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Viewpoint: Undergraduates look at professional education

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Viewpoint: Undergraduates look at professional education

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Viewpoint

Undergraduates look at professional education

Kansas State University has proven historically to produce some of the finest teachers in the state. We are proud of this accomplishment, but our pride goes much deeper. Each of us has sensed a caring attitude in the faculty of the College of Education, evident in their willingness to go above and beyond their expected duties to individually prepare us as future educators. They realize that proper preparation is a must for the student willing to teach. However, we feel that many students are simply not receiving the preparation they need.

As undergraduates, we have seen students acquiring the content without learning the application. In other words, the material is there, and the knowledge of the material has been gained, but many students cannot translate it into actual teaching strategies for the classroom. A math education major recently said, "All the calculus in the world has not shown me how to explain what a square root is!" Why aren't students learning application, which is a must for proper preparation? We see two major reasons.

First, some students are not able to learn the content as readily and as quickly as they should. These slow-paced students put tremendous pressure on many professors to spend more time than necessary on content. Of course, we understand the importance of knowing the material, but we have seen for ourselves where professors in many instances have neglected the teaching of material application in order to accommodate the students who slow the progress of the entire class. Even in methods classes, all too often too much time is devoted to theory and concepts, and insufficient time on actual teaching strategies because of the slower learning students.

Second, we strongly believe that field experience goes hand in hand with learning application, which is extremely important for proper preparation. But many students lack enough of this hands on experience to help them become better prepared to teach. All too often students will enter their student teaching assignment with little or no previous exposure to a real classroom setting. In fact, surprising numbers of students in education entering their junior year have only had the experience of being just that—students. We must have our eyes opened to what teaching is all about. We need to be out in the field not only longer but earlier, so we can observe first hand the application of a variety of teaching strategies used in classroom situations.

Even though we feel that too many students are not receiving the preparation they need, we believe that it is possible for undergraduates to become **better** prepared than they are now, if changes are made. We would like to see a demand for higher academic excellence placed on the student in education. If, for example, the overall GPA for college work in the student's teaching field or major were to be raised to 2.7 - 3.0 to receive certification to teach, much wasted time in classrooms with slower students could be devoted to the valuable learning of application. Second, we would like to see a much greater emphasis placed on field experience. Yes, freshmen need more than a casual exposure to the classroom through an optional orientation course. They should be required to gain in depth experiences as a teachers aide.

We want to see Kansas State continue to be a leader in the production of exceptional teachers, and we feel that proper preparation is the key. We hope that the profession will consider our request for quality.

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