

USU UWLP Releases Research on Utah College Students' Views on Teaching as a Career

Emmalee Chastain and Julene Reese

09/17/2025

```
$(document).ready(function(){ $(''.pdf-wrapper').hide();  
$(''.pageTitle').addClass('text-bold'); });
```



The teaching profession is part of a broader field known as “care work,” which encompasses occupations devoted to supporting and nurturing others. This work has historically been undervalued in pay and prestige, and women are disproportionately represented in “care work” occupations. These dynamics are important as they influence who pursues teaching as a career and how the profession is valued and rewarded.

The [Utah Women & Leadership Project \(UWLP\)](#) at Utah State University recently published a research report, [“What Utah College Students Think about Teaching as a Career: An Analysis by Gender.”](#) Using data collected by Envision Utah, a nonprofit that engages Utahns in collaborative, bottom-up decision making, the report explores the perceptions of Utah college students as they consider and prepare for careers. The findings offer important insights about the pipeline of teachers and provide recommendations for attracting and retaining the best educators for Utah’s classrooms.

Challenges Teachers Face in Utah: Utah teachers earn an average of \$69,161 (18th nationally), yet the state has the highest teacher/student ratio in the U.S. – 1:22.2 compared to 1:15.4 – and ranks 49th in per-student spending. Data indicate that 84% of new Utah teachers return for a second year, but only 61% make it to five years. Factors such as large class sizes, low pay, behavior

challenges, and limited support contribute to attrition, highlighting the urgent need for stronger investment in Utah’s teacher workforce as the state’s population grows.

Profile of College Students Who Aspire to Teach:

Demographics: The report shows that women are more likely to aspire to teach than men (62.4% of women versus 20.5% of men). When compared to white women, women of color are significantly more likely to pursue teaching (40% vs. 26.7%), while interest is higher for white men (27.8%) than for men of color (18.8%).

Paying for College: Roughly one in five students will rely on student loans, and a small group will work full-time while pursuing higher education. Overall, the analysis shows that future teachers may be slightly more self-reliant than students who are not majoring in teaching professions.

Factors in Choice of Major: Students majoring in teaching are often motivated by both an interest in the subject and a desire to make a difference, with women especially influenced by these factors. Potential salary was among the lowest influences, though aspiring male teachers were more likely to be influenced by salary than females.

Career Plans After Graduation: There are marked differences by gender regarding a student’s five-to-seven-year post-graduation plan. Men expect to remain in the workforce, with most planning to stay in the same career or shift to a different career in the same field. No male students indicated they expected to leave the workforce to raise a family. In comparison, women planning to teach indicated a strong commitment to remaining in the same career, and 13.7% of women expected they would leave the workforce to raise a family.

“The results for choice of major reveal notable gender differences,” said Eric Dahlin, co-author of the report and associate professor of sociology at Brigham Young University. “The findings imply that women who choose teaching may be more intrinsically motivated.”

Factors That Would Help Students Reconsider

Teaching as a Career: The Envision Utah survey asked students not planning to teach what might change their minds. Higher salary was the most important reason identified (62.5%), representing a 21.5 percentage-point increase over the same question in 2018. Similarly, the percentage of those who reported nothing would get them to reconsider teaching also increased from 19% in 2018 to 28.3% in 2025.

Teachers' Encouragement or Discouragement: Survey respondents were asked if they had been encouraged or discouraged by other teachers to enter the teaching profession. Among those who planned to teach, 79.4% of women and 62% of men reported being encouraged.

"Although these data do not establish causality, they do highlight how gendered expectations are communicated differently to men and women," said Susan Madsen, UWLP founding director and co-author of the report. "These results reflect broader cultural patterns of the role that gender plays in sorting students into professions."

Policy Implications to Encourage Teaching

Careers: Attracting and retaining great teachers in Utah necessitates addressing both economic and cultural barriers. Potential solutions include increasing teacher pay, expanding student recruitment efforts and scholarships, and creating more visible career advancement opportunities. These measures are vital for building a more diverse and committed teaching workforce, which, in turn, is essential for producing the qualified and dedicated teachers needed to prepare the next generation for high-demand careers.

"If Utah wants to maintain and attract the best workers to nurture, support, and teach our children, we must demonstrate how much we value their work by providing them with the proper resources," said Madsen.

The "[A Bolder Way Forward](#)" initiative provides opportunities for Utahns to learn and contribute to meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. For more information, visit the UWLP website at utwomen.org. The UWLP is affiliated with the [Jon M. Huntsman School of Business](#) and [USU Extension](#).

Contact

Emmalee Chastain
Emmalee.Chastain@usu.edu

More Extension Updates

- [Extension News](#)
- [Gardening](#)
- [Recipes](#)
- [Personal Finance](#)
- [Relationships](#)
- [Our Impact](#)

[Tips Sign Up](#)[Take a Course](#)[Donate to Extension](#)