

University of Houston – Downtown

Houston, Texas

Department of Urban Education



2010 OVERALL TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM DESIGN

While the curriculum used for teaching elementary teacher candidates how to teach reading is a strength in the design of this institution’s teacher preparation program, a number of core elements need improvement, most notably the subject area preparation 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. The University of Houston – Downtown 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 the University of Houston – Downtown has open admissions and is therefore not rated for selectivity by U.S. News and World Report, NCTQ checked the entrance criteria for admission into its Department of Urban Education. Unfortunately, the department’s standards are not high enough, only requiring candidates to meet the state’s minimum cut-scores on the THEA (a test of college readiness).

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 fully meets the standard because the program provides preparation in all components of the science of reading. Although this program fully addresses the science of reading, we identified four required textbooks that did not support reading science.

b. Adherence to science of reading throughout coursework ●

+ 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.

The institution only partially meets the standard because only two of four required reading courses address the science of reading.


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 only partially meets this standard because it does not provide a sufficient number of mathematics courses necessary to cover the essential topics and also because of the design of the existing coursework.

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 does not meet this standard because neither the institution nor its teacher preparation program ensures sufficient coverage in the content elementary teachers need (including children's literature, world history, world geography, art history and music history).

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 does not fully meet this standard because we could find no evidence of any sort of subject matter concentration, save four 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 somewhat above typical counts. The institution requires 57 hours of professional coursework (not including student teaching), exceeding the generous upper bound of 50 credits that should be sufficient. Our limited examination suggests that the institution appears to be covering essential professional topics to some extent.

**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 does not meet this minimal standard as it does not offer a 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 without having taken sufficient coursework in any one of these areas.

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.

While course requirements in other certification areas for middle school teachers appear to be more adequate, the institution does not meet this standard because of an inadequate program design for the "middle school generalist." Acknowledging that flawed state regulation is the principal culprit for the prevalence of poorly designed middle school programs across the state, including here, the institution should not sanction a system that qualifies a middle school teacher in all four core disciplines without sufficient coursework in each.

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, we were able to complete an accurate count of the credit hours in professional coursework and it appears to be above typical counts. The institution requires 30 hours of professional coursework (not including student teaching), at the generous upper bound of credits that should be sufficient for secondary teachers. Furthermore, in spite of these counts, we believe we are able to identify key professional topics inadequately addressed in this sequence, such as 1) subject-specific methods and 2) teaching diverse learners.

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? 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 does not meet this minimal standard as it does not offer a full semester of full-time student teaching.

Special Education Teacher Program

Because the University of Houston—Downtown does not offer a program for special education certification, Standards #14-16 are not included.

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 meets these standards. In our survey of local school districts that hire the institution's graduates, the Pasadena Independent School District responded that the institution does request data regarding the job performance of graduates and 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 as it appears that it designs 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 elementary teacher candidates are required to take three credit hours of Spanish language coursework, but we did not find coursework requirements regarding world geography, or education-focused study abroad programs, nor do foreign students comprise a significant proportion of 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 does not meet this standard because it qualifies middle school teacher candidates by virtue of passing the middle school generalist licensing test. This test is inadequate because of its lack of separate cut-scores for reading and four core subjects. 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 independently pass assessments in each subject area.

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.

25. Special Education (EC-12) NA

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

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| Accreditation: | NCATE | TEAC | None |
|----------------|-------|------|------|
|----------------|-------|------|------|

Number of Teachers (2009): 179 Medium Producer

Data are from the Texas Education Agency.

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Elementary: | 157 |
| Middle: | 22 |
| Secondary: | 0 |
| Special education: | 0 |

[+ Statewide teacher production](#)

Opportunities for institution to respond: December 10, 2008; May 4, 2009; October 29, 2009; February 24, 2010

[+ More on communication](#)

Institution Comment: *The University of Houston – Downtown has a strong record for embracing accountability measures, as do the deans who comprise the Texas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (TACTE). While we are pleased to share syllabi and the results of data collection for various accrediting and governance bodies, these will not significantly change the ratings because of the criteria selected by NCTQ. The Texas Education Agency’s State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) both indicate surprise that NCTQ did not contact them since they are willing to send NCTQ the measures required by statute for accrediting university programs in Texas. Further, they stand ready to cite legislation and rule that make compliance with some NCTQ’s criteria unattainable. The negative NCTQ ratings contradict commendations by both state and national accrediting bodies. The University of Houston – Downtown chooses not to participate in this study and thanks NCTQ for this opportunity for input.*

[+ NCTQ responds to institution comments](#)
