

Alumni Spotlight: Andrea Brandley

08/16/2019

Andrea Brandley '16

Drama Enhancement and Integration Teacher

Uintah Elementary School

Could you tell us a bit about your journey since USU and how you've gotten to where you are today?

After graduating from USU in 2016 I taught at Box Elder High School, West Point Jr. High, and am currently teaching at Uintah Elementary School. Because I am insane I decided to go the route of 3 schools, 3 vastly different age groups, 3 different school districts, 7 shows directed, in 3 years. (No, I don't recommend it.) Despite my habit of continuously starting over, I feel very comfortable and confident as a teacher embarking on year 4 and look forward to continued growth and improvement! I am excited to officially be a Level 2 teacher. I also started a Master's degree in public policy, emphasizing in education policy. Since this decision, I am grateful for my varied experience and think it will inform my future work.

Tell us about the work you are doing now. What is a typical day like for you?

I currently teach elementary students from age 5 to 12 using drama enhancement and integration. Basically, that means I teach everything (math, science, English, history) using drama/theatre techniques. My students go from creating tableaux of Paul Revere's ride, to creating genetics machines, to redesigning fairytales, to clapping rhythms for times tables. I love that it keeps me on my toes and my students are grateful for the chance to get out of their chairs and move! Sometimes I think they even forget they're learning. :) I am also currently working as a graduate assistant for the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, studying everything from tax structure to air quality to education funding. While my primary interest is education policy, I am finding that all policy is interconnected and there are so many social issues that deserve to be studied! I spend my evenings taking classes and doing homework for my policy graduate program.

How did your time at USU prepare you for your current position? Are there any specific skills, competencies, or understandings you developed at USU that you might not have otherwise developed?

My time at USU prepared me exceptionally well to be a teacher. Matt Omasta runs a theatre education program with high expectations and those expectations led me to surpass what I thought I was capable of. I learned to write detailed lesson plans using effective strategies. I learned professionalism. I learned to collaborate. I learned to efficiently manage my time. While these are skills I might have been able to learn elsewhere, I don't know that I could have learned them as well as I did as a part of this program.

It was also this program that sparked my interest in studying public policy. After reading *Savage Inequalities* by Jonathan Kozol for a seminar course, I found myself frustrated at educational inequities and passionate about searching and advocating for solutions. Had I not been in this program and been exposed to this book, I may be looking at a different career path. This experience helped me to look beyond myself and my immediate environment and recognize the need for improved policy and work in social justice.

What is one of your favorite memories from your time in USU's Theatre Education program?

My favorite memories from USU all involve the people. I loved Chester's holiday celebrations, late-night portfolio parties, and trips to AATE conferences. My classmates were some of my greatest teachers and even better friends. Spending time with them, often venting about a difficult project or the stresses of school, are some of my favorite memories.

What advice would you offer to a potential student considering studying theatre education at USU?

Embrace the challenge. The theatre education program is far from easy, but nothing worth doing is. While all the coursework, extracurriculars, and other requirements can seem overwhelming, the best advice I can give you is to jump in feet first. Take every opportunity that is thrown your way, and take it with the attitude that you want to squeeze it for everything it's worth. Do research, present at AATE, do service, work as a teaching assistant, teach guest lessons in schools, direct, design. Every opportunity I had taught me something that shaped me as a teacher, artist, and human and I am very grateful for that today.