The mission of the College of Education and Professional Studies (CEPS) at Jacksonville State University (JSU), located in Jacksonville, Alabama, is to prepare students for successful careers in a variety of professions, including career and technical education (CTE) teacher preparation. The college’s uniqueness is reflected by its diversity of programs and services. CEPS programs enable graduates to be creative decision makers who effectively solve problems using concepts appropriate for each discipline.

The CEPS programs maintain rigor and relevance through outreach and partnerships with schools and businesses related to its programs within and surrounding the university’s service area. We believe that strong affiliations with constituency groups such as superintendents, principals and teachers benefit our teacher candidates through supervision of practical experiences, and as members of college advisory committees dealing with program development. The ultimate goal of the CEPS is to assure that its graduates are effective, highly performing employees.

CTE Certifications
The Alabama State Department of Education offers five distinct certifications in the area of CTE. The programs are agriscience education, business/marketing education, family and consumer science education, technical education, and career technologies. Graduates from each program must be able to demonstrate a knowledge of the history, philosophy, principles, objectives, trends, patterns and issues of CTE programs; the organization, management and methods of assessment of CTE programs; the Alabama Course of Study: career and technical education; and teaching techniques, including evidenced-based strategies, project-based learning, and authentic assessments applied to CTE programs. The CTE program Pre-service Teachers complete the general requirements of the JSU teacher education program. In addition, due to the unique demands of the CTE program, pre-service teachers have an opportunity to experience the varied responsibilities of a CTE teacher.

Clinical Experience Key to Learning
Immersing students in schools during their clinical experience is one of the primary ways that CEPS ensures that CTE teacher candidates learn the skills necessary to be effective teachers. The clinical experience portion of the teacher education program is divided into four levels:

**LEVEL I**
In their professional studies classes and in method classes, teacher candidates engage in micro-teaching, project and unit development, subject matter portfolios, group research, presentations, and other activities.

**LEVEL II**
Activities for Level II experiences are provided at the Teacher Learning Center and the Child Development Center. These experiences provide teacher candidates with opportunities for one-to-one tutoring and interaction with local children. Candidates work with university instructors to diagnose learning needs and develop and implement learning activities.

**LEVEL III**
These experiences are provided in collaboration with local schools and provide gradual exposure to the classroom. Pre-service teachers conduct observations, teach classes and participate in school activities. College professors, along with classroom teachers—called cooperating teachers—monitor JSU students’ performances.

**LEVEL IV**
Intern teachers spend approximately 15 weeks in this level and work with carefully selected mentors. Intern teachers have a cooperating teacher in the classroom setting and a university supervisor. This child development lab. Remaining hours are completed in the course CTE 460 Practicum Plus.

While not required, we prefer that CTE 460 Practicum Plus students conduct their hours in a CTE program that is Business and Industry Certified (BIC). For Alabama’s CTE programs to receive Carl Perkins funding, they must pass a strenuous business and industry certification process, which requires accountability on numerous issues. We try to place our pre-service teachers with cooperating teachers who have three years of teaching experience in their field of study and have earned either a master’s or National Board Certification. Our pre-service teachers gain better appropriate articles to share with the class. Practicum students don’t write a paper; they learn how to keep up with best practices from peer-reviewed publications. That’s what a working teacher will have to actually complete. Writing papers works toward a degree or a grade or tenure; reading articles, meanwhile, improves a working teacher’s toolbox. This research project, along with the Content Pedagogy Project, lesson plans, unit plans, and a Classroom Management Plan are uploaded into a LiveText electronic portfolio, which university supervisors assess using rubrics.

CTE 461 is the methods course which is offered online for our undergraduates. Those who have already earned a Board Certification.

In the program, CEPS requires all pre-service teachers to complete a total of 201 practicum hours before admission to internship. JSU requirements far exceed the minimum number of hours required by the state. Approximately 30 of these hours are earned through micro-teaching projects and individual lessons. Family and consumer science education majors may earn additional hours by participating in our level experience in developing lesson plans when their cooperating teachers are required to submit lesson plans. During the practicum, CTE pre-service teachers write and teach five lesson plans which they then reflect upon, make changes to, and submit to the university supervisor.

These plans are finally incorporated with an Integrated Academics plan (an 18-week planner) and a final course exam into a Content Pedagogy Project. In addition, JSU CTE pre-service teachers are encouraged to complete their practicum hours with CTE programs that maintain an active Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO).

Research skills are exercised during CTE 460, but only to the extent to find

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Teachers are mentored by a cooperating... During the CTE 495 Internship, interns also begin a CTSO binder or file. Many interns fill this with photos, fundraising, and “fun-raising” activities that they accumulate from their own participation during their high school days and/or from being involved with the cooperating schools’ clubs while they completed practicum and intern hours. They also create a BIC binder for which they download current state standard check sheets and create corresponding sections. Interns create an Integrated Academics plan, a syllabus for at least one course they are likely to teach, and a safety test for a related course. During CTE 462, they prepare a professional development file for which they use the Alabama State Department of Education’s teacher evaluation documents.

The textbook used in CTE 462 covers the history of CTE, as well as federal funding and legislation. Interns make two major presentations, one from the textbook and one on diversity. Two minor presentations on academic concepts and teaching/learning strategies are also given. Presentations account for about 26 percent of the course grade. Textbook discussion and quizzes account for about 13 percent. The remaining points for CTE 462 come from projects that interns can use once a teaching job is found.

Job Placement

CTE 462 interns create an application with Alabama’s online application system (which every school district can use to post jobs) where they can receive and review applications. We use our extensive networking and the state’s listserve to link our graduates to job openings. The state department of education collects data on first-year teachers, and generates summative data to the universities so that we may measure outcomes and refine programs if needed.

Student Input

We have a short anonymous survey to gather feedback from our five most recent students who have graduated and are currently employed as teachers. With a 100 percent response rate, the most useful assignments identified from the practicum have been lesson plan development (80 percent), practicum hours in schools (60 percent), and professional observations and the career portfolio (both at 60 percent). The most useful assignments identified from the internship have been lesson plan development (100 percent) and internship hours in schools (60 percent), with each of the following at 40 percent: evaluations from cooperating teachers and university supervisors, the student organization binder, and the BIC Binder. Currently employed teachers who were trained through JSU’s CTE program recommended assignments that focus on real-world application in the classroom. One stated, “I gained more knowledge with the assignments (career portfolio, CTSO binder, BIC Binder, lesson and unit plan creation) that Ms. Townsel gave us during practicum than I learned during any of my other classes in college. It is the above mentioned items that I still refer back to during my first year as a teacher.” Another student recommended “the opportunity to have more experiences in the classroom and exposure to the professional world through workshops and networking with current teachers and professionals at the state level.”

Conclusion

Pre-service teachers need hands-on experience with activities and assignments that are closely related to job duties that “real” teachers have. Having pre-service teachers take tests and write papers might provide graduates with a degree, but does it prepare them for teaching in the “real world?” We believe JSU students are better prepared by leading learning during presentations and educational sessions, as well as by preparing for professional duties. Just as our CTE students in the middle and secondary schools prefer assignments that have rigor and relevance—hands-on learning with a purpose—so do our pre-service teachers.

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