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ABSTRACT

In 1986, a Commission appointed by the governor of Virginia recommended that the teacher preparation degree program should consist of the greatest number of courses in the arts and sciences that can be included feasibly and some specially developed education courses. In response to this challenge, Radford University developed a totally restructured undergraduate teacher education program which was subsequently approved by the State Board of Education. This paper presents a summary of the more salient features of the Radford University Plan to Restructure Teacher Education. The summary is organized to address three major areas: collaboration, innovation, and evaluation. The first of these is the collaboration by an interdisciplinary task force composed of faculty from throughout the University and public school personnel which reviewed and developed new courses. The second area, that of innovation in the four-year degree program, provides for extensive general education which includes generic pedagogical studies appropriate to all preservice teachers regardless of level or subject matter specialty. Clinical experiences are emphasized for elementary, middle, and special education teachers. An outline is presented of the Comprehensive Teacher Education Assessment and Management plan, which was established to evaluate the program. Resources for program planning research are listed. (JD)

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RESTRUCTURING TEACHER EDUCATION: A POLITICAL PREROGATIVE - A PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVE

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Introduction

In the July-August, 1988, issue of AACTE Briefs, the statement is made that the AACTE Board of Directors "adopted a resolution decrying the recent actions of the Texas state legislature that affect teacher education programs in that state." While the Board is to be commended for their action and we deeply sympathize with our colleagues from the great state of Texas, I wonder if the AACTE Board of Directors has overlooked the fact that Virginia has been undergoing a massive restructure of teacher education based primarily on a political prerogative of the governor. That we have, at least to this point, survived the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in attempting to respond to these mandates is at best miraculous!

On March 26, 1986, Governor Gerald Baliles convened what he had designated as a Commission on Excellence in Education. This commission was charged with the responsibility of identifying specific actions which must be taken to make Virginia one of the nation's top states in the quality of education it offers. In his comments to the Commission, Governor Baliles cautioned that "things don't just happen, they must be made to happen." Notice that the charge was not to examine what we are doing well and moving from there. The specific charge was to remake --- period. This commission was composed of 16 individuals, none of whom represented the professional sector of education at any level.

The Commission reported that many "penetrating" reports concerning teacher education had been published which reach one overwhelming conclusion. "Teacher education must undergo fundamental change. Cosmetic changes and tinkering will not suffice." One of the most inflammatory statements coming from the commission followed: "To bring about real change in the way teachers are prepared in college, the

undergraduate degree in teacher education should be abolished." The Commission recommended that the appropriate education for teachers is one grounded in the Liberal Arts. More specifically, the report stated that the degree program which prepares teachers:

should not be simply a traditional arts and science bachelor's degree that includes a few education courses. The four-year curriculum for students preparing to teach should consist of the greatest number of courses in the arts and sciences which can be included feasibly and some specially developed education courses.

Having defined the academic degree which is acceptable for the preparation of classroom teachers, the Commission established the parameters for the professional education component of that degree. Specifically, the Commission recommended that the state approved program standards be revised "to limit professional education course requirements to 18 semester hours." According to the Commission this requirement "will dramatically change the way teachers are educated." This recommendation was later refined to exclude clinical experiences from the 18-hour limit.

On October 28, 1986 (seven months later) the commission published its findings. In the same month the Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at Radford University appointed a special Interdisciplinary Task Force to begin preparing an initial response to the report. In October, 1987, the Task Force made its report which was adopted through the University channels and approved by the Board of Visitors in December, 1987. On August 17, 1988, the restructure plan was approved by the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia and the State Board of Education. Implementation of the restructure began in the Fall Semester of the present academic year.

Recognizing that the move for restructure was political in nature, the University took the stance that we should seize this opportunity to innovate rather than to demonstrate. Using the interdisciplinary task force as the primary vehicle, a totally restructured undergraduate teacher education program was developed and subsequently approved by the State Board of Education.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The information which follows is a summary of some of the more salient features of the Plan to Restructure Teacher Education at Radford University. To assist the reader, this summary has been organized to address three areas: collaboration, innovation, and evaluation.

Collaboration

The restructure plan was developed initially by an interdisciplinary task force composed of faculty from throughout the University and public school personnel.

The restructure plan evolved over a period of two academic years and included collaborative development, review, and approval by appropriate departments, Colleges, University councils, the President of the University, and the University Board of Visitors.

Apart from the development of the restructure plan and the new degree program, the collaborative process has resulted in the review and development of new courses by faculty in departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Visual and Performing Arts, and the College of Education and Human Development. This pattern is continuing.

Innovation

Undergraduate Teacher Education will continue to be founded on a four-year degree which includes the following characteristics:

- extensive general education;
- comprehensive subject matter knowledge base derived from expanded studies in the Liberal Arts;
- generic pedagogical studies appropriate to all preservice teachers regardless of level or subject matter specialty;
- pedagogical studies specific to the age level and/or subject matter specialization;;
- educational foundations which include educational

psychology, tests and measurements, history and philosophy of education, and the education of minorities and exceptional learners; and

- clinical experiences throughout the four years of the program.

A new degree program will be required for persons seeking endorsement in Elementary and Middle Education. The B.A./B.S. Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies will require 126 semester hours of course work, 94 of which are concentrated in the Liberal Arts. This program will provide a broad base of preparation in the Liberal Arts and, at the same time, contain academic rigor equal to or in excess of other degrees based in these areas of study.

The restructured teacher education program will place increased emphasis on clinical experiences, particularly for persons seeking endorsement in Elementary (NK - 5), Middle (6 - 8), and Special Education:

- clinical experiences required beginning in the Freshman Year and continuing through Student Teaching;
- expanded pre-student teaching experience to include three to five weeks of full-time teaching which, combined with student teaching, will result in a total of 18 - 20 weeks of full-time teaching prior to graduation; and
- course work will be combined with special seminars (led in most instances by school personnel) in the pre-student teaching program to enhance professional growth and better integrate theory with practice.

A Clinical Faculty Model was implemented in September, 1988, which is designed to:

- provide enhanced recognition and training for classroom teachers who supervise students in clinical experiences;
- encourage continuing participation in the teacher education program through the use of a plan for advancement, recognition, and training; and

- encourage expanded cooperation and collaboration between the University and the schools.

The Professional Education component in the restructured program was designed to be consistent with an identified knowledge base as well as guidelines developed by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Also included in the review and development processes were examinations of curriculum guidelines prepared by relevant learned societies, including the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Association for the Education of the Young Child, and the International Reading Association. A significant portion of the process followed by the State in reviewing and approving restructured plans included reviews by national consultants, specialists in the Virginia Department of Education, and former Secretary of Education, Dr. Terrell Bell. Internally, all courses were collaboratively reviewed, revised, and, in many instances, dropped to comply with appropriate findings and/or guidelines. The review process also included the development of both scope and sequence to eliminate content overlap and ensure systematic scheduling of courses.

Evaluation

A comprehensive Teacher Education Assessment and Management plan has been implemented to:

- provide a comprehensive student data system designed to track students in teacher education through their experiences at Radford University, particularly focusing on the identification and monitoring of "high risk" students;
- expanded follow-up studies of graduates which include assessments one year and five year intervals following graduation and evaluations completed by principals in schools where graduates are employed;
- regular, structured department program assessments;
- administration of the Academic Profile II to Freshman and Junior teacher education students to develop a data base for comparing the old and the new programs; and

- analysis of the performance of graduates on the NTE and in the Beginning Teacher Assistance Program.

The combination of the elements of the plan will provide a comprehensive profile of:

- a. student performance as it relates to academic achievement in the Liberal Arts and in pedagogical studies (GPA);
- b. student performance as it relates to externally defined standards (Academic Profile II, NTE, and BTAP);
- c. performance of graduates as measured by externally defined measures and procedures (BTAP);
- d. program content relative to existing academic standards - both internal and external (Academic Profile II, NTE, BTAP, follow-up studies);
- e. the restructured curriculum in teacher education compared to the previous program;
- f. performance of graduates as perceived by employing school administrators (follow-up studies); and
- g. relevance of the program knowledge base to current teaching practice (follow-up studies, BTAP).

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