FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING STUDENT TEACHING

As you enter the student teaching experience you may find that you have a few unanswered questions related to the classroom experience. The following are questions student teachers often ask.

Q. What is the best way to prepare for student teaching?

A. You will need to attend the mandatory student teaching orientation meeting. During this meeting information is given regarding preparation. You will need to contact your first block mentor teacher. Often they can tell you what units you will be working on and you can begin your preparation for that block. You should also become familiar with the mentor teacher’s expectations and the core curriculum of that particular grade level.

Q. What are my responsibilities as a student teacher? What policies I should be aware of?

A. Consult the other pages on this website for information about responsibilities and policies.

Q. If I plan to complete my student teaching in Cache Valley, how will my assigned schools and grade levels be selected?

A. The schools we are assigned to use for the designated semester give us a list of qualified mentor teachers who would like to mentor student teachers. We consider your preferences, your previous practicum placement assignments, and your major requirements, and then we try to place you in the most suitable place that our options allow.

Q. If I plan to complete my student teaching outside of Cache Valley, who chooses the schools I will be placed at?

A. The directors of the Human Resources departments of each district choose the schools that you are placed in.

Q. How early can I contact my mentor teachers?

Please wait until two weeks before the beginning of the semester to contact your mentor teacher.

Q. Is there a chance that I can student teach in the grade I prefer?

A. Elementary Education majors are required to teach in a primary grade (1-3) and an upper elementary grade (4-6). ECE majors will teach a kindergarten block and in grade 3, whereas an ECE/ELED will most likely have a kindergarten placement and an upper elementary grade (4-6). Elementary Education/Special Education majors will have an upper elementary grade (4-6) for their ELED block. ELED/SPED/ECE majors will have a 3rd grade placement for their ELED block.

Q. I have a very strong preference of where I want to do my student teaching, but I have already completed another level at that school. Can I request to complete my student teaching at the same school?
A. A high-quality teacher preparation program such as ours strives to provide a variety of practicum placements and therefore you probably will not be assigned to the same school for student teaching. Because of the number of student teachers going through the Elementary Education Program, we cannot honor individual requests. We also rotate school sites and therefore we do not use every school each semester.

Q. When do we get our student teaching assignments?
A. Fall semester placements are usually emailed at the end of spring semester. Spring semester placements are emailed to students before the end of fall semester.

Q. I don’t like the placement I’ve been given, but I know of another teacher and school that would love to take me. Can I make arrangements with them to be placed there?
A. Absolutely not. Students are not allowed to make their own placements and those who attempt to do so display a lack of professionalism. If you see a serious problem with your placement, the appropriate course of action is to discuss the issue with the Director of Elementary Field Experiences. They will work through the proper channels to determine the best resolution for your conflict.

Q. If I am assigned to Cache Valley and my plans change, can I switch assignments?
A. Once placement emails have been sent to mentor teachers we do not switch placements. Only in extreme emergencies are placements changed.

Q. How many weeks do student teachers actually teach?
A. We follow a co-teaching model. There is a gradual release of responsibility from the mentor teacher teaching the content and you providing a supporting role to you teaching the content and the mentor teacher providing the supporting role in the classroom.

Q. Will I do all of my student teaching in one school?
A. Some student teachers complete both blocks in one school, while others have two schools. It depends upon the mentor teacher pool forms we receive from the districts and your endorsement area. Students who are pursuing a math endorsement will be placed in two schools.

Q. Do we take any classes during student teaching?
A. Yes. There is a student teaching seminar, ELED 5250, that accompanies your student teaching experience. You receive three credits for this course and it is required for graduation. This class will be online. During this course, you will complete the culminating project for your program, the Teacher Work Sample.

Do not take any other course work during your student teaching experience.

Q. What should I do if I can’t attend a mandatory student teaching orientation?
A. The orientation is mandatory. If you can’t attend, you must contact the Director of Elementary
Field Experiences beforehand to obtain their permission to be absent.

Q. **What exactly are we expected to do within the classroom during student teaching? As soon as I enter the classroom will I be required to teach everything?**

A. Student teachers should be carefully integrated into the classroom setting. There is a gradual release of responsibility in the co-teaching model. Your mentor teacher needs to role model everything you will be teaching. Usually student teachers begin with one content area and gradually other content areas are added. Your mentor teacher may ask that you observe for a day or two to learn the students’ names as well as classroom management routines and procedures. Please consult the Co-Teaching Model on the website.

Q. **Am I required to do all of the lesson plans or will my mentor teacher give me a plan and expect me to teach from it?**

A. Student teachers are required to generate their own lesson plans, but may use the mentor teacher’s plan as an example of what is expected. Student teachers need to complete lesson plans for all content areas taught by the student teacher and, dependent upon the subject matter, lesson plans should be more or less detailed, and they need to be given to your mentor teacher before you teach, so they can provide feedback to you, before you teach. You will also write detailed lesson plans as part of the Teacher Work Sample. Lesson plans should be provided 2-3 days in advance to your supervisor before they come to observe you, so they can give you feedback, and you can make those changes before they observe.

Q. **Do I have to use a particular format for lesson plans during student teaching?**

A. Please consult the Model Lesson Plan on the website, unless the district wants you to use their planning format. You should script out what you will say to the students as you begin planning lessons.

Q. **How much help will my mentor teacher give me?**

A. Mentor teachers are encouraged to give on-going feedback. They should be willing to exchange ideas and offer suggestions as needed. Some mentor teachers share their files, but we ask student teachers to only use mentor teacher files as a resource. By doing this you begin to think about and reflect upon the types of methods and materials you want to use. This way lessons and units become your own.

Q. **Do I need to preapprove every lesson with our mentor teacher beforehand?**

A. All lessons should be checked by your mentor teacher. As you become more familiar with the curriculum you are teaching, you may not have to have every lesson plan approved first. If you lack knowledge in a particular content area you must work closely with the mentor teacher before teaching a lesson. This is an area you need to work out with individual mentor teachers.

Q. **Do student teachers have any flexibility in how they teach their lessons or do they have to do everything the same way the mentor teacher does?**
A. It definitely depends upon the content you are teaching and the mentor teacher you are working with. Some mentor teachers give you the objective and allow you a great deal of leeway. Other mentor teachers expect you to address the curriculum in the same manner they do.

Q. How much of our own philosophies are we allowed to use and do we always have to follow the same methods the mentor teacher is using?

A. It would really be nice if the student teacher’s philosophy and the mentor teacher’s philosophy blended well together, but this does not always happen. Most mentor teachers are willing to let you “try out” your philosophies, but ultimately you need to work within the mentor teacher’s framework. Remember that you can learn in even the most challenging situations.

Q. If I have issues with my mentor teacher, who can I talk to?

A. You will first want to talk with your university supervisor about the concern and if it can’t be resolved you will need to talk to the Director of Elementary Field Experiences. You do have a support system.

Q. If I have a problem with the mentor teacher I am placed with, is it possible to switch teachers?

A. It depends upon the situation. We always try to work problems out, but we look at each set of circumstances on an individual basis.

Q. Are student teachers required to participate in after school programs?

A. Student teachers must decide for themselves if they choose to participate in any after school programs. Some student teachers actively participate in these programs while others choose not to. It is the student teacher’s choice.

Q. What involvement do student teachers have with parents?

A. Student teachers are required to send four letters home to parents during their student teaching experience: one at the beginning of each block in which the student teacher introduces himself or herself to the parents and one at the end of each block, thanking the parents for the opportunity to work with their child. Student teachers will also be working with parents who are volunteering in the classroom and as circumstances permit.

Q. If a problem occurs with a child and a parent needs to become involved, what is the student teacher’s responsibility?

A. It is the teacher’s responsibility to contact the parent. Student teachers should not contact parents without the consent of the mentor teacher.

Q. Are student teachers required to attend faculty meetings?

A. As a student teacher, you are required to attend the same meetings as the mentor teacher. This includes faculty meetings, district meetings, in-service meetings, grade level team meetings, PLC meetings, IEPs, etc.

Q. Do student teachers have to attend parent teacher conferences?
A. Yes. You are required to attend as many parent teacher conferences as the mentor teacher feels comfortable with. If they are being conducted during school hours and the mentor teacher has said you do not have to attend, you still need to be working in the school. Most student teachers are asked to conduct a parent teacher conference.

Q. Will I receive more information about dealing with diverse populations of children?

A. We know that you will soon have your own classrooms. Some of you will be in inner city classrooms. We will be talking about diverse populations of children in ELED 5250. Please feel free to discuss specific questions you might have with your individual mentor teacher and supervisor.

Q. What are my legal responsibilities during student teaching? Can student teachers be left alone with the children?

A. Mentor teachers should be in the classroom as much as possible, however there will be times when the mentor teacher could be in the workroom, the office or another area of the school. Should a mentor teacher be absent, it is the district’s responsibility to supply a substitute teacher for the time the mentor teacher is out. You will hear more about legal responsibilities at the student teaching orientation.

Q. Can student teachers substitute for their mentor teacher during student teaching?

A. No. A substitute teacher must be hired if a mentor teacher will be absent; there must be a licensed teacher or district hired substitute in the classroom, even if you are teaching the class.

Q. What should I do if I need to miss a day or more of student teaching? What happens if I get really sick during student teaching?

A. Student teachers are allowed to miss three days for sickness during the entire student teaching experience. If more time is needed (with a doctor’s signature) we will look at other options. Students should notify their mentor teacher, supervisor, and our office if they will be absent.

Q. How often do university supervisors come to visit?

A. University supervisors will conduct a triad conference and come two times each seven-week block.

Q. When supervisors observe student teachers, what are some of the things they look for?

A. The supervisor will observe to see that each student teacher is prepared, has lesson plans, is punctual, is professional, and is meeting student needs (both group and individual). Supervisors look carefully at the student teacher’s attitude and commitment to teaching. Formative and summative evaluations require that supervisors also assess your competencies based on the Utah Effective Teaching Standards. Also see the document “What Supervisors Look For” on the website.

Q. Do student teachers get regular feedback from mentor teachers and university supervisors?
A. In addition to the triad, mentor teachers are asked to complete two formal (written) observations and the final assessment each seven-week block. University supervisors are asked to complete two formal (written, formative) observations, and a final evaluation. In a triad conference, the university supervisor, mentor teacher, and student teacher sit down together and go through the mentor teacher’s expectations during the seven-week block. The triad conference is to be held during the first two weeks of each block. Student teachers should always keep the line of communication open. Don’t hesitate to ask for feedback. If you are not getting the feedback you desire from your mentor teacher, please contact your university supervisor. If your supervisor is not responding to your concerns, please contact the Director of Elementary Field Experiences.

Q. **Do I get a grade for student teaching?**

A. Student teaching is Pass/Fail. Not completing your Teacher Work Sample or your ELED 5250 assignments could result in failing student teaching. Your evaluations will also determine your success as a student teacher as well as your “hire-ability”.

Q. **How are student teachers assessed on their Final Assessment?**

A. The Final Assessment for each block of student teaching is based upon the Utah Effective Teaching Standards. Once completed, these assessments will be automatically emailed to you, the Office of Teacher Preparation and your mentor teacher or supervisor.

Q. **How do I know what the mentor teacher is going to put on my Final Assessment? If there is a problem do I have time to correct it?**

A. Student teachers receive two Final Evaluations, one at the end of each block. There are also observations of both the mentor teacher and university supervisor that can determine progress and areas of improvement before the Final Evaluation.

Q. **Do I meet with my mentor teacher and university supervisor to review the completed Final Assessment?**

A. Yes. It is important that student teachers conference with both the mentor teacher and the university supervisor regarding their final evaluation.

Q. **If I do not get perfect scores on my evaluations, will that keep me from getting a job?**

A. Absolutely not. We ask that you do the best you can during student teaching, but we seldom see “perfect” scores. District personnel realize that you are still learning and growing. Please note that your evaluations are only one variable the districts refer to when they are interviewing candidates for teaching positions.

Q. **How likely is it that I will get hired in the same school or district in which I complete my student teaching?**

A. It depends upon where you have been assigned to student teach. The most important factor is how well you do during your student teaching experience. This definitely has an impact upon the district’s decision to hire you. For some districts, it does have a positive impact on whether you get hired or not.