



STUDENT TEACHING HANDBOOK

2026 – 2027

PreK-4 Certification • PreK-4 with Special Education K-12 Dual Certification

400 Saint Bernardine Street, Reading, PA 19607 • 610-796-8200
Alvernia.edu

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1. Introduction

Alvernia University Education Department

Name/Position	Email	Phone Number
Dr. Shawn Rutt; Chair	Shawn.Rutt@alvernia.edu	610-796-8268
Dr. Molly Brobst	Molly.brobst@alvernia.edu	610-568-1529 570-956-6251 (C)
Dr. Arielle Phillips Law	Arielle.PhillipsLaw@alvernia.edu	610-796-8207
Dr. Chrystine Mitchell	Chrystine.mitchell@alvernia.edu	717-468-6702

Mission of the Alvernia Education Department

The Alvernia University Education Program, rooted in a proud Franciscan heritage, provides instruction in educational theory balanced with current classroom practice. The program prepares reflective practitioners who demonstrate content knowledge, pedagogical skill, and the professional dispositions expected of effective teachers.

Franciscan Mission and Core Values

Student teaching is shaped by Alvernia's Franciscan mission and its core values of service, humility, peacemaking, contemplation, and collegiality. Candidates carry these values into every placement classroom. For the University mission, vision, and core values, see [Alvernia's Mission, Values and Vision](#).

Purpose of Student Teaching

Student teaching, also called the Professional Semester, is the culminating experience of the education program. Candidates apply what they have studied in a supervised classroom setting, observe theory and practice working side by side, and take on progressively greater instructional responsibility under the direction of a qualified cooperating teacher.

Candidates are expected to examine their own strengths and areas for growth throughout the semester and to seek improvement where it is needed. Everyone involved in this experience, the candidate, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor, shares responsibility for making it productive.

Certification Pathways Covered by This Handbook

This handbook applies to two pathways:

- PreK-4 certification
- PreK-4 certification with Special Education K-12 as a dual major

This handbook does not address secondary or middle level certification, as the Department does not currently offer those programs.

2. University Policies That Apply to Student Teaching

Student teaching is governed by University policy, not by separate program rules. The policies below apply in full during the Professional Semester, including at placement sites. This handbook links to each one rather than restating it, so that candidates always see the current version.

Topic	Governing policy
Student conduct	Candidates remain subject to the Alvernia University Student Code of Citizenship at all placement sites. The Code applies on and off campus for as long as a student has a continuing relationship with the University. See the Student Handbook, Student Code of Citizenship .
Grading	Grades follow the Alvernia University undergraduate grading policy. See the Undergraduate Catalog .
Accommodations and ADA	Candidates who need accommodations should contact the Office of Accessibility Services. See the University ADA policy . Approved accommodations are shared with a placement site only with the candidate's written consent, coordinated through the university supervisor.
Harassment and sexual misconduct	The University's Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy applies to all field placements. Reports may be made to the Title IX Coordinator . A candidate may also raise a concern with the university supervisor, Department Chair, or Dean. Doing so does not replace or delay the University process.
Grade appeals and grievances	A candidate who disputes a grade, a removal decision, or a gate decision may pursue the Academic Grievance Procedure in the Student Handbook, which requires the candidate to begin with the instructor or decision-maker within 20 calendar days of the occurrence.
Attendance	Candidates follow the calendar of the placement site rather than the University calendar. Specific attendance requirements, including permitted absences, are stated in the student teaching course syllabus as provided for in the University attendance policy .
Clearances and health compliance	All clearances and health requirements must be verified in Complio before the first day of placement. See University health and clearance requirements .

3. Eligibility and Requirements

Candidates must have completed the required coursework for their pathway and must have the following in place by the last day of the semester preceding student teaching:

- A TB test signed by a health professional
- Three clearances showing no record of arrests or convictions
- Verified compliance with University health requirements in Complio
- All required field experience hours for prior stages, verified on the Field Hours Log and Verification form

Candidates are responsible for providing clearance documents to the placement district as well as to the University.

Pennsylvania Certification Testing

Candidates must take and pass the certification tests required for their certificate area to be certified by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Candidates are responsible for registering for these tests and for meeting all testing deadlines. Passing the required tests is a condition of certification, separate from passing student teaching.

4. Organization of Student Teaching

Definition

Student teaching is a full-time, supervised, semester-long teaching experience that closely approximates full-time employment as a teacher.

Placement Structure

PreK-4 candidates are ordinarily placed in a single classroom for the full fifteen weeks, which allows the candidate to build sustained relationships with students and to see a full arc of instruction. Where a single placement is not available, or where the Department determines that a split placement better serves the candidate, the semester may instead be divided between two classrooms across the PreK-4 grade band. Candidates are told which structure applies to them before the semester begins.

Dual certification candidates seeking PreK-4 with Special Education K-12 complete two placements, one in each certification area, of approximately seven weeks each. Each placement has its own cooperating teacher, its own hours log, and its own midterm and final evaluation. Where possible, the special education placement is in a classroom that includes students with an Individualized Education Program.

Placement availability

Placement structure depends on district capacity and is not guaranteed. The Department secures the strongest available placement for each candidate and confirms the structure before the semester begins. A candidate may not arrange or negotiate a placement structure directly with a district.

Assignment of Placements

Placement assignments are made by the Department in cooperation with the participating school districts and private schools. School districts retain the right to accept or decline a candidate. Candidates may not arrange their own placements or contact a district directly to request one.

Transportation

Candidates are responsible for their own transportation throughout student teaching. The Department encourages candidates to carpool where possible but cannot guarantee a placement within any particular distance.

Seminars

Candidates are required to register for ED472: Seminar for Student Teaching, and this is a requirement during the student teaching semester. The first seminar will be held before student teaching begins and covers expectations, documentation, and evaluation. The remaining seminars will be held during the semester and addresses certification, job searching, and the transition to employment.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Candidate

Professionalism

- Show enthusiasm for teaching and act in a mature, responsible manner
- Demonstrate punctuality, thorough preparation, and confidentiality
- Follow the rules and regulations of the school and district, including dress and school day expectations, remembering that candidates are guests of the school
- Learn school policies on discipline, safety, first aid, use of equipment, copying, and field trips
- Complete all required activities by the deadlines set by the cooperating teacher or university supervisor
- Demonstrate care, interest, and concern for all students by remaining alert to their needs

Preparation and Instruction

- Allow adequate time for instructional preparation, including organizing materials
- Prepare lesson plans in sufficient detail that effective instruction occurs
- Base instruction on Pennsylvania standards and the established curriculum
- Integrate technology where it enhances learning
- Adapt instruction to meet the needs of the diverse learners in the class
- Use evidence-based methods
- Assist in evaluating student progress through formal and informal assessment
- Accept feedback and suggestions professionally, and act on them
- Reflect on instruction and on all aspects of the teaching day

Classroom Environment and Student Interaction

- Accept responsibility for classroom management and for the climate of the classroom as delegated by the cooperating teacher
- Learn about students, including their names and any special needs
- Maintain professional relationships with students
- Show respect to families and to the significant adults in students' lives
- Attend or participate in extracurricular activities where invited

Conduct Expectations

- Contact the cooperating teacher and university supervisor to introduce yourself and arrange an initial meeting before the semester begins
- Conform to the policies, hours, calendar, and routines of the school and the cooperating teacher
- Limit outside commitments, including employment, clubs, and athletics, during the Professional Semester
- Obtain approval from the university supervisor before leaving early for any reason
- Notify both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher immediately in the event of an absence
- Do not contact parents or schedule parent conferences without the approval of the cooperating teacher
- Exercise caution with social media, and maintain appropriate boundaries with students and families online as well as in person

Professional dispositions

Candidates are assessed on eight professional dispositions using the Professional Dispositions Assessment, which is completed by the candidate and by a faculty member or supervisor at the student teaching midpoint. The dispositions, the indicators, and the rating thresholds appear on that instrument. A documented concern initiates a Dispositions Action Plan.

The Cooperating Teacher

The cooperating teacher is the most influential part of the teacher education program. Alvernia values its cooperating teachers and appreciates the time and expertise they contribute. Cooperating teachers must hold a teaching certificate in the area of the candidate's certification and must have at least three years of teaching experience, one of which is in the current district.

Cooperating teachers are asked to:

- Acquaint the candidate with school policies, procedures, regulations, and privileges
- Arrange a tour of the school facility
- Permit a pre-teaching observation period with analysis of instruction
- Help the candidate connect with other teachers in the building to complete two additional observations
- Observe the candidate's teaching, accentuating strengths while identifying areas for growth
- Record day-to-day feedback on the Cooperating Teacher Feedback Log
- Conduct and submit at minimum one formal observation (of the ST) approximately every four weeks
- Communicate progress to the candidate and to the university supervisor
- Acquaint the candidate with available technology and with organizational details such as class lists, seating charts, and grading practices
- Share ideas, resources, and materials, and accept the candidate as a colleague
- Complete the Student Teaching Evaluation and Three-Way Conference Record at midterm and at final

- Contact the university supervisor without waiting for the next scheduled visit if a concern arises

The cooperating teacher does not assign the grade. Cooperating teacher ratings and comments are weighted input to the grade, which is assigned by the university supervisor.

The University Supervisor

The university supervisor coordinates the experience and serves as liaison among the candidate, the cooperating teacher, and the Department. Supervisor responsibilities are:

- Review this handbook and the current instrument set before the semester begins
- Establish a communication plan with the candidate
- Hold an initial meeting with the candidate and cooperating teacher near the beginning of the placement
- Observe the candidate and complete the Field Experience Observation Instrument at each visit, providing feedback as soon as possible afterward
- Conference privately with the candidate following each visit
- Provide guidance in developing lesson plans and units
- Check the Student Teaching Binder at each visit for the required components
- Initiate a Placement Improvement Plan when a rating of 0 is recorded in any observed teaching domain, or a rating of 2 is recorded in the same domain on two consecutive observations, and notify the Chair
- Lead the three-way conferences at midterm and at final
- Complete PDE 430 at midterm and at final using the conference outcome
- Enter domain ratings and rubric scores in the learning management system for program reporting
- Write a letter of recommendation for the candidate
- Assign the final grade and report it to the University
- Maintain a working relationship with cooperating teachers and school administrators

6. The Student Teaching Binder

Each candidate keeps a Student Teaching Binder, established before the first day of placement and available to the university supervisor at every visit. The binder contains the following.

Component	Requirement
This handbook	A copy of this handbook, for reference throughout the semester.
Weekly reflection log	An entry for every week, beginning in week one. At minimum two substantive paragraphs: one summarizing the week's activities and one reflecting on professional growth. Handwritten or typed. Use the Weekly Reflection Log template.
Lesson plans	A plan for every lesson taught, whether small group, whole group, or one to one. Use the Alvernia lesson plan format or the format used by the cooperating teacher, with permission. Plans

Component	Requirement
	include behavioral objectives or essential questions, Pennsylvania standards, materials and resources, procedures covering introduction, development and closure, and the evaluation method. The cooperating teacher initials each plan to indicate approval before the lesson is taught. Plans must be legible, thorough, in logical order, and free of spelling and grammatical errors.
Observations of other teachers	At least two observations of two other teachers, each covering at least one subject or period, documented on the Observation of Other Teachers form. Each includes a narrative of what was observed, strategies and techniques, instructional activities, management practices, and reflection. The candidate plans these with the cooperating teacher; they may occur in other schools within the placement district.
Collection of teaching ideas	Bulletin board sketches, learning center ideas, record-keeping documents, family communication samples such as newsletters, useful websites, and instructional resources.
Evaluation copies	Midterm and final Student Teaching Evaluation and Three-Way Conference Records, PDE 430 forms, and the Professional Dispositions Assessment.

7. Evaluation

Instruments

Instrument	When and by whom
Field Experience Observation Instrument	Completed by the university supervisor at each observation visit.
Cooperating Teacher Feedback Log	Kept by the cooperating teacher throughout the placement. Formative only; not scored.
Cooperating Teacher Observation Form	Completed by the cooperating teacher at a minimum once every 4-weeks
Student Teaching Evaluation and Three-Way Conference Record	Completed independently by the candidate and the cooperating teacher before each three-way conference, then completed jointly at the conference. Used at midterm and at final.
Professional Dispositions Assessment	Completed by the candidate and by the supervisor at the student teaching midpoint.
PDE 430	Completed by the university supervisor at midterm and at final, as required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, using the three-way conference outcome.

Midterm and Final Sequence

1. The cooperating teacher keeps the Feedback Log throughout the placement, and the university supervisor completes the Observation Instrument at each visit.
2. Before each conference, the candidate and the cooperating teacher independently complete their rating columns on the Student Teaching Evaluation form, without comparing answers.
3. The university supervisor convenes a three-way conference with the candidate and the cooperating teacher. Ratings are compared, differences of two or more levels are discussed, and the conference record is completed together.
4. The university supervisor completes PDE 430 for the placement using the conference outcome, and enters the domain ratings in the learning management system.
5. At final, the cooperating teacher provides a recommendation letter.

Timing. Midterm evaluation occurs at the midpoint of each placement, and final evaluation at its conclusion. Where a candidate completes more than one placement in a semester, the midterm evaluation occurs near the completion of the first placement, and the final evaluation occurs near the completion of the second placement.

Grading

Grades for student teaching follow the Alvernia University undergraduate grading policy. [See the Undergraduate Catalog.](#)

The rubric used to determine the student teaching grade, including component weights, rating descriptors, and the minimum grade required for recommendation for certification, is published in the student teaching course syllabus.

The minimum grade for student teaching is C. Because student teaching is required for the degree, a candidate who does not earn a C must complete a remediation pathway before the degree can be conferred, and will not be recommended for certification.

8. When Concerns Arise

The Department's approach is to identify concerns early, while there is still time to address them, and to document each step. Candidates are told about a concern at the time it is raised, not at the end of the placement.

Early Intervention

Any of the following initiates a documented conference within five business days: a rating of 0 in any observed teaching domain; a rating of 2 in the same domain on two consecutive observations; a midterm result below expectation; a documented dispositions concern; or a concern raised by the cooperating teacher or principal.

Written Plans

- **Placement Improvement Plan** addresses performance concerns. It states observable required actions, the support the program will provide, a review date no more than four weeks out, and the consequence if the actions are not demonstrated.

- **Dispositions Action Plan** addresses professional disposition concerns, on the same terms.

Removal from a Placement

The Department makes every effort to secure placements that support candidate success. In a limited number of cases a placement is not completed. A removal may be initiated by the cooperating teacher or principal, by the candidate, or by the university supervisor.

All removals require the approval of the Chair of the Education Department. No candidate is removed from a placement, and no reassignment is arranged, without the Chair's approval. Where immediate removal is necessary for the safety of students, the university supervisor may act at once and must notify the Chair the same day for ratification.

Initiated by the cooperating teacher or principal

1. The cooperating teacher or principal contacts the university supervisor.
2. The university supervisor notifies the Chair and arranges a meeting with the candidate.
3. The cooperating teacher completes the evaluation form.
4. The university supervisor completes an evaluation.
5. The Chair determines whether the candidate is withdrawn from the school and whether another placement is arranged.

Initiated by the candidate

1. The candidate writes a clear statement of the reason for withdrawal.
2. The candidate contacts the university supervisor, who notifies the Chair.
3. The supervisor arranges a meeting with the cooperating teacher and, where appropriate, the principal.
4. The candidate may request another assignment. Subject to Chair approval, and where appropriate, the candidate remains in the school until a second placement is confirmed.

Initiated by the university supervisor

1. The supervisor writes a clear statement of reasons for withdrawal after two documented visits.
2. The supervisor contacts the principal and the cooperating teacher.
3. The supervisor arranges a meeting with the cooperating teacher and, where appropriate, the principal, and brings the recommendation to the Chair for approval.

In an extreme case a candidate may not be placed in another school. Abusive behavior or language, demonstrated inability to manage children, drug or alcohol abuse, or inability to meet professional expectations may result in immediate removal and dismissal from the program. The Chair determines the outcome in all such cases, and the Dean is notified.

Documentation and grievance rights

Every removal is documented on the Removal and Reassignment Documentation form, which requires a written statement of reasons, a record of prior interventions, the grade assigned, whether withdrawal was offered and the candidate's response, and a dated notice of grievance rights. A program-initiated removal results in a grade of W rather than F. A candidate may challenge a

removal decision or a resulting grade through the Academic Grievance Procedure in the Student Handbook, within 20 calendar days. Because the Chair approves all removals, a grievance concerning a removal decision begins with the Dean rather than the Chair.

9. Forms and Instruments

The following documents are maintained separately so that candidates, cooperating teachers, and supervisors always use the current version. They are distributed at the first seminar and are available from the Department.

Document	Used by
Field Experience Observation Instrument	University supervisor
Common Lesson Plan Rubric	Faculty and supervisors
Cooperating Teacher Feedback Log	Cooperating teacher
Cooperating Teacher Observation Form	Cooperating teacher
Student Teaching Evaluation and Three-Way Conference Record	Candidate, cooperating teacher, supervisor
Professional Dispositions Assessment and Dispositions Action Plan	Candidate, faculty, supervisor
Weekly Reflection Log template	Candidate
Observation of Other Teachers form	Candidate
Gate Decision Record	Decision authority
Placement Improvement Plan	Supervisor, candidate, Chair
Removal and Reassignment Documentation	Supervisor, candidate, Chair
Recommended placement timeline	Candidate, cooperating teacher