



A Closer Look at Methods Coursework and Practice for Secondary Teachers

Graduate and Alternative Route Secondary Programs

KEY FINDINGS: Three quarters (77 percent) of 315 graduate secondary teacher prep programs require all teacher candidates to take a methods course that will prepare them to teach their intended subject. Alternative route programs are less apt to provide such training with only 43 percent of the 80 programs requiring similar methods coursework.

Why all secondary teacher prep programs should require subject-specific methods coursework

Aspiring teachers need to learn how to deliver content to students, as it is one thing to know a subject and quite another to teach it. While some elements of instruction are common to all subjects, secondary teacher candidates should take at least one course focusing on the methods of instruction relevant to their subject area. This allows beginning teachers to enter the classroom with an understanding of specific content-area practices that have proven effective. Preparation should include an opportunity to practice techniques and receive feedback from a content area expert.

Methodology

In this edition of the *Teacher Prep Review*, the Secondary Methods Standard considers both English and mathematics for all programs in the sample.¹ While analysis under the standard is unchanged from 2014, the results are now reported under two separate standards: Secondary Methods: Coursework and Secondary Methods: Practice.

We look at course catalogs, degree plans, and course syllabi under this standard for two purposes. First, does the program require methods courses specific to core secondary subjects? For example, is there an English methods course rather than a general methods course for those who will teach high school English? Second, will aspiring teachers receive feedback on a practice teaching experience in a secondary classroom?

To assess the approaches taken by programs, under Secondary Methods: Coursework, we look for the requirement of a subject-specific methods course for candidates preparing to teach either English or mathematics. If institutions provide methods coursework in both certification areas, it can be reasonably assumed that the other certification areas also require methods courses.

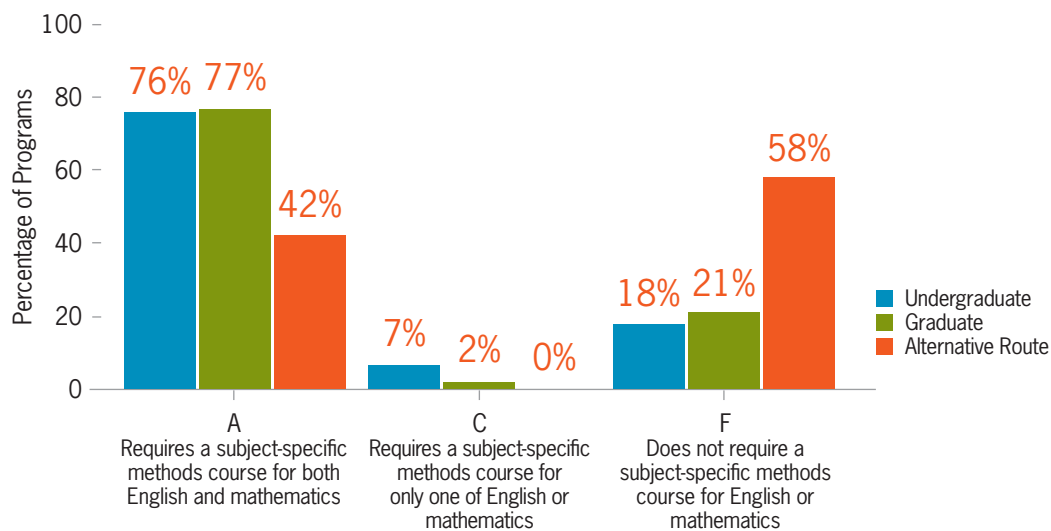
For Secondary Methods: Practice, we review if aspiring teachers receive feedback from their supervising teacher or methods course instructor on a practice teaching experience in a secondary classroom. It is not enough for candidates to teach a lesson and write a reflection, professional feedback must be provided by an expert who observes the lesson.

For more information about analysis and program grades, see the *Understanding program grades* section at the end of this document.

¹ Where certification in either English or mathematics is not offered, the program score reflects the analysis of the available certification route. Where neither English nor mathematics is offered, analysis is completed using a certification route in the sciences.

How many programs require secondary teacher candidates to take a subject-specific methods course?²

(N=716 undergraduate; N=315 graduate; N=80 alternative route)



A closer look at Secondary Methods: Coursework

This edition of the *Teacher Prep Review* finds 77 percent of graduate programs to earn an A, which is in-line with the 73 percent of graduate programs to earn the same grade in 2014. As can be seen in the table above, there is little difference between undergraduate and graduate programs under this standard.

While only two in five alternative route programs require all candidates to take subject-specific methods courses, differences exist between *residency* and *internship* programs.³ Among the 17 *residency* programs reviewed, 59 percent were found to require single-subject methods courses. In comparison, of the 63 *internship* programs, only 38 percent required such coursework.

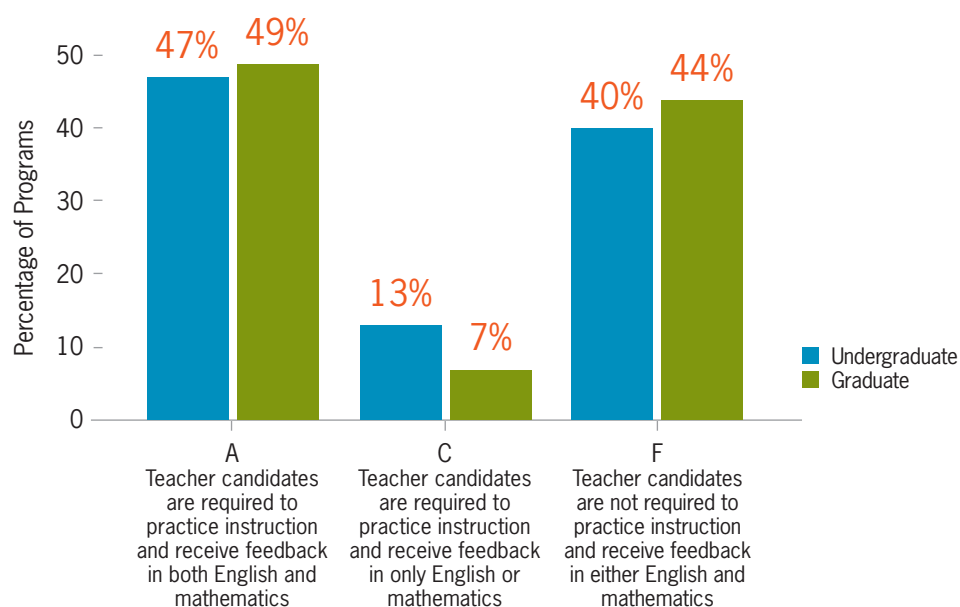
A closer look at Secondary Methods: Practice

As can be seen in the figure below, only about half of graduate secondary programs with subject-specific methods courses require both English and mathematics teacher candidates to practice instruction and receive feedback during a fieldwork experience. This again is in-line with the findings for undergraduate programs.

- 2 Secondary Methods: Coursework independently considers the requirements for English and mathematics with each subject potentially earning a grade of A or F. The grades for the two subjects are then averaged. When a subject-specific methods course is found for one subject, but not the other, the program earns a grade of C.
- 3 Two key components of alternative certification programs are program duration and when individuals become the teacher of record. *Internships* are generally one-year programs with limited coursework requirements that immediately place candidates as the teacher of record. Conversely, *fellowships* are most often multiple-year programs that require coursework on par with traditional preparation programs and include a year of observation/student teaching before candidates become the teacher of record in the second year of the program.

How many programs with a subject-specific methods course also require practice?

(N=239 undergraduate⁴; N=134 graduate⁵)



Understanding program grades for Secondary Methods: Coursework

Each program's letter grade is based on the requirement of a three semester credit hour, subject-specific methods course in English and mathematics. Where both subjects are evaluated, the grade for the program represents the average of two. Where just one subject is evaluated, programs can only earn scores of A and F.

- A** The program requires that both teacher candidates pursuing English certification and those pursuing mathematics certification take a subject-specific methods course.
- C** The program requires that either teacher candidates pursuing English certification or those pursuing mathematics certification take a subject-specific methods course, but such a course is not required for both subjects.
- F** The program does not require teacher candidates pursuing either English or mathematics certifications to take a subject-specific methods course.

Understanding program grades for Secondary Methods: Practice

Each program's letter grade is based on whether, in the subject-specific methods course or concurrent practicum, the program requires fieldwork and a teaching experience for which the teacher candidate receives direct feedback from the supervising teacher or methods instructor. Where programs offer both English and mathematics, the grade for the program represents the average of two scores. Where programs offer just one of these two subjects, programs can only earn scores of A and F. Programs that do not require a subject-specific methods course automatically earn a grade of F under Secondary Methods: Practice.

- 4 For the undergraduate sample, the 126 programs earning a grade of F under Secondary Methods: Coursework automatically earn a grade of F for Secondary Methods: Practice and were removed from this sample because these programs are not directly analyzed under this Secondary Methods: Practice. Also excluded are the 351 programs for which the necessary documents were not made available for analysis.
- 5 For the graduate sample, the 67 programs earning a grade of F under Secondary Methods: Coursework automatically earn a grade of F for Secondary Methods: Practice and were removed from this sample because these programs are not directly analyzed under this Secondary Methods: Practice. Also excluded are the 114 programs for which the necessary documents were not made available for analysis.

- A** During a fieldwork experience, teacher candidates pursuing English and mathematics certification are required to teach a lesson and receive feedback from an expert in the subject area.
- C** During a fieldwork experience, teacher candidates pursuing either English or mathematics certification are required to teach a lesson and receive feedback from an expert in the subject area, but such a requirement is *not* found for both subjects.
- F** Teacher candidates pursuing English and mathematics certification are either not required to complete a fieldwork experience or, if a fieldwork experience is required, teacher candidates are *not* required to teach a lesson where feedback is provided by an expert in the subject area.



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