

# UTeach Institute

## UTeach Alabama Year 1 Report

September 2023 – August 2024



In 2022, the UTeach Alabama initiative launched when the Alabama STEM Council and the UTeach Institute, in partnership with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), selected six fully accredited, state-supported Alabama higher education institutions to receive funding to recruit and prepare secondary STEM teachers through the implementation of the UTeach secondary STEM teacher preparation program. UABTeach, a well-established program at The University of Alabama at Birmingham, is also receiving state funds targeted at bolstering student recruitment efforts. In addition, the UABTeach program team is providing additional coaching and guidance to the newly implementing Alabama programs.

The six Alabama universities selected to receive grants began their implementation in January 2023. In the fall of 2023, the Alabama STEM Council provided additional funding to support four statewide initiatives to further advance UTeach Alabama. The UTeach Institute is managing 1) the expansion of the UABTeach program to community college partners, 2) a statewide STEM teacher recruitment campaign, 3) additional local UTeach program recruitment support from Get the Facts Out, and 4) an economic impact study.

### New UTeach Program Implementation

The Alabama STEM Council manages the initiative to establish new UTeach programs at six universities and serves as liaison with the state legislature, and ACHE serves as the fiscal agent, administering appropriated funding. The UTeach Institute serves as the hub of the national network of more than 50 universities and delivers comprehensive program monitoring and implementation support — including 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 reporting quarterly financials to ACHE. The Institute provides status reports to the program sites and to the STEM Council.

## Year 1 Outcomes

The new Alabama programs began their first full year of program implementation in Fall 2023. In this first year, a total of 369 STEM majors were recruited to UTeach pathways. In addition to introducing UTeach courses and welcoming their first cohort of students, program’s arranged partnerships with local K-12 districts, planned field experiences, and trained mentor teachers. Each program established and implemented recruiting and advising activities and provided financial and academic support to students.

Program leadership also spent this year securing university approval of four-year UTeach degree plans, planning for upcoming courses and identifying faculty to teach them, and ensuring Master Teachers and instructors attended all virtual course workshops that aligned with their curriculum roll-out schedule. Co-Directors convened their Steering Committees to advise on hiring decisions, the planning and organizing of paid-internship partnerships, and ongoing student recruitment strategies. All six new programs participated fully in grant compliance and implementation support activities led by the UTeach Institute.

Figure 1. Student Recruitment for Year 1

UNIVERSITY	PROGRAM NAME	YEAR 1 RECRUITMENT
Alabama A&M University	AAMUteach	45 students
Athens State University	Athens State TEACH	17 students
Auburn University	AUTeach	42 students
Auburn University at Montgomery	AUMTeach	42 students
University of South Alabama	UTeach South	41 students
The University of West Alabama	UWA-Teach	19 students
The University of Alabama at Birmingham	UABTeach	163 students
<b>YEAR 1 TOTAL RECRUITMENT</b>		<b>369 students</b>

## Program Development

Each role within the program team plays an important part in building a robust program that supports students and retains them after their first year and beyond. All six universities finished their UTeach implementation Year 1 fully staffed with Co-Directors, Master Teacher(s), and an Advisor/Recruiter. Some programs, such as AUTeach at **Auburn University**, also employ a Program Coordinator or Administrative Assistant to help with budget management and day-to-day operations. Co-Directors at several programs are already engaged in the hiring process for their second Master Teacher — one usually specializes in science and one in mathematics — in preparation for the Fall 2024 semester.

Program leadership also used Year 1 to garner support across colleges and spread awareness about their program to organizations throughout campus. UTeach requires a fundamental shift in how Colleges of Sciences and Colleges 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. Co-Directors worked to establish steering

*A great example of leadership support is at **Athens State University**, where both the Dean of the College of Education and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences were present for the Athens State TEACH Stakeholders Meeting in the fall, along with the university president, provost, and administrative leadership from partnering community colleges.*

committees with representation from key stakeholder groups. They also collaborated with members from both colleges to build UTeach degree plans and identify instructors for future courses.



*Alabama STEM Council representative, Lawrence Cooper, participates in the Knowing and Learning in Mathematics and Science class during a UTeach visit to **The University of West Alabama**.*

Master Teachers partnered with university field placement offices to select campuses and mentor teachers at partnering school districts to serve as hosts for student field experiences. Most programs had these various stakeholders — including university leadership like deans and provosts — in attendance for their annual Stakeholders Meeting held during the fall site visit.

All six universities hosted members from the Institute support team for their Year 1 site visits in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024. The UTeach Alabama site coordinator, Lindsay Hammond, uses these intensive in-person visits to meet with program staff and faculty, conduct student focus groups, and visit UTeach classes. Additionally, the fall

semester visit included the Stakeholders Meeting, which serves as an annual update on the UTeach Alabama initiative and the national UTeach network and provides Co-Directors an opportunity to present on their current progress and plans for the program. Initial meetings were also held with university/college leadership and development officers to discuss plans for sustaining the program past the grant period. During the spring visit, the site coordinator led each program team through an exercise to revisit and revise their recruitment plan designed during the “Recruitment: Strategizing in Context” workshop held during the Planning Period.

UTeach Alabama was well-represented at the 2024 UTeach STEM Educators Conference held May 21-23 in Austin, Texas. Over 40 program team members from every university attended sessions on strengthening curriculum and instruction, building community and support, and managing overall program improvement. Molly Trammell and Dr. Samantha Junkin from AUMTeach at Auburn University at Montgomery led a session called “From the Ground Up: Recruitment in Year One and Beyond,” pulling from their experience as a new program. Development officers from each Alabama university were also invited to the conference for a special session, led by the UTeach Institute and the Alabama STEM Council, on how UTeach Alabama programs can work together to fundraise throughout the state.



Two AAMUteach students from **Alabama A&M University** attended the UTeach STEM Educators Conference and presented their poster titled “Diary of a New UTeach Program” in the student competition. They are pictured here, with AAMUteach Co-Director, Dr. Vernessa Edwards.

## Recruitment Efforts

One of the most challenging tasks UTeach programs face is attracting and recruiting students, because many students who come to the university to pursue a STEM major are likely not considering teaching as an option. Program teams take every opportunity to share information with prospective students on how UTeach increases career options without requiring them to change their major while also not increasing their cost or extending their time at the university. For example, UTeach South at the University of South Alabama volunteered for campus “move-in day,” sharing information about their program to incoming freshmen while helping them move into their dorms.



*Molly Trammell, Advisor/Recruiter at Auburn University at Montgomery, hosts an AUMTeach informational table at an area high school.*

Throughout Year 1, the Advisor/Recruiters worked to create relationships and processes with advising teams so that interested students can be directed into the program. They were also focused on hosting various recruitment activities, keeping track of campus events, and presenting about the program to introductory STEM classes throughout each semester. They managed program information shared on social media accounts and on their program’s website. In May 2024, Alabama programs were invited to a recruitment resources workshop held in Austin prior to the UTeach STEM Educators Conference. A representative from each team attended the all-day meeting, learning about various aspects of the teaching profession in their area — salary, benefits, work/life balance, etc. — to use in recruitment materials. Templates for posters and presentations were provided, along with specific data points to insert into presentations for

different audiences. Attendees left with valuable information on how to uplift STEM teaching as a STEM career when reaching out to science and math majors at their university.

## Student Experience

The student experience in each UTeach program, along with the financial and academic supports they receive, are of utmost importance when retaining them in the certification program and encouraging them to consider entering the teaching profession. Program teams spent this first year welcoming their first groups of students and ensuring that they enjoyed their introduction to teaching. Master Teachers from each program carefully selected districts and campuses with energetic, encouraging mentor teachers to guide students in their field experiences. Together, new UTeach Alabama programs partnered with 19 school districts around the state and placed UTeach students in over 30 campuses for their first observations and lessons.

*“I enjoy the material taught and find it very useful for both education and my life overall. My peers, professors, and other members of the program team are also very welcoming and understanding. It is a joy to learn and engage with them.”*

-AUMTeach student from Auburn University

Providing adequate student support and incentives like scholarships and paid internship opportunities is crucial to ensuring that students stay in the program through certification. Each program reimbursed students for their fingerprinting and background checks and provided tuition reimbursement for completion of the introductory courses. AAMUteach at Alabama A&M University even offered transportation stipends for students who were unable to drive themselves to and from the partner schools.

The National UTeach Student Survey was administered to each UTeach Alabama program’s students during Year 1. With a 59% response rate, students reported an overall program satisfaction of 88%. Over 55% of students said they would not have considered teaching if a UTeach program did not exist on their campus, and 94% said they benefited from their UTeach classes.

The top three factors influencing students’ decisions to enroll in their first exploratory course are: multiple career opportunities with no extra commitment of time or money (67%), the first course was offered with no additional cost (44%), and program scholarships were available (26%).



A UTeach South student at the **University of South Alabama** has some fun during a Step 1: Inquiry Approaches to Teaching class.

## **Program Pathways**

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. Virtual training workshops hosted by the UTeach Institute provided guidance and resources to instructors preparing to offer introductory courses this academic year.

*UWA-Teach at **The University of West Alabama** is building their online Alternative-A Certification pathway for graduate students and career changers and will offer the Step Combo course in Fall 2024.*

*An upper-division institution, **Athens State University** is partnering with area community colleges to offer introductory UTeach courses to underclassmen before they come to campus to complete their certification.*

All UTeach Alabama programs have had their degree plans approved by their university committees. In addition, universities submitted applications, along with their degree plan checklists, to the Alabama State Department of Education, and all were granted Innovative Program status by the board in March 2024.

## **Challenges**

All programs experienced lower than anticipated student enrollment into introductory courses. It is not unusual for programs to miss their targeted recruitment numbers in the first year. These targets are provided during the project proposal stage and based on limited program knowledge. In some cases, these targets may be adjusted as program leaders better understand the level of student interest and program capacity. Some programs experienced delays in hiring of master teachers and advisor/recruiters, key staff involved in student recruitment. In other cases, it took longer than planned to finalize degree plans and student support elements, program structures which are critical to student recruitment.

## **Funding Recommendation**

Each of the six new UTeach Alabama programs have met the expected milestones and grant compliance activities required during Year 1 of implementation. The UTeach Institute recommends Year 2 funding to continue, as scheduled, for all programs. The recommended awards for Year 3 and subsequent years may be adjusted for institutions not on track to meet their outcome targets for student enrollment.

## **Year 2: Upcoming Milestones**

The second year of implementation begins in Fall 2024. Universities will have their first cohort of students continuing to subsequent courses and will continue to enroll new students into the introductory courses. They are expected to continue meeting regularly with their Steering Committees, planning for upcoming courses, identifying instructors, and expanding partnerships with local school districts for student field experiences. Master Teachers and instructors will attend all virtual course workshops that align with their curriculum roll-out schedule. All financial and academic supports, including scholarships and paid internship opportunities, should be finalized and available to students. Teams will also begin to develop plans for new teacher induction support in preparation for their first program graduates.

## **Additional Statewide Projects**

The UTeach Institute is supporting four statewide projects to further support the UTeach Alabama initiative. The four projects in this Alabama extension work are described below.

- **UABTeach Community College Expansion.** The University of Alabama at Birmingham’s established UABTeach program is deepening their partnership with Jefferson State and Lawson State Community Colleges to recruit more of their STEM students to teaching by providing early UTeach courses, experiences, and incentives. Initial meetings have been held to begin discussions about program components and identify evaluation metrics. UABTeach plans to have the Step 1 course listed in the Lawson State Community College SP25 catalog by October. With the hiring of an additional Master Teacher and intensive recruitment efforts, a Step 1 section could be taught at Lawson State as early as next spring.
- **Statewide UTeach Alabama Recruitment Campaign.** The UTeach Institute is coordinating and supporting a comprehensive statewide recruitment campaign for STEM teaching alongside a media vendor identified through a competitive RFP process. The Alabama STEM Council/AIDT issued an RFP in June. Seven applications were received and reviewed. On August 6, the UTeach Institute submitted a report of review results and recommendations to the STEM Council.
- **UTeach Alabama Economic Impact Report.** The Bureau of Business Research at The University of Texas at Austin will conduct an economic impact study on the statewide expansion of the UTeach Alabama initiative to model the impact of investment in Alabama’s STEM teacher training programs on the technical workforce needed for advanced manufacturing, aerospace, and biomedical industries. This study will estimate the return to Alabama’s economy on such an investment. Preliminary analysis of Alabama teacher workforce and student achievement data was carried out over the summer by Dr. Michael Marder. The full study team will convene in Fall 2024 to launch the full research study scope of work.
- **Get the Facts Out Alabama.** To bolster local STEM teacher recruitment efforts across the six new Alabama UTeach programs including The University of Alabama at Birmingham’s UABTeach program, the Institute is coordinating and overseeing UTeach program-based recruitment data collection and messaging campaigns in collaboration with the National Science Foundation funded Get the Facts Out (GFO) initiative. On August 7, almost 20 representatives from all UTeach Alabama programs attended a kick-off webinar led by Dr. Wendy Adams. Participants learned about GFO resources, impact data, and survey services.