

Running head: ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

Bringing alternative certification to rural Missouri

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the efforts of Drury University to provide alternative certification programs primarily in rural areas of Missouri. These certification programs consist of a highly successful Troops to Teachers program enabling certification of middle school teachers in the areas of science, mathematics, social studies, and language arts; and a crucial new program enabling certification of special education professionals through a cohort Master in Education degree.

Each of these programs will be discussed at length providing their development, unique benefits, and requirements. Additionally, information will be provided on current participants, program completers, program impact, and retention, including demographic breakdowns for each program. A discussion will also be presented on whether or not these programs truly meet the criteria for alternative certification. The Troops to Teachers program will be discussed first, followed by the Special Education certification program.

### **Part 1 Troops to Teachers program at Drury University**

#### **Introduction to Troops to Teachers**

In January 2002, the Troops to Teachers program was reinstated at Drury University following a period of relative inactivity. In the five years since its reorganization, the program has been responsible for certifying a total of thirteen 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 obtained continuation through fiscal year 2006 ("Program Overview," n.d.). For fiscal year 2006 a total of \$14,645,070 was appropriated ("Funding Status", 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. During the past school year in Florida, thousands of students were being taught by military veterans (Bailey, Fantz, Pinzur, & Sampson, 2006).

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. According to Ong, "The program benefits schools because many of its teachers are hard to find minorities or males, and many teach high-demand specialties like science, math, and special education" (2006, August 8).

### **How the Troops to Teachers program was developed**

During the 2000-2001 academic year, 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 a fact-finding trip was taken to examine the Troops to Teachers program at Armstrong Atlantic State University, considered by many to be the national model for such programs. Following this fact-finding trip, a report was prepared 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, as of March 2007, the state of Missouri had not decided to participate in the program. Additionally, in 2004, Drury University proposed and gained approval for, 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 its 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 or bonuses, 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 the bonus awards are \$10,000 for districts with a high percentage of disadvantaged students). Acceptance of the stipend or bonus requires a commitment to teach for three years in these schools ("Troops to Teachers," 2005).

#### 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 their 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, possess at least a Baccalaureate degree, and obtain a passing score on the specific Praxis II examination for their teaching field.

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? We 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 2007, Drury University was working with a total of 150 individuals in this program. See Table 6 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	109
United States Air Force	9
United States Navy	9
Non-specified*	9
Army National Guard	5
Army Reserve	4
United States Marine Corps	3
Spouses	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>

\*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 73% 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 73% 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 groups are those with a United States Air Force or United States Navy background each with roughly 6%. The remaining percentages for our participants are: non-specified 6%, U.S. Marine Corps 2%, and spouses 1%.

Table 2 Gender of participants

Gender	Number of participants
Male	91
Female	59
Total	150

Table 2 shows that 61% of our participants are male while 39% 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. A more recent assessment by the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) reports that 82% of teachers entering through Troops to Teachers were male (Troops to teachers: Numbers, success stories). 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	88
African American	38
Non-specified*	14
Hispanic	9
Asian American	1
Total	150

\*denotes those who have not met with an advisor

Table 3 shows that 32% 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). An NCEI study showed that 37% of Troops to Teachers participants are persons of color, compared to 15% overall (Troops to Teachers: Numbers, success stories). Drury University's program falls a little short of this percentage.

Table 4 Area of certification sought by participants

Social Studies	78
Non-specified	19
Science	17
Mathematics	12
Language Arts	8
Social Studies and Language Arts	7
Social Studies and Science	3
Mathematics and Science	3
Social Studies, Science, and Language	1
Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics	1
Science, Math, and Language	1
Total	150

Table 4 shows that slightly over half (52%) of our participants are seeking certification in middle school social studies while 11% are seeking science certification, 8% mathematics, and 5% 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). According to a recent NCEI study, 46% of Troops to Teachers participants teach science, compared to 18% overall while 27% teach mathematics (Troops to Teachers: Numbers, success stories).

Table 5 Former rank of participants

Enlisted	109
Officer	25
Non-specified*	14
Spouses	2
Total	150

\*denotes those who have not met with an advisor

Table 5 shows that 73% of our participants are former enlisted personnel while 17% 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
Spring 2005	29	227
Summer 2005	24	111
Fall 2005	22	194
Spring 2006	28	244
Summer 2006	22	127
Fall 2006	35	280
Spring 2007	38	313

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 38 in the spring 2007 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 313 hours as of the spring 2007 semester. While the number of credit hours enrolled in has fluctuated, the average number of credit hours since the inception of the program, including the summer semesters has been 198 hours.



### **Demographics of Troops to Teachers Program completers**

Since its inception, the Troops to Teachers program at Drury University has certified a total of thirteen 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	6
Spouses	4
United States Air Force	2
United States Marine Corps	1
Total	13

Table 7 shows that 46% of our program completers served in the United States Army, while 31% were spouses of military personnel, 15% served in the United States Air Force, and 8% served in the United States Marine Corps.

Table 8 Gender of Program completers

Gender	Number of completers
Male	7
Female	6
Total	13

Table 8 shows that 54% of our program completers are male and 46% are female. This is very much the opposite of our present participants and very much out of line with the national average of 82% male participants. However, due to the small sample size, extreme fluctuations can be expected. If the four spouses of military personnel are discounted then the ratio of male to female becomes more than 3:1.

Table 9 Ethnic background of Program completers

Caucasian	11
Hispanic	2
Total	13

Table 9 shows that 15% of program completers are from a minority background. As shown previously, 32% 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

Social studies	5
Mathematics	4
Science	3
Language Arts	1
Total	13

Table 10 shows that 38% of program completers were certified in social studies, while 31% were certified in mathematics, 23% were certified in science, and 8% were certified in language arts. 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 (31%).

Table 11 Former rank of Program completers

Enlisted	7
Spouses	4
Officer	2
Total	13

Table 11 shows that the percentage of program completers who served as enlisted personnel was 54% while those who were former officers was 15%. Even if the four spouses are discounted the ratio of former enlisted personnel to officers remains more

than 3:1 which while not similar to the current participant ratio of more than 4:1 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 Troops to Teachers program completers are**

Out of the thirteen program completers at Drury University, two math teachers have moved out of state due to the transfer of their spouses. One math teacher is currently teaching at Waynesville High School in Waynesville, Missouri (this district serves students from Fort Leonard Wood). Another math teacher teaches at Plato R-V in Plato, Missouri. 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 was hired at Rolla Middle School, in Rolla, Missouri and received the Missouri Troops to Teachers Educator of the Year award for 2005-06. Other social studies teachers continue to be employed at Oak Hill R-1, a rural K-8 district outside of Salem, Missouri, Pulaski County R-IV in Richland, Missouri, Laclede County C-5, a rural K-8 district outside Lebanon, Missouri, and Dixon R-1 in Dixon, Missouri. Our lone language arts teacher is currently employed by Stoutland R-II in Stoutland, Missouri.

One more participant in the Troops to Teachers program is currently completing her student teaching at Plato R-V in Plato, Missouri and is seeking employment. In addition to these individuals, five 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 Dixon R-1 Middle School in Dixon, Missouri; Laquey R-V in Laquey, Missouri; Oak Hill R-1 near Salem, Missouri; Crocker R-II in Crocker, Missouri, and Steelville, R-III in Steelville, Missouri.

### **Retention**

Out of the thirteen teachers certificated through Drury University's Troops to Teachers program, eleven are still teaching. This is a retention rate of 85%.

### **Summary of Troops to Teachers program at Drury University**

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 year. 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.

### **Part 2 Special Education certification program at Drury University**

#### **Introduction to Special education certification program**

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE) reports annually to the U. S. Department of Education on teacher shortages in the state by subject area. The most recent MoDESE (2002) data report indicated a shortage of qualified special education teachers. This shortage is also noted as a nationally growing

trend (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). To address this critical need, Drury University initiated a cohort program in 2005 for preparing special educators with cross categorical special education teaching certification. The course of study for this program leads to a Master in Education degree with emphasis in special education.

Drury University's program for alternative certification of special education teachers is designed to serve two groups of candidates: those who hold an initial teaching certification in elementary or secondary education and those who have an undergraduate degree in a related field, but no teaching certificate.

The MoDESE offers a temporary authorization certificate in special education for those candidates who hold an undergraduate degree in a related area, such as psychology, sociology or criminal justice. Candidates who seek this temporary special education certificate must complete no more than 29 credit hours of foundation education courses. Candidates must also pass Praxis II assessments in content knowledge and principles of learning and teaching to complete requirements for special education certification. The design of Drury's graduate program in special education is fitted to the academic requirements set for these candidates.

Drury University graduated its first class of Master degree candidates who completed requirements for special education cross categorical certification in December, 2006. The extended aim of this new alternative certification program will now be on retaining these graduates in their teaching assignments and on sustaining enrollment in the program.

**Benefits of the special education certification program**

Current education reform initiatives have focused attention on an expectation for our nation's public school educators to maintain trends of measurable academic progress for all students, those who are typical learners as well as those students with educational disabilities. Today's population of students who require specialized instruction includes not only students with significant educational disabilities (blindness, deafness, mental retardation), but also represents those students whose educational disabilities are not a direct result of sensory or cognitive deficits. Incidence rates for students diagnosed with learning disabilities, health impairments and milder forms of pervasive developmental delay, for example, are the most rapidly increasing categories of students with disabilities. Raymond (2004) reports ... "students identified as having mild disabilities now account for 70 to 95 percent of all students receiving special education services" (p.5).

Because many of these students may be able to learn successfully in regular education settings, a credible argument emerges for training special educators to work collaboratively with teachers in regular education classrooms rather than using categorically designated pull-out programs as the primary instructional setting for students with disabilities. Raymond (2004) describes the learning characteristics of students with milder degrees of educational disability as similar to those of students with learning problems who do not meet qualification standards to receive special education; thus, specialized instruction offered in integrated classroom settings might benefit both types of learners.

Additional rationale for training Missouri special educators to serve students with exceptionalities in inclusive settings is the requirement that students with disabilities complete state assessments for their grade level, even though their academic skills may be significantly below those of their age peers. If special educators holding cross categorical certificates work in concert with regular classroom educators, their collective efforts to improve instructional methods and/or learning strategies for all students could be more focused and, possibly, more effective. Environments which encourage special educators and regular educators working in partnerships to address the specific learning needs of students with both disabilities and delays should positively impact student achievement.

A final benefit of this alternative certification program is the response to the critical shortage of special educators needed to serve increasing numbers of students with exceptionalities. Special educators leave their teaching assignments at about twice the rate as their regular education peers with annual attrition rates as high as 50 percent in some geographical regions (White, 1999). With an embedded emphasis on collaborative teaching, Drury's alternative certification program aims to address the issue of teacher attrition proactively.

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

The Drury University alternative certification program was developed specifically to address the shortage of certificated special education teachers in mid-Missouri. A needs assessment survey was mailed to forty school administrators in twenty school districts within the geographic service area of the Drury University Mid-Missouri campuses in Lebanon and St. Robert. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to elicit

responses of school superintendents and directors of special education programs to the proposal for a program of study leading to candidates' certification in cross categorical special education. Of the forty surveys issued, responses were received from 22 school administrators. Respondents indicated their agreement to questions regarding the existing shortage of certified special educators, their difficulty recruiting appropriately certified special educators to fill teaching vacancies and their willingness to employ candidates with cross-categorical special education certification. In general the survey results indicated both a need for the alternative certification program and administrators' confidence that the cross-categorical certification would be appropriate for the teaching positions in their districts.

Drury's program design was submitted for a program standards compliance review and was approved for implementation in January, 2005 by the state department of education. The Drury University graduate program for a Master in Education degree with an emphasis in special education requires completion of 36 credit hours.

No prerequisite courses are required for candidates who hold a valid license to teach in elementary or secondary education. If candidates have an undergraduate degree in a related field, but do not have a Missouri teaching certificate, completion of these prerequisite courses is required: education of the exceptional child, classroom management, human growth and development and methods of teaching reading and math. A defining feature of the Drury program which exemplifies it as an alternative certification program is the concurrence of course requirements with the MoDESE requirements for a temporary authorization certification in special education. Drury faculty designed the special education course of study to allow candidates to complete



both a Master in Education degree and to satisfy MoDESE requirements for a temporary teaching certificate.

The program was designed as a cohort to allow realization of the climate of collegiality and collaboration embedded in the program's philosophy. Twelve students comprised the initial cohort. The students completed two courses (six credit hours) each semester. The courses were offered in a blended format; seated instruction was offered during one evening session per week followed by an online extension of learning. The blended class format acknowledged the demands of the work and travel schedules of the cohort members. Eleven of the twelve candidates were full-time teaching practitioners for the duration of the cohort program.

In December, 2006, eleven of the twelve initial cohort candidates received their Master in Education degrees during the fall commencement ceremony. The twelfth cohort member suffered some significant health issues, moved out of state and was unable to complete program requirements. An exit survey completed by cohort members reflected a high degree of satisfaction with both the organization and integrity of the graduate program.

### **Requirements of the special education program**

As stated in the Drury Graduate catalog: "Applicants for admission to graduate study must hold a four-year baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university" (p.70) as the initial admission standard. Other admission requirements include:

1. completion of an application for admission
2. payment of an application fee

3. receipt of official transcripts of all undergraduate and previous graduate credit hours from the issuing institutions
4. submission of two letters of recommendation
5. submission of a personal statement describing the candidate's interest in completing a graduate degree
6. submission of Miller Analogy Test (MAT) or Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores not more than five years old

During the first semester of graduate study candidates complete admission to candidacy which provides opportunities for (1) a general assessment of progress (2) meeting with the graduate advisor and (3) approval of transfer courses. Candidates are allowed to transfer nine credit hours of graduate study from another institution.

The course of study for the Master in Education degree with emphasis in special education includes these twelve courses (36 credit hours):

Technology in the classroom

Teaching and evaluation of writing

Introduction to cross-categorical disabilities

Language development of the exceptional child

Clinical experience-elementary (meets requirement for elementary student teaching)

Clinical experience-secondary (meets requirements for secondary student teaching)

Methods of teaching students with mild/moderate disabilities

Evaluation of abilities and achievement

Transition and career education

Counseling parents of school students with exceptionalities

Capstone/case study

Graduation requirements include completion of the 36 hour program with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 (using a four-point scale). Credit hours for grades below “C” cannot be applied toward degree completion. Candidates must also complete the Capstone seminar with a satisfactory rating as well as a comprehensive, written graduate examination. The graduate program must be completed within seven calendar years of initial enrollment.

Candidates with a four-year baccalaureate degree who do not have a teaching license or certificate may apply to Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for a Temporary Authorization Certificate. Requirements for admission include:

1. completion of a joint application form by the applicant and the employing school district. Applicants must have a teaching contract to pursue the temporary authorization certificate.
2. submission of a plan of study; iterating courses to be completed during the first and second year.
3. submission of original transcripts from all institutions attended. A minimum grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale in the major field and overall is required.
4. completion of a criminal background check.

Seven of the courses required on the MoDESE plan of study coincide with those included in the Drury Master in Education degree with emphasis in special education. The integration of these courses allows candidates to work toward simultaneous completion of degree and certification requirements.

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

A similar rationale to that described for the Troops to Teachers programs is offered for characterizing Drury's special education emphasis in the Master of Education degree as an alternative certification program. The program's course of study is designed to parallel courses required for completion of the temporary authorization certification offered by the MoDESE. Graduate candidates who have a baccalaureate degree in a related field can complete a condensed program of study to allow them to enter the classroom without taking all of the foundation courses required of the traditional education degree.

The instructional model also offers candidates a means for completing courses in a compacted time frame that is not a part of the conventional program of study. Graduate classes are offered in a blended format (both seated and online components). The Drury program was designed to address the particular needs of those educators who seek to complete a teaching certification in special education as they are teaching students with educational disabilities.

### **Profile of the initial Drury Special Education cohort**

The initial cohort of twelve candidates began the program of study leading to special education cross categorical certification in January, 2005. Eleven of the twelve candidates received their Master in Education degrees with emphasis in special education

in December, 2006. One candidate suffered a serious illness and was unable to complete the final course prior to graduation. Eleven Caucasian females and one African-American female comprised the initial cohort. Currently eight graduates are elementary teachers, three are secondary teachers. Ten graduates have special education assignments; one graduate teaches a second grade class with some students with disabilities included for portions of the school day. One candidate moved from the state and is currently employed in a counseling assignment in Georgia.

An electronic peer mentoring model is being initiated to provide on-going communication, networking and opportunities for interaction to initial cohort completers. The intended outcome of applying the model is to encourage these educators to persist in their special education classroom assignments.

The second rotation of special education candidates has begun the Drury graduate program of study. The diversity of the membership of this new cohort reflects the characteristic pattern of diversity of the educators in this geographic region. The most notable distinction of this group of ten Caucasian female candidates is that all of them have undergraduate degrees in related fields, such as psychology, sociology or criminal justice. None are certificated educators. Hopefully, the extreme differences in the undergraduate preparation of the two groups will support a longitudinal study of those influences on their success, satisfaction and tenure as special educators.

### **Summary**

This paper has provided information relative to two vitally important programs being operated by Drury University. The Troops to Teachers program and the Special education certification program provide qualified teachers to rural school districts in mid-

Missouri through alternative means. Without these programs, key teaching positions in these hard to staff schools would either go unfilled or would be filled with unqualified individuals. The service provided by Drury University through these programs will be evident for years to come.

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