated Instruction focuses on developing and implementing curriculum and instruction that that best meets the needs of all learners within a given instructional setting.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate evaluates empirical data to determine the most appropriate and effective manner for modifying curriculum and instruction.
- The graduate integrates methodologies for differentiating instruction into the design of curriculum.
- The graduate modifies curriculum and instruction to address individual student needs in a diverse educational environment.
- The graduate modifies curriculum and instruction to align with the specific requirements of an individualized education plan.

Current and Emerging Technology

Instructional Theory
Instructional Theory focuses on exploring instructional design theory and related models and processes. Students will apply instructional design principles to the design and delivery of plans to meet the learning needs found in the instructional setting.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate applies empirically-based, professionally recognized instructional design models to the development of instruction.
- The graduate develops instruction that accounts for learner motivation and achievement through the application of instructional design principles.
- The graduate develops instruction that accounts for individual learning styles and preferences through the application of instructional design principles.
- The graduate evaluates various instructional design methodologies.
- The graduate develops strategies for addressing predicted challenges to the effective delivery of instruction and incorporates those strategies into the design of instruction.
Research

Research Foundations
The Research Foundations course focuses on the essential concepts in educational research, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed, and action research; measurement and assessment; and strategies for obtaining warranted research results.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate applies and justifies appropriate research methods and design in quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios to address the research question(s).
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of quantitative research and characterizes the major approaches to quantitative research.
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of mixed methods research and characterizes the major approaches to mixed methods research.
- The graduate analyzes the characteristics of research quality and the potential threats to the quality of results in qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and action research studies.
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of qualitative research and characterizes the major approaches to qualitative research.
- The graduate analyzes different measurement scales and differentiates between reliability and validity, and their subtypes, as they relate to assessments.
- The graduate evaluates and selects appropriate basic data analysis techniques for quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios.
- The graduate develops clear research questions that can be investigated and hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data.
- The graduate analyzes ethical issues and identifies appropriate procedures for educational research.
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of action research and characterizes the major approaches to action research.
- The graduate describes the purpose for a literature review and develops an organized literature review relevant to educational research topics, problems, and questions.
- The graduate evaluates the purpose, process, and practice of the generation and justification of knowledge in educational research.
- The graduate differentiates among the major methods of data collection, including their strengths and limitations in the selection of an appropriate method of data collection.
- The graduate completes a research proposal.

Research Fundamentals

Research Questions and Literature Review
The Research Questions and Literature Reviews course focuses on how to conduct a thorough literature review that addresses and identifies important educational research topics, problems, and questions, and helps determine the appropriate kind of research and data needed to answer one’s research questions and hypotheses.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate develops clear research questions that can be investigated and hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data.
- The graduate describes the purpose for a literature review and develops an organized literature review relevant to educational research topics, problems, and questions.
The graduate differentiates among the major methods of data collection, including their strengths and limitations in the selection of an appropriate method of data collection.

**Research Design and Analysis**

The Research Design and Analysis course focuses on applying strategies for effective design of empirical research studies. Particular emphasis is placed on selecting or constructing the design that will provide the most valid results, analyzing the kind of data that would be obtained, and making defensible interpretations and drawing appropriate conclusions based on the data.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate applies and justifies appropriate research methods and design in quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios to address the research question(s).
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of quantitative research and characterizes the major approaches to quantitative research.
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of mixed methods research and characterizes the major approaches to mixed methods research.
- The graduate analyzes the characteristics of research quality and the potential threats to the quality of results in qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and action research studies.
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of qualitative research and characterizes the major approaches to qualitative research.
- The graduate analyzes different measurement scales and differentiates between reliability and validity, and their subtypes, as they relate to assessments.
- The graduate evaluates and selects appropriate basic data analysis techniques for quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios.
- The graduate analyzes ethical issues and identifies appropriate procedures for educational research.
- The graduate analyzes the key aspects of action research and characterizes the major approaches to action research.
- The graduate differentiates among the major methods of data collection, including their strengths and limitations in the selection of an appropriate method of data collection.

**Research Proposals**

Research Proposals focuses on planning and writing a well-organized and complete research proposal. The relationship of the sections in a research proposal to the sections in a research report will be highlighted.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate applies and justifies appropriate research methods and design in quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios to address the research question(s).
- The graduate evaluates and selects appropriate basic data analysis techniques for quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research scenarios.
- The graduate develops clear research questions that can be investigated and hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data.
- The graduate analyzes ethical issues and identifies appropriate procedures for educational research.
- The graduate describes the purpose for a literature review and develops an organized literature review relevant to educational research topics, problems, and questions.
- The graduate differentiates among the major methods of data collection, including their strengths and limitations in the selection of an appropriate method of data collection.
- The graduate completes a research proposal.
MS, Curriculum and Instruction Capstone

MS, Curriculum and Instruction Capstone takes the student through the steps of planning and conducting research on a topic or issue related to the students' practice setting. Students will design, deliver, and evaluate a curriculum and instructional unit based on their content area. They will implement curriculum and instruction, and evaluate the effectiveness.

This course covers the following competencies:

- The graduate integrates and synthesizes competencies from across the degree program, thereby demonstrating the ability to participate in and contribute value to the chosen professional field.
Need More Information?  WGU Student Services

WGU’s Student Services team is dedicated exclusively to helping you achieve your academic goals. The Student Services office is available during extended hours to assist with general questions and administrative or accessibility issues. The Student Services team members help you resolve issues, listen to student issues and concerns, and make recommendations for improving policy and practice based on student feedback. The Student Services team provides a formal means by which you can express your views, which in turn will inform the decisions we make.

Student Services team members also assist with unresolved concerns to find equitable resolutions. To contact the Student Services team, please feel free to call 877-435-7948 or e-mail studentservices@wgu.edu. We are available Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., Saturday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., mountain standard time. Closed Sundays.

If you have inquiries or concerns that require technical support, please contact the WGU IT Service Desk. The IT Service Desk is available Monday through Friday, 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., mountain standard time. To contact the IT Service Desk, please call 1-877-HELP-WGU (877-435-7948) or e-mail servicedesk@wgu.edu. The support teams are generally closed in observance of university holidays.

For the most current information regarding WGU support services, please visit “Student Support” on the Student Portal at http://my.wgu.edu.