

## Some Questions and Answers on the SEPS Reorganization Proposal

### 1. Are assessment and accreditation procedures severely hampered by the current structure?

**Alfano:** Yes. Working in the current structure has not enabled the faculty to develop systemic, productive collaborations with content area faculty or public schools. Some collaboration occurs but it is individual and not systemic enough to meet new standards and to serve our students well. Research (available on request) and emerging state policy (e.g., CT's Educator Preparation Advisory Committee-EPAC) tell us that these collaborations must be systemic.

**Ayalon:** As a faculty member in the past 13 years here, I didn't feel the current departmental structure hampered us in creating collaborations. The structure that does prevent us from collaboration with content area faculty is that they are in different schools and departments. For example, the secondary English Education is in the School of Arts and Sciences embedded in the department of English. This creates barriers (while it also has its advantages). The current restructuring plan will not alter that. However, the creation of C-TEC, if done well, might enhance productive collaboration and create systemic collaboration.

### 2. How are assessment and accreditation procedures concretely simplified or better addressed by a change of structure?

**Alfano:** The proposed structure will enable the faculty to focus their talents on the particular needs of their students and will foster important, mutually beneficial and sustainable collaborations with content area faculty and public schools. There are three ways that accreditation will be better addressed in the new structures: (1) the collaborative redesign of undergraduate and graduate programs to meet new standards, (2) the development of systemic elementary and secondary school partnerships to provide needed field placements and input from the field, and (3) the development and integration of meaningful performance assessments that address content and pedagogical knowledge and skills for the various content areas and the grade levels.

Until now collaboration with content area colleagues and public schools has been primarily the product of individual faculty initiative but it must become systemic and wide spread to meet the mandate for school university partnerships and the requirement of more placements for our students. This is not only clear from the research literature, it is, as mentioned above, a mandate from Connecticut's Educator Preparation Advisory Committee (EPAC; I sit on this group). Public schools, especially high schools, value opportunities to interact with content area faculty. In fact that is often their primary motivation for secondary partnership work. Since the current structure has not fostered systemic partnership work or collaboration with content area faculty and since elementary and secondary teacher preparation and school partnerships are inherently different, new structures that focus the faculty's attention on their specific level seem essential. Those structures will support more focused and purposeful collaboration in the design of programs and assessments that will benefit our students.

Employers have suggested a number of ways our current programs could be improved and these structural changes will help us to address their concerns. Reorganizing departments to integrate literacy

into elementary and allow the secondary faculty to focus on collaborating with content area faculty should allow both groups to work more effectively with campus and public school colleagues. Emphasizing inclusive preparation for regular and special educators at the graduate level will meet a particular and important need in today's schools. Collaboration with content area faculty and public schools will help the faculty develop the integrated programming that ensures all our education graduates are fully prepared to teach in today's schools.

**Ayalon:** Again there is nothing in the current structure that prevents the department of Teacher Education in creating meaningful collaborations with public schools as we currently have with Naylor School, New Britain High School, Cromwell schools, etc. In fact, since school districts are K-12, they prefer to develop K-12 partnerships instead of separate ones based with different departments. Furthermore, the elementary and secondary field experiences are not completely different. In our EDTE 316/EDTE 314 Learning Theories courses, students' field experience is not in their major. The purpose is to expose our secondary and K-12 students to elementary and middle schools, mentor students, and become familiar with the school culture. Our teacher candidates are not just learning about their own narrow specialty but also about the whole K-12 spectrum. The subsequent field experience in the methods courses (major and general) then focus on discipline-specific experiences. In other words, both elementary and secondary have also common field experiences.

Regarding inclusive experiences (combining with special education), all teacher candidates – undergraduate and graduate students – need to be prepared to teach in inclusive settings. There is nothing special about graduate-level teacher preparation to require only them to get inclusive experiences. Therefore, there is no reason to provide a different kind of preparation in a different department for post-bac and other graduate students.

### **3. Is it true that these processes can't be accomplished completely or efficiently or well under the current structure?**

**Alfano:** History says yes. Employer feedback, enrollment patterns, and hiring data indicate that change is essential and the current departmental structure has not yielded the kinds of change we need. A new structure that brings additional relevant voices to a more focused agenda seems imperative. As I noted earlier, the current structure has not fostered the kind of sustained collaboration and program redesign that would best serve our students.

**Ayalon:** All around the country as well as in Connecticut, Schools of Education have a variety of structures. For example, Southern has a department that combines special education and reading - that arrangement could work as well. The point is that first we should create a productive and workable C-TEC and see if we need any other structural changes. We now work across Teacher Education, Reading, and Special Education in our elementary cohort School Apprenticeship Program. SAP provides blocks of time where professors from the three departments co-teach in the schools and provide double the amount of field experience that our other students receive. Lets further develop this for all elementary majors. Change of structure is not necessary. In addition, if one insists on combining reading and

elementary program there is of course an option of bring the reading program or at least a few reading faculty into Teacher Education and work with both the elementary and secondary program. This was the structure in my previous institution (SUNY Potsdam).

#### **4. Could program changes solve these problems?**

**Alfano:** Program changes are needed but the current structure has not led to the changes that are essential for our students. We need to offer programs that represent the current thinking around best practice. The existing structure has not helped the faculty move in that direction. I believe that part of the issue is that the present structure does not adequately involve content area faculty or practitioners in the process of program improvement and there is no evidence to suggest that will change as long as the departmental structure remains the same. It appears that we will need to restructure to bring in new voices. More effective collaboration with the schools and content area faculty should help us improve the continuity in undergraduate advising; increase articulation within the programs; and update preparation programs to better focus on helping our teacher candidates meet current standards. The department's master's degree programs for practicing teachers have similar issues: Enrollment in those programs is 58% lower than it was in 2008. The elementary and secondary faculty need to focus in on insuring their undergraduate and graduate programs are current, well articulated, and the product of productive collaboration –achieving that goal should be easier when the faculty are free to focus on developing programs that meet both the new state standards and the differing needs of practicing teachers at elementary and secondary levels.

**Ayalon:** Actually the current structure has the advantage of having a critical mass of faculty committed to general teacher preparation at the K-12 level. The past several years saw important improvements and cross fertilization among the elementary-secondary-foundation divisions. EDF 415 for example now has a field experience opportunities. Furthermore, the coordinators school partnerships – one from the elementary level (Cromwell schools) and one from the secondary level (Naylor school) - provide field experiences opportunities for both the elementary and secondary programs. Furthermore, since all our faculty members are in essence generalists they increasingly teach in both programs (FYS for education majors, EDTE 210 – pre-professional course requirement for elementary majors, EDF 415 Foundation course required for all education majors, etc.). Separating elementary and secondary to different departments will create more barriers and could result in less collaboration. Furthermore, with the restructuring program, education majors will now have to take courses in more departments in SEPS (in addition to Special Education, Reading, and Teacher Education (which will become Secondary Education), now also Education Leadership). This will result in less coherency of the program.

Finally, regarding our graduate programs, I agree we need some changes to enhance enrollment but separating programs to different departments will do nothing to increase enrollment. We need to work with our graduate programs in the School Humanities and Social Sciences and school of engineering to develop more joint graduate program (since all experience decline enrollment).

## **5. What will the benefits be to all of our students through this restructuring?**

**Alfano:** More articulated, current, and effective undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation leading to a better chance of initial employment in their chosen field and a much better chance that they will be successful teachers who remain in the field they trained for! Our graduates should be skilled enough to be part of the 50% of beginning teachers who stay in teaching past the first couple years. Right now, the state data indicate that only 30 % of the elementary teachers certified through CCSU in 2011-12 had a teaching job in a CT public school the following year. UCONN's placement rate for the same time period was 48% and SCSU's was even higher. When we asked employers in local districts for feedback on our preparation programs, they were blunt. They feel that our graduates are not adequately prepared for almost every aspect of teaching.

**Ayalon:** Recently the head of CREC – a major education entity that manages many magnet schools and provides professional development to teachers in central Connecticut - indicated that CCSU has the best teacher preparation program in Connecticut. Last year, half of the 60 plus teachers hired in New Britain Schools were from CCSU. Our experience indicates that CCSU graduates are very desirable. I am not familiar with the source of information about comparing elementary certified teacher placement but I believe our elementary program is with very good quality and our graduates have no problem finding jobs (within the available market constraints). We get many requests from area districts to recommend graduates of ours for teaching positions. Furthermore, our teacher preparation programs have always passed accreditation with good standing. Finally, I am not saying we can't improve but to suggest that our graduates are not well prepared has little evidence. We're especially strong in preparing teachers for urban settings. The improvements needed are programmatic and not necessarily structural.

## **6. Are there any foreseeable harms or inconveniences to our students brought on by the plan?**

**Alfano:** I do not think so. Frankly, I hope that the restructuring will create tighter units that are more supportive of students, better field placements, and redesigned programs that will gain national accreditation and attract more undergraduate and graduate students. I want to work on a campus where the content area faculty encourages their students to enter the teacher education programs.

**Ayalon:** Actually, there is a potential for harm and inconvenience –

1. Students will now have to take courses in four different departments at SEPS instead of the current three. This might result in less program integrity and less possibility of creating close relationship with faculty (more likely to happen when students engage with the same faculty in more than one course).
2. Students having to be taught by more adjuncts instead of full-time faculty (number of elementary faculty will be reduced as well as more adjuncts will be teaching foundation courses)
3. Less identification with education – currently the education club includes both elementary and secondary majors advised by a Teacher Education faculty member. Now the club will have split identity.

**7. Will the current strengths of the Teacher Education department be lost with the restructuring? I.e. Will those values that are important to the faculty continue to have a place in the new curriculum? Will they be factored into future assessments and curricular initiatives?**

**Alfano:** The opportunity to redesign programs to reflect current thinking in the field provides the faculty an opportunity to incorporate areas of their particular interest like social justice and fine arts integration into programs that also insure every graduate has the essential skills required of a beginning teacher. The emphasis on performance assessment and public school partnerships brings a new opportunity for the faculty to create learning and assessment tasks that insure CCSU beginning teachers can not only talk about values like culturally responsive instruction (which they can do now), they can implement that instruction in their classrooms, which employers tell us they cannot do now.

**Ayalon:** Since many of the faculty will be moved against their will and since there haven't been formal discussions between faculty in those departments that are scheduled to merge on such issues of whether they should merge, the role of field experience, creation of new courses, etc., there actually could be a great loss of strengths. For example, the Reading department is mostly a campus-based program and doesn't have any formal partnerships in the schools while the elementary program is very much field experience based. There might be then a clash of approaches.

The Teacher Education candidates are well versed in lesson planning and instructional strategies but they also learn how to incorporate cultural responsive instruction. At the elementary level, use of the arts and creating compassionate communities is emphasized as well. With the rampant use of testing, the growing achievement gap between poor and minority students and affluent suburban white students, and growing violence in schools, our graduates need to be more versed in using culturally responsive instruction and in humanizing education.

**8. Do you think new values and strengths will be generated by the new structure that may be hampered by the status quo?**

**Alfano:** We will all have to get past old issues and concerns but I think the new structures create new and logical organizational structures such that progress is much more likely. I think that having a secondary education department will create new opportunities for education and content area faculty to interact with secondary schools in ways that enhance the experiences of high school students, practicing teachers, our teacher candidates, and the CCSU faculty. Focusing the elementary faculty more on literacy and numeracy and partnership with the schools should bring similar benefits. The current structure is simply not able to support or sustain such critical collaborations.

**Ayalon:** Creating a separate secondary education department will not enhance secondary education. The faculty members currently teach a total of seven undergraduate sections of learning theories and general methods courses but don't have majors - those are located in their content area departments. A

department without majors is not a viable department. Furthermore, opportunities for the secondary faculty to teach students in foundation courses will be severely hampered reducing their opportunities to interact with teacher candidates.

In addition, removing most graduate programs from the secondary education will force the faculty to teach outside of their department. Interaction between content area faculty members might be enhanced with such structures as C-TEC or Secondary/K-12 cohort meetings as we used to have in the past. Another idea perhaps is to create joint appointments between faculty in each content area and secondary education.