

LIBERAL STUDIES AT LONGWOOD COLLEGE: PREPARING TEACHERS FOR VIRGINIA'S FUTURE

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The Liberal Studies Major provides future teachers studying at Longwood College with an excellent opportunity to prepare for all aspects of teaching in elementary school classrooms. In the area of mathematics and science, the Liberal Studies Major contains a total of 24 hours of mathematics and science, and prepares future K-6 classroom teachers to teach all components of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) in these disciplines. Longwood College is currently studying how requirements can be modified within the Liberal Studies Program to make it possible for students to complete the discipline specific course work that will be necessary for middle school endorsement.

Knowledge and Longing for Knowledge: Conceptions of Teaching

In *Hard Times* [1], Charles Dickens provided a caricature of teachers and schooling in 19th Century England. His schoolmaster insists that teachers must stick to teaching facts: "Facts, teach these boys and girls nothing but facts. . . . Nothing else will ever be of any service to them."

In sharp contrast to this view of the role of teachers is Albert Einstein's perception: "The most important thing for a teacher to impart to the children is not information and knowledge but rather a longing for information and knowledge . . ." [2].

It is obvious that teachers must be people who have mastered the facts they teach. Our culture increasingly demands that people have the ability to organize information precisely and transfer it rapidly.

Our society requires more of educators, however. Einstein's call for teachers who inspire a yearning for knowledge continues to be important. Preparing people to become competent in facts and skills, proficient in teaching, and able to lift the vision of their students is a humbling charge for higher education.

In the late 1980s, the state of Virginia began requiring that teachers have a major in one of the liberal arts and sciences rather than in education. Students entering Longwood College at that time could select a major to any of the disciplines. By adding to that major specified professional studies courses and field experiences, these students became licensed to teach in the elementary and middle schools of Virginia. The College soon found, however, that our students were not as prepared as we thought necessary to teach mathematics, natural sciences, English, and social studies, since the only courses they were required to have in those disciplines were at the General Education level.

The Liberal Studies Major described here was designed to give students a background broad enough in these disciplines to be able to teach all of them at the elementary level. The College also wanted to provide background extensive enough for these students to be able to teach two disciplines at the middle school level. When Virginia created the Standards of Learning for the disciplines at each grade level, Longwood's Liberal Studies Major was revised to ensure that all of the SOL were covered in the content studied by students in the Teacher Preparation Program.

General and Content Studies

Acknowledging the need for elementary and special education teachers to have more extensive backgrounds in mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities beyond the general education requirements, a cross-disciplinary team from the School of Education and Human Services and from the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences designed a major tailored for the candidates. This major, designated as the Liberal Studies Major, is a fifty-four credit program that requires specific courses in the following areas: Mathematics (9 credits), Natural Sciences (15 credits), Social Sciences (12 credits), Humanities (15 credits), Electives (3 credits). When general education and liberal studies major requirements are combined, teacher candidates complete a total of twenty-one credits of English (grammar, literature, and writing); eight credits in fine arts and humanities; twelve credits of mathematics and computer science; nineteen credits of natural sciences; and twenty-one credits of history and social sciences. These requirements ensure that teacher candidates have a broad general studies background in the various content areas of the elementary school plus the depth of studies required for the middle school.

Teacher candidates in elementary education take an additional forty credits in professional studies and field experiences for the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science Degree. This prepares them to meet the requirements for professional licensure in PreK-8. Teacher candidates in special education complete forty credits of professional studies and field experiences at the undergraduate level and 36 credits at the graduate level. The graduate year in special education includes coursework in regular and special education.

Secondary education programs are currently under review relative to the new licensure regulations passed by the Virginia Board of Education in May of 1998. Longwood College foresees the revision of the Modern Languages 8-12 program to meet the new requirements for Modern Languages Pre K-12. The History and Political Science 8-12 programs will be revised to meet the licensure requirements for History and Social Sciences 6-12. Although the licensure regulations for other programs do not vary greatly from the programs currently offered at Longwood, all programs will be reviewed to ensure their compliance with the new state regulations.

Professional and Pedagogical Studies

Students majoring in Liberal Studies are required to have the following courses in the professional component of the teacher preparation studies:

- Introduction to the Teaching Profession (1 credit)
- Human Growth and Development (3 credits)
- Methodology - Reading and Curriculum and Instruction (12 credits)
- Measurement & Evaluation (1 credit)
- Classroom Management (2 credits)
- Instructional Technology (2 credits)
- Survey of Exceptional Students (2 credits)
- Education Seminar (1 credit)

Two factors have already enhanced the technology competencies of teacher candidates at Longwood College. The first is the new professional education facility, the Hull Building, which was completed in the Summer of 1996. The second is the requirement of a computer science course as part of the mathematics component of the liberal studies curriculum. A third factor is having an even greater impact: the requirement of personal laptop computers for all

students.

Since Longwood restructured its curricula in the 1980s, its teacher preparation programs have required a course entitled, "Media and Computer Technology Module." The course is a requirement during the professional semester, prior to student teaching. While this idea was excellent from its inception, the lack of technology available in the professional unit and the lack of prior experience in the college career of teacher candidates made this course difficult to implement. In 1996, the Department of Education, Special Education, and Social Work moved into a new facility equipped with the advanced hardware and programs that allow for the preparation of teacher candidates who are truly able to use technology efficaciously in their classrooms. This development, combined with the fact that candidates now entering Longwood are more literate in the use of technology than their predecessors, results in teacher candidates who are genuinely competent to use technology in their teaching, and otherwise in their professional roles. With "Introduction to Computer Science" as a mathematics requirement in the Liberal Studies Major, all teacher candidates now have experience with techniques of structured programming, algorithms, problem solving, and applications.

In the Spring of 1998, Longwood College made the decision to require all incoming students to have their own computers. The College supports numerous computer labs on campus for student and faculty use. Students are required to own a laptop computer that contains the same basic software as all College office, classroom, and lab computers. All dormitories on the campus have network connections. Students have, therefore, Internet and email access from their dorm rooms. Technical support is provided by the computer vendor and resident technology assistants. The Office for Instructional Technology for Teaching and Learning hires, trains, and maintains eighteen technology assistants who are assigned to dormitories for the sole purpose of training and supporting students in their technology needs. The 250-300 incoming teacher candidates each year are provided a rich background in technology before they reach the professional semester where the Media and Computer Technology Module is taught.

Field Experiences

Field experiences continue to be a cornerstone of the Teacher Preparation Program at Longwood College. Teacher candidates in the elementary and special education programs

enroll in two practicum experiences prior to the professional semester when they student teach. Secondary teacher candidates also enroll in two field experiences prior to the professional semester. All candidates entering the teacher preparation program for secondary education enroll in practica focused primarily on observation and teacher aid activities, and a second practicum focused on planning and implementing instruction.

Professional Community

An exciting aspect of the Liberal Studies/Elementary and Liberal Studies/Special Education Majors at Longwood College is the collaboration that takes place among faculty in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the School of Education and Human Services. The Director of the Liberal Studies Program is a faculty member in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The Liberal Studies Advising Coordinator is a faculty member in the School of Education and Human Services. The Liberal Studies Steering Committee consists of faculty leaders from both schools. All curricular decisions regarding the major are made by this faculty body. Annual workshops are offered for all faculty in the two schools who teach in the Liberal Studies major. Advising of teacher candidates in these programs is carried out by faculty from both schools. This collaboration results in the ownership of the elementary and special education teacher preparation by the entire College.

The spirit of cooperation and collaboration in the College and in the School of Education and Human Services has increased. As revised licensure regulations and endorsement areas have been developed by the Virginia Board of Education, more interaction has occurred between School of Education and Human Services and the curriculum committees of the various departments offering majors associated with secondary teaching licensure. This kind of collaboration can only continue to strengthen the teacher preparation programs of the College.

Future Directions

The immediate future of the School of Education and Human Services at Longwood College will include a number of specific activities:

- A number of faculty appointments will become available in the next several years. The faculty will be examining the best use of these positions and will be making recommendations to the Dean concerning revised definitions of the faculty positions that

are available and appropriate reconfiguration of teaching resources. The needs of pre-professional students and teachers with continuing professional development needs will be considered. The projected need of the Commonwealth of Virginia for teachers will also be a factor in this decision making process.

- A task force of the faculty will be formed and charged with the responsibility of developing recommendations for the creation of the Longwood Educators' Network. The Network will be established by technology links to all partner schools in the Commonwealth who work with Longwood College in providing practica and student teaching placements. The Network will allow for more frequent and convenient communication between students in field placements, their cooperating teachers, their field supervisors, and the Longwood faculty.
- The Longwood College Teachers for Tomorrow Program has been established in eight high schools in the Southside Virginia region. This program for high school juniors and seniors encourages competent, committed students to consider teaching as a profession and Longwood as the institution of choice for pursuing that profession. These students will participate in a credit-bearing elective course, observe and participate in public school classrooms, learn about career opportunities in education, and receive information about scholarships and other college support options including opportunities at Longwood College. The program will benefit both Longwood College and Southside Virginia by encouraging talented young people from the region to enter the teaching profession, by encouraging these talented young people to serve Southside Virginia as teachers, and by assisting Longwood College and the region in recruiting and retaining minority teachers.

In July 1997, Longwood College was accepted into the membership of the Renaissance Group. Conceived and established as an organization for Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Deans, the Renaissance Group is devoted to strengthening teacher education programs. A condition of membership is presidential involvement along with the participation of the Chief Academic Officer and the Dean of Education. The Renaissance Group has identified a set of principles for the preparation of educators. When Longwood College become a member, it endorsed the following principles as guidelines for the future of its teacher preparation programs. As the faculty, students, and administrators of the institution look toward the new

millennium, these principles will be implemented in the following ways by Longwood College:

- Longwood will continue to be committed to the principle that the education of teachers is an all-college responsibility.
- Longwood will continue to value quality teaching above all else in the preparation of educators.
- Longwood will continue to integrate the preparation of teachers throughout the collegiate experience. Early and continued involvement in schools will also continue to be central to the program.
- Longwood will continually examine its curriculum and make changes to that curriculum as the needs of students and schools change.
- Longwood will maintain rigorous entrance and exit requirements of its teacher preparation candidates.
- Longwood will continue to be committed to preparing teachers who are competent in teaching methodologies, teaching content areas, and in the understanding of the needs and characteristics of learners.
- Longwood will continue to be dedicated to preparing teachers from diverse backgrounds to teach in an equally diverse society.
- Longwood will continue to support and encourage its teacher preparation faculty in their scholarly and professional endeavors.
- Longwood will remain committed to providing quality continuing education to teachers.

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References

- [1] C. Dickens, *Hard Times*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1868.
- [2] A. Einstein, "To National Council of Supervisors of Elementary Science," Einstein papers, Princeton University, July 3, 1934.