

UTeach Institute

UTeach Alabama Program Launch Report

August 2023



In 2022, the UTeach Institute, in partnership with the Alabama STEM Council and the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), invited fully accredited, state-supported Alabama higher education institutions to respond to a competitive proposal opportunity to receive up to \$3 million in funding over five years to recruit and prepare secondary STEM teachers through implementation of the UTeach secondary STEM teacher preparation program. Six Alabama universities were selected to receive implementation grants.

During the first eight months of the UTeach Alabama initiative, these six new university-based UTeach programs were launched, and all have successfully implemented Planning Period milestones and activities. These new programs have selected Co-Directors from colleges of sciences and education to lead their efforts; assembled program teams of faculty and staff and hired new positions; identified spaces for program operations and instruction; planned student support and scholarship programs and recruited students; began designing instructional programming, planning for field experiences, and modifying degree plans; and created distinctive identities through program launch events, logos, websites, and program branding. All six new programs participated fully in grant compliance and implementation support activities led by the UTeach Institute.

These universities are currently enrolling their first cohorts of students for Fall 2023.



UNIVERSITY	PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	AMOUNT AWARDED
Alabama A&M University	AAMU <i>teach</i>	Huntsville, AL	\$2 million
Athens State University	Athens State TEACH	Athens, AL	\$2 million
Auburn University	AU <i>Teach</i>	Auburn, AL	\$3 million
Auburn University at Montgomery	AUM <i>Teach</i>	Montgomery, AL	\$2 million
University of South Alabama	U <i>Teach</i> South	Mobile, AL	\$2 million
University of West Alabama	UWA- <i>Teach</i>	Livingston, AL	\$3 million

The Alabama STEM Council manages the initiative and serves as liaison between the state legislature and the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). ACHE serves as the fiscal agent, administering funding from the legislature to the six implementing universities. UAB*Teach*, a well-established program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, is providing additional coaching and guidance to these new programs.

Serving as the hub of the national network of more than 50 universities, the U*Teach* Institute provides comprehensive program monitoring and implementation support. Throughout the grant period (January 2023 to May 2027), the Institute provides technical assistance, evaluation services, and implementation support, which includes assistance with day-to-day operations, instructional program guidance, and alignment with the *UTeach Elements of Success*. The Institute also evaluates each program’s progress through tracking of implementation milestones, conducting biannual site visits, carrying out regular data collection, and quarterly reporting of financials to ACHE. The Institute provides status reports to the program sites and to the STEM Council.

Program Launch Activities and Highlights

The Planning Period for each university began in January 2023. During this time, universities were expected to reach implementation milestones and activity benchmarks as detailed below to prepare their programs to welcome students for the Fall 2023 semester.

Providing Program Launch Support and Visiting Sites

The U*Teach* Institute, along with the Alabama STEM Council, hosted an all-day Co-Director Kick-Off Meeting in Birmingham, Alabama on February 7, 2023. This in-person gathering gave the program Co-Directors the opportunity to learn more about the Planning Period activities from Institute staff and have time to discuss specific goals, roles, and responsibilities, as well as work through any potential obstacles. The UAB*Teach* core team was also in attendance and offered guidance based on their U*Teach* program implementation experiences. In June 2023, all six programs had representation at the annual U*Teach* STEM Educators Conference in Austin, Texas. Alabama State Senator Arthur Orr, Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee for Education and supporter of the initiative, was also in attendance.



Representatives from all seven Alabama UTeach programs, including UABTeach, at the UTeach STEM Educators Conference in June 2023.

All six universities hosted members from the Institute support team for their inaugural site visits in Spring 2023. During this time on each campus, site coordinator Lindsay Hammond held initial meetings with program staff and faculty. These intensive visits included the Planning Period Stakeholders Meeting, which served as an introduction to the UTeach Alabama Initiative and the national UTeach network and provided Co-Directors with the opportunity to update college and university leadership on their progress and plans for the program. A stakeholders meeting will occur annually during every fall site visit. Additionally, program leadership participated in a “Recruitment: Strategizing in Context” workshop designed to define an organized action plan to recruit students based on custom program enrollment goals. Each spring, the recruitment plan will be revisited to assess progress and make any necessary updates.

Collaborating Across Colleges

An important component to the launch of any successful UTeach program is garnering cross-college support from campus leadership. UTeach requires a fundamental shift in how Colleges of Sciences and of Education work collaboratively to prepare STEM teachers, so it is imperative that programs have support from all department chairs, deans, and others to overcome any initial challenges they may face as they build new processes. Each of the six new UTeach programs selected two Co-Directors, one representing the College of Sciences and one representing the College of Education to co-lead the development of the new program and to ensure cross-college collaboration.

*A great example of cross-college support is at **Auburn University at Montgomery**, where both the Dean of the College of Education and the Dean of the College of Sciences were very involved in drafting the original grant proposal and continue to be active participants in the AUMTeach Steering Committee.*

Assembling UTeach Program Teams

Universities use the Planning Period to build capacity and assemble their program team based on their proposal and anticipated needs. Early hires include Master Teachers — usually one specializing in science and one in mathematics — an Advisor/Recruiter, a Program Coordinator, and an Administrative Assistant. Faculty are also identified to teach program courses. Each role plays an integral part in building a robust program ready to welcome the first cohort of students, and all are crucial in retaining and supporting students in the program thereafter.

*Aside from the two Co-Directors, the first position that UTeach South at the **University of South Alabama** filled was for the Advisor/Recruiter. They wanted to take advantage of the summer “Southbound” orientations and recruitment fairs to reach incoming freshmen for the upcoming school year.*

Identifying Program Space

All new programs have established a “home” for their UTeach programs that includes administrative offices, dedicated workspaces for students to gather and to access Master Teacher support, storage for hands-on materials and science and math kits, and classrooms where the initial UTeach courses will be offered in Fall 2023. A UTeach program can be housed in the College of Sciences, College of Education, or other suitable location. All of the Alabama programs have secured space for their program staff and students. Half of them have acquired space within their Colleges of Sciences, and the other half have chosen to be located in their Colleges of Education.



Students at **Athens State University's** Athens State TEACH program enjoy a pizza party in the program space, called the Teaching and Learning Den. Dedicated spaces like this give students a place to collaborate, work with Master Teachers outside of class, and access hands-on materials.



AUteach at **Auburn University** has a strong presence at multiple “Camp War Eagle” orientations with banners and informational tables consisting of flyers, brochures, and branded merchandise.

Supporting and Recruiting Students

One of the biggest challenges UTeach programs face is attracting and recruiting students. Many students who have come to the university to pursue a STEM major are likely not considering teaching as an option. Once they learn, however, that the UTeach program is structured in a way that increases their career options, does not require them to abandon their major, and does not extend their time at the university, it becomes an attractive option for many of them. However, recruiting students into the program is just one part of this equation. Providing adequate student support and incentives like scholarships is crucial to ensuring they stay in the program through certification.

Alabama Co-Directors and their teams have been heavily focused on recruitment activities throughout the summer, ensuring they take advantage of all opportunities to share information about their program to incoming students. Program staff worked with university advising teams on how to share the program with incoming STEM majors, set up tables at student orientations, and gave brief presentations to introductory STEM classes during the first week of the semester. Several have also started social media accounts, highlighting program opportunities and activities on campus.

Designing Courses and Instructional Programming

A UTeach instructional program offers a streamlined, field-intensive curriculum that is firmly situated within the domains of math and science. The instructional program elements include compact and flexible degree plans, research-based instruction, early and intensive field experiences, and dedicated clinical Master Teachers. Co-Directors have spent the Planning Period drafting four-year degree plans, identifying instructors, getting new courses on the schedule, and planning field placements with partnering school districts. Program team members and instructors have also prepared to offer introductory courses by attending virtual training workshops hosted by the UTeach Institute.

*During the Planning Period, AAMUteach leadership at **Alabama A&M University** developed four new STEM teaching degree plans in **Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics.***

Creating a UTeach Identity on Campus

Cultivating interest and support for a local UTeach program begins with establishing a distinctive identity. Everyone, particularly participants from colleges of science, should be clear that UTeach is a comprehensive academic program and that the goal of UTeach is to establish STEM teacher preparation as a core university function. Promotional materials like posters or flyers and strong social media campaigns, successes will help with student recruitment and overall program visibility and reputation.

Co-Directors at the six new programs worked to build their program's identity by designing logos and creating branded materials like t-shirts, stickers, and pens to distribute on campus.

They developed websites and brochures to share information with students about their UTeach program, how to enroll, and who to contact with questions.



*Flyer for AUMTeach at **Auburn University at Montgomery***

Universities were also encouraged to plan and execute a “program launch event” to widely announce their new UTeach program on campus. This event is an opportunity to introduce the program to students, faculty, and the larger community. Five programs hosted their kick-off events in the spring and summer, with the final event planned for this fall.

Challenges

A common challenge for universities that build a UTeach program is figuring out how to best collaborate between two colleges in a way that fits into existing university structures and processes. It takes time to navigate various considerations to create the infrastructure for a program that is designed to eliminate the barriers discouraging STEM students from becoming secondary teachers.

Leadership changes can also hinder progress toward a seamless collaboration between the colleges. For example, one of the Co-Directors at Auburn University at Montgomery retired over the summer and while her replacement was quickly in place, momentum was interrupted while the new Co-Director was onboarded into the role. AAMUteach at Alabama A&M University is experiencing a major transition in

their College of Education, with a new interim dean arriving right before the start of the upcoming fall semester. The UTeach Institute is working with program leadership to provide the new dean with all the necessary information through site visit meetings to ensure there is no interruption in leadership support.

A specific challenge for this group of universities is that the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) requires that new teacher certification programs be approved before student candidates can be recommended for certification. The ALSDE has indicated it will grant “innovative program status” to all new UTeach programs, but this is not yet in place. Not only are universities hesitant to introduce courses and recruit students into a degree plan that technically is not yet approved by the state, this could also cause a delay in the universities’ abilities to offer “fast-track” options for upper-level students. For example, the University of West Alabama offers two pathways for students who already have a degree—bachelor’s or master’s—and requires immediate enrollment into the certification courses. They are unable to introduce this option until ALSDE approves their pathways. Likewise, Athens State University, an upper-division university, will need to wait for approval before transitioning upperclassmen from their current STEM teacher program into Athens State TEACH.

The Alabama STEM Council, with help from the UTeach Institute, is working with ALSDE to ensure that the universities are familiar with the application timeline and expectations. On July 11, 2023, the ALSDE board held a working session to discuss the letters previously drafted by each university’s leadership requesting permission to begin their UTeach program with plans to submit for “Innovative Status.” A representative from each institution was present at the meeting and was able to discuss their plans for their program and the impact it will have in their region. In the subsequent meeting held on August 10, 2023, board members voted to adopt the resolution to “authorize review of educator preparation programs” for each of the six universities. ALSDE representatives will be in touch with information on the application process, with official approval expected during the 2024–2025 academic year.

Funding Recommendation

Each of the six UTeach Alabama programs has met the expected milestones and grant compliance activities required during the Planning Period. Currently, the UTeach Institute recommends funding to continue as scheduled to all programs.

Implementation Year 1: Upcoming Milestones

The Fall 2023 semester marks the beginning of the first year of implementation where universities will have students enrolled into the introductory UTeach courses. In Year 1, each program will be expected to complete ongoing milestones such as regular Steering Committee meetings, identifying faculty to teach upcoming courses, and ensuring Master Teachers and instructors attend all virtual course workshops that support upcoming and future courses aligned with their curriculum roll-out schedule.

Additional Year 1 milestones include implementing various advising activities, providing financial and academic supports to students, securing university approval of four-year UTeach degree plans, expanding partnerships with local K–12 school districts, planning for courses and field experiences, and training mentor teachers.