



Abilene Christian University

Abilene, Texas

College of Education and Human Services



2010 OVERALL TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM DESIGN

While there are some strengths in the design of this institution’s teacher education programs, some critical elements are in need of improvement, particularly the curriculum used for teaching elementary and special education teacher candidates how to teach reading and the subject matter preparation required of middle school teacher candidates. Because some of the data that we collect is drawn from public sources, we always ask the institution to verify the accuracy and currency of what we have collected. Abilene Christian University declined to review and comment.

Admission Standards

1. Admits teacher candidates with strong academic records ●

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The standards for admission either into the institution or its teacher preparation program should select teacher candidates from only the top half of the college population.

Because Abilene Christian University is only rated as “selective” in its admissions by U.S. News and World Report, NCTQ also checked the entrance criteria for admission into its College of Education and Human Services. While the college commendably exceeds the state’s minimum cut-score for the reading portion of the THEA (a test of college readiness), it does not do so for the mathematics portion of the test, and therefore does not fully meet this standard.

Elementary Teacher Program

2. Prepares teacher candidates to teach reading

a. Extent to which the science of reading is covered ●

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The research-based content proven to be necessary for teaching all children to read should be clearly evident in course materials such as lecture topics, assignments and textbooks.

The institution only partially meets the standard because while required textbooks include several that adequately present the five components of the science of reading, lecture topics do not address most of the components. We identified four required textbooks that did not address the science of reading.

b. Adherence to science of reading throughout coursework NA

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

All of an institution’s required reading courses — not just some courses — should impart the research-based content that is necessary for teaching all children to read.

Because we could discern little evidence of the science of reading being taught in either a single comprehensive course or in a combination of multiple courses (see standard #2a), any further rating on this standard is irrelevant.

Ratings: ● Meets standard ● Nearly meets standard ● Partly meets standard ● Meets a small part of standard ○ Fails to meet standard
? Data insufficient for a final rating ⊘ Data withheld despite request NA Not applicable 2011 Evaluation pending NR Not rated

3. Prepares teacher candidates to teach mathematics

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Teacher candidates, even those who excel in math, generally require three semesters of coursework in order to progress from a procedural to a conceptual understanding of the essential mathematics topics taught in the elementary grades.

The institution does not fully meet this standard because it simply does not require a sufficient number of courses to allow for adequate coverage of the essential topics.

4. Educates teacher candidates in the broad content areas relevant to elementary teaching

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Because they cannot teach what they do not know, teacher candidates need to have a solid grasp of literature and composition; American history, world history, art history and music history; geography; and science.

The institution only partially meets this standard because neither the institution nor its teacher preparation program appears to ensure sufficient coverage in the world history, music history and art history content elementary teachers need. Our conclusion took into consideration music and art courses designed specifically for teacher candidates. We note course requirements in other essential content areas, including literature, composition, American history and geography.

5. Requires an area of concentration so that teacher candidates develop content expertise and have a second career option

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Teacher candidates should develop some expertise outside of their professional studies, not only to enrich their own academic experience, but also to serve as a fallback major in the event that the student teaching experience goes poorly.

The institution only partially meets this standard because we could find no evidence of any subject matter concentrations, save four courses explicitly grouped as a concentration in "social studies" and three English courses. Should a teacher candidate fail student teaching, she would face well more than an additional semester's work to be able to graduate under a non-education major.

6. Offers all required courses at least once a year

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

It must be possible to complete the requisite program in a timely manner.

The institution fully meets this standard because it offers all required courses each year.

7. Prepares teacher candidates for the profession

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The well-documented ineffectiveness of first year teachers may be mitigated by professional preparation that includes coursework on classroom management, methods for teaching specific content and diverse learners, child development, assessment and data driven instruction, and how education policy challenges affect practice.

Because we could only gain access to course descriptions for this standard rather than syllabi, we did not rate this standard. However, we were able to complete an accurate count of the credit hours in professional coursework that the institution requires, and it appears to be slightly above typical counts. The institution requires 54 hours of professional coursework (not including student teaching), exceeding the generous upper bound of 50 credits that should be sufficient. Furthermore, in spite of this count, we believe we are able to identify key professional topics inadequately addressed in this sequence, most notably 1) assessment and 2) education policy challenges.



8. Student teaching effectively prepares teacher candidates for the challenges of the classroom 2011

+ Rationale + Methodology + State findings

Although there are a number of characteristics that define a high quality student teaching program, at a minimum a full-time, full-semester clinical experience is necessary.

The institution meets this minimal standard as it offers a full semester of full-time student teaching.

Secondary Teacher Program

9. Prepares high school teacher candidates to teach their subject area(s) ●

+ Rationale + Methodology + State findings

All children deserve to have teachers who are well versed in each and every one of the subjects they teach, regardless of teacher shortages.

While most of the course requirements in the certification areas for secondary teachers appear to be sound, the institution does not fully meet the standard because of an inadequate program design in social studies. Acknowledging that flawed state regulation is the principal culprit for the prevalence of poorly designed social studies preparation programs across the state, including here, the institution should not sanction a system that qualifies secondary teachers to teach multiple subject areas in social studies after having taken sufficient coursework in only one of these areas, history.

10. Prepares middle school teacher candidates to teach their subject area(s) ●

+ Rationale + Methodology + State findings

All children deserve to have teachers who are well versed in each and every one of the subjects they teach, regardless of teacher shortages.

The institution only partially meets the standard because of a flawed program design for the "middle school subject specialist." The institution should not qualify a middle school teacher to teach science without requiring either a major in a science discipline or a combination of courses equivalent to a major that would include at least a minor in one discipline.

11. Offers all required courses (high school certification) at least once a year ●

+ Rationale + Methodology + State findings

It must be possible to complete the requisite program in a timely manner.

The institution meets this standard because it offers all required courses each year.

12. Prepares high school teacher candidates for the profession ?

+ Rationale + Methodology + State findings

The well-documented ineffectiveness of first year teachers may be mitigated by professional preparation that includes coursework on classroom management, methods for teaching specific content and diverse learners, adolescent development, assessment and data driven instruction, and how education policy challenges affect practice.

Because we could only gain access to course descriptions for this standard rather than syllabi, we did not rate this standard. However, our limited examination of course requirements and descriptions suggests that the institution potentially appears to give inadequate attention to a number of essential professional topics for the secondary teacher, most notably 1) assessment and 2) education policy challenges.

Ratings: ● Meets standard ● Nearly meets standard ● Partly meets standard ● Meets a small part of standard ○ Fails to meet standard
 ? Data insufficient for a final rating ⊘ Data withheld despite request NA Not applicable 2011 Evaluation pending NR Not rated

13. Student teaching effectively prepares high school teacher candidates for the challenges of the classroom

2011

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Although there are a number of characteristics that define a high quality student teaching program, at a minimum a full-time, full-semester clinical experience is necessary.

The institution meets this minimal standard as it offers a full semester of full-time student teaching.

Special Education Teacher Program**14. Prepares teacher candidates to teach early reading**


[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

All special education teachers, regardless of whether they are teaching toddlers or teenagers, need coursework in the research-based strategies shown to dramatically reduce the number of children needing remediation in reading.

The institution only partially meets the standard because while required textbooks include several that adequately present the five components of the science of reading, lecture topics do not address most of the components.

15. Prepares teacher candidates to teach elementary mathematics


[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Special education teachers, regardless of whether they are teaching toddlers or teenagers, generally need three semesters of coursework in order to progress from a procedural to a conceptual understanding of fundamental mathematics topics.

The institution fully meets the standard because it commendably requires that special education teacher candidates take the same two elementary content courses required of elementary teacher candidates and an additional course in middle school content.

16. Offers all required courses at least once a year


[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

It must be possible to complete the requisite program in a timely manner.

The institution meets this standard because all required courses are offered each year.

Outcomes**17. Systematically seeks and uses feedback on graduates from school districts**

18. Utilizes available data systems to monitor performance of graduates


[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Mirroring a similar commitment now found in K-12 education, higher education institutions must embrace data driven decision making and accountability in preparing teachers.

The institution does not meet these standards. In our survey of local school districts that hire the institution's graduates, the Merkel Independent School District responded that the institution does not regularly request any data regarding the job performance of graduates or the performance of graduates' students.

Institutional Features**19. Assigns faculty to teach in their area of expertise**


[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

Only the most extreme examples of unsuitable assignments are noted, such as an instructor teaching both reading and mathematics methods.

The institution meets this standard as we could find no evidence of faculty being inappropriately assigned.

**20. Offers grade-span specific coursework as appropriate** ●[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

A single class with curriculum addressing students from preschoolers to high school seniors cannot adequately prepare both elementary and secondary teacher candidates in areas such as classroom management or instructing students with disabilities. *The institution meets this standard based on the assumption that multiple sections of a common course allow for separate classes for elementary and secondary candidates on topics benefiting from age-specific approaches.*

21. Ensures that teacher candidates are prepared to teach in a global society NR[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The world has shrunk. Recognition of that fact should pervade the campus. *Because this standard is still in a developmental phase, we do not provide an institutional rating and our findings should only be viewed as exploratory. We note that teacher candidates must take either a world geography or a world cultures course and six credits of foreign language, unless they took two years of foreign language in high school. Several education-focused study abroad programs are offered, but we did not find a significant proportion of foreign students in the institution's student body.*

Exit Standards

Either state licensure standards are adequate or the institution sets a higher standard for program completion than licensure requires

If the state fails to establish rigorous licensure requirements, institutions are still obligated to ensure that their graduates meet high standards. For example, if the state does not require a licensure test that measures candidates' knowledge of every subject taught, institutions must fill this vacuum.

22. Elementary (EC-4/EC-6) ○[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The institution does not meet this standard because it relies only on the state's licensing test, the TExES elementary generalist test, to determine if its elementary teacher candidates possess adequate knowledge of reading instruction, as well as content knowledge in four subject areas. This test is wholly inadequate—both because of its low level of rigor and the lack of separate cut-scores for each subject. Recognizing that action on the part of the state to remedy these deficiencies is needed, the institution could require a more meaningful test of reading instruction and insist that its teacher candidates pass assessments in each of four subject areas.

23. Middle School (Grades 4-8) ●[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The institution meets this standard because it only qualifies middle school teacher candidates for certification in areas for which the TExES licensing tests appear to be adequate.

24. Secondary (Grades 8-12) ●[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The institution does not fully meet this standard. Acknowledging that flawed state regulation is the principal culprit for the prevalence of poor design of some secondary programs across the state, the institution should not qualify secondary teacher candidates to teach multiple subjects by means of a "composite subjects" certification (e.g., preparing a teacher to teach "science" instead of chemistry, biology, physics, and/or earth science). The institution could remedy the state's regulatory deficiency by requiring candidates to pass content assessments in each subject for exit.

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 ? Data insufficient for a final rating ⊘ Data withheld despite request NA Not applicable 2011 Evaluation pending NR Not rated

25. Special Education (EC-12) ○

[+ Rationale](#) [+ Methodology](#) [+ State findings](#)

The institution does not meet this standard because it relies on state licensing tests, either the TExES elementary generalist test or the special education test, to determine if its special education teacher candidates possess adequate knowledge of reading instruction, as well as content knowledge. These tests are wholly inadequate—both because of their low levels of rigor and their lack of separate cut-scores for each subject. Recognizing that action on the part of the state to remedy these deficiencies is needed, the institution could require a more meaningful test of reading instruction and insist that its teacher candidates pass assessments in each of four subject areas.

Accreditation:	NCATE	TEAC ✓(candidate)	None
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Number of Teachers (2009): 75 Low Producer

Data are from the Texas Education Agency.

Elementary:	47
Middle:	9
Secondary:	13
Special education:	6

[+ Statewide teacher production](#)

Opportunities for institution to respond: March 30, 2009; May 4, 2009; May 26, 2009; June 1, 2009; October 29, 2009; February 22, 2010

[+ More on communication](#)

Institution Comment: *The Abilene Christian University Department of Teacher Education is committed to continuous assessment and improvement. We have established a culture of openness about program accountability and evaluation. We actively seek opportunities to provide syllabi and the results of data collection for various accrediting and governance bodies. However, this will not significantly change the ratings of the NCTQ report because of the vague and arbitrary criteria selected by this group. The criteria used by the NCTQ are not consistent with either state or national accrediting bodies in the field of Teacher Education. In addition, NCTQ failed to utilize recognized and rigorous methods of evaluation utilized by these state and national accrediting bodies. Therefore, Abilene Christian University respectfully declines participation in the study.*

[+ NCTQ responds to institution comments](#)