

Hello, everybody. My name is Veronica Stanford, and I am a graduating senior elementary education major with a minor in coaching originally from Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. I would like to start off by saying thank you to the chair, vice chair, and the committee for giving me this opportunity to be speaking here today.

Today I will briefly tell you why I decided to peruse a degree in elementary education, specifically at the University of Vermont, and why this decision has more than adequately prepared me to officially enter the field of teaching for this upcoming school year.

As I was beginning the college search process, I was nearly certain I wanted to pursue a degree in education, but I genuinely did not know at what institution I wanted to attend. Being a Pennsylvania native, choosing one of the state schools for higher education would have been a simple and cheap choice, especially because the colleges and universities in the Pennsylvania state school system have a reputation for good educator preparation programs. However, when I started looking into these programs, it was never very clear to me if I would have observations and practicums in real schools leading up to my final student teaching during my senior year or if the final student teaching would be the only classroom experienced guaranteed by these state programs.

I would like to note that as of today, it is possible these schools in Pennsylvania may have changed their programs to require more experience before student teaching; however, a lack of the hands-on opportunities with real students and teachers in elementary schools was simply not my reality 5 years ago.

Knowing that at the time I was not completely sure that I would pursue an undergraduate degree in education, I knew I wanted to participate in a program at a university that had practicums and guaranteed various opportunities for me to be in a school setting before my senior year. This way, in the event I decided to not become an educator, I would know this early on in my time in college, rather than coming to this realization during my senior year student teaching, where at that point it would be nearly impossible to switch majors and still graduate on time. Because of this, I began looking at colleges and universities outside of the PA state school system and this was when I became aware of UVM and what their elementary education program had to offer to me.

When I was on my tour of UVM, I learned that all educator licensure programs in the state of Vermont require candidates to complete a minimum of 60 hours in the field, in addition to a two-week solo teaching experience. Because of the three practicums leading up to the culminating student teaching senior year, UVM education students complete between 600 and 900 hours in their respective fields.

As I have mentioned before, when I was applying for college, I was almost certain I wanted to be an educator, but there was still a bit of doubt in my mind. So, hearing that at UVM I would get three different opportunities provided by my program to have multiple hands-on learning experiences with real students in local elementary schools instead of just being “thrown-in” to student teaching, like I would have been at other colleges I was interested in, this was the single, biggest reason that I chose UVM.

Now that I am on the precipice of graduating, looking back on my entire college experience, I could not be more grateful for my time at UVM, specifically due to the experiences and relationships I formed within the elementary education program.

Even though I began this educator preparation program with some hesitancy because I was not completely sure if I wanted to become an educator, the moment I began my first practicum experience sophomore year, I knew that becoming an educator was the right path for me.

If I had gone to a different university besides UVM, I would have been living with a constant fear that education was not the right path for me because during my first few years on campus, I never would have had the opportunity to be in different schools applying what I learned in the college classroom to real students in the school environment and I would have had to wait until I was a senior to see if education was the right path for me.

UVM's unique practicum experiences before student teaching is what set this institution apart for me and why ultimately, I chose to pursue a career in education in Vermont. Next year, I will be teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at BFA Fairfax, and this opportunity would not have been possible without UVM's educator preparation program that has set me up for success.

I will happily answer any questions you may have now or after everyone has presented. Thank you.