

**Unification of Teacher Preparatory Programs
to Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners**

A Manuscript Submitted for Publication in the Proceedings of the

**2002 OSEP Joint Personnel Preparation/
State Improvement/CSPD Conference**

Arlington, Virginia

February 20 – 22, 2002

Pamela Brucker, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Special
Education and Reading
Brucker@southernct.edu

Vincent Breslin, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Dept of Science Education
and Environmental Studies
Breslin@southernct.edu

James Granfield, Ph.D.
Associate Dean
School of Education
Granfield@southernct.edu

Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent St.
New Haven, CT 06515 USA

Introduction

This project established a group of faculty in the School of Education (SOE) and faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences (A&S) to align the Elementary/Special Education program with the rest of the university. Each faculty member is committed to aligning coursework in the teacher preparation program in Elementary and Special Education (ESE) program with coursework required to complete an undergraduate degree program. This work includes all courses in the SOE related to the State of Connecticut certification requirements in Elementary/Special Education. Additionally, these courses are being aligned with the requirements associated with meeting the General Education Requirements at the university, i.e., Liberal Arts education. Finally, the program and its courses are being aligned to meet the requirements for a second major field of study. (i.e., Mathematics, Chemistry, Foreign Languages). A coordinating group – known as the Council for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE) – is overseeing the evolution of the project. Membership on CITE includes faculty in SOE and A&S, public school classroom teachers, current SOE education students and other stakeholders such as parents of students receiving special education services in the schools.

Survey of All University Requirements: One of the overall goals of this project is to align the content in at least 3 general education requirements for a liberal arts education with the pedagogical course content in the ESE teacher preparation program. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to identify courses students in the SOE are selecting in A&S to fulfill their requirements for a liberal arts education at SCSU. One of the main ways SOE students interface with A&S coursework is through the selection and completion of their All University Requirements (AURs). AURs are a common core of

courses in liberal education maintained to serve as a foundation for all degree programs at SCSU. Students have the choice of selecting a range of courses within specific categories in a Cumulative Program Record (CPR) to fulfill their degree requirements. AURs within A&S include Natural Sciences A, Natural Sciences B, Foreign Language, Mathematics, and L course requirements. L courses have extensive writing requirements as part of the course curriculum.

A review of the CPR forms for each program of study showed that the students are able to choose among several courses within each of the major AUR categories. The variety of courses available to students makes it difficult for project directors and CITE members to identify possible courses for consideration for alignment with coursework in the teacher preparation program in ESE. In addition, inquiries into the advising process indicated that student advising concerning their selection of AURs is not consistent. Therefore, to assist the project directors and the CITE committee in identifying specific courses for consideration for alignment, we conducted a review of the AURs selected by students in the ESE program to identify courses and strategies which will allow the CITE committee to identify disciplines/courses where teaching methods, course content or method of delivery may be modified to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

To accomplish this goal, student CPRs were randomly selected for review. CPRs were reviewed for students who completed all or most of their AURs (junior or senior standing) currently enrolled in the Elementary Education (n=17) and Special Education (n=20) programs at SCSU. Results of the review of the student transcripts were distributed in the handout at the conference session.

Several important trends and deficiencies were noted in the choices students were making in selecting courses to complete their AURs. For example, greater than 70% of the students selected CHE 100 Challenge of Chemistry to complete their Natural Science B requirement. The collaborative ESE program at SCSU no longer lists this course on the CPR as a choice to fulfill this requirement. In its place is CHE 120 General Chemistry I, the course which serves as the introductory course for the Chemistry major. This raises important questions: Is CHE 120 the most appropriate course for training future ESE teachers? Is it more appropriate to develop an alternative lecture/laboratory course which will be better suited to training ESE teachers? We also noted deficiencies in Mathematics in ESE students. Many ESE students are required to take remedial Math courses prior to selecting the Math requirements for both the AUR and ESE degree requirements. This trend will become more of a challenge as the collaborative ESE program requires more Math courses (both MAT 105 and 106) to complete the degree requirements.

Learner Diversity Needs Survey: A key component of this project is the incorporation of strategies for meeting the needs of a diverse population of learners. In order to gather the data on the extent of modification and adaptation in the University classes, in the SOE and in A&S, a subcommittee of CITE was formed to address the following question: To what extent are required courses in both schools addressing the needs of diverse learners? The CITE committee defined learner diversity as “the wide range of learner characteristics, such as cognitive, emotional, physical, cultural, economic, racial, ethnic, age, and gender differences, that can place a learner at risk for failing to maximize potential in a traditional classroom environment.” Three learner diversity needs were

identified. First, instructors must have an acceptance and knowledge of the diversity. Second, a variety of modes of instruction and resources must be utilized in the instructional setting. Third, there must be a mechanism for the learners' needs to be communicated to the instructor in a timely fashion.

The subcommittee developed a rubric for reviewing and scoring course outlines from the required courses to determine if evidence of these indicators were reflected in the syllabi. The course syllabi are usually used as a point of information for students regarding the course requirements and the instructors' expectations, and the syllabi can vary greatly in the format and information presented. Each course outline was reviewed and scored by two committee members. If there was disagreement on the scoring of any of the rubric criteria, the subcommittee discussed the criterion and came to consensus. The results reinforced the wide variance in information presented in course syllabi. For example, 90% of the syllabi reviewed indicated the modes of learning utilized in the classroom (lecture, small group discussion, field experience), 25% indicated that additional help was available for learners, 20% indicated that additional resources were available for learners, while only 10% contained a standard statement regarding accommodations for students with identified disabilities. Conclusions drawn from the review of the data include the fact that few course syllabi adequately address the needs of diverse learners. Also, of the 18 syllabi reviewed only one contained 75% of the items identified as necessary to reflect accommodation for learner diversity. Deficiencies were noted in all syllabi, including those from the SOE. Finally, SOE syllabi consistently reflected the modes of learning utilized in the course. SOE faculty are in the process of converting their syllabi to a standard template to meet the requirements for the National

Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) certification, with Modes of Learning as one section on that template. It would appear the use of this template could dictate which areas were addressed in each syllabus. Currently, there is no required template for use university-wide.

As a result of the needs assessment based on the data collected thus far in the project, two initiatives are underway. A member of the Department of Chemistry has been enlisted to develop a new course better suited to the needs of education students to fulfill the Natural Sciences B requirement. A committee of ten members from A&S, representing the All University Requirements, are working on adapting their course outlines to meet the NCATE standards, utilizing the same template adopted by the SOE. These course syllabi will reflect accommodations, learner outcomes, professional standards of that discipline, and modes of learning. When these syllabi are drafted, the CITE subcommittee will reconvene to score them on the diversity rubric.

Response of Session Attendees: Participants expressed interest in the efforts to enlist faculties of both schools in coordinating course syllabi and utilizing differentiating instructional strategies in their courses. But the area of most interest was the Collaborative Elementary / Special Education Certification Program in the SOE. While many universities offer dual certification programs, few of those appear collaborative between both departments. This program is centered on cores of courses with common instructional themes (Language Arts Core, Mathematics Core) as well as interdisciplinary field experiences. While this collaboration among faculty in the SOE is currently in progress, the goal of this project is to extend this collaboration to faculty in A&S.