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Evolution of the Education Department at DePauw University

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Education

By Jessica Howard '08

Education at DePauw will soon mean something new. Amidst the confusion of graduate school rumors and a shift in curriculum, a new education studies department will soon emerge.

Education is one of the oldest departments on campus, dating back to 1836 when teacher preparation was part of seminary training. A Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Program was offered through DePauw from 1965 until 1990, when the department returned to strictly undergraduate teaching licensure. The faculty and the board of trustees voted in 2004 to reintroduce the MAT program.

The faculty vote led many to believe that a graduate program was under development. Many students were under the impression that a master's track would be implemented fall 2006; spring 2005 four seniors submitted applications and recommendations for a nonexistent graduate program. The confusion as to the start date left several seniors without post-graduation plans. "[University officials] could've felt more sympathy that they've screwed us over," senior education major Tom Major told The DePauw last spring. "There wasn't even a sorry; it was 'Oh, well!'"

Sophomore education major Joy Oguntimein had a similar misunderstanding. "I thought the plan was to have it in effect by this year, 06-07...I was under the impression when I came to DePauw that as a student and as an education major, I would automatically be in a [five-year master's] program."

New department chair, Marcelle McVorrán, stated that the program proposal has been approved by the university but has yet to be formally submitted to the state, and the submission itself is on hold until a departmental accreditation process is complete. She was unable to speculate as to a start date, but noted that the process was a lengthy one.

The MAT proposal is taking shape in the midst of a transition period for education faculty and students. The department is in the process of coordinating a curricular shift away from a more traditional four-year undergraduate teacher preparation program and towards a broader definition of education.

"It has less to do with preparing teachers at this point" said McVorrán. "We do accept the fact that a liberal arts preparation is a very good model for teacher preparation. So what we thought is that the field of education is ripe enough, is rich enough to take its place among the liberal arts. And we can expand the learning and we can expand the learning space which includes but is not restricted to the classroom."

Beginning fall 2008, this new 'education studies' focus (formerly just 'education') will no longer license education majors for teaching, though the department will continue to certify music education students.

The hope is that a 'fifth year' program would recruit students with four-year undergraduate degrees from other universities to pursue their MAT at DePauw. The department stresses that this graduate track is not a five year program in teacher training, but a 'fifth' year of study open to students of all fields with interests in education.

McVorrán added that, had a master's program been implemented fall 2006 as some had mistakenly assumed, the small department would be responsible for three distinct courses of study. "We would have been handling the phase-out of the four year undergraduate teacher-ed, the introduction of a four year undergraduate ed studies, and the MAT. At the same time. With eight [faculty members] that's impossible. Moreover, the proposal has to be approved by the state."

Junior education major Lindsay Chalmers acknowledged the false impressions, but said students were cautioned early on about the transition. As the class of 2008 will be the last to graduate with undergraduate teaching certificates, she reported that current juniors in the program were given the option to graduate in five years or be "fast-tracked" to graduate in four years and ease the introduction of the new education studies program.

Faculty and students alike note the unique role of an education department on a liberal arts campus – as an accredited, license-issue program, the curriculum must meet university, state, and federal standards. "So we have been straddling a lot of fences trying to meet everybody's expectations," said McVorrán, "and so a lot of these changes you may find within this particular struggle."

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