

RESEARCH

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Brief

Missouri State University Internship Academy

The Missouri State University College of Education is committed to educating teacher candidates through a high-quality teacher preparation program. A new addition to this program is an alternative to the traditional, semester-long student teaching experience at the conclusion of the students' degree program. This alternative program, called the Missouri State University Internship Academy (IA), is a yearlong field experience in a single public school setting. The Internship Academy allows teacher preparation students to engage in active learning in an elementary classroom for an entire school year. University coursework is integrated into this placement.

At the conclusion of the pilot year of the IA, research was conducted with all participants, allowing them to provide information on their perception of how effectively the Internship Academy prepared the interns to become teachers. Two focus group interviews were held. The first focus group had 12 participants. This included seven interns and five Master Teachers. The second focus group had 13 participants including four interns, six Master Teachers, and three Teachers in Residence. Focus group participants were 92% (23) female and 8% (2) male. Personal interviews were conducted with a representative principal from each district, the Teacher Internship Academy Director, and the Executive Director. Personal interviews were conducted over the phone or face-to-face at the end of the pilot year. Participants were 80% (4) female and 20% (1) male.

In addition to interviews, all participants were emailed a survey consisting of 38 questions pertaining to intern preparation in relation to the Missouri Teacher Standards. All participants in the research were involved in the IA during the pilot 2015-2016 school year. This included 25 interns, 25 Master Teachers, four Teachers in Residence, and two full time Missouri State University faculty members. Fifty-five participants responded to the survey.

Interview Results

Table 1: Top Program Strengths

	Frequency of Theme Appearance in Personal Interviews, Focus Group Interviews, and Open-Ended Survey Questions
Relationships	41
Classroom management	29
Seeing the year from beginning to end	28
Experiencing the beginning of school	26

The theme that emerged more often than any other theme was relationships. Forty-one times, participants mentioned the positive impact relationships had on the success of the program. The relationship interns developed with students was key, as was the relationship between interns and Master Teachers. One intern said, “You learn by asking questions. You have to have the communication with your Master Teacher. The Master Teacher has to be willing to share... You just have to have that good relationship between the two, and I think that is the key.” Additionally, relationships with parents, colleagues, University Instructors, Teachers in Residence, and principals were also mentioned. One intern stated that the relationships were very important because she was not working only with her Master Teacher. She was working with the other colleagues in her building as well. If there was something her Master Teacher could not answer completely, they would go to someone else and get the answer. She further said, “Developing relationships throughout the whole building, even district-wide, has made a huge difference.” Another intern said, “At the beginning of the year, I began building relationships. I went to open house so I got to meet all of our kids and our parents before school started. I feel like this batch of kids and their parents really take me seriously. I’m not just the student teacher. I am the second teacher in the classroom because I’ve been there all year long. I’m just really glad I got to experience that because I don’t think it’s always the case when you’re just a one-semester student teacher.”

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“You have to have the communication with your Master Teacher. The Master Teacher has to be willing to share... You just have to have that good relationship between the two, and I think that is the key.” – An intern speaking about the importance of the Master Teacher-Intern relationship

Table 2: Top Program Challenges

	Frequency of Theme Appearance in Personal Interviews, Focus Group Interviews, and Open-Ended Survey Questions
Too much University coursework and irrelevancy and timing of assignments	55
Disconnect and distrust between University faculty and public schools	30

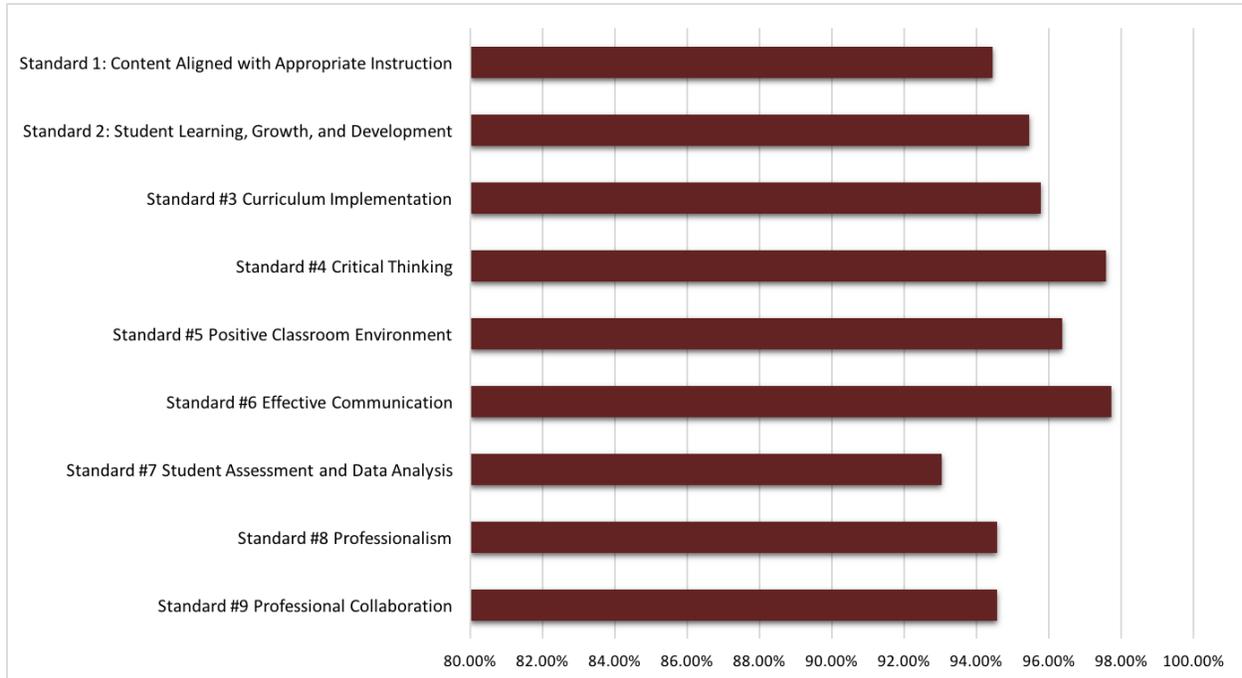
There were two themes which emerged significantly more often than any others. Too much University coursework and irrelevancy and timing of assignments emerged fifty-five times. One Master Teacher stated the amount of University coursework they are required to do should be reduced considerably because it is unrealistic to expect the interns to co-teach all day everyday and still complete University assignments which have no relevance to the classroom where they are teaching. The theme that emerged next with the most frequency was a disconnect and distrust between University faculty and the public schools. As a Teacher in Residence, one participant was involved in the planning and meetings with the University faculty and the public school representatives. She said, “There is definitely a trust issue. Change is hard for everybody, and this is a pilot program... The University worked so many years to build such a respectable program, and now they’re changing that respectable program. I think they almost felt like they’re not needed, and that’s not the case. We’re just trying to find that balance.” Another participant indicated, “The biggest challenge has been trust between the college faculty and the school faculty. The college faculty are reluctant to change their ways and be open to the quality of an in-classroom experience that can more than adequately teach the competencies that build a strong beginning teacher.”

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Survey Results

Perception of Intern Preparation Measured Against Missouri Teacher Standards n=55



Master teachers participating in the Internship Academy during the 2015-2016 school year were asked to rate their perceptions of intern preparedness when measured against the Missouri Educator Standards. The standards include 36 targeted indicators that can be used for evaluation. Master teachers rated interns on a scale of not at all, somewhat, adequately, and extensively for each of these 36 indicators. The chart above shows the percentage of responses indicating interns were adequately or extensively prepared and are reported in aggregated across the nine Missouri Educator Standards. The survey results indicate participants perceived interns to be adequately or extensively prepared when measured across all of the Missouri Educator Standards. However, interns were rated highest in the areas of Effective Communication (standard #6), Critical Thinking (standard #4), and Positive Classroom Environment (standard #5).

In addition to the survey data collected from Master Teachers participating in the Internship Academy, data from the Missouri Educator Evaluation System (MEES) were also examined. The MEES is used to evaluate all pre-service teacher education candidates on sixteen of the thirty-six Missouri Educator Standards which have been identified by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MO DESE) as having the greatest impact on student achievement in the classroom. These specific indicators are presented in the table below.

Table 3: MEES Indicators by Standard

Standard 1: Content Knowledge	
Indicators 1.1 and 1.2	1.1 Content Knowledge and Academic Language 1.2 Student Engagement in the Classroom
Standard 2: Learning, Growth and Development	
Indicator 2.4	2.4 Differentiated Lesson Design
Standard #3: Curriculum Implementation	
Indicators 3.1 and 3.4	3.1 Implementation of Curriculum Standards 3.2 Lessons for Diverse Learners
Standard #4: Critical Thinking	
Indicator 4.1	4.1 Instructional Strategies for Critical Thinking
Standard #5: Positive Classroom Environment	
Indicators 5.1 and 5.2	5.1 Classroom Management Techniques 5.2 Management of Time, Space, Transitions, and Activities
Standard #6: Effective Communication	
Indicator 6.1	6.1 Verbal and Nonverbal Communication
Standard #7: Student Assessment and Data Analysis	
Indicators 7.1, 7.2 and 7.5	7.1 Effective Use of Assessments 7.2 Assessment Data to Improve Learning 7.5 Communication of Student Progress and Maintaining Records
Standard #8: Professionalism	
Indicator 8.1	8.1 Self-Assessment and Improvement
Standard #9: Professional Collaboration	
Indicators 9.1 and 9.3	9.1 Induction and Collegial Activities 9.3 Cooperative Partnerships in Support of Student Learning

A series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare formative MEES scores by faculty members of student teachers in traditional placements and students in the Internship Academy. There was a significant difference in the scores on implementation of curriculum standards (quality indicator 3.1) for interns ($M=2.61$, $SD=0.58$) and traditional ($M=2.28$, $SD=0.59$) students; $t(89)=2.89$, $p = 0.23$. In addition, we found a significant difference in the scores on communication of student progress and maintaining records (quality indicator 7.5) for interns ($M=2.11$, $SD=0.46$) and traditional ($M=1.77$, $SD=0.91$) students; $t(62)=2.06$, $p = 0.43$. These results suggest that type of placement has an effect on quality indicators 3.1 and 7.5 during the student teaching process. Students in the Internship Academy scored statistically significantly higher on implementation of curriculum standards and on communication of student progress and maintaining records than traditional students.

In addition to the MEES data, scores from the Missouri Content Assessment (MoCA) for Elementary Education were also examined to determine if difference exist between traditional student teachers and interns. While interns tend to score higher on these exams than traditional student teachers, no significant differences were found. The table below displays the overall scores by placement for each of the four sub-tests on the MoCA exam.

Table 3: MoCA scores by Content Area and Placement Type

	Student Type	n	Mean	S. D.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
English Language Arts Subtest	Intern	23	246.30	19.001	1.248	116	.214
	Traditional	95	240.16	21.666			
Mathematics Subtest	Intern	23	254.39	16.323	.777	117	.439
	Traditional	96	250.56	22.204			
Science Subtest	Intern	23	242.96	11.463	-.162	177	.871
	Traditional	96	243.69	20.788			
Social Studies Subtest	Intern	23	244.04	16.185	1.006	117	.317
	Traditional	96	239.33	20.986			

Summary

The Missouri State University Internship Academy is an innovative approach to improving teacher preparation. Innovation is not easy. It comes with change, difficulty, and more change. Ultimately, a yearlong clinical placement has a significant impact on improving teacher quality. One intern said, “This has been the most stressful and tiring college year of my life. It has also been the most rewarding, most informative, and greatest experience of my life.” Another intern stated elementary education needs to be more difficult for teacher candidates. “Don’t be afraid that it’ll be too hard for them. Teaching is hard sometimes! That’s what makes it important, valuable, and worth doing. This program was by far the most beneficial, authentic, and real-life experience I have had while being a part of the education program. This has to be the future if the goal is to continue training quality teachers.”