

Alumni Questionnaire (Job or Grad School)

How did your experience at USI help you find your first position after graduation?

My time at USI gave me so much experience within different schools and different classrooms. I very distinctly remember being asked during my very first interview the question "You teach first grade and have to teach a lesson over the vowel team "au". What would that look like in your classroom?" Within a couple seconds, I was giving them an answer, and they were very impressed. They said that it is very rare to get a candidate that was able to answer that question so well. In my classes I wrote many different plans on so many different skills. I was able to witness so many amazing teachers giving a variety of engaging and unique lessons. I was also able to participate in the full year student teaching program, and with all of these amazing experiences, I had a wide range of ideas to pull from. That was the first and only interview I did after graduation, and I was hired as a first grade teacher.

If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently?

I would have asked more questions. I did ask questions, but sometimes I felt as though I was bothering my professors or the teachers I was observing. I wish I wouldn't have felt that way. If you have questions, ask them. There is no such thing as a silly question. I also wish that I would have asked more teachers to either share with me resources I saw them use, or that I would have asked them where they got their resources from.

On a typical day in this position, what do you do?

Last year, I was a 1st grade teacher to 26 rambunctious littles. This year I am a 4th grade teacher to 25 amazing humans. My day starts at 8 and the kids leave at 3, but I normally stay until 4 or 5 to catch up on any planning or grading, depending on the day. My kids come in from 8-8:30 and I believe in a non-stressful start to our day. We talk a little, and work on practicing spelling. We then move into a "What I Need" time where we break the grade up into leveled skills and teach them where they are. From 9-10 I teach reading, and then from 10-10:20 I read a chapter book to my kids. Currently we are reading "The Percy Jackson" series and THEY LOVE IT! My students go to specials from 10:20 until 11:05, then we do our writing and language arts time and go to lunch at 11:40. After lunch and recess, its math time at 1 and then science or social studies (depending on the nine weeks we are in) at 2. After science, we pack up, and I either read to them or we go outside to play until time to get on the buses.

What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?

Above all else, grace. Grace for yourself, and grace for your kids. This job is tough. It is worth it, but it can be so tough. My classroom may not be perfect, but it is awesome. I love my kids and they are growing like crazy. At the end of the day, that is the only two things that matter. There are so

many things that us teachers feel as though we should be doing or need to be doing. However, if you try to do all of it, you will be miserable. Be willing to try new things, and be willing to fail. Without a little failure, we won't ever learn what doesn't work. As my assistant superintendent says, "I want you to fail, that shows you are trying and learning. All I ask is that you fail forward, so that you are always making yourself and your kids better through the failure." 😊 Lastly, teamwork is incredibly important. Share with others what you are doing, and allow them to share what they are doing. Life is so much more fun when you put your brains together and share the workload a bit to bring together some awesome shared learning experiences for your kids.

****answer to later question.****

Future teachers, or really anyone, this is so important and it took me from September to May of last year to figure it out. If you are not happy where you are, that's okay. Try somewhere else. If what you are doing is not working, do not try to force it because you think it's where you are supposed to be. Yes I love each and every child, but I was not created to be a first grade teacher, and that is okay.

I will share some of my backstory, because when I got my first job, I assumed that because I love all ages of children that I should be able to teach all ages of children. However, that is simply not true. My first year of teaching was terrible. I did not want to go to work and I almost quit in November. Every single day I wondered if I could come back tomorrow, and I wondered why in the world did I ever want to be a teacher in the first place. I had an incredibly challenging group of children with a TON of academic and behavioral needs that I couldn't physically meet then all. I was positive that I would be quitting teaching and that I had made a huge mistake. However, I did not do any of that. I persevered. I showed up every day and I worked as hard as I could to teach them as much as I could. I loved them as much as my heart could possibly love them. Many days lessons went to the side because learning how to cope with anger was more important. Some days math didn't happen because we needed to learn how to be kind. I had to learn to be okay with that. I had to learn that I couldn't be everything for these kids, but I could love them and meet them where they were at. I learned to go with the flow and be flexible. Luckily, God had a plan for my teaching career and this first year was not in vain nor without a purpose.

Through the hard year, I was taught how to manage a classroom. I learned how to be an authority figure, and I learned how to discipline in a way that is beneficial to my students by validating their feelings, but teaching them an alternative to the unacceptable behavior, rather than just punishing them. I learned how to empower my kids to believe in themselves to be better.

This year, I was able to start strong and build a real, loving community in my classroom. When misbehavior happens, they help each other out and encourage each other to make a better choice. When I do intervene, I know how to word it to prompt a better choice rather than just giving a punishment without teaching the child anything. There are still consequences for poor choices, but they are always surrounded by a teachable moment, and I have very little behavior issues within my room this year.

All of this to say, if you do not think where you are is working, DON'T GIVE UP! This may be a teachable moment for you, and a job you LOVE could be right around the corner. Give yourself grace. Do the best you can with what you have, and let that be enough. Love them, try to show growth in yourself and your students, and you will be successful.

What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?

If I was interested, I could go on to be a principle if I wanted, but I don't want to do that. 😊

Is there a demand for people in this occupation?

YES! We need GOOD teachers. Teachers that are willing to love the hard kids, and that want to help all their kids grow. We need teachers that want to empower kids to believe in themselves and to know that they can grow up and be better. Many of our kids now are in broken homes. Due to that fact, it is imperative that we WILL NOT give up on that kid that does nothing but jump off tables and tries to yell out "chicken nugget" through your entire lesson. You have to be willing to love them anyway and help them make a better choice next time. It is important to get people that will not make him feel ostracized, because everyone else in his life does. We need teachers that will do the work to reach our kids where they are, and teach them there. When that happens, the rest will follow. It is important for those great teachers to give themselves grace for not getting to the standard the first time, but that know they'll get there eventually. 💙

What do you think of the experience you've had so far in terms of entering this field?

*****See up there******

If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself?

Why? What would you change?

Even though that year was the hardest thing I have EVER done, I would not change a thing. There was a very specific purpose for that year. I had to learn some tough things, and I needed that group of kids to teach it all to me. I had to grow in my ability as a teacher, and I had to learn to rely on God and not on myself. I would have never in a million years voluntarily signed up for a year that hard, however the good Lord knew exactly what I needed and He used it to make me a better teacher. I am thankful for all of those kids, and I'm thankful that I was able to show them love and teach them as best as I could.

What part of this job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?

My students make every second worth it. I LOVE watching them grow, experience success, learning how to fail gracefully. I love having fun with them and giving them opportunities to get excited about their learning. I love reading to them and hearing the collective "awwww" when my alarm goes off

telling us it's time for specials. I love laughing with them and I love when a little girl leaves a note on my desk saying "This is the best birthday I have ever had. Thank you guys." I love that every day a student I was sure I failed last year hangs out of his bus window yelling my name so that I will come give him a hug before he goes home. THAT is what makes this teacher heart go pitter patter. It fuels my fire and is the reason I do what I do. At the end of the day, test scores and grades do not matter. Loving them, and watching them grow, that is what it's all about. 