

Students in the new five-year certification program will graduate with more classroom experience and greater expertise in their academic specialties — and be halfway to their master's degrees.

MAKING THE GRADE by Randall Turk In Teacher Education



If there is one thing on which classroom teachers, parents, taxpayers and employers can agree, it is this: American education is having trouble making the grade.

Public school educators recite a litany of horrors about the pressures coming to bear on today's classrooms. A dwindling tax base shrinks resources. Parents are no longer involved in their children's education. Drugs and crime intrude in the schools. Students bring to school fewer of the basic values needed for learning. A heavy-handed school bureaucracy distorts educational objectives, cutting teachers adrift in an outmoded system.

But the worst indictment is the *outcome* of public education today. Nationally, 25 percent of American youth drop out of high school. The trend could result in 10 million drop-outs over the next decade. Of those left to graduate, *half cannot read at the eighth grade level*. In recent years, education reform has become a major emphasis. National, state and professional groups have gone to the root of the education problem—the funds and other resources needed to improve the nation's schools and the need for comprehensive improvements in teacher preparation.

The problems of education today have been compared to the nation's crumbling infrastructure. Yet unlike deteriorating roads, bridges and utilities, the education system cannot be rectified simply by an infusion of money or by government decree. There is no tidy blueprint for some radical new approach to achieve excellence in public education.

The University of Oklahoma and 95 other major research universities in the country are viewing education from a new perspective, examining different dynamics that impact learning today. They see a need to strengthen teacher education programs to help teachers take control of the teaching environment, empowering teachers to teach. New teacher education curricula are focusing on changing priorities and more teacher activism in and out of the classroom. The new direction? Creative, life-long skills needed to teach are being reinforced by essential qualities: Professionalism, Leadership, Understanding and Scholarly research. That's the "plus" in OU's new Teacher Education PLUS program.

Over the past four years, OU's College of Education has been overhauling the teacher education curriculum with new emphasis on preparing teachers

for a proactive role in the classroom. Effective this fall, OU students beginning work toward the bachelor's degree in education will undergo a five-year certification program rather than the current four years. Students who completed some college credit in education courses prior to fall 1991 have the option of completing either the four- or five-year program at OU. The four-year program will be phased out entirely by fall 1995.

A professional sequence committee has reconceptualized education courses, scrapping some to make way for more courses in the teacher's academic field, such as mathematics, the sciences or languages. There is increased emphasis on internship in the classroom. The five-year program will result in teachers completing a bachelor's degree and half the work toward a master's. Along the way, education students will benefit from varied classroom experience in urban and rural schools, advice and counseling from veteran teachers, more multicultural skills and "real time" classroom research into what works in today's learning environments.

"Preparing a teacher to be a professional has to be a developmental learning process," says Michael



OU student teacher Shane Hainzinger, left, of Bartlesville, listens intently as her cooperating teacher, Edna Shoaf, center, offers some suggestions on a 9th grade English assignment to Norman Central Mid-High School student Jeremy Miller.

Angelotti, associate dean of the OU College of Education and director of the TE-PLUS program. Because of University and state certification requirements, the new undergraduate program "can't be done in four years," Angelotti explains. "The fifth year is a capstone master teacher approach. We'll have a far better prepared beginning teacher."

Angelotti says that "the nut of the problem in education" is developing problem-solvers and critical thinkers. He contends that creative thinkers can bring quicker, more valid changes to the classroom than those made by rigid, "top-down" school administrators.

The rationale behind having OU teachers earn half a master's degree is to set them on a course of lifelong learning, Angelotti says. "Once they're educated as beginning teachers, it's not over. Teachers are scholars continuously pursuing questions. They are researchers who know where to go for help in solving problems." Although earning half a master's degree will encourage OU graduates to complete the degree while they are teachers, the primary reason for the extended program is "to produce a thinking teacher solid in the subject matter."

Just as critical to successful teaching, Angelotti believes, is preparing teach-

ers to communicate effectively with the growing numbers of minority students in public schools. "The tradition in this country has not been for minorities to pursue higher education," he says. "Secondly, a shrinking percentage of minorities is choosing to become educators." Minority students comprise about 16 percent of OU's College of Education enrollment, more than double the national rate of minority teachers. Still, Angelotti and other educators think OU can do better. "There's a strong commitment at OU to address this issue," he says. "This means we have to program in interactions between our students and minority students in urban and rural schools."

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OU is among 96 American research universities that formed The Holmes Group in 1987. Henry Holmes, for whom the group is named, insisted that a more serious conception was needed of the place of the teacher in the life of the nation. Dean of the Harvard School of Graduate Education in the 1930s, Holmes saw the need for teachers with "the power of critical analysis in a mind broadly and deeply formed."

The Holmes Group set out to change the way teachers are educated, help construct a true profession of teaching, cooperate with public schools to improve education outcomes and restructure teacher education programs to achieve new standards. Startling changes in the country's population, society, knowledge, technology and economy have rendered many traditional teaching methods obsolete, the investigators found. The U. S. is becoming a multicultural nation, living and working in the high-tech information age and dealing with the competitive global marketplace—conditions demanding levels of education never before aspired to, the organization determined. To help public education meet the new challenges, The Holmes Group has advo-

cated sweeping changes in what is learned and how it is taught in the schools; how schools are organized, managed and equipped; and how schools relate to the communities they serve. To reach those ends, the group calls for changes in the way teachers learn and how they work.

In "Tomorrow's Schools," a report setting out its findings and recommendations, The Holmes Group calls for "teaching and learning for understanding," leading to life-long learning for students and teachers, and for the increased involvement of parents. Schools are urged to become "learning communities" where concepts and relationships are taught, not just facts—and where research continually searches for effective ways to reach and involve students. Central to that idea is increasing teacher awareness and understanding of cultural diversity in the classroom and creating teaching approaches relevant to "everybody's children." Also recommended: continuing learning by teachers, teacher educators and administrators and long-term inquiry into teaching and learning by school and university faculty working as partners.

Holmes Group universities are "committed to make teaching intellectually sound," to provide teachers with a greater depth of understanding that translates to better teaching. That commitment involves a teacher earning a major in an academic subject, undertaking education courses that integrate research findings about learning and teaching. It means preparing teacher candidates to work with culturally and socio-economically diverse students through academic studies and clinical experiences.

The Holmes Group urges that teacher candidates get "realistic, demanding, well-coached assignments in classrooms. These should be long enough, complex enough and varied enough to prepare them to demonstrate success with students who are different from themselves and for whom school learning is difficult."

In response to the Holmes agenda, OU and other colleges and schools of education across the country have organized into regional consortia to restructure teacher education. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has been formed to provide

national certification standards and other incentives for classroom teachers. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and many state departments of education have joined the reform movement by significantly strengthening standards for preparing teachers and other school personnel.

In the 1987-88 academic year, the faculty of the OU College of Education conducted an extensive self study and formed a Division of Teacher Education to monitor and coordinate teacher education studies. A strategic plan was developed to revise teacher education, and a representative planning committee recommended curriculum changes in the teacher education program. In 1989, the College of Education approved teacher certification changes. In agreements with other OU colleges, professional education courses were reduced by about five hours across five-



year certification programs. In fall 1990, the OU provost, president and Board of Regents approved the extended teacher preparation program. In spring 1991, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education approved the program.

Some features of the new TE-PLUS curriculum:

- a baccalaureate degree in arts and sciences, education or fine arts;
- extended initial certification to include a fifth year of internship and graduate studies;
- added depth in subject matter preparation and extended study in cultural pluralism and education;
- up to 15 hours toward a master's degree of choice, including six to nine hours of graduate subject matter coursework completed by the end of the fifth year;
- developmental field experiences, including more than 100 contact hours with children in diverse settings, beginning in the sophomore year;

—a semester internship in the schools (formerly only 10 weeks) with a mentor teacher and a "capstone" research project, both completed in the fifth year;

—Graduate College admission requirements met by the second semester, senior year.

A curriculum for teachers, however sound, is not worth much until it can be put to the test in the classroom. Here the four school districts near the University will be indispensable. Last year representatives of OU and the public school systems of Norman, Moore, Blanchard and Oklahoma City formed a "Field Experience and Mentoring Committee" to devise new ways of training teachers in the classroom environment. "We developed an in-the-trenches view of the current needs, problems, challenges," explains committee member Nancy O'Brian, assistant superintendent of Norman Public Schools.

"A real strength of the steering committee is the urban, suburban and rural blend of communities where the dynamics of teaching are very different," O'Brian says. "We picked some pretty good brains to determine the activities that will go with each course."

The committee produced a document, "Field Experience Activities," that presents a more tightly knit set of expectations and a program for teaching interns that is more structured and closely aligned with the students' coursework. The new program is "better for the leap from theory to practice," O'Brian says. "That's how you help the pre-service teacher see the link."

According to O'Brian, the committee feels that the mentoring function is "more than just supervising. A mentor is critical to a support system: a reference, guide and model." She contends that mentoring always has functioned in the schools, "but we've just put a label on it."

The new program formulated by the Field Experience and Mentoring Committee is a sequenced curriculum for classroom teaching experience that spans the gap between the University and the public school. The first group of master teachers from the four school districts attended mentoring workshops at OU in August.

"These are our finest, the best teachers we could put with student teachers," O'Brian says. Of the new

relationship of public schools and the University, she says, "It opens avenues for partnerships we haven't had in the past. This has the potential to solve most of the criticisms of teacher education. The key to improved schools anywhere is the classroom teacher."

Frank McQuarrie, director of field experiences in the OU College of Education, favors early student teaching experience for several reasons. He says involvement in the public schools each year of the program transfers the realities of the classroom to the theories taught at OU, where there will be more interaction about experience. The experience factor is critical to commitment, he insists.

"Teaching is one of the most rewarding or frustrating professions," he says. "Early student teaching experience permits students to re-examine the decision to enter the teacher education profession. It's too late for seniors to change majors."

McQuarrie coordinates planning for the teaching experience with three OU colleges and the four school districts involved. His responsibilities include training selected teachers from the four school districts as mentors. "We wanted more positions in rural, urban and suburban settings," he says. "Previously, the vast majority of student teaching has been in the Norman area."

In training sessions for experienced teachers, McQuarrie introduces a teacher education model and invites revisions to make it work in particular classroom settings. McQuarrie's program also focuses on adult learners (the student teachers) and the University's education curriculum. "Input from teachers can modify the University's programs," he says. Many of the mentoring activities can be done on a group basis, but McQuarrie says the mentor's role is a departure from the traditional advisor's functions. "Advisors help plan a student's program and resolve problems. Mentors do more. They inspire, explain and challenge. We were looking for people in the schools supporting a closer relationship with the University, those with the skills to pass the profession on to someone else."

Teaching has become a much tougher and more complex profession, and those entering the field today need more expert guidance to make the critical transition from student to teacher,



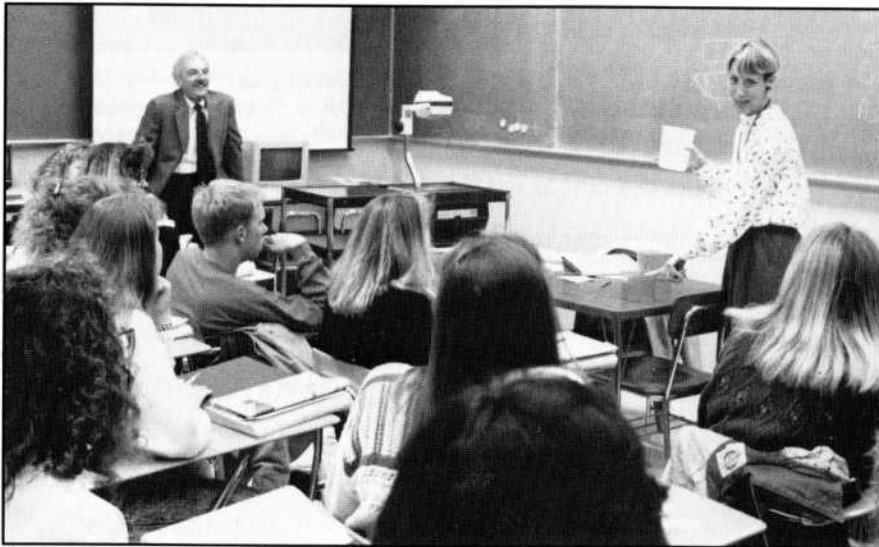
Teaching can be the most rewarding or the most frustrating profession. Under the new five-year program, Sara Gae Pratt, above in a third grade classroom at Norman's McKinley School, would not wait until her final semester for the practical experiences that enables her to re-examine her commitment to teaching.



OU education majors, from left, Kim Spears, Scott Boucher and Shannon Roche confer with graduate teaching assistant Sacra Nicholas after one of the teacher preparation courses in which they gain theories they will be taking into the classroom.



Recruiting the very best public school teachers, such as Edna Shoaf, above, to serve as mentors to student teachers like Shane Hainzinger, is the key to spanning the gap between the University's teacher education program and the public school system where skills newly acquired in OU courses must meet the realities of the classroom.



Associate education dean Michael Angelotti, above, who oversaw the development of the TE-PLUS curriculum, drops in on one of the college's teacher education classes, taught by graduate assistant Sacra Nicholas.

McQuarrie feels. "If we're going to move ahead, we need to collaborate to produce the best possible teachers." In selecting mentor teachers for the program, OU's College of Education has specific criteria. "We want to work with everyone, but we want to start with those highly committed," McQuarrie explains.

In August, a TE-PLUS workshop for the first of some 150 mentor teachers was held at OU. The workshop was the first opportunity for College of Education curriculum planners to test their theories on career educators. The

teachers generally reacted favorably to the TE-PLUS program, but several had concerns. "The program will aid our team effort. We're a grade-level team-teaching school," says Cecelia Cumby, a fifth grade teacher with 24 years of teaching experience. "But more time will be required to give student teachers feedback. We have a commitment to build a profession, but the middle—the district administration—has to be involved. They're not here."

Cumby believes the multicultural focus of the program's fifth year will improve teaching techniques that will help bring needed changes to the classroom. But she perceives some transitional problems. "Some teachers will have stipends, others will not," she says. "The adjustment period will be tough on everybody. We'll get teachers more dedicated, who know what they want to do, more professional and with love in their hearts to do it. But there may be a shortage of them."

Michael Adkins, a high school social studies teacher for 17 years, feels that TE-PLUS will produce students more mature and qualified in their subjects. "Exposing student teachers to rural, urban and suburban schools makes them more marketable," he says. But Adkins admits that this heightened marketability may make it even more difficult to keep the best teachers in the state.

Sandy Bahan, who has taught mid-high school social studies for 20 years, says that while the new OU program is more effective, the expanded responsibilities of mentor teachers may make the plan difficult to implement in school districts. "There's got to be some adjustment of teacher responsibilities," she says. As for the addition of the fifth year, "education majors might as well stay in school and do it right," she concludes. For those who undertake TE-PLUS, "Their view of teaching will be much more enjoyable and pleasant, and the kids will be better off."

The ultimate goal of TE-PLUS is to produce a well-educated college graduate who also is prepared to teach. "I think we've done it," insists Fred Wood, dean of the College of Education. "Majors in math, English, history and science still are possible in the academic area. Students feasibly can complete 50 to 60 hours in their chosen academic field."

The territory for practicum teaching covers the entire Oklahoma City metro area and some of the rural and suburban school districts, all within 30 minutes' drive of OU's Norman campus, he says. "Internship will include work with unsuccessful students, the exceptional and college-bound. We'll identify the very best teachers of the disadvantaged and gifted, as well."

Wood says the best practitioners in the field of teaching will help teach education courses at OU and hold faculty rank, an arrangement producing good results in other universities of The Holmes Group. The University has supplied the resources for new faculty and operating costs for TE-PLUS, but other funds are needed, "scholarship funds in return for our students' five-year commitment," Wood says.

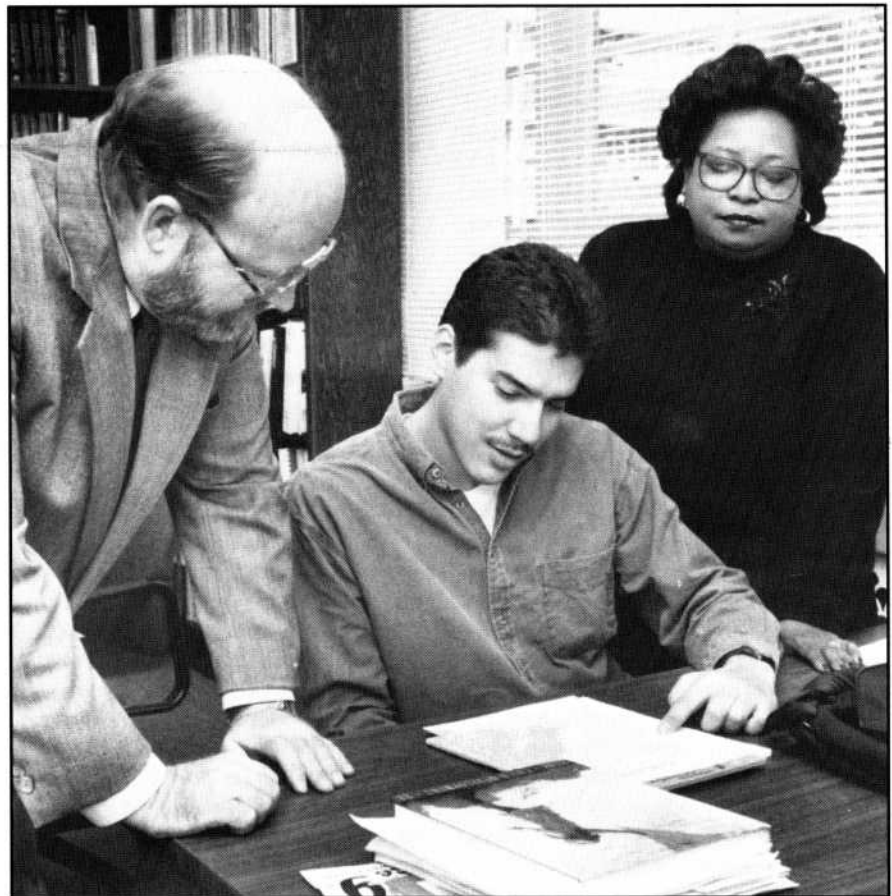
The College of Education is seeking help from alumni and other donors to establish an endowment to fund the fifth year of the program, he said. "We have hired a full-time fund raiser," Wood says. "Our goal is to raise \$150,000 to \$200,000 the first year for our first group of people entering the fifth year of the program in 1993." Funds for fellowships and forgivable loans could "hold outstanding teachers and administrators in the profession" in exchange for their commitment to teach in Oklahoma for a specified period.

In shepherding the design of the new teaching curriculum, Angelotti has emphasized that a new generation of teachers must exercise greater powers of understanding, communication and responsibility. "One of the great failings of education is not communicating with the public about the needs of the kids and the system," he says. "Clearly, the classroom teacher has to be the focus. As it stands now, teachers suffer the consequences without having the responsibility. They don't design the standardized tests . . . Until they have the responsibility for the full education of the student, we can't fully measure their effectiveness." *Continued*

Frank McQuarrie, left, director of field experiences, and Barbara Webber, right, coordinator of field supervisors, are shown in the photo at right with graduate student David Sunkeah, a business major working on elementary education certification.



photos by Gil Jain





OU's education dean, Fred Wood, left, has enlisted a committee of public school leaders such as Norman's Nancy O'Brian, right, to devise new ways of training student teachers in the classroom environment.



The new teachers and their experienced counterparts "will have to educate themselves, understand teaching differently," Angelotti maintains. "Teacher education has to align itself with outcomes-based education." Family commitment to education, found lacking in many classrooms, is vital to teaching and learning, Angelotti emphasizes. "If it's not there, it's awfully difficult for the teacher to overcome."

The University has committed more than half a million dollars to create 12 new faculty positions in education. New science and math teaching labs are operating, and English and social studies labs are planned. "We need more space, and we're trying hard to find it," Angelotti says.

Will TE-PLUS prove attractive to new education majors, or will the ambitious program diminish College of Education enrollment? "I would expect enrollment to fall initially, but we might be able to head that off," Angelotti says. In states such as Kansas, Virginia and Florida, which have adopted the five-year program, "Usually there is a 10-to-25 percent dip over a three-to-five-year period. Then there's standing room only, and you have to cap the program."

OU might be able to fend off the drop in enrollment because beginning education majors are better students. Admission to the College of Education requires a grade point average of 2.5 or better. Entry into the graduate school for the fifth year of the program requires

a 3.0. "Our real grade point for entering students is 3.0, with a minimum of 30 hours in Arts and Sciences courses," Angelotti says. "You have to be an able student to complete our program."

This year is the last for education majors to have a choice between OU's four-and five-year programs. Is TE-PLUS best for all, or should other options be available for students with different objectives? In an orientation

excited about the opportunity to participate as a transition student," he says. "What's being attempted is exciting to the profession and to students." McClelland plans to complete the four-year program first, then decide on further education. "I see the five-year program as basically for young students without much life experience."

Nancy Jones, a junior, has just entered teacher education, hopes to com-

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at OU for education majors this fall, three students commented on the new program.

Jo Gonker, a transfer student halfway through the four-year program, is a science education major. She says she will complete four years and then undertake a master's degree in life sciences. "If I were just starting out, I'd be interested in TE-PLUS," she says. "I like the thought of the mentor program. But I believe I need a degree in science to teach science."

David McClelland, 47, is a sophomore in the four-year program. His background has been varied, with experience in the military and as a minister. "I'm

complete the four-year program but "may switch over to the five-year program because it offers more. For any kind of salary, you have to have at least a master's."

How will the new degree program be received by principals and administrators who hire teachers? Will it command higher salaries for teachers, lessen their chances of being hired, or will it matter?

"We've talked to a lot of constituent groups and districts," Angelotti says. "Most would pay more. The general consensus is that teachers with this kind of education will definitely go to the front of the line in the teaching pool." 