



Lehigh
University

NEW TEACHER-PREPARATION PROGRAMS AT LEHIGH

PROPOSED CHANGES

Lehigh University's College of Education is in the process of preparing new teacher-preparation programs for submission to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for official approval. We are making dramatic changes to all four of our teacher-preparation programs. This document talks about why we are making the changes and the process we have used to get where we are today.

Inspirations behind the Changes

State Regulations. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has issued guidelines specifying that the existing K-6 elementary teacher certification will be divided into two separate certifications: *PreK-4th grade* and *4th-8th grade*. Every university in Pennsylvania that prepares elementary teachers must apply for approval for one or both of the new certifications. Further, the Pennsylvania legislature has passed a requirement that all initial certification programs at all levels in Pennsylvania must, by January 1, 2011, include at least 9 credits (or 270 hours) of training in inclusionary practices in special education and 3 credits (or 90 hours) of training in working with English language learners (ELL).

Federal Regulations. The 2001 *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation mandated that teachers, including special education teachers who have primary responsibility for teaching core academic subjects, be "highly qualified." Highly qualified is defined as (1) holding a bachelor's degree, (2) having obtained full state certification in the academic core area for which a teacher has primary responsibility, and (3) passing the Praxis test in the content area to demonstrate subject matter competence. School districts were given some time to work toward having all their faculty attain highly qualified status. While the states, including Pennsylvania, were given a number of alternate approaches to seeing that currently employed teachers attained this status, new graduates are expected to graduate as highly qualified. In practice, this meant that school districts moved systematically to giving hiring preference in special education to teachers who were already highly qualified.

Given this fact, over the past few years, the number of students preparing to be special education teachers who have also sought regular elementary teacher certification has increased dramatically. To accommodate this increased cross-certification, the Special Education (SpEd) and Teaching, Learning, and Technology (TLT) programs designed a program of study for the students currently enrolled and seeking either special education certification or elementary certification. Under this "additional certification" program, students in either program could acquire the other certification by completing five courses in the additional certification program. We even designed a unified student teaching experience to allow students seeking the two certifications to have a single enriched student teaching experience in an inclusive classroom.

Increased Collaboration. The "additional certification" program has proved extremely popular and almost all students preparing to be PreK-8 special education teachers now complete the additional elementary certification. A number of our regular elementary teacher candidates also seek the

additional special education certification. In order to handle advisement for these students, we have assigned an additional advisers in the program in which the student seeks the additional certification. This means that each such student has both a SpEd and a TLT adviser. As a result, the faculty in the two programs began to spend much more time talking about how we prepare our teachers and what we might wish to see enhanced.

While these two faculties had been quite collegial before, that collegiality moved to a higher level of engagement and collaboration. For example, we began to identify differences in our procedures and assessment forms and then to discuss the reasoning behind those differences. This led us to agree upon common procedures and assessment forms for both programs to use. That not only streamlined the way we worked with students seeking additional certification; it also produces a healthy discussion of what best practices from each program might inform the practices of the other. In addition, it began an on-going discussion of what we wanted our graduates to be able to do once they began teaching and how we might change our courses to provide them with an expanded repertoire of skills.

Process Employed in Deriving Our New Programs

In spring 2008, the dean appointed a five-member Teacher Certification Curriculum Committee (TCCRC) with three members from the TLT program and two from the SpEd program. This committee, which meets every two weeks, was charged with working with the faculties in the two programs to derive new teacher-preparation programs that comply with new regulations from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and represent best practice in teacher preparation.

The TCCRC began by reviewing and discussing at length all guidelines documents produced by PDE. We decided fairly early on that we would not offer **both** of the two new certifications into which the current K-6 elementary certification had been divided. It was clear that we could not do both well with the limited number of faculty we have. While we can always propose adding the 4th -8th certification in future, we felt it was more important to focus on the PreK-4th certification for the present.

We analyzed the 750 or so competencies listed under the PreK-4th curriculum and the 12 credits in special education and teaching English language learners. We discussed extensively what a program that covered these competencies might look like and how it might be organized. We were aware that many higher education institutions were simply modifying the descriptions of their existing courses and then adding additional required courses to their curricula in order to meet the legislative requirement of nine credits in special education and three credits in teaching English language learners (ELL).

While we completed our analysis of these competencies, one member of the TCCRC met with teacher groups in the schools to learn what they felt new teachers coming out of an effective teacher-preparation program should know, believe and be able to do. We also asked them to identify knowledge, attitudes, and skills that they were seeing in student teachers and new graduates that they thought were either desirable or undesirable and why. We asked them to reflect not just on students from Lehigh, but on all student teachers and new teachers with whom they had experience. In this way, we derived a real-world check on what an optimal teacher-preparation program should look like.

Based on our previous discussions about what we wanted our graduates to be able to do after leaving Lehigh, what we learned from our real-world check, and what seemed to be the true spirit of the changes from PDE, we chose to design a highly integrated curriculum that interweaves inclusionary and adaptive practices throughout, rather than treat special education and ELL approaches as add-ons. This meant a redesign of every existing course in our teacher-preparation programs and the addition of several new courses.

We next generated a tentative list of course titles, discussing among ourselves extensively what each possible course might cover and how that might contribute to producing the best possible teachers. We explored online what other universities were doing in their programs and what such courses elsewhere covered and how. Our next step was to map the competencies to our proposed courses, assuring that each competency was addressed in at least one course, often across multiple courses in increasing depth. Then we generated draft course descriptions for each of the proposed courses, using current course descriptions as a basis (when they were available) and creating new descriptions (when no such course currently existed).

When we had earlier examined the competencies in the arts area, we felt they would be better satisfied through a distributed program that included out-of-class arts experiences coupled with in-class training in arts integration. We assigned one member of the TCCRC to work with the Director of *ArtsLehigh* to formulate such a program. The distributed arts integration program was to represent best practice and to see that students studying to be teachers would have repeated and mentored arts integration experiences in their preparation program. Over a period of six months, a distributed program was developed and confirmed to align with the PDE-issued arts competencies.

While PDE does not require us to change our secondary teacher-preparation program in any way other than to assure that it includes by January 1, 2011 the required nine credits (or 270 hours) addressing special education and three credits addressing English language learners, we felt that we should use this opportunity to redesign the entire structure of our teacher-preparation programs, including secondary. We felt that our students preparing for secondary certification would benefit from the same highly integrated inclusionary approach to teaching. Further, since some knowledge, techniques and approaches are not specific to the age of the student with whom a teacher is working, it made sense to create a "core" of courses that taught these techniques and approaches and to require that both PreK-4 and secondary teachers-in-training take those courses. When we designed the core for our programs, we included six courses: instructional design; education and inclusion of individuals with special needs; diversity, family and school collaboration; principles and applications of assessment, and advanced inclusionary practices. We redesigned every secondary content-area teaching methods course to reflect our new focus on universal design, differentiated teaching, and greater inclusion. We also embedded multiple field experiences throughout the secondary teacher-preparation program, as we had done in the PreK-4 program.

We shared with the SpEd and TLT faculties the general description and philosophy of our intended approach to redesigning our teacher-preparation programs and our tentative course descriptions. They strongly endorsed our integrated approach. Over the next seven months, there was much discussion of

what individual courses might cover and ways to realign courses with competencies. As a result, we combined two proposed courses, moved some competencies to other courses, and changed most of the course descriptions. During this time, we worked closely with the faculty members who would teach these courses to make sure what we proposed aligned with standards in the individual content areas and with best practices in each of the disciplines.

We also shared our philosophy and tentative programs of study with PDE personnel, PDE work groups focusing on designing guidelines for post-baccalaureate programs, and groups of representatives from other institutions in the state that prepare teachers. We received positive feedback from all. It became clear very quickly, however, that we were taking a very different approach than other institutions. In fact, many faculty and administrators from other institutions in the state marveled that our regular education and teacher education faculty were working together so well.

Next Steps

Now in September 2009, the TCCRC is sharing the revised and now much more detailed new programs of study with the entire faculty of the College of Education to assure that they approve of the changes we have made and with our external TCCRC Advisory Board for a second, more global real-world check.

We have asked the College of Education faculty to get back to us with their suggestions and any concerns by the end of the day, Friday, September 18. We are asking our TCCRC external advisory board to provide us with their suggestions and concerns by the end of September.

In the interim, we will continue to revise and create course syllabi for the courses in our new teacher-preparation programs, to collect faculty vitas, and to create the many documents that constitute our program submissions to PDE. At the end of September when we have all the feedback, we will use it to revise our new programs accordingly.

Then in the third week of October 2009, we will submit our new programs to PDE for their consideration. PDE projects that it will likely take at least two months for the initial program review, after which they will tell us if our new programs are approved.

If we receive PDE approval on our new programs –as we anticipate we will– we plan to begin phasing in those new programs starting in summer and fall 2010. By the start of fall 2011, we anticipate we will largely have made the transition to our new programs, with a few students who are finishing our current programs completing the last courses in those older curricula.