

## **It's in the Handbook! A New Guide for the Student Teaching Internship**

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### **Introduction**

Significant agricultural education research is devoted to the student teaching internship, and rightly so. Student teaching not only builds teaching skill (Smalley et al., 2015), it also requires navigating a complex relationship between teacher candidate (TC), cooperating teacher (CT), and university supervisor (Paulsen et al., 2016). Amid learning new skills and developing relationships, TCs also must meet additional licensure requirements, including, but not limited to licensure exams, paperwork, and edTPA. We needed to alleviate the challenge of navigating both experience and resources.

While courses within our academic program are intentionally sequenced, the teaching internship handbook content was not. Previous versions highlighted responsibilities and expectations, internship and teaching schedules, and a myriad of suggested professional experiences. Substantial resources were available to reference and utilize but lacked direct connection to the experience in terms of where and how TCs might use them. Former TCs requested “checklists” identifying tasks and sought guidance regarding when they should be completing the responsibilities of the internship. As a result, we revised the teaching internship handbook and supporting Canvas site. This innovation is consistent with Paulsen et al.’s (2016) call to align teaching internships with assessments and best practices in teaching.

### **How It Works**

To situate resources within the teaching internship, we redesigned our student teaching handbook to serve as a weekly guide. We structured the handbook to correspond with the fifteen-week experience with multiple TC/CT seminars, including mirroring pages for teacher candidates and cooperating teachers. In addition to weekly guides, we also provided pages to organize the experience, including a calendar with key dates, contact information, and grading policies.

Each TC page included encouragement, a place for weekly goals, a reminder checklist, three to five resources, and a reflection prompt. The mirroring CT page included a mentor tip for the week, conversation starters, a reminder checklist, three to five resources, and a reflection prompt. While the pages had a similar format, the weekly content was tailored to the individual role to grow both future teachers and mentors. In addition, a supporting Canvas site served as an electronic version of the handbook. This format allowed us to stagger the edTPA experience. Each week, students were directed to a FlipGrid reflection with an edTPA prompt, and resources referenced throughout the handbook refocused edTPA as an assessment of teacher effectiveness rather than a licensure hoop.

### **Implications**

Student teaching is overwhelming enough without having to sort and sift through resources. This new format made our handbook accessible and useful to both TCs and CTs by sequencing and scaffolding resources based on when they would be needed throughout the experience. The new format also helped TCs connect their university training to the student teaching internship; each week connected students to specific course content and resources. The streamlined and sequential organization has reduced some TC tension resulting from searching for resources. As such, TCs were able to refocus questions of university supervisors on becoming a teacher rather than the logistics of the experience.

A teacher candidate commented, “I like the calendar in the front and room to write in things that will be happening. I also like the to-do list each week; it’s nice to know what I should be doing and keeping up with.” A cooperating teacher offered:

Having the conversation starters and reminders listed out for each week has been very helpful to give focus for each week and make sure they are growing throughout the internship. The binder is also very helpful to stay connected with the assignments they are turning in so that I can ask questions and give support as needed.

### **Future Plans & Advice**

We plan to continue using this format and would encourage others to do the same. A key addition to future handbooks will also include a clearer overview of the student teaching internship, including TC, CT, and university supervisor roles, as well as a general overview of the edTPA assessment and guidelines for the reflective processes integral to long term TC success (Meder et al., 2018).

Furthermore, we encourage others to use a hardcopy handbook in tandem with their learning management system (LMS). This has been invaluable in aligning a calendar, managing due dates, and maintaining adaptable communication throughout the student teaching internship.

### **Costs & Resources Needed**

The cost of implementing our new handbook was minimal, and our willingness to share this resource further reduces the time commitment for other faculty to take a similar approach. While the initial handbook and Canvas page took approximately 20 hours to create and compile, once built, this resource is transferrable and usable over multiple cohorts to guide TCs and CTs through the student teaching internship.

Each TC, CT, and university supervisor received a hard copy of the handbook and printed copies of required assessments, observation forms, templates, and the edTPA handbook. The total cost for binders (\$1.36 each) and binder dividers (\$0.94 each) was \$27.56. Due to COVID, we were required to mail these resources to candidates; shipping cost \$76.05. In future years, shipping costs would be eliminated with binders distributed in person.

**References**

- Meder, A., Smalley, S., & Retallick, M. S. (2018). Evaluating first year agriculture teachers' use of reflection. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 59(2), 289-304. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2018.02289>
- Paulsen, T. H., Smalley, S. W., & Retallick, M. S. (2016). Student Teacher Activities—Are they relevant? The university supervisor's perspective. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 57(3), 33-54. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2016.03033>
- Smalley, S. W., Retallick, M. S., & Paulsen, T. H. (2015). Cooperating teachers' perspectives of student teaching skills and activities. *Journal of Agricultural Education*. 56(4). 123 - 137. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2015.04123>