

Get SMART (Service Members Alternative Route to Teaching)

The Troops to Teachers program at Drury University

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**Introduction**

In January 2002, the Troops to Teachers program was reinstated at Drury University following a period of relative inactivity. In the three years since its reorganization, the program has been responsible for certifying a total of nine new middle school teachers in Missouri.

The original Troops to Teachers program at the national level was proposed in 1993 and authorized by the U.S. Congress in 1994. The original program helped to place more than 3,000 veterans in the public school classrooms of the United States primarily through providing funds to school districts providing for up to half of the salary of the participants (Hewitt & Siew, 1998). The U.S. Department of Defense was responsible for the original program.

In 2000, the National Defense Authorization Act transferred responsibility for oversight and funding to the U.S. Department of Education. The program is now coordinated by both the Department of Defense and the Department of Education and has obtained continuation through fiscal year 2006 ("Program Overview," n.d.).

**Benefits of the Troops to Teachers program**

Persons who have spent a large portion of their lives in service to the United States of America are given another opportunity to serve--this time in the public schools. These military veterans bring with them a wealth of world knowledge that makes them attractive to school districts.

Many school districts surrounding military installations prefer to hire former military veterans since they understand the population of the district. Schools in rural and high poverty areas benefit from being able to hire individuals who prefer to remain in close proximity to military installations. This enables such schools the opportunity to hire persons from minority groups and men. These groups are typically underrepresented in rural areas, especially in southern Missouri. The schools are also able to hire individuals who bring significant subject area knowledge to the classroom, resulting in improved instruction for their students.

In addition, many military veterans bring with them extensive technical training in mathematics and sciences, areas that are traditionally hard to staff in small rural schools. This creates a "win-win" situation for the school district and the potential faculty member.

### **How the program was developed**

During the 2000-2001 academic year, the author was approached by the Chair of the School of Education and Child Development and given the task of investigating the possibility of revamping the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University.

An investigation was conducted into the extent of Troops to Teachers programs in the United States and individuals were interviewed from each state offering alternative certification programs. In September 2001 the author was sent by Drury to Savannah, Georgia to examine the Troops to Teachers program at Armstrong Atlantic State University, considered by many to be the national model for such programs. While there, the author was able to observe the processes and procedures of that program, at the University and also at Fort Stewart, the local Army post.

Following this fact-finding trip, the author prepared a report and the proposed Troops to Teachers revisions were accepted by the Teacher Education Council at Drury University. The Chair of the School of Education cooperated in gaining the necessary approvals from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The program was launched in January 2002.

Spouses were eligible to participate at the beginning of the program. Spouses of military personnel face many of the same challenges as veterans with regard to completing a Baccalaureate degree. With the ever present possibility that they will PCS (Permanent Change of Station) many of them end up with a few credits from several different colleges and universities without ever staying in one location long enough to complete a degree.

With these limitations in mind, the U.S. Department of Defense created a companion program to Troops to Teachers. This program is known, appropriately enough, as Spouses to Teachers ("Spouses to Teachers," 2004). Due to unforeseen considerations the inclusion of spouses was terminated after the first semester. Drury University allowed those spouses who had already begun the certification process to complete it. However, no more spouses are currently being encouraged to enter the program. This could change with the advent of the national Spouses to Teachers program, although, in 2004, Drury University proposed and gained approval, the establishment of a post-Baccalaureate program leading to initial certification at the middle school level. With this program in place, the need for an expanded Spouses to Teachers program has waned.

## **Requirements of the Troops to Teachers program**

### National requirements

Drury University operates their Troops to Teachers program under the umbrella of the national Troops to Teachers program managed by DAN TES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support). The program requirements are broken down into two options. Option one is for referral and placement assistance from DAN TES. In order to qualify for this track, former military personnel must have either retired from active duty, be active duty personnel who separate from active duty with six or more years of service on or after October 1, 1990, or must be current members of the Selected Reserve with at least six years of creditable service. In all cases, the service must be honorable. In addition, applicants must possess a Baccalaureate or advanced degree from an accredited institution at the time of application.

The second option is for financial assistance and includes all of the preceding requirements for option one as well as additional stipulations based upon active duty or reserve component status. Financial assistance is in the form of stipends, awarded to the military veteran, which carry with them the requirement to teach for a specified period of time in "high need" districts or those with a large number of low income students (the stipend awards are \$5,000 for "high need" districts; and \$10,000 for districts with low income students). Acceptance of the stipend requires a commitment to teach for three years in these schools ("Troops to Teachers," 2003).

### Drury University requirements

There are two tracks within the Drury University Troops to Teachers program. The first track was developed for those with a baccalaureate degree. The second is for those who lack a baccalaureate degree. Drury University does not require a certain number of years of military service in order for persons to participate in the program. Interested individuals are asked to check their eligibility with DAN TES to determine if they qualify for referral and placement services or financial assistance.

For former military veterans with a Baccalaureate or advanced degree from an accredited institution the following requirements must be met in order to enter the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University:

1. Written communication skills (grades of "C" or higher in six hours of composition.
2. Oral communication skills (grade of "C" or higher in an oral communication course.
3. Cumulative grade point average of 2.75 or higher based upon all undergraduate course work. At least 12 hours of credit at Drury University must be completed with a 2.75, or higher, grade point average.
4. Letters of recommendation from three persons familiar with the applicant's potential for success as a teacher. (One letter of reference must be from a faculty member familiar with the applicant's undergraduate course work.)
5. No felony convictions.

6. Background check: A background check must be conducted through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the Missouri Highway Patrol for felony convictions and the Missouri Department of Family Services for sexual abuse and family violence reports.

7. A passing score on the Praxis II Subject Area Specialty Test for all persons seeking middle school teacher certification.

8. A résumé or biography of the applicant attached to a properly completed application for admission to the teacher certification program.

9. Qualifying status for the U.S. Department of Education Troops to Teachers program.

Military veterans who lack a Baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution receive academic advising to help them complete their degree while taking those courses that will be required for certification. Once the applicant has completed the Baccalaureate degree they seek admission to the Troops to Teachers program in the same manner outlined immediately above.

#### Academic requirements for certification

Individuals who wish to be certified in middle school education in Missouri through the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University must, at a minimum, complete the following courses:

##### General education requirements

Six hours of humanities

Nine hours of communication skills (six hours of composition, three hours of speech)

Nine hours of social studies (three hours each of American history, American government, and behavioral science)

Six hours of science (three hours each of biology and physical science, to include a lab)

Three hours of mathematics (to include college algebra or a more advanced course)

#### Professional education requirements

Three hours of educational foundations

Three hours of human development

Three hours of educational psychology

Three hours of education of exceptional children

#### Teaching methods requirements

Three hours of middle school philosophy

Three hours of middle school curriculum

Two hours of teaching reading in the content field

Three hours of improvement of reading instruction

Three hours of teaching and evaluation of writing

Three hours of methods of teaching in the specialty area

#### Clinical and field experiences requirements

Two hours of teaching in diverse classrooms

Eight hours of student teaching at the middle school level

#### Teaching field requirements

A minimum of 21 hours in the teaching field

Participants can be awarded credit for several courses based upon their military experiences. Some of these courses include technology in the classroom, classroom management, and one of the field experience components. These courses are waived on the strength of platform teaching experiences that many of the Troops to Teachers participants bring with them from the military.

Troops to Teachers participants can enroll in any of the general education, professional education, or teaching field courses without being admitted to the teacher education program at Drury University. However, in order to enroll in any of the teaching



methods or clinical and field experiences courses, the participant must be admitted to the Drury University Teacher Education program. The requirements for admission to the teacher education program are: admission to Drury University, a grade of "C" or better in two writing courses and one oral communication course, a passing score on either the C-BASE test or the Praxis II examination (in participant's teaching field), at least 30 hours of college work (with at least 12 hours completed at Drury University), a grade point average of at least 2.75 for all college work, submission of an admissions portfolio, and completion of a criminal background check.

An interesting component of the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University is that participants have the option of taking many of the required courses for certification at the graduate level, thereby enabling them to work toward the Master in Education degree at the same time they are fulfilling certification requirements. If a participant takes all of the courses possible at the graduate level, they will earn a total of 21 hours applicable to the Master in Education degree leaving them with only 15 more hours to complete in order to graduate. This is an important consideration because in Missouri, like many other states, a teacher's salary increases in proportion to the number of graduate hours completed in their teaching field.

In order to receive graduate credit, Troops to Teachers participants must meet the admission requirements for the graduate program. These requirements are: submission of a graduate admission form, payment of the graduate application fee, official transcripts must be sent from previous institutions, two letters of recommendation, a personal statement indicating the desire to pursue a graduate degree in education, and a score

report from either the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) not more than five years old.

Another important component of the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University is that the clinical and field experiences requirements are to be completed on the job. Participants in the program are encouraged to apply for teaching positions in local schools while they complete the certification requirements. This enables the participant to gain valuable experience while receiving the salary and benefits requisite for a teaching position. In Missouri this is possible through the use of Temporary Authorization Certificates (TAC) or provisional certification. School districts have the option of hiring individuals to staff teaching positions who lack certification as long as they have an approved program of completion and possess at least a Baccalaureate degree.

Once the Troops to Teachers participants have completed all of their coursework they complete an application for student teaching. The student teaching experience is conducted without the requirement that the participant give up their teaching position. They continue to receive their salary and benefits while completing the student teaching component. The student teaching requirement is otherwise identical to that for any other prospective teacher. The Troops to Teachers participants must complete lesson plans, be evaluated by university supervisors, complete all required paperwork, and submit a student teaching portfolio.

### **An alternative path to teacher certification**

Is the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University truly an alternative certification program? The list of required courses for certification at Drury can indeed

seem imposing. Drury University is a private, liberal arts university requiring courses that many public, state universities do not. In addition, the teacher education program at Drury University is accredited through NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) which has stringent guidelines. Many of the colleges and universities offering alternative certification programs are not operating under these constraints.

With this in mind, the question remains, is the Drury program truly an alternative? I believe the answer must be yes. Participants in this program are in an accelerated program that eliminates some of the standard requirements for teacher certification.

Drury Troops to Teachers participants are not required to take the following courses: technology in the classroom, classroom management, teacher aide 1, and secondary field experience. This is a total of eight hours which are waived due to military experience. Also, a conscious attempt was made by the designers of the program to require only those courses that enable the participant to meet the Missouri requirements with no additions. This is in contrast with regular aspirants to the teaching profession at Drury University (in the elementary and secondary teaching fields) who exceed the Missouri requirements.

### **Current breakdown of Troops to Teachers participants at Drury University**

As of 1 January 2005, Drury University was working with a total of 78 individuals. See Table 11 for a summary of the growth of the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University. Table 1 shows the breakdown of participants by prior military service.

Table 1 Prior military service of participants

Branch of service	Number of participants
United States Army	56
United States Air Force	6
Other*	5
Army National Guard	3
Army Reserve	3
United States Navy	2
Spouses	2
United States Marine Corps	1
Total	78

\*denotes those individuals who have indicated an interest in the program and have begun taking courses but have not met with an advisor

Table 1 shows that 72% of our participants come from the United States Army. According to The National Center for Education Information (as cited in "Troops to Teachers fast facts," 2004) the percentages of participants since the inception of the Troops to Teachers program in 1994 is as follows: U.S. Army 37%, U.S. Air Force 33%, U.S. Navy 21%, U.S. Marine Corps 6%, U.S. Coast Guard 3%.

A percentage of 72% is not surprising for the Drury University Troops to Teachers program since it is based at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, a large Army post. In fact, if those in the National Guard and Reserve are included, the percentage of participants with a background in the United States Army jumps to 79%. The next largest group consists of those with a United States Air Force background with roughly 8%. The remaining percentages for our participants are: other 6%, U.S. Navy 3%, spouses 3%, and U.S. Marine Corps 1%.

Table 2 Gender of participants

Gender	Number of participants
Male	50
Female	28
Total	78

Table 2 shows that 64% of our participants are male while 36% are female. According to The National Center for Education Information (as cited in "Troops to Teachers fast facts," 2004) 90% of the participants since the inception of the Troops to Teachers program in 1994 have been male. The program at Drury University is a little more balanced than the national percentage, but still reflects the preponderance of males in the United States armed forces.

Table 3 Ethnic background of participants

Caucasian	51
African American	15
Hispanic	6
Non-specified*	6
Total	78

\*denotes those who have not met with an advisor

Table 3 shows that 27% of our participants are minorities. This compares favorably with the national average of 29% for all participants since the inception of the Troops to Teachers program in 1994, and very favorably with the national average of 10% for traditional teachers ("Troops to Teachers fast facts," 2004).

Table 4 Area of certification sought by participants

Social Studies	40
Non-specified	9
Science	8
Mathematics	6
Language Arts	5
Social Studies and Science	3
Mathematics and Science	3
Social Studies and Language Arts	2
Social Studies, Science, and Language	1
Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics	1
Total	78

Table 4 shows that slightly over half (51%) of our participants are seeking certification in middle school social studies while 10% are seeking science certification, 8% mathematics, and 6% language arts. The national average for all participants since the inception of the Troops to Teachers program in 1994 who teach mathematics is 29% ("Troops to Teachers fast facts," 2004). However, if all Drury University participants are included, (those who indicate multiple areas of certification), who are seeking middle school mathematics certification, the percentage increases to 13% which is equal to the percentage of all traditional teachers who teach mathematics.

Table 5 Former rank of participants

Enlisted	57
Officer	12
Non-specified*	7
Spouses	2
Total	78

\*denotes those who have not met with an advisor

Table 5 shows that 73% of our participants are former enlisted personnel while 15% are former officers. According to The National Center for Education Information (as cited in "Troops to Teachers fast facts," 2004) the percentage of all participants since the

inception of the Troops to Teachers program in 1994 who were former officers was 59%. The program at Drury University is overwhelmingly comprised of former enlisted personnel.

An indication of the vitality of the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University can be seen in a review of the numbers of students who have enrolled in the program since its inception. Table 6 shows the number of students and total hours of enrollment for the program since 2002.

Table 6 Enrollment in Drury University Troops to Teachers program

Term	Students	Total hours
Spring 2002	15	117
Summer 2002	16	94
Fall 2002	24	185
Spring 2003	28	192
Summer 2003	26	152
Fall 2003	29	238
Spring 2004	36	325
Summer 2004	27	176
Fall 2004	27	200

Table 6 shows that the enrollment in the Troops to Teachers program has grown from 15 in the spring 2002 semester to a high of 36 in the spring 2004 semester, and a current enrollment of 27 students as of the fall 2004 semester. Figures for the spring 2005 semester will not be available until several weeks into the upcoming semester.

The enrollment shows a decline during the summer semesters. This is typical of all undergraduate and graduate programs at Drury University. During the summer enrollment usually declines as students are preoccupied with vacations and other activities.

The total number of hours enrolled in by Troops to Teachers participants has grown from 117 in the spring 2002 semester to a high of 325 hours in the spring 2004 semester, and the current 200 hours as of the fall 2004 semester. While the number of credit hours enrolled in has fluctuated, the average number of credit hours since the inception of the program has been 187 hours.

### **Demographics of Drury University Program completers**

Since its inception, the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University has certified a total of nine middle school teachers in Missouri. While this is a very small sample size, the following tables and explanatory notes are included.

Table 7 Prior military service of Program completers

Branch of service	Number of completers
United States Army	4
Spouses	3
United States Air Force	2
Total	9

Table 7 shows that 44% of our program completers served in the United States Army, while 33% were spouses of military personnel, and 22% served in the United States Air Force.

Table 8 Gender of Program completers

Gender	Number of completers
Female	5
Male	4
Total	9

Table 8 shows that 56% of our program completers are female and 44% are male. This is very much the opposite of our present participants and very much out of line with



the national average of 90% male participants. However, due to the small sample size, extreme fluctuations can be expected. If the three spouses of military personnel are discounted then the ratio of male to female becomes 2:1.

Table 9 Ethnic background of Program completers

Caucasian	8
Hispanic	1
Total	9

Table 9 shows that only one program completer (11%) was from a minority background. As shown previously, 27% of our current participants are minorities, and the small sample size of program completers discourages drawing conclusions.

Table 10 Area of certification for Program Completers

Mathematics	3
Science	3
Social studies	3
Total	9

Table 10 shows that one-third of program completers were certified in each of the areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. The national average for all participants since the inception of the Troops to Teachers program in 1994 who teach mathematics is 29%, and while this is a small sample, the percentage at Drury is essentially the same (33%).

Table 11 Former rank of Program completers

Enlisted	4
Spouses	3
Officer	2
Total	9

Table 11 shows that the percentage of program completers who served as enlisted personnel was 44% while those who were former officers was 22%. Even if the three spouses are discounted the ratio of former enlisted personnel to officers remains 2:1 which while not similar to the current participant ratio of 5:1 still shows a preponderance of former enlisted personnel. This is very different from the average of 59% at the national level who served as officers, but is in line with the total participants at Drury where 73% are former enlisted personnel.

### **Where our Program completers are**

Out of the nine program completers at Drury University, two math teachers have moved out of state due to the transfer of their spouses. The third math teacher is currently teaching at Waynesville High School in Waynesville, Missouri (this district serves students from Fort Leonard Wood). Prior to being hired at Waynesville, this math teacher taught for two years at Crocker High School in Crocker, Missouri (a neighboring district to Waynesville). One science teacher taught for two years at Stoutland High School, a small K-12 school in Stoutland, Missouri, but did not return for her third year. Another science teacher is teaching at Cassville High School in Cassville, Missouri while the third is currently searching for a teaching position. One social studies teacher has been hired at Rolla Middle School, in Rolla, Missouri. Another social studies teacher continues to be employed at Oak Hill R-1 school, a rural K-8 district outside of Salem, Missouri while the third continues to be employed by Pulaski County R-IV in Richland, Missouri.

There are two more participants who will be certified during this present semester. One (social studies) is currently teaching at Joel E. Barber school, a rural K-8 district outside of Lebanon, Missouri. The other (mathematics) is currently searching for

employment. In addition to these individuals, four other Drury University Troops to Teachers participants are currently in the classroom gaining teaching experience while completing their certification requirements. These participants are located in Morgan County R-1 in Stover, Missouri; Dixon R-1 Middle School in Dixon, Missouri; Wood Middle School in Waynesville, Missouri; and Laquey R-V in Laquey, Missouri.

### **Summary**

The Troops to Teachers program at Drury University has been reasonably successful since being revamped. While not producing enormous numbers of teachers the program consistently turns out two or three teachers each semester. In the region of Missouri where Fort Leonard Wood is located there are limited numbers of schools. It would do little good to saturate the market with large numbers of qualified teachers with little chance of employment. In addition, the smaller size of the Drury program enables personal service for each participant. The high standards of Drury University insure that our program completers are sought out by local school districts. In the future the program will have to be refined in order to continue to meet the needs of local schools as well as state and federal teacher certification guidelines.

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