

5.17 STUDENT FITNESS TO TEACH POLICY

The College of Education and Human Development (COEHD) offers a curriculum designed to academically prepare individuals for the teaching profession. However, satisfying the curriculum and testing requirements alone does not make a candidate worthy for The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to recommend the candidate to the State of Texas for teaching certification. All teacher candidates in the UTSA Teacher Certification Program (TCP) are expected to demonstrate that they are prepared to teach children and youth. This preparation results from the combination of successful completion of university coursework and the demonstration of important human characteristics and dispositions that all teachers should possess.

A. Required Documentation

Prior to admission to the TCP, all teacher candidates will be apprised of the Fitness to Teach (FTT) policy. This policy applies to all students upon enrollment in the TCP, and to students completing coursework in the COEHD that requires interaction with schools, and remains so until completion of their program.

1. In October and March a reminder will be sent to faculty to use the *Referral Forms for Identification of Outstanding TCP Students* or the *Faculty Concerns Regarding Fitness to Teach*. Faculty may submit the referral forms at any time prior to or during the professional level courses.
2. The completion of these forms will allow the COEHD to identify teacher candidates who display outstanding knowledge and/or skills that deserve recognition and identify those who may have some difficulties that raise concerns about the candidate's ability to successfully complete the program. All forms completed will be sent to the associate dean for teacher education.

B. Fitness To Teach Criteria

In addition to curriculum and testing requirements addressed in the UTSA catalog and other UTSA policies, all TCP teacher candidates will be screened throughout their program according to the criteria addressed in this policy, including dispositions for teaching. Dispositions for teaching are defined as those professional attitudes, values, and beliefs expected of an education professional contained in this document. As a professional program, the COEHD reserves the right to recommend or not recommend teacher candidates for certification. If all criteria are not met satisfactorily, teacher candidates may be denied full acceptance into the Teacher Certification Program and/or denied the opportunity to student teach. Without unconditional acceptance into the TCP and successful completion of all course work, field work, and student teaching or its equivalent, the university does not recommend teacher candidates for Texas Teacher Certification. All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to

participate in the process. Refusal to participate will not terminate or invalidate the process.

1. Completed Criminal History Review

In accordance with Texas Education Code 22.083, an examination of each teacher candidate's criminal history will be conducted by the independent school district (ISD) prior to participation in field-based course work, including student teaching. Criminal history record information, which includes both conviction and arrest records is obtained. An ISD or other school field-based entity may deny placement of students with a criminal background. The student's clearance for fieldwork is the prerogative of the ISD or participating entity and not UTSA. If a student is unable to obtain a field-based placement, he/she will not meet UTSA's requirements for recommendation for teacher certification. If a student cannot complete course-required field work because of their criminal history, the student will be required to withdraw from the course. The student may retake the course if and when the criminal history changes, allowing them to be cleared by the school district. If the offense is one that will preclude any further field work, the student will be dismissed from the teacher education program.

2. Academic Requirements

- a. Teacher candidates attend all classes as expected. Preparedness for class and punctuality are expected at all times.
- b. Teacher candidates complete course assignments in a professional manner according to the timelines designated by the course instructor.
- c. Teacher candidates complete all field experiences in a professional and timely manner as required.

d. Scholastic Integrity

The teacher candidate demonstrates honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing one's own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials.

e. Communication Skills

The teacher candidate demonstrates written and oral skills expected of an education professional that shows the ability to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.

- (1) *Written:* Writes clearly, uses correct grammar and spelling. Demonstrates professional level skills in written English to understand content presented in the program and to adequately complete all written assignments, as specified by faculty.
 - (2) *Oral:* Communicates effectively with other students, faculty, staff, and professionals. Expresses ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrates a willingness and an ability to listen to others. Demonstrates professional level skills in spoken English to understand content presented in the program, to adequately complete all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of field placement experiences, as specified by faculty.
- f. Admission criteria are found in UTSA's Undergraduate Catalog.
3. Personal and Professional Requirements
- a. A teacher candidate does not reveal confidential information concerning students unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.
 - b. Teacher candidates demonstrate interpersonal skills that are required for successful professional teaching. These skills include:
 - (1) an openness to accepting and testing the results of unfamiliar ways of teaching;
 - (2) the ability to accept and act upon reasonable criticism;
 - (3) the ability to understand others' perspectives about teaching;
 - (4) the ability to separate personal and professional issues when in the classroom or completing course work;
 - (5) the ability to work collegially with parents, teachers, staff, and administrators;
 - (6) the disposition to act always for the benefit of all students.
 - c. The teacher candidate does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with their students, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways.
 - d. Teacher candidates demonstrate positive personal hygiene habits.

- e. Teacher candidates dress appropriately for their professional contexts.
- f. Teacher candidates adhere to the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators.

4. Cultural and Social Attitudes and Behavior

- a. Teacher candidates exhibit respect for superiors, peers, and children and youth in all settings.
- b. Teacher candidates understand and appreciate the value of diversity and look beyond self in interactions with others; respect differences of race, ethnicity, religion, and social class, national allegiance, and cultural heritage. Teacher candidates do not impose personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on others.
- c. Teacher candidates exhibit acceptance of and provide accommodations for exceptional learners.
- d. Teacher candidates are able to work productively with their peers.
- e. Teacher candidates are able to speak in a manner appropriate to the context of the classroom.
- f. Teacher candidates must display positive attitudes toward faculty, colleagues, and students;
- g. Teacher candidates demonstrate positive social skills in professional and social interactions with faculty, colleagues, parents, and students.

5. Physical Skills

The teacher candidate exhibits motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum placements, with or without accommodations as recommended by the Office of Disability Services.

Note:

No otherwise qualified teacher candidate shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination or excluded from participation in the TCP. A teacher candidate with a disability may be protected by Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act and be eligible for a reasonable accommodation that will provide an equal opportunity to meet the academic criteria related to professional behavior and scholastic performance.

Any otherwise qualified teacher candidate with a qualified disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must notify the Office of Disability Services and provide documentation as needed. The Office of Disability Services makes recommendations for accommodations. A COEHD ad hoc committee will review academic performance criteria in light of individual circumstances to explore issues of appropriate accommodation. An initial assessment, subsequent plans, use of outside experts (including the Office of Disability Services), and periodic checks between the committee and the teacher candidate are appropriate courses of action in making accommodations.

6. Emotional Dispositions

a. Stress Management

The teacher candidate demonstrates the ability to deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. He or she handles stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.

b. Emotional and Mental Capabilities

The teacher candidate uses sound judgment.

The teacher candidate demonstrates the emotional and mental health required to function effectively as a teacher.

c. Cognitive Dispositions

(1) Teacher candidates think analytically about educational issues.

(2) Teacher candidates are thoughtfully reflective about their practice.

(3) Teacher candidates are flexible, open to new ideas, and willing and able to modify their beliefs and practices.

(4) Teacher candidates question and test their assumptions about teaching and schooling.

C. Admission to Teacher Certification Program at UTSA

1. Provisional Acceptance

All teacher candidates at UTSA are provisionally admitted to the

Teacher Certification Program upon application and satisfaction of admission criteria.

2. Unconditional Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance in the Teacher Certification Program is granted prior to the student teaching (or internship) experience if the following conditions are met: there are no outstanding negative Fitness to Teach reviews that a candidate has not successfully remedied and the teacher candidate has earned a grade of "C" or better in any and all Approaches or Models of Teaching courses. Approaches courses are offered in the Division of Bicultural Bilingual Studies, the Department of Health and Kinesiology, and the Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching. The grade of "C" represents a minimum standard. Each department or division has the right to establish a higher grade requirement provided that the higher requirement is published in the catalog.

3. Probationary Acceptance

Teacher candidates are placed on probationary status in the case of a Level 1 or 2 Formal Review. (See below.) Teacher candidates will remain on probationary status until such time as they have successfully completed a remediation plan or a decision to revoke candidacy has been made. If a student successfully completes a remediation plan and additional Fitness to Teach referrals arise, the student's full program history will be reviewed.

D. Conditions for Completion of Student Teaching/Internship

Successful completion of student teaching/internship is a condition for meeting teacher certification requirements. Students may attempt student teaching/intern-ship a maximum of two times. If the student does not successfully complete the second student teaching experience, they will not be eligible to enroll in student teaching a third time. The student may appeal to the Fitness to Teach Council to be reinstated only in the case of documented extenuating circumstances.

E. Review of Teacher Candidates at UTSA

All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to participate in the process. Refusal to participate will not terminate the process. The level of review will depend on factors such as the nature, severity, frequency of the incident or concern. For example, repeated violations may result in immediate Formal Level 2 review. Violations of the UTSA or host school

district's student code of conduct will result in immediate Level 2 Formal Review.

1. Informal Review

An informal review involves a faculty member and a teacher candidate. When a faculty member has concerns about a teacher candidate meeting any of the fitness to teach criteria, the faculty member will:

- a. discuss the concerns directly with the teacher candidate and seek to work with the candidate to resolve the difficulties;
- b. advise the appropriate department head and the dean or his or her designee of the concern(s) in order to identify potential patterns and issues related to the teacher candidate;
- c. document dates and content of meetings with teacher candidates.

If a problem arises in the field, the cooperating teacher of the host school district may discuss concerns directly with the UTSA faculty member. The teacher candidate may also be included in this meeting.

2. Formal Review: Level 1

When a faculty member is sufficiently concerned about a teacher candidate's fitness to teach, he or she will fill out the *Fitness to Teach Referral Form Addressing Faculty Concerns*. These forms are to be turned in to the associate dean for teacher education or his or her designee.

A three-way conference will then be scheduled with the instructor, the teacher candidate, and the associate dean or his or her designee. During this conference, a plan for remediation will be developed. The nature and content of the plan will depend on the specific situation. However, all remediation plans will be stated in measurable, objective terms, include a reasonable timeline, and be signed by all parties involved. If the candidate fails the remediation plan(s) he/she will be placed on Level 2 Formal Review. If the candidate successfully completes the remediation plan, probationary status will be removed. The remediation plan may continue for more than one semester, depending on the individual circumstances.

3. Formal Review: Level 2

If a second incident or concern is reported on the same teacher candidate, the candidate has failed a remediation plan during the Level 1 Review, or the seriousness of the incident or concern

warrant it, the Fitness to Teach Council will be convened. This group (made up of faculty and chaired by the associate dean or his or her designee) will meet to:

- a. review the paperwork,
- b. interview the faculty members who have instructed the teacher candidate,
- c. interview the teacher candidate, and
- d. make a determination regarding the teacher candidate's suitability to continue in the program.

The teacher candidate is afforded due process throughout these proceedings. Following a Level 2 review, a letter of appeal may be submitted to the dean for consideration. The dean's decision is final.