Hen Werner: Taking Educational Risks for the Future

June 11, 2014

Hen Werner checked her phone as she walked back to her car after teaching her last history class for the year at Vacaville High School. She had now completed all the requirements for her California teaching credential and would be a part of the UC Davis School of Education graduation ceremony in a few weeks. But Hen wasn’t thinking of celebrating just yet. The UC Davis program was uniquely structured so that students who completed their credential in the spring would be hired into teaching jobs for the following fall. They would also start the Masters degree program at the same time, and complete the degree during their first year of teaching. That was the ideal scenario and it is what Hen wanted to do. However, Hen didn’t yet have a job offer she was willing to accept and without that income, she didn’t feel she could afford the additional tuition to complete the Masters. She wanted to secure employment before she threw her mortarboard in the air.

Learning was enjoyable for Hen, but the credential year had proved to be incredibly stressful. Credential students had their own homework to prepare for UC Davis classes and were also placed into a K-12 classroom immediately in the fall and asked to observe and complete their student teaching requirement. This meant dual preparation, and with a husband and two young children, Hen had to juggle priorities. Financial issues had also been difficult. The credential program began in late August to coincide with the school schedule in most of the surrounding K-12 districts. But the academic year for UC Davis programs didn’t actually begin until late September and this limited the loans and financial assistance that graduate students could obtain.

Still, Hen was entirely happy with her credentialing experience and knew that she would now be able to provide opportunities for her children that had not been available to her at the same age. She had participated in the recent UCD School of Education job fair and had been offered a teaching position in Pittsburgh, CA and would possibly be interviewed for a job in Oakland, CA. But Hen and her husband wanted to stay in Davis and neither

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1 This case was prepared for use as the basis for class instruction and discussion by Sylvia Sensiper, PhD, Office of Graduate Studies, UC Davis.
of those positions would afford a reasonable commute time. Hen didn’t want to compromise her family life and she didn’t want to wait for jobs at schools closer to home to be posted on EDJOIN.org. She had called a friend in the Elk Grove School District in Sacramento and had decided to be pro-active about looking for a job. Tomorrow morning she would submit her resume and cover letter to a couple of high schools in the district and hoped this would result in an interview. (See Exhibit A) If she didn’t secure a teaching position, there were still ways to complete the Masters, but Hen wasn’t sure what was the best course of action.

Foster Care Experience

Hen was placed in foster care when she was only a year old, and then was in and out of foster homes and group homes until she was eleven. At one point, a social worker had placed her and her younger brother Jon with a relative who had a heroin habit. Deciding it was safer to live on the San Francisco streets, the children left. “I had a lifetime of experience that contributed to a head-butting personality,” Hen said, “I just didn’t trust anyone and it was hard to place me in foster homes.”

In the early 1990s, a religious family adopted both Hen and Jon, along with eleven other foster children, and moved the entire group to a small town in northern Washington to escape any disasters that might occur because of Y2K. “I wanted to leave the moment I got there,” said Hen, “but they had my little brother and wherever he was, I had to be there too.” The church group lived off the grid and Hen learned a lot of farming skills but didn’t receive any formal education. “I can make cheese and antibiotics. And I can raise, kill and butcher my own meat: cows, goats, bears, moose, anything like that. But I didn’t learn any academic skills.”

Hen waited until her brother turned eighteen. Then they both completed their GEDs and left northern Washington, Jon heading into the Navy, and Hen hitch-hiking back to Sacramento, CA.

Getting Settled in Sacramento

In Sacramento, Hen took the first job she was offered, a position at the Ralphs in the parking lot where her ride from Washington dropped her off. “There was a We’re Hiring sign out front so I walked right in and told them I needed a job. I told them I was good at working hard and they said they would test me out for a day.” Hen worked that day, was hired on the spot and continued as a courtesy clerk in the Sacramento Ralphs until she relocated when she got a job at the Ralphs in Davis.

Hen immediately wanted to enroll at Sacramento City College but was told she would have to wait until she had residency. Once that requirement was met, she started classes but was only able to take one or two classes at a time because of her work schedule. “I worked 60-80 hours some weeks. During the day I worked at Ralphs and in the evenings

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2 EDJOIN.org is a nationwide job search website for K-12 educators.
I worked at a retirement home.” Hen wasn’t sure she wanted to take on debt and she often didn’t qualify for financial aid. “It was a balance for me. If I quit working I couldn’t pay the rent and that was what I would have had to do to go to school full-time and get financial aid. If I got the financial aid it would cover the rent, but I was worried about having that much debt and whether I would be able to pay it back.”

Not having attended high school, Hen found Sacramento City College to be somewhat of a struggle. “I didn’t have a lot of the skills you need for college, I hadn’t even had to sit still in a class since I was eleven. Reading is difficult because I have ADD and I also have difficulty with numbers.” But Hen found help from a cultural anthropology professor who guided her through the process of figuring out new learning strategies and how to succeed. Hen had planned to major in history but realized she didn’t have the ability to memorize dates, and with the support from this professor, cultural life became her focus. “My anthropology professor was really supportive and I really liked what she was teaching. That sort of made me love anthropology.” During Hen’s years with the religious group she had read many books written in an old English style. This literature had given her foundational writing skills and because she welcomed her professor’s critiques, her writing continued to improve.

Hen worked slowly to accumulate credits, and then was able to accelerate her success when she met her husband Heath and they moved in together. She maintained a 3.8 GPA at Sacramento City College and transferred to the anthropology department at UC Davis in Winter quarter 2009.

**At UC Davis**

Hen’s schedule during her undergraduate years included taking care of a child and that made life hectic yet she still managed to take classes that she enjoyed. To satisfy many of the anthropology department requirements at UC Davis, Hen took classes in Chicano Studies and Native American Studies because they focused on both history and culture. She participated in a study abroad program in Costa Rica that brought some of her academic studies to life as she explored the ways in which diasporic peoples adapted to new cultures. She was an active member of the Guardian Scholars program and did service work with dependent adults and their families. She also participated in MURALS, completing research on gendered immigration laws and their effects on US immigration patterns. During this time, she maintained a 3.4 GPA.

As Hen neared graduation, she considered working in the social services but after completing an internship decided that wasn’t the kind of assistance she wanted to provide.

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3 Hen had an unfortunate experience with a former friend who had used her credit card and left her to pay off the bill. This created concerns about owing money.
4 Hen’s first son Logon was born in 2007 and her second son Max was born in 2012.
5 MURALS (Mentorships for Undergraduate Research in Agriculture, Letters and Science) is a pre-graduate program for students who are disadvantaged in their access to graduate school.
to people. It also helped her realize that additional education would probably increase both her possibilities and value. Valerie Garcia, the Guardian Scholars Program Coordinator suggested Hen consider the teacher credential program in the School of Education, knowing Hen had the aptitude to work with teen-agers and young adults. An additional incentive was that the school had a Guardian Teacher Scholarship that would cover tuition for former foster youth who wanted to become K-12 teachers.\(^6\) Hen agreed that teaching was a good career fit. Her own positive experience with the Sacramento City College anthropology professor made her realize how she could contribute. “The anthropology professor was there at the moment when I needed some positive reinforcement. I wanted to be that positive force and give my students the tools they need to be successful.”

The credential program was for elementary, middle and high school teachers and also provided training for a Bilingual Authorization that credentials teachers to work with native Spanish speakers.\(^7\) The requirements included 30 hours of public classroom experience in the subject area or at grade level that one wants to teach, an educational psychology class, a GPA of 3.0 or better, and the state required tests, CBEST and CSET.\(^8\) Ideally, an applicant would have completed all of the required prerequisites prior to the start of the program in August, however the state required tests are only offered every two months so students are often admitted without having completed every test.\(^9\)

This was the case for Hen. She completed the CBEST and other requirements, but she was admitted to the program without yet having taken the CSET tests required for her chosen subject, social science. *(See Exhibit B)* Hen needed to take and pass the three subtests that made up the social science CSET prior to beginning her long-term student teaching assignment which started in Winter quarter 2014.

**The State Required Tests: CBEST and CSET**

All teacher credential students in California are required to take and pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test, usually referred to as the CBEST. The examination is designed to test basic reading, mathematics and writing skills but is not intended to measure a person’s ability to teach those subjects.\(^10\) Each credential student also has to

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\(^6\) Scholarship funding is available for the first year credential program with the possibility of continued funding for the second year Masters program. [http://education.ucdavis.edu/guardian-teacher-scholarship-fund](http://education.ucdavis.edu/guardian-teacher-scholarship-fund)

\(^7\) See more information here: [http://education.ucdavis.edu/overview/bilingual-authorization](http://education.ucdavis.edu/overview/bilingual-authorization)

\(^8\) The UC Davis School of Education calculates GPA in various ways. “The standard for admission to UC graduate work is 3.0. We look at either one’s cumulative work, all upper-division coursework, or the last two years of upper-division course work.” See [http://education.ucdavis.edu/post/applying-uc-davis-teacher-credential-program](http://education.ucdavis.edu/post/applying-uc-davis-teacher-credential-program)

\(^9\) These were the requirements the year that Hen applied but potential applicants should check a program website for the current requirements.

\(^10\) [http://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/about_CBEST.asp](http://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/about_CBEST.asp)
make a decision as to what subject they want to teach and at what grade level: this determines the CSET (California Subject Examinations for Teachers) examination that the student is required to take. This subject will also determine their student teaching assignment and the subject in which they will receive their credential.

Elementary school teachers take the CSET: Multiple Subjects test which consists of three different subtests. Prospective middle and high school teachers can take the Single Subject tests including the basic Social Science, Science, Math, English and Art, as well as tests in more specialized subjects and numerous languages. Each single subject varies in the number of subtests that make up the entire exam and the cost for all subtests together is often lower than taking each subtest individually. Taking all the subtests together however, is a significant time investment as a test taker is given five hours to complete the entire exam. Students are usually credentialed in one subject.

Winter Quarter Success

Like all UC Davis credential students, Hen received a short-term student teaching assignment and a long-term student teaching assignment, each with a different age group and subject matter. Students were able to spend a couple of weeks during their fall semesters in the class where they would ultimately complete their long-term assignments but spent most of the fall semester in their short-term assignments. Hen’s short-term class was 7th grade world history and her long-term class would be 12th grade government.

“The idea with the short-term assignment is that you are just observing, but it depends on the teacher. I had a teacher who thought the best way to learn was to teach, so three days into my training I was teaching,” said Hen.

During the fall semester Hen also had to balance her student teaching with homework for her UC Davis classes, her family life and financial considerations; she worked part-time until financial aid was available through UC Davis in October. Hen’s biggest challenge however, was passing the CSET so that she would actually be able to move into her own classroom for the long-term teaching assignment in January 2014.

Hen took all three subtests in early September but didn’t pass any of the tests. Two months later she passed two tests and failed one test by one point. Finally in early January Hen passed her final test.11

“The tests for the social sciences are really broad and the first time I took the tests, I wrote from a constructivist viewpoint which was not how they were graded,” said Hen. “Instead, I had to think about the information the testers really wanted and also improve my test taking strategies. On the second set of tests, I opened the books to the essay prompts and jotted down notes right away, then went back and completed some of the multiple choice questions. This way I didn’t get as tired.”

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11 The Guardian Professions Program at UC Davis covered the financial costs associated with the CBEST and CSET.
Hen also was at a disadvantage because she had not attended a traditional high school, but she used whatever information she could gather from peers who had already completed the tests. One cohort member who did standardized test grading, told her that all information in her written essays would receive points. On her last and final test in January, Hen was asked to write about South African apartheid writers but didn’t know enough to construct a complete essay. Instead she wrote an essay that compared civil rights in the US, India and Africa. “Even though I couldn’t give them exactly what they wanted, I was able to show that I knew enough about those civil rights movements. My cohort member had told me that the graders give you points for the appropriate use of a name or a landmark – or a fact. And while I couldn’t address the question directly, I received enough points to pass.”

In January, Hen walked into her 12th grade government classes ready to get started. She would be teaching two classes on her own, with observation by the resident teacher. “Both my short-term and long-term teachers were very different so I got to see many ways of managing classrooms. Both teachers knew their material really well and they were comfortable handing me the reins. I had a lot of freedom to explore how I wanted to teach and it was a great experience.”

The Job Fair

In the Spring, UC Davis School of Education held a job fair for their credential students, as they did every year. Principals and vice principals came from across California and students were able to sign up for ‘mock interviews’ to practice their skills. “Everyone wants UC Davis students as we come out of our program more prepared than teachers from other programs,” said Hen. “The interviews are just practice, but principals are really testing out what teachers they might want. A number of math and science teachers, who are often in high demand, received job offers straight from those interviews.”

During the second year of the credential/Masters program students use their classroom as the research lab for the Masters portion of the program. UC Davis classes are held only on Saturdays and only every other week. “If you are within 2 hours of UC Davis you are considered a local student, but even if you get a job farther away you can complete your Masters degree,” said Hen. “There is one person in my cohort who has a job in San Diego and she will be a long distance student. She will complete her Masters and will be required to be physically present for just three of those Saturday classes. Her other meetings will be conducted by Skype.”

Yet students don’t have to be employed to complete the Masters. “You can be a guest teacher in someone else’s classroom or have a long-term substitute position,” said Hen. There is also an option to PELP and return later to complete the Masters.

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12 PELP stands for Planned Education Leave Program
Considering the Timing and Tuition for the Masters degree

Towards the end of the credential program, Hen had begun to think about the Masters program and her various options going forward. Knowing that classes were scheduled only on alternating Saturdays had helped her see that it was manageable, but there were other things to consider. Tuition plus books would cost approximately $8,500, a figure that was reasonable if she was employed and the job was within a do-able commuting distance so that her family life didn’t suffer. After all, teachers with Masters degrees received higher salaries, so completing the program was advantageous. (See Exhibit C)

“I had to assess the ‘long term opportunity costs’ is what it came down to,” said Hen. “I had to go through the same kind of thinking process I went through when I made the decision to start the credential program. It was a high risk as well because my immediate concern was to pay rent. But I had to think, am I going to continue to struggle to pay rent the way that I’ve been paying rent or take this risk to make it so its not a struggle in the future? That meant sitting down and looking at some numbers and fortunately Heath is an accountant and really good at that.”

Hen had also struggled with the fact that she would be spending time away from her children. “My kids are young and they would love to be with me all the time,” she said. “During the credential program I was gone 12 hours a day, 5 days a week. These were the things I was thinking about going into the program. Can I even do this? Am I being a bad mother by choosing this?”

Hen knew only too well, the results of neglectful parenting and she wanted her children to have a childhood and early adulthood that was easier than what she had. Getting a job in Sacramento would be ideal so she was willing to do the extra work and distribute her resume. But she also had to consider what she might do if a job didn’t materialize or if the only job she could get was an hours commute away. “Completing the Masters is not just a money risk, it’s a time risk and an energy risk too,” Hen said.
Appendix A: Cover letter, resume and teaching statement

Hen Werner 530-220-0503 • hjwerner@ucdavis.edu
730 M Street Davis, CA 95616

Craig Doug
9050 Vicino Drive
Elk Grove, CA 95758

Craig Doug,

I would like to express my interest in a Secondary Social Sciences teaching position at Laguna Creek High School. I hold a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Cultural Anthropology with a Minor in Religious Studies from the University of California, Davis. I will be receiving my Single Subject Social Science Teaching Credential from the University of California, Davis on June 11, 2014. This credential includes an authorization to provide instruction to English Learners.

I am currently Student Teaching at Vaca High School. I am teaching a semester of 12th grade Government. This position involves a collaborative effort to create units according to the Common Core standards with an emphasis on skill building and teaching history from a constructivist perspective. I strive to combine the teaching of content while building community awareness and promoting involvement. I have also developed and implemented learning and support materials for English Learners as well as modified materials for students with 504s and IEPs.

I actively participate in student’s sporting events, benefit concerts, clubs and meetings as an additional means of supporting my student’s success. In addition to Government, I have also student taught 7th grade World History at Vaca Pena Middle School where we utilized District Benchmarks. I am currently a substitute teacher for the Vacaville School District. My student teaching experience has helped me to develop my classroom management and community building skills. My organization and consistency work well in creating a healthy, welcoming classroom community.

I am particularly interested in Laguna Creek High School because of its focus on community and student involvement in a diversity of extracurricular activities. My cultural studies background and unique life experiences make me a particularly good match for your students and school.

I am excited by the prospect of joining Laguna Creek High School as a first year teacher. I sincerely believe that all students have the ability to learn and that we are all lifelong learners. I wish to share this belief with the students Laguna Creek High School.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warmest,
Hen Werner
Job Objective
Seeking a Middle or High School teaching position in the Social Sciences

Education
University of California, Davis
California Teaching Credential Program expected completion June 2014
University of California, Davis
Bachelor of Arts, Major, Anthropology, Socio Culture 2011
Universidad Católica de Costa Rica
Study Abroad, Immigration Studies 2010
Sacramento City College
General Education 2009

Teaching Experience
Student Teaching:
Vaca High School, 12th Grade U.S. Government
• Developed and Implement Semester course material meeting the new California Common Core Standards while collaborating with other teachers and staff.
• Developed & implemented support materials for ELL students.
• Attended parent conferences, faculty and team meetings, IEP & 504 meetings, and district board meetings. Actively participated in activities which included: assessing student progress, assigning grades, taking attendance, keeping parents/guardians informed through School Loop, phone calls and email.
• Actively participated in students sporting events, benefit concerts, clubs and meetings.
Vaca Pena Middle School, 7th Grade World History
• Developed and Implement unit course material meeting the new California Common Core Standards while collaborating with resident teachers and staff.
• Actively participate in student clubs and meetings.
Observation:
Davis High School, 10th Grade World Civilization
Da Vinci Charter School, 12th U.S. Government & Economics

Additional Experience
Substitute Teacher, Grades 7-12, Vacaville School District, CA
Volunteer tutor and speaker for Yolo Foster Care & Child Welfare
Archival Research Coordinator, Uneasy Remains Film Project, Native American Studies
UC Davis Child Care Advisory Administrative Committee

Professional Development
Academic Literacy Summit, 2014 focusing on "...on how teachers and schools can imaginatively adapt to the new California Common Core Standards in literacy across all subjects."

Honor Societies and Memberships
Guardian Scholars, member since 2009
Golden Key Honor Society, member since 2010
Anthropology Club, Member since 2010
Additional Application Questions:

Why do you teach?

I am a natural teacher—the roles of leader, advocate and nurturer are ones I have filled all my life. My unique life experiences have formed me to be strong and focused, empathetic, passionate, and relatable. But I was not cognizant of what a good fit the classroom was until the first day that I stood in front of my own classroom. At that moment knew I had found my place in the world.

The door to teaching opened for me while I was participating in the UC Davis Guardian Scholars program for former foster youth. Through Guardian Scholars, I served as a mentor and promoted the benefits of college education to foster youth who were still in high school. I was grateful for the chance to be a positive influence and role model for these students. By sharing my story and successful education trajectory in a positive, achievable light; I provided a path by which they too could be successful academically.

Through Guardian Scholars, I also secured a place in the UC Davis School of Education, where I earned my teaching credential and am in the process of earning my Master's degree. After my first year of working in the classroom with junior high and high school students, I see more specifically how education is a path to empowerment, opportunity, and well-rounded success. I work hard to inspire a passion for learning that transfers from the classroom to the outside world. Being able to empower my students in the classroom in preparation for lifelong learning and economic resilience has been extremely rewarding.

Describe the classroom environment and/or setting you will create to provide the best possible learning conditions for your students.

I work to create an adaptable environment in which my students feel safe to express themselves. I want to give my students the tools they need to express themselves in a constructive and respectful manner and the desire to make their voices heard. It is important that students feel safe and respected in their learning environment.

I encourage my students to be part of the learning/teaching process. In encouraging initiative, leadership and community I try to maintain consistent and realistic expectations for my students to work towards while being clear and communicative with them.

It is important for the classroom to be a community of learners that are both supported and respectful of one another in their learning processes. This sense of community allows me to get to know my students so that I can make the content relatable to their lives and interests. I try to instill a sense that what they are learning today is a building block to help them in their futures.
Appendix B: Statement of Purpose from UC Davis Application credential program

Born to an interracial teen couple, ill equipped for parenting, my brother and I spent our early childhoods in the foster care system. As curious and inquisitive as I was, the day-to-day uncertainties made it extremely difficult to obtain a formal education. I have vivid memories of teachers' frustration when they realized I didn't know the alphabet or numbers. One teacher, Mr. Mike, took the time to teach me to read, write, and do basic arithmetic; most importantly, he taught me that if I worked hard, I could learn. I remember how powerful it felt to realize I was capable.

When I was ten years old, the State of California placed my brother and me with a very religious family who later sold all their worldly goods and moved us to Washington State. Their rampant anti-government sentiments were intensified by seclusion and religious indoctrination. Eventually, members of the church "cut ties" with the U.S. government by, among other things, pulling all of their foster children out of public school. I was never able to complete the sixth grade. The church encouraged corporal punishment past the boundaries of abuse and forbade communication with the outside world. I had spent my previous ten years without adequate care and often in the hands of abusers, so I was seasoned in self-reliance. My brother's safety was my main priority from a very young age.

In this secluded environment, I was told that being different was wrong and that all knowledge outside of the Bible was sin. Curiosity and questions were discouraged, conformity within was demanded, and all outsiders were demonized. My natural curiosity, intelligence and independence allowed me to question the dominant belief system and at the age of nineteen, I hitched a ride to experience the world. I was keenly aware that it was necessary to be adaptable and considerate of things I did not understand, as there was very little I would understand out in the real world.

In 2003, I started classes at Sacramento City College. I was once again behind and floundering. I was drawn to the study of others as a means of understanding myself and my place in society. Once more, an outstanding teacher helped me find my footing and
focus my passion for learning. I found myself in this teacher’s Anthropology class and with her guidance, found my way to the study of people and culture as a transfer student at UC Davis.

UC Davis inspired me. Working within the Anthropology, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies and Religious Studies departments, I was drawn to the stories of oppressed and struggling peoples. In 2009, I participated in the Costa Rican Communities Study abroad program, which allowed me to explore the challenges faced by diasporic peoples and their methods of adaptation to their new countries and cultures. I became an active member in Guardian Scholars, a group of former foster youth that supports and encourages emancipated youth to pursue higher education and supports and guides them in college. In the MURALS program I had the opportunity to participate in a focused research project on gendered immigration laws, their history and the effects on U.S. immigration patterns, and worked with Citizens Who Care, a support center for dependent adults and their families. Having children while a student spurred my interest in childcare and education and I participated in the UC Davis Childcare Advisory Committee and helped start a program called Time Off for Caregivers in the City of Davis. It was through these experiences that I came to realize that my difficult childhood gave me a unique perspective. My struggle was no longer a burden; it had begun to pay dividends of strength and character.

I have met many exceptional people and teachers who have guided and inspired me to become the person I am today. I hope to use my education to obtain an enhanced understanding of how to best lead, serve and inspire the disadvantaged youth within my community.
**Appendix C: Teacher Salary Scale Chart for Elk Grove School District**

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<th>CLASS C</th>
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*Maximum entry level effective July 1, 1997*

**Additional Stipulations**

- **Experience Placement**
  - Entry: A maximum of 10 years prior contract experience is allowed. Credit for prior experience will be determined by the Human Resources Department guided by the following criteria:
    - a. Prior teaching experience shall have required a teaching credential.
    - b. A year is defined as 75% of the contract or calendar year. Fractional parts of one (1) year may not be combined to meet the percentage requirements.
    - c. Prior teaching and/or vocational experience (including experience in the district) shall have occurred within fifteen (15) years immediately preceding the date of employment with the district. (Article 19.8)

- Class placements based on college semester units. (Quarter units equal 2/3 of a semester unit.)
- Doctoral bonus shall be based on 7% of the beginning step (A1) and awarded with the verification of the degree. (Article 19.903)
- **Entering teachers may not be placed on Step G until they have earned that placement after employment with the district. After being employed in the district, advancement to Class G requires the completion of 15 semester units of G approved coursework after completing Class F. (Article 19.609)**
- Completion of the Master's Degree does not guarantee G advancement if the 15 "G approved" semester units have not been completed.
- **Entering teachers may not be placed on Class H until they have earned that placement after employment with the district. Class H requires the completion of the Class G requirement and 5 semester Class H approved units. Placement on Class H must be renewed every 10 years.**