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An Alternate Route to Teaching

Abstract

Introduction: Alternate route to teacher certification typically refers to programs that permit people with non-education bachelor degrees the option to earn a teaching license. This route allows people to enter the teaching field without returning to a college campus for two years of coursework and student teaching to obtain a license.

An Alternate Route to Teaching

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"I appreciated being treated like an adult whose meaningful experiences and knowledge from my prior profession was an asset to the classroom."

Travis Lamb, Prior Profession: Lawyer

The History of Alternate Route

Alternate route to teacher certification typically refers to programs that permit people with non-education bachelor degrees the option to earn a teaching license. This route allows people to enter the teaching field without returning to a college campus for two years of coursework and student teaching to obtain a license. It appeals to career changers who need to continue earning a paycheck since they can enter an alternate route program while continuing to work. After a candidate obtains a teaching job, the State Department will issue a restricted teaching license and the intern become the teacher of record. They are paid as a teacher while they complete at least one year of internship. When all requirements are completed, the intern applies for their initial teaching license.

States created alternate routes to teacher certification 25 years ago as a way to attract talented individuals into teaching to improve the quality of the teaching force as well as to alleviate projected shortages of teachers. New Jersey launched the first alternate route program in 1985, followed by programs in California and Texas. There are programs in all 50 states being implemented by over 600 program providers. Approximately 62,000 new teachers are produced annually from alternative routes. At least one-third of all new teachers hired annually come from alternate route programs.

Why Alternate Route?

A contribution from alternate route programs is they bring more males and minorities into teaching than traditional teacher education programs. The need for more male and ethnically diverse teachers is recognized and alternate route programs have approximately 37% male teachers and 33% non-white teachers (NCEI survey). The report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2006-2007 for all teachers indicate there were 21.7% male teachers, 78.3% female teachers, 19.6% non-white teachers and 80.4% white teachers. These statistics indicate that Alternate Route programs provide more males and non-white teachers than traditional education programs. In addition, alternate route teachers are more willing to teach in difficult-to-staff schools and were more likely to move to rural areas and inner city schools to teach (NCAC, 2009). Alternate route teachers also teach subjects and grade levels where the demand is

greatest according to a 2005 NCEI study of public school teachers (Feistritzer, 2009). This survey shows that 20% of alternate route teachers were teaching mathematics, whereas 7% of all teachers teach mathematics. Science teachers comprise 18% of all teachers in contrast to 28% of alternate route teachers who are science teachers. Forty four percent of alternate route teachers were teaching special education. Sixty percent of alternate route teachers teach in middle schools and high schools.

The answer to "Why Alternate Route?" is that those going through alternate routes come into teaching from other careers, are older, more ethnically diverse, more likely to be men, more willing to teach in difficult-to-staff schools, and are teaching subjects where the demand for teaching is the greatest: math, the sciences, and special education in middle and high school (NCAC, 2009).

ESU Model

Emporia State University (ESU) began an alternate route program in June 2008 with the goal to produce high quality secondary teachers, school counselors or library media specialists. To be admitted to ESU's program, candidates must have a bachelor's degree and at least a 2.50 GPA. ESU accepts candidates only for programs that are presently on campus. Alternate route students need to have the same course equivalents as students getting an education degree. This is determined from a transcript review performed by professors in the content area that the candidate wants to teach or become a school specialist (school counselor or library/media). Any courses needed are listed as deficiencies and students must take all course deficiencies before they can apply for a teaching license. In order to be accepted into the program, students cannot have more than 9 credit hours of content course deficiencies, have a 2.75 GPA in their content area courses, and must be able to complete course deficiencies by the end of the first year of internship. In addition, students must take 9 credit hours of education classes prior to teaching. These courses are classroom management, designing instructional programs, classroom climate and survey of the exceptional child. This is one difference in ESU's program whereas other programs do not require interns to take education courses before teaching.

Candidates who have fewer than 9 credit hours of content courses listed as deficiencies can apply for the program. An application and three references are needed prior to scheduling an interview. After this pre-screening process, the applicants file is submitted to an Advisory Committee for review. This committee makes the determination if the applicant should be admitted, if more information is needed, or if there are concerns that need to be addressed before admittance. The candidates that are approved by the Advisory Committee may begin taking education courses, start applying for teaching positions, and are required to attend a summer orientation. In the first two years of the program, 25.5% of those who submitted transcripts for review were admitted into the program.

When candidates sign a teaching contract, they apply for a restricted teaching license and begin teaching, taking 12 credit hours of internship. During the year

of internship, a mentor, university supervisor and academic supervisor provide support and guidance. Evaluations and feedback are provided on a regular basis. Interns continue their education by attending seminars on campus that address a variety of topics. In addition to course work and seminars, interns must take the Praxis content exam and the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) exam. If interns pass the Praxis content and the PLT exams, they can apply for their initial teaching license at the end of their first year of internship.

The 21 education credits required for the Alternate Route Program count toward a Master of Education in Teaching. Students have the option to take an additional 15 credits and earn this master's degree.

Participants

Participants come from all walks of life but share a common desire to teach. They range in age from mid-twenties to over 60 years old. ESU's interns are 27.5% male (national average for all teachers is 21.7%) and 15% non-white (national average for all teachers is 19.6%). There are architects, biologists, lawyers, business owners and managers, military personnel, journalists, paraprofessional educators, community college teachers, radiologists, engineers, professional counselors, librarians, and so forth in the program. Alternate Route interns bring professional skills into their teaching or school specialist positions and help students apply what they learn to the world outside the classroom.

ESU Teacher Education Program Comparison

An important question is how Alternate Route Interns perform in comparison to students who go through the traditional program and student teach. The statistics indicate they are doing very well in the following four assessments that both student teachers and alternate route interns. ESU Alternate Route Interns scored higher than the average scores for all ESU must perform. students taking the Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching exam in 2009- 2010: ESU Alternate Route 71.64%; ESU Institution average 67.57% Alternate Route scored higher in all the content areas on the 2009-2010 Praxis Content tests except mathematics. The following are the scores: Business Interns Alternate Route 676.7 average points, ESU 658 average points; Mathematics, Alternate Route 148 average points, ESU 154.8 average points; English, Alternate Route 191 average points, ESU 177.9 average points; Earth Science, Alternate Route 175 average points, ESU 159 average points; Biology, Alternate Route 180 average points, ESU 172.3 average points.

All ESU education majors must do a Teacher Work Sample (TWS) during their student teaching or internship. This project involves planning a unit of study, teaching it, measuring students' learning, evaluating and reflecting on the results. The TWSs are scored by a pool of trained scorers who do not see names of

students and are not aware if they are scoring units from student teachers or alternate route interns. Student teachers have instruction on this project and create a TWS prior to student teaching in contrast to Alternate Route Interns who only have an hour presentation on the project. In 2009-2010, Alternate Route interns scored an average of 125.1 points out of a possible 134 points equaling a 93.4% average. Student teachers had an average of 124/134 points with a 92.5% average.

Both Alternate Route interns and student teachers are assessed on their teaching by Academic and Education Supervisors. The same supervisors are used for both groups, while the onsite mentor or cooperating teacher would be different. On the final evaluations, Alternate Route interns scored an average percentage of 96.4% compared with 90.9% for ESU's student teachers.

Summary

ESU's Alternate Route Program is beginning its third year of operation. In two years it has established itself as a viable option to get quality teachers and school specialists in secondary schools. Thirty-one were hired to teach and twenty-five (80.6%) were rehired and are still employed in the 2010-2011 school year. Four (12.9%) did not get rehired, two because of budget cuts and two because of poor performance. Two interns (6.5%) did not finish the program, realizing that teaching was not for them. Most interns express appreciation for a program that allowed them to change careers. One intern said, "ESU has provided a phenomenal experience and has allowed me to obtain my goals while still raising my family and earning a salary." Another commented, "I'm extremely pleased that this program exists, without it, I would probably have never gotten into the teaching profession. I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year as a teacher and I look forward to many more." A Principal writes, "I applaud you on your efforts to help capable people gain the proper credentials to teach in our schools. Helping them do so in as painless way as possible while maintaining professional integrity is wonderful. Thanks!" That is the purpose of the Alternate Route Program—to get professionals with a desire to teach or become a school specialist licensed so they can work in a school system. Because of this program, we have quality teachers and school specialists who are making a difference in the lives of students.

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