TITLE: Selection of School Leadership Candidates for UIC's EdD Urban Education Leadership Program, Part I

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ABSTRACT:

In Part I of this continuous improvement brief on selection, UIC Center for Urban Education Leadership researchers and UIC Ed.D. program administrators describe the development of an admissions process to the EdD in Urban Education principal preparation program to assess characteristics associated with school leader success.

CENTER for URBAN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Continuous Improvement Brief

Selection of School Leadership Candidates for UIC's EdD Urban Education Leadership Program

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Selection of School Leadership Candidates for UIC's EdD Urban Education Leadership Program

Center researchers and EdD program administrators describe the development of an admissions process to assess characteristics they associate with school leader success.

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As the field of school leader preparation undergoes changes toward intensive school-based training models, programs nationwide are beginning to develop selective admission practices. A number of universities such as the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and University of California at Berkeley, school districts including Gwinnett County in Georgia, and not-for-profit organizations such as New Leaders and New York City Leadership Academy have for over a decade been selective in admitting candidates to their principal preparation programs. A significant problem of practice in more selective admissions is assessing and measuring individual characteristics most likely to be associated with later school leader success, including achievement of strong student learning outcomes. This continuous improvement brief, in two parts, describes the progress UIC has made on designing and developing its selection processes to address this problem of practice. UIC runs a small-batch, high-intensity cohort program that places and supports on average ten new principals in schools each year with another half-dozen placed and supported in assistant principal roles as they continue to develop principal leadership capacity.

The purpose of selection is to ensure that individuals entering the profession want to take on the job of the principal and can develop the capacity to be effective in it. Principal preparation programs in higher education traditionally have admitted anyone with a teaching certificate. Selection is a remedy for these open admissions practices, which have resulted in the overproduction of credentialed administrators without adequate training to perform in school leader roles (Levine, 2005). Selective processes also make it possible to represent the interests of school district partners in this gateway into the principal role. Consequently, selection intentionally aimed at improving schools through school leadership can help higher education improve its impact on K-12 education.

The field of principal preparation in higher education is in the early stages of learning how to select candidates for principal preparation programs. A recent review of state policies that govern school leadership preparation sought to identify the prevalence of policies in support of innovative or "exemplary" models (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Manna, 2015). The authors found that only six states or just over 10% require programs to be selective at admission. Selection was one of the least prevalent high-leverage policy requirements across states.

Although Illinois is one of the six states that require colleges and universities to be selective, this requirement has been fully in effect statewide only since 2014. UIC, which has been a leader in principal preparation reform in Illinois, instituted selective practices in 2003. While our process has undergone numerous iterative changes based on experience and data analysis, we have always required multiple kinds of candidate performance evidence, including an in-person interview, to support our assessment of urban school leadership potential prior to program admission. The same overarching questions have guided our candidate selection over the years: What candidate characteristics predict later success as a school leader and how do we select for these characteristics?

One indicator of the effectiveness of UIC's selection process over the past 13 years is a 98% rate of placement in administrative roles in schools or school systems for those who successfully complete the pre-service portion of the program. Additionally, UIC has had a low rate of attrition from the program due to academic and/or leadership performance problems—approximately 10% in recent years. Another indicator of effectiveness is the diversity of our student population; overall, 60% of students have been minority and 40% have been white. Finally, for the past decade, Chicago has been decisively outperforming Illinois averages on measures of growth in student learning outcomes (Zavitkovsky, Roarty, & Swanson, 2016). The increasing numbers of our graduates as leaders in Chicago Public Schools, as well as the commitment to selective admissions of other programs such as New Leaders, likely contributes to this trend toward higher performance (Emanuel, 2016; The Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015).

Our intent in writing this brief is to encourage discussion in the field of principal preparation about selection. It is also to encourage individual programs to use our experiences and approaches to reflect on their own selection processes. We caution that we do not regard our process as one for others to copy or emulate because there is no one-size-fits-all process. As we will discuss in this brief, what a program selects for depends on what a program prepares for and this can vary depending on program mission and local context. Additionally, we want to encourage other programs to engage in continuous improvement processes as we have. Smylie (Smylie, 2009) emphasizes the concept of "equifinality" in continuous school improvement, or the idea that organizations can begin at different starting points and pursue different paths to similar goals. In our case, the goal is to produce principals who can continuously improve schools as learning organizations for students, teachers, and staff.

In Part I of this brief, we foreground the ideas that currently frame and shape the UIC selection process, including the characteristics we select for and how and why we seek evidence for these characteristics. We highlight the idea that what a program selects for depends on what a program prepares for. The logic of "exemplary" preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) is that selection works in conjunction with other program elements to produce effective school leaders. Selectivity alone would not produce the principals our schools need. In Part II of the brief (forthcoming), we describe our journey to our current process, with a focus on our use of data and measurement to drive improvement.

SEVEN SELECTION DOMAINS

We lead this brief with the characteristics we select for because they guide our design of application requirements and review processes. Over time, we have determined that we are looking for evidence in seven different domains of candidate promise, which are illustrated in three groupings in Figure 1: dispositions, professional practice, and ethics. As shown, the three "disposition" domains are:

- Strengths as a learner in the context of urban schools and diverse populations;
- Personal commitment to equity and excellence for students; and
- Presence and attitude as a leader.

The three "professional practice" domains are:

- Deep instructional knowledge for diverse populations;
- Collaborative orientation to working with and leading adults; and
- Educational systems management expertise.

The graphic organization of the domains is purposeful with "strengths as a learner" positioned at the bottom, signifying its role in driving development in the other domains, and "educational systems management expertise" positioned at the top where it integrates the other domains and tends to be the least developed at the selection point. Ethical conduct and leadership holds everything together. Engagement with family and community crosses all the domains.

The domains are summarized briefly in terms of the characteristics of candidates who are strong in each domain[1]. We find this kind of description helpful for supporting coherent understandings of what we look for in candidates. An important source for developing these domain descriptions has been the evidence-based Leadership Connection Rubric developed at the University of California, Berkeley (Tredway, Stephens, Leader-Picone, & Hernandez, 2012). Additionally, the domains have been informed by literature on key individual differences that drive leadership development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009a).
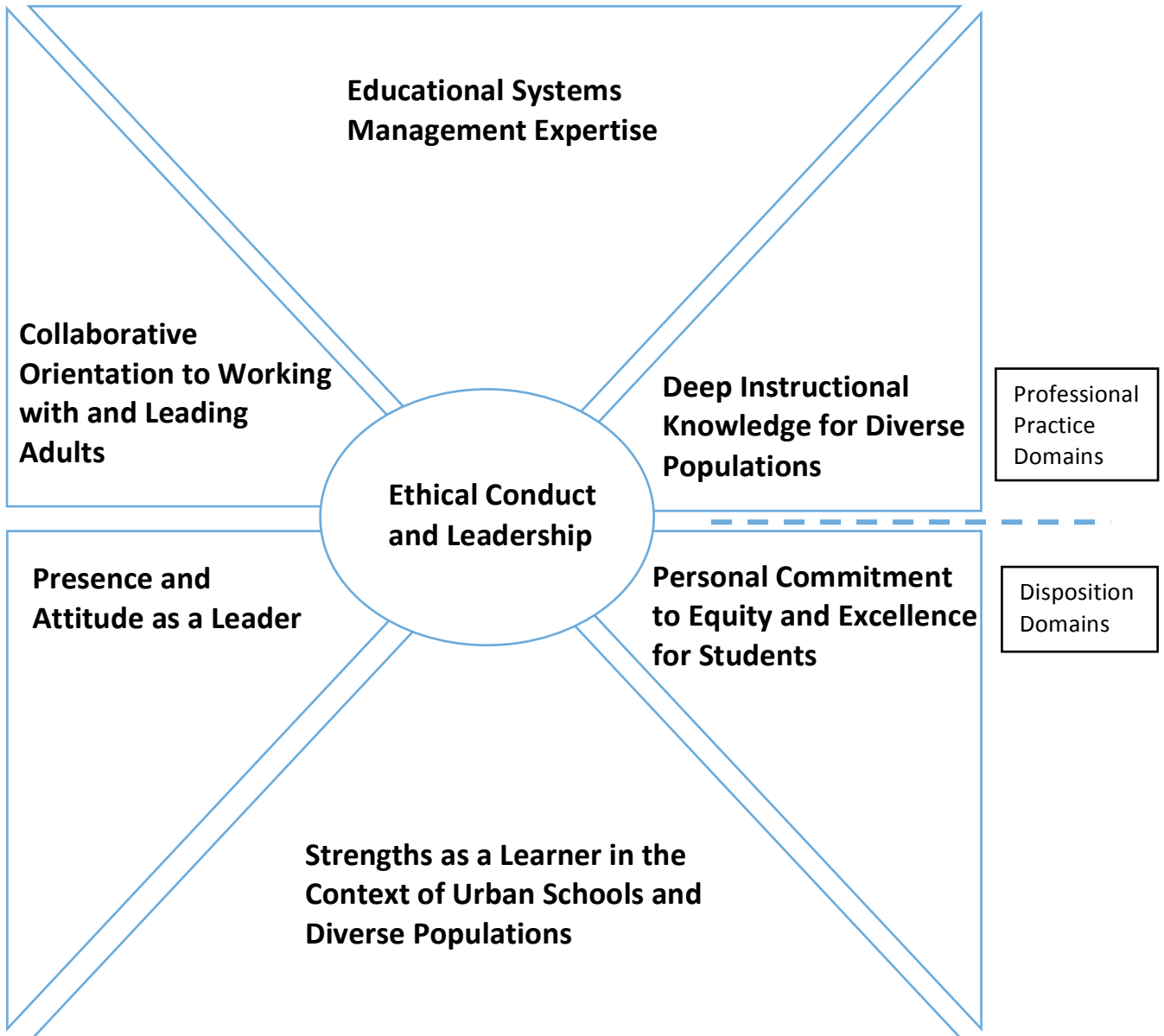
Dispositions Domains

Strengths as a learner in the context of urban schools and diverse populations

Strong candidates in this domain demonstrate a commitment to and proficiency at learning about themselves, other people, and the work of school improvement within the context of urban schools and diverse populations. We at UIC believe a strong capacity to learn, both in the preparation program and continuing in a leader role, will drive development of leadership capacity overall. As indicated by the domain title, this domain is not primarily about academic learning or book smarts. It is about being self-reflective, open to learning about and from others, seeking out and rising to challenges, and being committed to one's own

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[1]The summaries are based on long versions of the domains that more fully elaborate the ideas.

Figure 1: UIC Leadership Candidate Selection Domains

Educational Systems Management Expertise

Collaborative Orientation to Working with and Leading Adults

Deep Instructional Knowledge for Diverse Populations

Professional Practice Domains

Ethical Conduct and Leadership

Presence and Attitude as a Leader

Personal Commitment to Equity and Excellence for Students

Disposition Domains

Strengths as a Learner in the Context of Urban Schools and Diverse Populations

development. It is about having an open and questioning mindset toward the work and people who do the work. It is about demonstrating these qualities when building relationships in a context where cultural differences are the norm as is the case in urban environments.

Personal commitment to equity and educational excellence

Strong candidates in this domain demonstrate a deep commitment to equity and educational excellence for urban students. This is the domain of values and beliefs regarding educational opportunities for urban students, existing constraints on those opportunities, and one's responsibility for ensuring educational excellence for all students. It is the domain of social justice. This domain is not about school improvement per se (or raising test scores), but about the ends of school improvement, that is, better life chances for urban students through education. The theme of diversity runs through this domain. It is about providing excellent educational services that respond to children's differences and treating others with respect and dignity. A deficit perspective on students and/or families can compromise commitment in this area. An assets perspective can open up possibilities for commitment from others. This domain is also about acting on one's values and beliefs through one's instruction, influence on colleagues, and advocacy in school settings.

Presence and attitude as a leader

Strong candidates in this domain communicate a presence and attitude that inspires confidence in their potential to lead others in the pursuit of common vision and goals. This domain focuses on what the candidate communicates to others about who s/he is as a leader: in writing, in formal presentation, and in interpersonal interactions. It includes self-regulation of one's presence and attitude in response to others within demanding situation and/or when one is under stress. An authentic voice that communicates awareness of self, respect for others, and "heart" or "passion" for the work are important. Substance matters. Self-assurance and a positive stance contributes to a leader presence.

Professional Practice Domains

Deep instructional knowledge for diverse populations

Strong candidates in this domain have developed standards-based and evidence-based instructional designs and approaches that demonstrate advanced, culturally responsive pedagogical skills and repertoire. This domain is about knowledge of standards-based instruction with attention to cognitive challenge (rigor), cultural responsiveness, intrinsic motivation, differentiation, and a whole-child focus (social and emotional skills). It also foregrounds use of assessment and data to inform instruction, high expectations for all students, and engagement of families in the learning process. Candidates should have a strong base of instructional knowledge coming into the program and be able to assess the instruction of others, as well as their own.

Collaborative orientation to working with and leading adults

Strong candidates in this domain demonstrate their ability to interact with adults to solve problems related to student learning and achievement. Using data and evidence, they engage in dialogue with adults in ways that can lead to shifts and changes in attitudes, beliefs, and practices. This domain is about embracing the need for adult capacity development while taking an assets-perspective on adult learners. It is about engaging adults in improvement processes while holding them accountable for their contributions and performance.

Educational systems management expertise

Strong candidates in this domain demonstrate an understanding that it is the responsibility of the leader to manage the interdependent components of the organization to improve learning outcomes for diverse students. This domain is about depth of knowledge of the school as an educational system and the role of the principal in managing the system in the service of both adult and student learning. Family and community are viewed as integral to the educational system. Strengths in this domain include analytic abilities in the use of data and evidence to identify organizational assets and challenges, as well as a strategic mindset. "Managing up" in the district is considered essential to enlist district resources effectively and to buffer the work of the school from district-level stressors.

Ethics Domain

Ethical conduct and leadership

Strong candidates in this domain are guided by a moral-ethical perspective on their school leadership roles and their roles as scholar-practitioners within the UIC doctoral program and the field more broadly. This domain is at the heart of leadership and overlaps with every other domain. When leaders lose their positions outright, it tends to be for breaches in the ethical domain. Ethical leaders communicate the importance of ethical conduct for every member of a school community, including students, staff, and stakeholders, and they consider ethical choices thoughtfully and carefully in contexts where the right course of action is not always clear or when they experience pressures to act hastily or expediently. As scholar practitioners, they take responsibility for knowing the expectations of ethical scholarship and adhering to those expectations throughout their academic and professional careers.

USE OF DOMAINS AT ENTRY

The domains help support selection interview panels make the critical distinction between candidates likely to become effective leaders through training in the UIC program and those who may perform well in an interview, but are not strong candidates for our program. Making this distinction has, is, and will continue to be a central challenge in our selection process. Operationalizing this distinction will likely be a challenge for other institutions as well.

Domain assessment at entry is supplemented by additional evidence, including leadership experience, years of teaching experience, and student growth in one's practice as a teacher. Although we have found it difficult to assess ethical conduct directly and effectively at the selection point, we collect letters of recommendation and other evidence, including background checks of candidates. These can surface inconsistencies in a candidate's dossier and raise questions for candidates, such as deliberately omitted background information.

SELECTION FROM A DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

As represented in our theory of action in Figure 2, UIC aims to select the best people for the purposes of developing particular forms of leadership in schools. More specifically, it aims to develop leaders who demonstrate: successful performance as assessed against professional leadership standards; positive impact on school performance and student learning in urban contexts; and the capacity for ongoing development as a leader. UIC fulfills these aims by focusing on the development of leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions, or leadership competence. Our working definition for leadership competence is, "...the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served. Competence builds on a foundation of basic clinical skills, scientific knowledge, and moral development"[2] (Epstein & Hundert, 2002).

Development of leadership competence starts with the characteristics we assess at the entry point and accelerates through program experiences of increasing role and task complexity, leading first to the Illinois P-12 Principal Endorsement and later an Ed.D. Degree. Preparation prior to licensure includes a six-month pre-residency phase and a year-long leadership residency in an urban school. In the post-residency phase of three years, students serve as novice principals and/or assistant principals.

As Figure 2 illustrates, development of leadership competence during these four-plus years varies as program elements and the candidate as a learner interact (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009c). Program elements of coursework and coaching provide assessment, challenge, and support that offer resources and/or motivation for development with the intent of fostering "deliberate" leadership practice (Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman, 2010; Ericsson, 2016). Candidates engage in purposeful learning as they take responsibility for their leadership development around three knowledge and skill domains: interpersonal, cognitive, and intrapersonal (National Research Council, 2013). The intrapersonal and interpersonal domains in particular specify "dispositions" in ways that are productive for assessment and development, for example, by focusing on beliefs and values in leadership actions, capacities for self-awareness, and abilities to cultivate collaborative working relationships with others (Donaldson, 2008). This theory of action is grounded in theoretical knowledge of leadership development that integrates understandings of adult development, identity, and cognition (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009b; Lord & Hall, 2005).

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[2]This definition, drawn from the field of medical education, requires further development to fully adapt it to education leadership.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE

CANDIDATE ENGAGES in *purposeful* Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Cognitive learning (Donaldson 2008)

"DELIBERATE PRACTICE" program elements (Ericsson 2016) require systemic Assessment, Challenge, & Support, academically and in leadership roles (CCL 2015)

Variable candidate development

OUTCOMES include standards-aligned high performance as a school leader, demonstrated impact on school performance, and clear capacity for ongoing leadership development

Selective Admissions ➔ Pre-Residency ➔ Residency ➔ Novice Post-Residency Leadership Roles ➔ Post Program Leadership Role

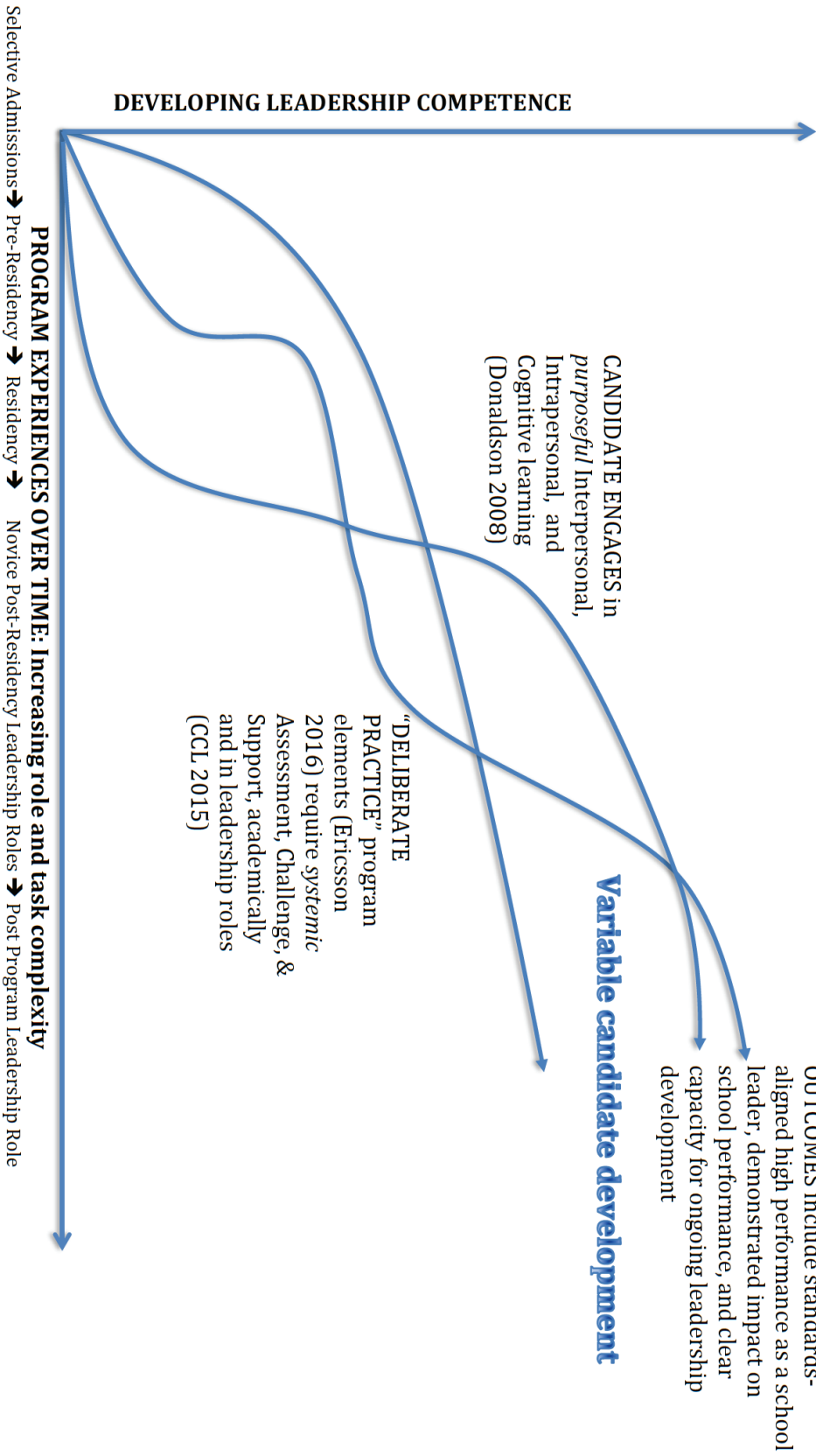**PROGRAM EXPERIENCES OVER TIME: Increasing role and task complexity**

Figure 2: UIC Theory of Action for School Leader Development
Continuously Improving PROGRAM Elements and CANDIDATE Engagement Interact to Accelerate Leader Development

WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE OF "PROMISE" IN THE SEVEN SELECTION DOMAINS?

In assessing applicant characteristics, UIC engages in a "holistic review" process. It is the nature of holistic review, which is described by a 2016 report of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), to be mission and values driven. According to the CGS report, programs using holistic review consider "a broad range of characteristics, including noncognitive and personal attributes." In doing so, they seek to achieve a diverse student body while at the same time selecting for characteristics they believe are more likely than traditional measures of test scores or grade point averages to be related to student success in a career. We recommend the CGS report to other principal preparation programs as they re-design their admissions processes to better support principal preparation efforts or reflect on and revise their existing processes (Kent & McCarthy, 2016).

Selection into the UIC EdD program is based on assessment of seven application components or requirements, including:

• Resume including Leadership Roles and Accomplishments
• Letters of Recommendation (3)
• Essay: Goal Statement and Analytic Essay on Urban School Performance
• Professional Practices Portfolio
• On-Site Analysis of Teaching Video (Writing Sample)
• Simulation: Powerpoint Presentation of Goals and Plans as Principal based on Illinois School Report Card for an underperforming urban school
• Interview by selection panel using protocol linked to selection criteria

Each applicant is reviewed by a panel of three people closely affiliated with the program, including faculty members, leadership coaches, research staff members, and EdD program graduates currently working in principal or other administrator roles. There are two phases of the assessment process: 1) review of application materials and 2) review of in-person performances and interview. Panel members complete a 35-item selection packet organized around six of the seven domains described earlier. Interviewers rate each application element on two or more of the domains using a six-point developmental scale: red flag, undeveloped, emerging, developing, advanced, and exemplary. Using the same scale, they also rate the applicant overall in each of the evidence domains for each phase of the assessment process. Assessment against the domains occurs without panel member knowledge of academic credentials, such as undergraduate institutions attended and GRE scores. Panel members then make a final recommendation. Final admissions decisions are made by a committee of academic and clinical faculty based on the interview panel data and informed by the applicant's academic credentials.

CONCLUSION

Part I of this continuous brief considers what selection means in the context of our school leader preparation and development program. It describes the characteristics we select for and how we select. Selection for us is about more than assessing candidate performance and engaging in rigorous review. Selection supports our theory of action for the development of urban school leaders capable of developing capacities for instructional improvement in high need schools.

Part II of this brief (forthcoming) describes how we developed the domains and our selection practices through a continuous improvement process, including how we measure selection characteristics. Even when selective practices are required in state legislation, there is a considerable gap between state requirements and the development of a coherent, effective admissions system at the program level; continuous improvement can bridge this gap. In our case, we developed and refined our thinking about what to select for over time. For example, we learned through trial and error about the importance of dispositions in selection and later codified selection criteria to focus on assessment of characteristics we expect to be related to effective leadership. Processes for selecting candidates also developed over time as we learned to apply selection characteristics in reliable ways. Such processes require considerable organization and training of admissions personnel. Again, continuous improvement processes, initially informal and more recently deliberate, enabled this work.

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