

Concept Paper: Graduate Study in Education – A 5th Year Teacher Education Program

Submitted by: Department of Education & Child Study

Intent:

The Department of Education and Child Study proposes the development of a fifth year program in teacher education. The program would afford qualified Smith undergraduates the opportunity to receive, tuition free, a masters degree and teaching licensure in either elementary, middle school, or secondary education by completing a fifth year of study and practicum work through the College.

Rationale:

1) Smith envisions itself as an active participant in the larger world and community. This participation is guided by the institution's values; none of which more central than that of providing the highest quality education to all students, off all ages, and from all backgrounds and circumstances. A commitment to preparing excellent teachers supports this value with one of the College's great strengths, our graduate teacher education program. Supporting the preparation of excellent teachers is simply the right thing to do. It speaks well of who we are.

2) A fifth year masters program would extend Smith's outreach to the community by providing top quality teachers to the field. The requirements for teacher licensure are becoming increasingly complex. Getting the most out of Smith's rich undergraduate curriculum, taking advantage of the various programs for study abroad, pursuing opportunities to engage in research and in-depth study while preparing to teach requires meticulous planning. Over the last few years the number of junior and seniors taking their first education course has increased dramatically. Many of these students come to our classes after having had a transformative Praxis experience where they worked with children or a compelling service experience in schools such as the Gerena tutoring program, the urban ed initiative, or an SOS sponsored program. These students come to realize that they want to teach and they begin to explore pathways to the classroom. Our department has long been concerned that many of these top students find they cannot complete the requirements in the time they have remaining as undergraduates. In most instances we are unable to offer them a viable option. Some give up. Others opt for programs like Teach for America¹, which do not provide them with the background and support they need to become effective teachers. A fifth year masters program would allow us to retain our very best students, and give them the kind of strong preparation that will enable them to be successful as teachers.

3) It would serve as a recruitment tool. While students may not be considering teaching when they enter Smith, knowing there is an option for a fifth year teacher education program leading to a masters degree and licensure is likely to be an attractive option for

¹ 29 Smith students have entered the Teach for America program over the past 4 years. Many more apply and, if they do not get into Teach for America pursue other "fast track" preparation programs.

many prospective students. This is especially the case as Smith continues to attract a diverse, multi-dimensional student body. Having an excellent teacher who was educated at Smith is another way this initiative would serve recruitment goals. Finally, many of the schools we compare ourselves to offer free or nominal cost post baccalaureate programs providing routes to teacher licensure. These include: Middlebury, Brandeis, Mt. Holyoke, Bowdoin, Princeton, Bryn Mawr, Haverford, Harvard, Vassar, Swarthmore, Brown, and Wellesley.

Implementation: Our existing graduate teacher education programs provide the basis for this fifth year initiative. Students would enter the program in the summer following their senior year along with the normal cohort of graduate students. We envision multiple routes into the program and have not yet developed them in detail. The program would be open to all students and we would establish program admission criteria. Students who want to teach subject matter in middle or high school will need to have majored in the field they want to teach. A likely track would see students opt into a series of three education courses. The courses would allow them to test their interest in teaching, allow members of the department to get to know the students, and it would prepare them to get off to a solid start in the masters program.

We believe that this proposed fifth year program responds to a real and important need, takes advantage of existing strengths in our program and at the College, and makes an important statement about Smith's values and commitment to make our world a better place.