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## WGU BACKGROUND

WGU's mission is to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity. Since its inception in 1997, WGU has prioritized learner success as the focus of its competency-based model. WGU uses key indicators to ensure that students are easily accessing WGU's education programs, completing their studies in a reasonable timeframe, and attaining their degrees (WGU, 2021). For students to realize their dreams of degree completion and career advancement, WGU continually innovates models for connecting talent with opportunity (DeMark, et al., 2022).

and the  degree-seeking students and more than 70,000 degrees conferred to date to education







# CHARACTER AT WGU TEACHERS COLLEGE

## COALITION FOR HEALTHY LEARNING

WGU Teachers College is a founding member of the Coalition for Healthy Learning, a movement focused on research, policy, and practices that promote healthy learning environments to increase student and faculty success.

The Coalition for Healthy Learning and Healthy Learning Initiative in WGU Teachers Col-

ing focus areas that are key drivers of student and faculty academic, professional, and personal success.

vidually, gain collective strength and create a thriving,

acter Core; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); Social Emotional Learning (SEL); Mental Health; Basic Needs; and Professional Dispositions and Ethics.

The Coalition for Healthy Learning brings together and better integrates these related initiatives so that healthy learning environments can be intentionally designed, cultivated, and championed to (1) facilitate access learning environments to be more attractive to, and inspiring for, increasingly diverse students; (2)





## THE CHARACTER CORE PROJECT

Through a generous grant provided by the Kern Family Foundation, the Character Core team was created to advance character work in the Teachers College strategic roadmap, initiatives, and culture. WGU Teachers College's distinctive position and national scale provides a unique opportunity for graduates to create a profound and positive impact on education by promoting character in K-12, higher education,

graduating knowledgeable professionals who are also caring and ethically guided individuals who will positively impact their communities, the Teachers College has chosen to place an intentional focus on character. Research indicates the intentional focus and nurturing of character makes a posi-

## THE CHARACTER CORE SKILLS COLLECTION

In 2020, the Character Core team worked with a national group of character researchers, partners, and practitioners to

of 60 Character Categories and 511 Rich Skill Descriptors. A Character Core Skills Collection was created by selecting

the master list. The selected Qualities are aligned - ing WGU terminology, published practices, curriculum, and

Skills Collections, and the WGU Character Professional Learn-

Qualities were selected to provide depth and breadth to the Character Focused Approach (curiosity, gratitude, humility, patience, purpose, service).

The Character Core Skills Collection is published for public access to support character work at other institutions (WGU Skills Library, 2022).

The  
**Mission of the  
Character Core project**  
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Character Qualities are developed and practiced within working and learning environments developed over time through strategies such as practice, modeling, habit formation, observation, and reflection. A focus on developing Character Qualities in educational and workplace settings cultivates healthy learning and working environments where all individuals are supported to thrive. Although the Character Focused Approach Framework is aligned with key domains such as SEL and DEI, it is not synonymous with them. Character Qualities are often interrelated and can be demonstrated in various ways. For example, Intellectual Character and demonstrate a Character Quality such as patience is supported by applying the SEL skills of self-awareness and self-management. Community and Ethical Character Qualities such as advocacy, inclusion, and justice are deeply connected to DEI practices.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guiding Principles are foundational to implementing the Character Focused Approach (Berkowitz, 2021; and Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2020) that include key concepts regarding character development: Character is pro-social, visible and observable, involves choice and

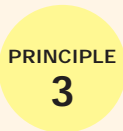
# GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Prioritize Character



Intentionally and Holistically Integrate Character



Create Healthy Learning and Working Environments



Value and Include All Community Members in Character Initiatives



Share Character Learning





## Value and Include All Community Member in Character Initiative

A district superintendent uses educational leadership by including trustworthiness, integrity, and advocacy.

A teacher team creates school-wide enrichment activities focusing on the development of agency, empowering students to be active citizens advocating for equity in their school community and society.

in community service projects that are meaningful to them.

## CHARACTER INTEGRATION

WGU's Teachers College integrates the Character Focused Approach into degree programs and Teachers College culture. Through professional learning oppor-

supported to include the Character Focused Approach into interactions and deci-

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# APPENDIX 1.

## WGU & TEACHERS COLLEGE CULTURE

### WGU Mission

### WGU Vision

### WGU Core Belief

We believe in the inherent worth and ability of every individual and in

Leadership Principles	Key Results	Cultural Beliefs
	Completion	

### WGU Promise

- We endeavor to make opportunities work for everyone by improving quality, access, and outcomes of education through diverse, innovative programs, sys-
-

## School of Education (SOE) Way

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<b>Teachers College Character Core</b>	<b>WGU Office of DE&amp;I</b>	<b>WGU Social Emotional Learning</b>
Catalyze healthy learning and working environments and thriving communities by prioritizing character and	Endeavoring to be the world's most inclusive uni-	Empower the WGU Learning Community by providing supportive pathways for connection, lifelong

## **APPENDIX 2.**

### SKILLS ALIGNMENT TO WGU FRAMEWORKS

Critical Thinking	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Educational Leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mindset	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Teamwork	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Acceptance	✓	✓		✓		
Advocacy	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Agency	✓		✓		✓	✓
Applied Ethics	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Civic Engagement	✓	✓		✓		
Compassion	✓	✓				✓



## **APPENDIX 3.**

# CHARACTER CORE SKILLS COLLECTION: QUALITIES AND RICH SKILLS DESCRIPTORS





Student Environment Creation	Create an environment where every student has a voice and that it will be heard
Student Opportunities for Leadership	Create opportunities for students to lead and make decisions
Student Rights Support	Support students to stand up for what is right
Support Voices of Others	Support others to have their voice heard

## AGENCY

Agency is the abstract principle that autonomous beings are capable of acting by themselves.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Revise Personal Learning Plans	Revise a personal learning plan based on changing situations and goals
Student Empowerment to Advocate	Empower students to be active citizens advocating for equity in their school community and society
Student Empowerment for Change	change
Student Empowerment for Growth	Empower students to take responsibility for their own growth

## APPLIED ETHICS

Applied ethics to real world problems.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Appropriate Emotions	
Do What is Right	
Ethical Qualities Cultivation	Cultivate the qualities needed to be an ethical individual
Ethical Response Encouragement	Encourage others to act well in situations that require an ethical response
Proper Ethical Response	Act properly in situations that require an ethical response

Take Responsibility for Ethical Decision-Making	Take responsibility for one's own ethical decision-making
Well-Being Deliberation	Deliberate when considering well-being of others

## **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Civic engagement or civic participation is any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern. Civic engagement includes communities working together or individuals working alone in both political and non-political actions to protect public values or make a change in a community.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Be an Active and Engaged Citizen	Be an active and engaged citizen in one's community
Community Betterment	Make the community better
Environment Creation	Create an environment of belonging for others
Service Commitment	Commit to actions that service the community or the larger world
World Betterment	Make the greater world better

## COMPASSION

Compassion motivates people to go out of their way to relieve the physical, mental or emotional pains of others and themselves. Compassion is often regarded as being sensi-

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Demonstrate Compassion for	Demonstrate kindness, caring, empathy, and a willingness to assist students, including those
Show Kindness	Show sympathy, kindness, caring, and a willingness to help others
Use Compassion	Use compassion to solve problems



## **CREATIVITY**

Creativity is a phenomenon whereby something somehow new and somehow valuable is formed. The created item may be intangible or a physical object.



## CURIOSITY

learning, evident by observation in humans and other animals. Curiosity is heavily associated with all aspects of human development, including the process of learning and desire to acquire new knowledge and skill.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Be Open to New Knowledge and Skill	Be open to new levels of knowledge or skills informed by
and Skill	
Desire for Knowledge	Demonstrate the desire to acquire new information or knowledge
Discover New Information	Discover various information and resources on various developmental topics
Opportunity to Learn Information	Create opportunities to learn new information about someone or something
Solution Recommendations	Recommend innovative and creative solutions

Collaboration for Evidence Based Decision Making	based decision making.
Courageous and Initiative-Taking Behaviors	Practice courageous, initiative-taking behaviors that compel others toward a common goal
Culture of Character Creation	Cultivate a culture encompassing character qualities
Culture of Care	Create a culture of a caring school community
Empowerment of Stakeholders in Character Programming	Empower all stakeholders in character programming
Ethical and Caring Adult Community	Cultivate an ethical and caring adult community in the school, with interpersonal trust
Families and Community in Building Character	Incorporate families and community members as partners in building character
Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Skills Usage	Use intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to proactively build a positive adult community and culture
Justice and Democratic Skills	Develop knowledge of justice and democratic skills and dispositions
Cultural Shift	Modify practices of a current school to change the culture of a school
Monitor Character Program Development	Monitor the development and implementation of character programming
Pedagogy of Empowerment	Cultivate a pedagogy of empowerment where all voices are heard and valued
Prioritization of Character Programs	Prioritize character programs and make it a school priority
Recognition of Shared Leadership	

## EMPATHY

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Actions and Feelings of Someone Else	Consider what one would do and feel if in the same situation as someone else
Consider Perspectives	Consider the perspectives of others
	others
Feelings of Others	Sense and consider the feelings of others
Understand Disagreement	Seek to understand all sides of a disagreement



## HUMILITY

Humility is the quality of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Accurate View of Self	Having an accurate view of one's talents and achievements
Evaluation of Accomplishments	Evaluate accomplishments accurately
Prioritization of Opportunities for Others	Provide opportunities to others to receive attention and recognition
Recognition of Self Limitations	Recognize the limitations of one's knowledge

## INCLUSION

Inclusion is the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Empowerment of Student Identity	Empower students to bring their full identities to school
Environment of Respect and Compassion	Cultivate an environment where all are treated with respect and compassion
Environment of Student Belonging	Create an inclusive environment for students
Model Self Respect	Show students that they can trust that they will be respected for who they are
Promotion of Student Belonging	Promote a sense of belonging for students as a valued part of an inclusive learning community



## INTEGRITY

Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong ethical principles and values.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Cultivation of Integrity	Cultivate the characteristics of integrity
Motivate Others	Motivate others to do the right thing
Truthfulness in Word and Deed	Be truthful in word and deed

## INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Intellectual Engagement is a personality construct referring to a person's enjoyment (or dislike) of intellectually demanding activities.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Academic Honesty	Promote academic honesty
Critical and Compassionate	
Curious and Open-Minded Thinking	Be a critical thinker guided by curiosity and open-mindedness
Positive Quality of Mind and Character	Demonstrate a positive quality of mind and intellectual character
Right Actions	Distinguish the right action based upon knowledge, truth, and understanding
Structural Thinking on Class Inequality	Demonstrate structural thinking about class inequality
Student Self Improvement	Empower students to learn something new so they can self-improve

## JUSTICE

Justice is “just behavior” or treatment, the quality of being fair and reasonable.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Avoidance of Bias Decisions	Avoid letting one's personal feelings bias decisions about others
Be Open Minded	Be open minded and listen
Fairness Towards Others	Be fair towards others by honoring their rights and responsibilities
Justice and Fair Skills	Model skills associated with justice and fairness
Openness to Ideas and Perspectives	Be open to new perspectives and ideas through listening
Recognition of Community Good	Recognize what is good for the community
Treat Others Fairly	Treat others fairly and equitably

## MINDSET

Mindset is a mental inclination, tendency or habit.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Belief in Improvement of Skills	Integrate the belief that through thoughts, behaviors, and language, one can develop and improve skills over time
Environment for Student Achievement	Cultivate an environment where students realize they can do more than they think is possible
Growth Mindset Application	Apply a growth mindset to academic, professional, or personal endeavors
Mindset Recognition	Recognize one's own mindset as a contributing factor in academic, professional, and personal success
Setback and Feedback Opportunities	Take setbacks and feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow educator skills
Student Success Mindset	Help students develop a mindset for success in education, career, and life

Understand Skill Development	Demonstrate an understanding that one can develop and improve skills over time through thoughts, behaviors, and language
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**OPTIMISM**



## **PURPOSE**

Purpose is a sense of resolve or determination.

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	



## RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to cope mentally or emotionally with a crisis or to return to pre-crisis status quickly.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Develop Inner Strength and Courage	Develop inner strength and courage
Overcoming Adversity Support	Support others in overcoming adversity
Perseverance Support	Support perseverance through challenge or adversity
Teach Students on Inner Strength and Courage	Teach students how to develop and draw on inner strength

## SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Self-Directed Learning is the process through which an individual takes responsibility for their learning.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Demonstrate Initiative Toward Goals	Demonstrate initiative in the pursuit of lifelong self-improvement and professional growth
Employ Self-Directed Skill Advancement	Employ self-directed activities that promote advancement of skills and lifelong learning
Student Goal Setting Empowerment	



Contemplation	
Trust Creation	Create trust by providing and requesting open and honest feedback between team members

## **TRUSTWORTHINESS**

(  
Communication)

<b>Rich Skill Descriptor Name</b>	<b>Rich Skill Descriptor</b>
Be Authentic with Others	Be authentic with others
Build Relationships Based on Trust	Build relationships based on trust
Demonstrate Honor and Integrity	Demonstrate honor and integrity

## **APPENDIX 4.**

# STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH

Collaboratively identify key Character Qualities that are essential to the community/class/course/program/organization. Identify goals for implementing the Character Focused Approach.

IMPLEMENT AND  
CULTIVATE

Cultivate Character Qualities in individuals,

EVALUATE AND  
ITERATE



## **APPENDIX 5.**

### EXAMPLES OF CHARACTER PROMOTING ACTIVITIES IN WGU TEACHERS COLLEGE □ ali ie in

## APPENDIX 6.

# EXAMPLES OF THE CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH IN K-12, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND WORKFORCE SETTINGS

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How will we prioritize the holistic and intentional integration of Character Qualities into all aspects of our working, learning, or living community?

- [redacted]
- [redacted]cies and procedures (inclusion, educational leadership).
- Create a vision for character that is aligned with the organization's mission and sys-

- Conduct a character curriculum analysis to identify which Character Qualities are included and where others may be integrated (purpose, justice, etc.).
- 
- Intellectual engagement, etc.).
- Read stories or watch inspirational movies that demonstrate the power of perseverance and resilience.

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How will we cultivate healthy working and learning environments where Character Qualities are supported, developed, and demonstrated over time?

- character qualities are known, evident and implemented throughout the organization (critical thinking, intellectual engagement, educational leadership). Celebrate successes and take deliberate, transparent, and ongoing action to address areas of improvement (applied ethics).
- Create an environment of belonging and empowerment by involving students in creating classroom norms and agreements using character qualities that are important to them.
- community circle meetings where members discuss their lives, learnings and growth in a supportive environment (acceptance, curiosity, empathy, compassion, justice).
- Implement activities that encourage individuals to identify their personal character qualities such as inclusion, teamwork, and service in common areas
- the qualities into organizational procedures and individual's daily work.
- 
- What are obstacles, what needs to change? Are we becoming the organization and people we want to be?
- Address inequity and bias within workplace hiring practices by using the character qualities of integrity, justice, advocacy, and civic engagement.

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: How will we promote an asset-based and inclusive framework for character development, where all community members are empowered to model, teach and practice Character Qualities?

- Establish an inclusive classroom and school environment with a shared vision empowered, and responsible for developing character.
- Include all community members to create a character vision statement.
- Promote a collective space and opportunities for individuals to contribute to a framework for the teaching and learning of character qualities.
- ensure the approach is being used on a regular basis.
- Invite a variety of stakeholders to create a character integration plan.
- Ask students to create shared classroom guidelines and make classroom posters of the guidelines. At open house night, students share the posters with caregivers and parents and ask them to contribute more ideas. Throughout the school day, the shared guidelines are referenced and incorporated into lessons.
- Establish Morning Meetings.
- Engage students in a course activity to identify their purpose for pursuing their chosen degree. Students then can create a vision and action plan of how to incorporate ethics into their student activities and future career.
- Ask faculty and students to analyze current course content to determine where they may intentionally integrate the character qualities of compassion, gratitude, and justice (practice, creativity, advocacy).

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How will we share our character research and best practices with others to contribute to systems change?

- Invite faculty to share research on successful character initiatives with other teams across the university (critical thinking, intellectual engagement, advocacy, educational leadership).
- Share practical classroom and school practices and content with other schools and education colleagues.
- Conduct and contribute to the body of research supporting character in university and workplace settings.
- Showcase character initiatives, opportunities, and activities inside and outside the workplace.
- Publish a guidebook of best practices for collaborative cross-cultural teamwork to accomplish an organization's mission and purpose (advocacy, courage, optimism, service).

