

Teacher Assistants (Paraprofessionals) Program Guidelines
University of Mississippi
School of Education

In order to ease the transition of paraprofessionals from assistants to certified teachers, the School of Education at the University of Mississippi will allow paraprofessionals to complete required field experiences in their districts. Prior to the fall semester of 2009, paraprofessionals were allowed to complete all field experiences and clinical practice (student teaching) in their school districts, with the exception of first semester senior year field experiences (Senior Practicum). Due to an increasing number of requests and concerns voiced by school district administrators and paraprofessionals, the School of Education modified the guidelines. Issues at the heart of the decision to modify guidelines were:

1. School districts had to replace paraprofessionals who they considered to be an extremely important part of their schools.
2. Paraprofessionals lost health care benefits and wages that were important to the well-being of them and their families.

The major issue/challenge related to the change in requirements was meeting the diversity standard as defined by The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for placements. According to NCATE, “candidates are expected to study and practice in a variety of settings that include diverse populations, students with exceptionalities, and students of different ages.” The diverse populations include “students from diverse ethnic, racial, gender, and socioeconomic groups in classrooms and schools.” Candidates must also have experiences in different grade levels. To meet this diversity requirement, the following guidelines have been established.

1. During the junior year (for EDCI 352 and EDCI 353), paraprofessionals can complete field experiences within the same classrooms they are employed. Paraprofessionals who are enrolled in the reading courses EDRD 355 or EDRD 400 must complete field experiences associated with these courses in the appropriate grades (K-3 and 4-6 respectively). Experiences for the reading courses can be performed either in the school or district.
2. During the first semester of the senior year, paraprofessionals can complete the senior practicum in the same districts of which they are employed. **Placement in a different school in the district is preferred.** However, this decision is left up to the district based on its individual needs. **The School of Education does require that the paraprofessional be placed in a different grade and with a different teacher than he/she has been placed with previously.** If the school (if different from previous years) has a diverse population of teachers and students or if the population represents a different demographic from the school the paraprofessionals was employed in during the junior year, the diversity requirement will be considered met. The decision on whether the diversity requirement is met or not will be made

by the Director of Field Experiences in the School of Education. If the diversity requirement is not met, the following will apply.

- a. The paraprofessional must observe **10 days** in a different setting. If an appropriate placement is not available within the district, the paraprofessional will be placed in a different district.
 - b. The district can decide between the following two options for completion of the ten days.
 - i. Paraprofessional completes the ten days sequentially for two straight weeks.
 - ii. Paraprofessional completes the ten days by visiting the alternate site one day per week for 10 sequential weeks.
3. During the second semester of the senior year, paraprofessionals can complete student teaching within the district in one setting. Since the diversity issue will be resolved in the previous semester, no further experiences in alternate locations are necessary. Furthermore, the paraprofessional should not be returned to the classroom of the teacher that he/she worked with prior to the senior year. The placement must be in a different classroom from where the paraprofessional was employed.

All paraprofessionals will be considered for this program, but paraprofessionals who have three years experience will get priority. Additionally, distances from the various University of Mississippi campuses will be a factor in who is accepted into this program. Another factor is the limit on the number of teacher candidates in courses. It is the responsibility of the paraprofessionals to communicate with district administrators and the Director of Field Experiences concerning this program. The district makes all decisions related to compensation and the school assignment for the student teaching experience. Paraprofessionals must submit to the Director of Field Experiences proof of employment as a paraprofessional from the district office (in a sealed envelope) in which he/she is employed.