



What makes teacher prep “traditional” or “non-traditional”?

What’s in a name? That’s a good question for anyone trying to make sense of the array of available preparation programs.

For the purposes of evaluating teacher preparation, NCTQ’s *Teacher Prep Review* has divided programs into two types, **traditional** and **non-traditional** – although it may be more appropriate to refer to these programs as “traditional” and “everything else.” (In the “everything else” category fall the programs you may have heard referred to as “alternative certification programs” or “residency programs.”)

Traditional programs produce about 80 percent of the nation’s teachers and are easy to define. They’re the programs one typically thinks of when someone says she’s going to college or grad school to become a teacher. For undergraduate teacher candidates, the program lays out a path that includes liberal arts courses to build broad content knowledge as well as specialized content knowledge for secondary candidates, ed school professional courses, and a culminating student teaching experience. For graduate teacher candidates, the path typically includes only professional coursework and a student teaching experience. When candidates graduate with their degrees, they are also “certified” (licensed) to teach.

Traditional secondary preparation program structure:



Non-traditional programs are, quite simply, anything else. This category encompasses any program that deviates in any respect from the “traditional” model of university-based graduate teacher prep: the program may be offered by a non-profit or for-profit rather than a university. Or it may be offered by a university as a non-degree program operating side-by-side with the university’s traditional degree-granting program. Its professional coursework may start before or after the teacher candidate begins teaching, but the number of courses candidates take before they begin teaching is usually quite limited. In the period of clinical practice that substitutes for student teaching, the candidate may be unpaid and supervised by the classroom’s “teacher of record” (here the teacher candidate is known as a “resident”) or be paid and serve as the teacher of record (in this case, the candidate is called an “intern”). Some non-traditional programs grant master’s degrees by affiliating themselves with university partners or by becoming sufficiently accredited by state agencies to offer master’s degrees themselves, but some simply offer certification to graduates.

The test for whether a program is non-traditional is very simple: If the program deviates sufficiently from the traditional model of preparation to require an explanation of at least a few sentences to convey its structure, it is “non-traditional.” The examples below graphically illustrate how much information has to be conveyed to understand the features of many non-traditional programs.

Teach for America Oxford, Mississippi

Teach for America (TFA) offers one of the most widely recognized non-traditional models for preparation, although it accounts for only a small percentage of non-traditional teacher production (roughly 13 percent), and for less than three percent of the nation's total teacher production.¹ TFA has a rigorous selection process and requires five weeks of training over the summer (including both supervised teaching and coursework). Depending on state regulations, teachers affiliated with TFA earn either just their certification or their certification and a master's degree through coursework taken during their two-year teaching commitment.

Non-traditional secondary preparation program structure:

Clinical practice:

Candidates have five weeks of training that includes 20 hours of lead teaching and 20 hours of small-group or one-on-one tutoring.

Instructional coaches observe and provide written feedback to corps members a minimum of 1 time per week.

Coaches must have quantifiable success as classroom teachers and the following mentoring skills: 1) demonstrated ability to connect quickly with adult learners and to build strong working relationships while offering direct feedback, and 2) ability to influence, coach, and motivate adult leaders to reach ambitious goals.

Notable features of internship:

Program supervisor conducts at least four formal observations. Candidates have their first observation within the first 5 weeks of internship.

Program supervisors have a minimum of two years of experience achieving ambitious outcomes as classroom teachers in low-income communities. Experience as a Teach For America corps member is preferred.

The school district to which an intern is assigned may or may not assign a mentor.

Vermont Agency of Education: Alternative Licensure Program (Peer Review)

In Vermont's Peer Review program, each candidate prepares a portfolio that can include college transcripts, a resume, copies of relevant licenses, letters of support from professionals, and examples of lesson plans and other teaching materials. A panel reviews the portfolio, interviews the candidate, and determines which competencies the candidate meets. If the candidate is deemed acceptable, the panel recommends licensure; if not, the program offers 18 months during which the candidate can correct deficiencies.

¹ Greenberg, J., Walsh, K., & McKee, A. (2014). Appendix C: Background and Methodology for Alternative Certification Pilot. In 2014 *Teacher Prep Review*. Retrieved from: http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/TPR_2014_AltCertPilotStudy.

Non-traditional secondary preparation program structure:

In Peer Review, candidates seek initial certification through coursework, workshops, and life experiences, rather than through a preparation program; arrange their own student teaching or equivalent experience, and prepare a portfolio demonstrating competency.

Orientation:
No more than 18 months before portfolio is submitted, candidate attends a peer review clinic for explanation process.

Coursework:
Candidate chooses and completes appropriate coursework.

Clinical practice:
During at least 12 weeks of student teaching or equivalent learning experience (arranged by candidate), candidate develops portfolio including necessary licensing test scores and teaching artifacts.

Review and approval:
Panel of educators reviews portfolio and recommends licensure or gives candidate 18 months to correct deficiencies.

Arkansas Professional Pathway to Educator Licensure (APPEL)

Arkansas’s APPEL program offers two cycles of summer coursework, as well as Saturday instruction and mentoring support during the school year. Certification is granted at the conclusion of the second year.

Non-traditional secondary preparation program structure:

Summer:
15 full days of on-line and face-to-face summer instructional modules.

School year:
Saturday online and face-to-face instructional modules completed monthly.

Internship:
Mentors support intern a minimum of two hours every two weeks.

Summer:
15 full days of on-line and face-to-face summer instructional modules.

School year:
Saturday online and face-to-face instructional modules completed monthly.

Internship:
Mentors support intern a minimum of two hours every two weeks.

Relay New York Teaching Residency Program

In the first year of the two-year program, candidates serve as classroom residents while they take coursework through the Relay Graduate School of Education, a fully accredited, degree-granting institution. During the second year, teachers work as full-time teachers while continuing coursework. At the end of two years, they earn certification and a master’s degree.

Non-traditional secondary preparation program structure:

1st year: Residency: Spend school year working with master Resident Advisor teacher.

2nd year: Work as lead teacher.

Take coursework through Relay Graduate School of Education.

Take coursework through Relay Graduate School of Education, resulting in MAT.

These four programs provide just a few examples of the variations that exist in non-traditional teacher preparation. Although programs take an array of different approaches to training, they all need to ultimately serve the same purpose – making sure that every new teacher who enters a classroom is effective from day one in helping students learn. Every preparation program needs to ensure that candidates have the academic aptitude required in a demanding profession, know the content they'll teach, and receive adequate support and feedback on their practice teaching or first stint of teaching. The standards from the *Teacher Prep Review* that NCTQ applies to non-traditional programs are designed to provide information to consumers about these important aspects of each program's preparation, whether the program is traditional or non-traditional.