



The Teaching Internship: How Much Time is “Enough” Time?

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Overview

Over the last two decades, scholars studying teacher preparation have increasingly focused investigations on coherence between training and classroom practice (Anderson-Levitt et al., 2017), their effectiveness after matriculation (Blanton et al., 2006; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Sleeter, 2014), as well as the implications of program components on equity for students (Aguirre et al., 2013) and for the preservice teachers themselves (Kuranishi & Oyler, 2017; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007). While there are many programmatic elements to consider when evaluating teacher preparation, one question that remains unresolved in research, but may impact each of these facets, is how much *time* is “enough” time for preservice teachers to spend in classrooms before they begin their professional careers (Ronfeldt & Renninger, 2012; Spooner et al., 2008). Among the purposes of the Maryland PDS 2025 Project is to conduct a meticulous review of the University of Maryland, College Park’s (UMD) current teacher preparation program, which includes among other objectives a review of (a) the time that undergraduate preservice teachers spend in internships and student teaching, and also (b) how they spend that time. This brief offers an overview of this issue in current research as well as the steps the PDS Project will take to address it at UMD and a call to action for scholars in the field.

Re-Imagining Teacher Preparation in Maryland Public Schools

Among the goals of the The Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, which inspired The Maryland PDS 2025 Project, is to increase in the rigor and standards of teacher preparation programs in the state (Kirwan et al., 2019, p. 20). To the Commission, this goal could be realized in part by creating teacher “practicum” programs that provide “a full school year of practical experience” (p. 53) in addition to earlier observation experiences that allow teacher candidates, “to determine if they have the aptitude and temperament for teaching” (p. 53). This charge resonates with a small, but growing body of scholarship that conceives of prospective teacher practica or “residencies” as “clinical” experiences, akin to those of medical professions (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 2005). But how much time *should* preservice teachers spend in classrooms as “interns” or “student teachers” before they seek employment? Furthermore, how should interns *spend* that time?

Scholarly Analysis of the Duration of Teacher Residencies

Research on preservice teachers is often premised on the idea that teacher preparation programs are predictors of teacher effectiveness, efficacy, and/or equity, particularly in the early years of teachers' careers (Boyd et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, Cheung, & Frelow, 2002), though some argue that there is insufficient data to make such claims (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Sleeter, 2014). Furthermore, policies increasingly emphasize authentic, coherent, and/or "clinical" teacher residency experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Goodson, 1993) which are met with similar degrees of suspicion (Sleeter, 2014). Critical to this Project's work, relatively few analyses have focused the lens on exactly how preservice educators spend their undergraduate credit hours (Ronfeldt & Reninger, 2012; Spooner et al., 2008). Among the barriers to our understanding of this phenomenon is that relatively few studies include rigorous methods that consider a host of potentially confounding variables such as placement school characteristics, unique features of preservice teacher cohorts, as well as preservice teachers' own career goals (Ronfeldt & Reninger, 2012, p. 1093). Increasingly, however, scholars argue that, in order to illuminate the effects of preservice preparation programs, research should include measurements that account for a diverse array of variables, measuring prospective teachers' performances against existing or self-constructed standards (Blanton et al., 2006), as well as the importance of focusing on individual preparation programs as much as cross-institutional studies (Sleeter, 2014). A common finding across several recent analyses of teacher preparation programs is that time spent in classrooms is only as good as the program that is preparing them (Ronfeldt & Reninger, 2012; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012). Extending beyond a year was shown in at least one study to have limited effects on teacher efficacy (Ronfeldt & Reninger, 2012).

Insights and Actions

How much time is enough time for preservice teachers? Current research on teacher preparation suggests that this question is best answered by pivoting to the *quality* of preservice experiences. However, a growing body of research suggests that it is reasonable to assume that the preservice conditions impact professional outcomes, and institutions of higher education, teachers, and public school students are likely best served if programs make the most of a year of preservice classroom experiences. In keeping with these findings, UMD and its partners in Prince George's County and Montgomery County Public Schools initiated collaborative work to rethink and redesign undergraduate and graduate experiences in public school settings. The PDS 2025 Project's "Yearlong Teacher Residency" Workgroup has undertaken to examine and propose a redesign of UMD's current preparation model to ensure the quality of a year's worth of classroom placements. This effort is inward-looking and cross-cutting. For instance, UMD currently offers teacher certification in twelve majors. While there is some overlap across and between programs in terms of time that students spend in K-12 classrooms in their coursework, there are some key points of discrepancy. Primarily, these differences emerge in the *terms* used to describe school-based experiences (e.g. "internship," "apprentice teaching," and "student teaching," to name a few), the *course requirements* associated with school placements, and--critical to this brief--their *duration*. While the latter is the focus of this brief, the former two elements may affect the amount of time undergraduates spend in

schools before graduation. We believe that our continued efforts to reflect on current research, existing programmatic structures, and to collect insights from key stakeholders from within UMD's College of Education and across partnering school districts will illuminate a path towards re-imagining the time that undergraduate students spend in schools. Furthermore, we hope that our work facilitates opportunities for scholars to analyze under-examined variables in the construction of teacher residencies and maximize the output of data that the YTR Workgroup collects from key stakeholders from each agency involved in the PDS 2025 Project.

Appendix

Appendix A: Sample of UMD Undergraduate Preservice Teacher School-Based Coursework

Program	Relevant Year 3 Courses (credits)	Time in Class- Room s	Relevant Year 4 Courses (credits)	Time in Class- Room s
EC/ECSE	Fall: Field Experience	Two 1/2 day-morning placements per week in an Infant/Toddler placement for a total of 10 weeks.	Fall: Field Experience	2 full days per week plus 4 Immersion Weeks.
	Spring: Field Experience	Two 1/2 day-morning placements per week, and a Full-day Immersion Week at the end of the semester.	Spring: Field Experience	5 full days per week
Music Education	Fall: Coursework	none	Fall: Pre-Student Teaching	none
	Spring: Coursework	none	Spring: Elementary Student Teaching (3credits) AND Secondary Student Teaching (3credits)	Full school days during the spring semester.
Secondary Social Studies	Fall: Coursework	none	Fall: Field Experiences (2credits)	1 day per week (in two school settings)
	Spring: Coursework	none	Spring: Internship (12credits)	5 days per week (full time placement)

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