

Wait! Why Test Me? I'm a Good Person!

Why indeed? Tests are imperfect. Some people “pass” when they should have failed, while others “fail” when they should have passed. It may not be fair, but it is a reality of the profession. Teacher competency testing is here to stay. So sit back and relax. Like every other beginning teacher in Utah, you’re just going to have to do it. Why? Because the Utah State Office of Education recently joined its counterparts in 35 other states in requiring the PRAXIS tests for initial teacher licensure.

Who Makes Up These Tests and How Do They Get Written?

When the Educational Testing Service (ETS) decided to develop the PRAXIS series of tests, the first step was to conduct national job analyses to discern what teachers across the country thought beginning teachers needed to know and be able to do. In every content area, ETS surveyed a representative sample (by region, by years of experience, by ethnicity, and by school setting) of hundreds — sometimes thousands — of practicing teachers and teacher educators. ETS compiled the responses in each content area and sent them back out again as a list of critical tasks. Teachers and teacher educators were asked to review each list, giving each entry a ranking of importance to a beginning teacher.

This revised list, along with information provided by state standards and professional organizations (such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) became draft specifications — the recipes from which the tests are built. At this point, ETS brought together nationally-representative committees of practicing teachers and teacher educators to establish final specifications for both the multiple-choice and constructed-response tests.

In short, the tests were determined and structured by practitioners. Like any licensure area, teaching should be overseen by practicing professionals in the area. Professional test developers craft the actual questions, but teachers determine the content of the questions and review the questions for appropriateness. Teachers also help create



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the constructed-response questions, oversee the reading of the pretests to determine whether a given question “works” or not, and perform the actual scoring of “live” candidate responses. These are tests in which teachers are very involved at all points of creation and oversight. This process, from job analysis through writing and scoring, gives us confidence that the tests are linked to practice on the job in a valid way.

Which tests will I need to take and how much do they cost?

The tests you take will depend upon the content area and grade level you are preparing to teach. If you are a secondary education major you will need to take the PRAXIS II PLT (Principles of Learning and Teaching) Secondary 7—12 test and a PRAXIS II Subject Assessment for your major. If a content area test is not available in your major area of study, you may take the exam for your minor. If you are an elementary major you will take the Elementary (K-6) PLT and the Elementary Content Knowledge test.

The registration fee for the PRAXIS PLT tests is \$50 and fees for the content tests vary from \$35 to \$50 according to the content area being tested. Since testing will be

done at the SUU center, other expenses should be minimal.

What is Covered on the Tests?

The Principles of Learning and Teaching test is designed to assess a beginning teacher’s knowledge of a variety of job-related criteria. Such knowledge is typically obtained in undergraduate preparation in areas such as educational psychology, human growth and development, classroom management, instructional design and delivery techniques, evaluation and assessment, and other professional preparation. The test includes three case histories, each presenting a particular teaching situation. The examinee will answer seven multiple-choice questions requiring analysis of features of each case and will respond to two short-answer questions related to problems posed in each case history.

Questions may require the examinee to do any of the following: demonstrate understanding of the importance of principles of learning and teaching underlying an aspect of teaching, recognize when and how to apply the principles of learning and teaching underlying an aspect of teaching. Each case history, with questions, will require approximately 30 minutes. In addition, the test contains 24 discrete multiple-choice questions covering an array of topics.

The Elementary Education Content Knowledge test is designed for prospective teachers of children in primary through upper elementary school grades. The 120 multiple-choice questions focus on four major subject areas: language arts/reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. Test questions are arranged in the test book by subject area. Each of the four content areas constitutes 25% of the test.

The Praxis II: Subject Assessments are two hour tests designed to measure your knowledge of the subject matter and teaching skills needed for each certification area. These assessments measure candidates’ knowledge of the subjects they will teach, as well as how much they know about teaching that subject. More than 140 content tests are available. Performance-based items allow test takers to demonstrate in-depth knowledge and reinforce the importance of writing in the teaching profession.

You can learn more about the specific tests by reviewing the Tests at a Glance booklet in each relevant content

Preparing for the

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these scores for evaluative purposes. They just need to see a passing score, and ETS reports only your highest score. You will receive your own report and you are entitled to have four score reports sent to the certification agency or colleges you choose. Any extra reports will be sent to you in sealed envelopes.

How Will I know if I passed the test?

You will receive passing score information on your score report for those score recipients you listed on your registration form. A list of states and their passing scores will be included with your score report. You also can locate the same information on the ETS Web site by clicking on the appropriate state name under State-by-State Requirements.

What If I Don't Pass the PRAXIS?

Candidates must pass the PRAXIS Content Assessment prior to admission to the Integrative Studies (Block) portion of the Professional Education Program. Unit faculty will work with candidates who fail the content test to develop a professional growth plan aimed at addressing deficiencies identified by the assessment. Candidates who complete the plan may retake the content test and reapply for the Block the following semester.

Utah state law requires that beginning teachers pass the PRAXIS II PLT in order to receive a Level II license to teach. Teachers who fail to pass the test at the end of their Entry Year Experience (EYE) will be required to develop a professional growth plan in collaboration with their employing district and the Professional Education Unit which recommended them for licensure. Teachers have up to three years to complete the test and qualify for Level II licensure.

Failing the PRAXIS PLT will not prevent a candidate from completing the Professional Education Program or from graduating from SUU. The test is required primarily as an assessment tool to identify strengths and weaknesses of beginning teachers produced by the Unit. SUU faculty are committed to your success as a teacher and will work collaboratively with candidates who fail the PRAXIS PLT to develop a plan to guide their professional growth during the Entry Year Experience.

area. Tests at a Glance booklets include content outlines, sample questions with rationale for the best answers, and test-taking strategies. You can review and download the Tests at a Glance information from the ETS Web site (<http://www.ets.org>).

When and Where Do I Take the Test?

A free pilot version of the PRAXIS II PLT will be given on campus to candidates in the Spring 2002 Block classes. This test will be used to gather baseline data useful for program improvement and to help establish test procedures to be used when SUU becomes an official ETS test site in July. Beginning Fall 2002, all candidates will be required to complete an appropriate Praxis II Subject Assessment prior to admission to the Block and take the PRAXIS PLT upon completion of student teaching. Registration and testing dates will be published and announced.

After July, 2002, all tests will be offered on campus through the SUU Career Services Office. Candidates may also take the tests at any approved ETS test site. For registration forms and test dates and times consult the PRAXIS Bulletin available in late July from ETS. You can obtain a copy of the bulletin from the SUU Career Services Office or you can call ETS to obtain the bulletin and other information.

in the U.S.: (800) 772-9476 (24 hours)
TTY for the deaf: (800) 275-1391
outside the U.S.: (609) 771-7395

When you get the Praxis Bulletin, check the location and schedule for the tests you want to take. Complete the registration form and send it to ETS with the correct fee.

Where Should I Have My Scores Sent?

The Praxis Bulletin lists a code for each organization approved by ETS to receive scores. You should list the code for each certification agency or college you want to receive your scores. The scores must usually be sent directly to the agencies from ETS. You may feel that you should wait until you know you have gotten a passing score before sending it in, but that's not necessary. You will just slow down the process and incur extra expense. Certification agencies do not use

