

Evergreen Masters in Teaching Program

Prompt Responses & Reflection for Victoria Osborne

#1. Look over what area you intend to teach and indicate how your course work has prepared you to teach in this area. This should match the endorsement area you indicate in your application. Name your strengths in preparation, areas needing growth, and plans for next steps.

My educational background in anthropology and English at Willamette University gave me a strong foundation in writing and communication, but also taught me the immeasurable value of compassionate educators willing to go the extra mile for their students. Throughout my life, I've been most inspired by those educators who genuinely seem to love what they teach and who also aim to foster a love of learning in their students that extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

As an anthropology major, I had the opportunity to conduct field studies with several different community groups, and through my coursework was taught how to deeply observe and reflect on the social behaviors individuals exhibit in group settings and the many influences at play in how each chooses to act as part of a collective. As a result, I learned how to better identify and articulate my own personal biases, and how each naturally influences my interpretations of others' actions and behavior.

These educational experiences helped me to be more mindful of how my personal experiences influence my perceptions of others and how to better identify ethnocentric behaviors in myself. This practice of recognizing one's own bias, particularly when faced with such a wide range of experiences as can often be contained in a single classroom, is invaluable for teachers, as I believe cultivating such self-awareness is critical to becoming a more empathetic, equitable educator.

During my studies, I had the opportunity to further develop my observational and analytical skills by conducting independent social research through group and individual interview experiences. Thinking critically about the ways in which people chose to describe themselves, their circumstances, and how they built community based on shared interests, location, or other point of common ground was very illuminating. These experiences were especially formative in terms of how I relate to and communicate with students and families today— particularly when the need for active listening & thoughtful analysis is necessary in order to reach a mutual understanding.

Areas of academic growth for me include deepening my understanding of subject areas that are outside of my typical comfort zone. Language arts, history, social studies, & etc. have been my most natural areas of strength for many years, so further developing my knowledge of these and other subject areas in order to better support students will be a priority.

Learning how to be a more culturally responsive and aware educator, particularly in regards to teaching subjects like history, is also hugely important to me and I look forward to diving more into the subject throughout my studies.

#2. Look over what area you intend to teach and indicate how your life experiences have prepared you to teach in this area. This should match the endorsement area you indicate in your application. Name your strengths in preparation, areas needing growth, and plans for next steps.

My own educational experiences inspired me to work and volunteer in K-8 schools both during (2009-2013) and after college (2013-present), with a particular focus on literacy and providing hands-on support for emerging readers.

Beginning at the age of 19, I worked as a work study student in a kindergarten classroom in Salem, OR, where I was tasked with forming a literacy group for emerging readers in need of additional support in areas such as phonics and letter recognition. It was a rich experience and inspired me to seek out more opportunities to work with elementary-aged students and learn how I could better support them.

After college, I worked as a small-town journalist for over a year, during which time I was given the opportunity to see the other, more bureaucratic side of the public education system when I was assigned to cover both the local school and county government beats. Over many months, I became familiar with the daily challenges a small district can face, an experience which served to open my eyes to the many decisions that are made at the board level, but which all deeply impact students and educators alike.

Following my time in journalism, I went on to earn my TEFL certification in Beijing and complete my teaching practicum with 3rd and 4th grade students in southern Guangdong province. During my stay in China, I was able to develop my skills in flexible, adaptive lesson planning and quickly learned the importance of thinking on my feet and being attuned to the ever-evolving needs of an extremely high-energy class.

I also came to understand how differently students at my school had learned to read English—relying almost entirely on immediate sight recognition rather than the traditional phonics-based method I was familiar with. Discovering effective means by which to navigate this difference in learning style was hugely instructive for me, and I deeply appreciate having had the opportunity to have such an experience.

Having worked with elementary-aged children in a variety of professional settings for many years, I am already familiar with the massive amount of time and energy it takes to dedicate oneself to a group of students. One of the things I most enjoy about working in education is getting to know each as the incredibly unique and interesting individuals they are, and so always welcome opportunities to develop rapport in ways that foster mutually respectful, honest, and thoughtful communication.

A few strengths I believe I've developed over the years are thorough lesson planning (with back-up plans!) and careful organization, empathetic and engaging classroom/behavior management, and ensuring students feel heard and valued no matter the circumstance. Areas of growth for me, on the other hand, include expanding my knowledge of equitable & engaging teaching strategies. I'm also looking forward to

learning more specific ways to tailor lessons to better support neurodivergent students and those who may struggle within the structure of a ‘traditional’ classroom setting.

#3. Education is both a social good and structurally unjust. Explain your understanding of this contradiction and ways it can be addressed.

Growing up in a rural community with limited financial and educational resources as well as having worked at a former Title I school for multiple years, I am already familiar with a number of the struggles many elementary-aged students face. Whether it is socially, emotionally, or academically, all play a role in a student’s overall ability to consistently be present and engaged to a degree that enables them to academically progress at the rate they are expected to in terms of state benchmarks and typical grade-level standards.

Just getting to school can be a huge barrier for many of our students, and so I’ve learned that being a teacher isn’t just about helping them learn how to structure a sentence or analyze the context surrounding a particular historical event. It’s also about being a responsible, caring adult who is actively engaged and aware enough to help students get the support they need to be able to attend and feel safe at school. If a student does not feel safe, supported, or welcome in their classroom—no substantial learning can take place and the gap between their understanding and their classmates who may not be facing some of the same challenges is allowed to grow wider.

At least one way that the particular issue of attendance barriers can be addressed is by forming focus committees composed of individuals who work across various school departments along with at least one district representative and attendance liaison to help provide outreach and connect families to support services directly. As a School Secretary in Portland, OR, I was part of our K-8’s own Attendance Committee, which was focused on identifying and supporting students who were having difficulty finding reliable transportation to and from school, as well as those whose health or the health of their immediate family members impacted their ability to attend regularly.

Our goal as a committee was to connect families to district and community resources that could potentially assist them, and we met regularly in collaboration with the school counselor and principal in order to do so. Such cross-communication among teachers and administrative staff is essential for such efforts to be effective.

Reflection: How has your time volunteering and observing informed your decision to be a teacher?

Since earning my BA degree from Willamette University in 2013, I’ve accumulated years of experience providing high-quality service and a wide range of administrative support in spaces centering students, families, and educators. I endeavor to be a positive, proactive member of every team I’m a part of and have had the pleasure of serving multiple community businesses and organizations based in K-8 education since 2010.

As School Secretary at Creston K-8 in Portland, OR, I dedicated myself to providing an accessible and inclusive registration experience for students and families and worked hard to meet the needs of a wide range of staff, parents, and partner organizations. In my

role as the ‘face’ of the school’s main office, careful time management, detail-oriented project organization, and the efficient prioritization of tasks were all absolutely essential to the job. I also spent a significant amount of time supervising students during my daily lunch and recess duties, which often proved to be the highlights of my day and gave me the opportunity to connect with students on a more personal level.

As the school’s lead registrar, it was up to me to guide families through the enrollment process and act as an intermediary for individuals in need of additional support services due to barriers created by factors such as homelessness or a lack of transportation resources. I was responsible for introducing families to the school community and providing them with all of the information they needed in order to make their students’ transitions into new classrooms as seamless as possible. Having so many different responsibilities made jumping from one project to the next almost second-nature, and I worked diligently to manage a demanding workload in the face of frequent interruptions and unique, often unexpected challenges.

I continued to serve children and families as both a lead and assistant teacher in Hands On Children’s Museum educational camp programs in the summer of 2021. As a lead teacher, I was responsible for crafting engaging, developmentally appropriate programming for students aged 3-5 and 6-10. In my elementary-age camps, I crafted lessons and activities based around themes such as veterinary medicine, experimental art, map reading & design, and even the basics of ‘treasure-hunting’ navigational strategies.

I am an extremely detail-oriented lesson planner and poured a tremendous amount of time and energy into the creation of my camp curriculum. One of the students’ main projects in the ‘Pets & Vets’ camp I lead involved the construction of an animal habitat diorama, which aimed to represent an appropriate living environment for the students’ chosen animal. Once complete, each student was given an opportunity to present their project and answer questions based on the research they had done in class.

Later that summer in ‘Treasure Hunters,’ I painstakingly designed a hunt that took place in and around the museum and included appropriately puzzling written riddles and mysterious hints as to the location of various hidden clues. During these hunts, students were divided into teams and had to work together to solve the riddles using their knowledge of compass navigation and map-reading, skills which we had learned and practiced over the course of the camp. It was enormously fun experience—and the students seemed to enjoy it as well!

In summary, I am a flexible, highly motivated person dedicated to providing the best possible educational experience for every student. I love working with children and find guiding them through both the academic and social-emotional aspects of learning to be extremely rewarding, and so am passionate about working towards a career in education as a part of the MiT program at Evergreen in 2023.