

Committee seeks to upgrade teaching standards

By Nick Reed
Of the Emerald

Imagine entering an emergency room for medical assistance and discovering that the doctor in charge earned a "D" in stitching at medical school.

Such a situation is, according to a comprehensive study completed by a citizens advisory

Analysis

group for Oregon's Interim Committee on Education, the equivalent of what most Oregon school children face when they enter public schools: teachers who are among the middle to lower academic ranks of college graduates.

Oregon schools of education annually grind out about 1,400 prospective teachers who obtain their certificates. Only about 400 of these newly-graduated teachers find full-time jobs.

According to the study, the long-term prospects for teacher

positions in Oregon is not going to get any better. It is, in fact, getting worse.

West Linn recently had 2,000 applicants for about 25 teaching positions. Other state public school districts report similar situations.

The advisory committee, made up of teachers, school board members, educators and businesspersons, submitted their findings and recommendations to the State Board of Education last September.

Many of the recommendations, if fully implemented, would change the face of teaching in Oregon drastically.

More than merely a face-lift, the changes would completely redefine what it means to teach, or to aspire to teach, in Oregon.

Phil Reisling, legislative assistant to House Speaker Vera Katz, D-Portland, who supports the changes, said he expects little opposition to the changes.

"There is very little in the package that people will be against," he said.

But the Oregon Education Association, which represents teachers statewide, is offering stiff resistance.

The main recommendations of the committee surfaced in the House last week in the form of five bills, each covering a different aspect of the suggested changes.

The committee suggests fundamental changes in the recruiting, training and licensing of new teachers in order to raise both the status of teaching as a profession and to attract the highest academic students.

The committee suggests the elimination of the undergraduate of education degree. This would be replaced by a masters in teaching degree.

The degree would be a nine-to-12 month graduate-level program for those who proved qualified in a particular field. Prospective teachers would be tested in the field in which they aspire to teach. This would allow a more specialized and targeted area of expertise. In other words, math teachers would be required to hold undergraduate degrees in mathematics instead of a general education degree.

According to the committee report, this would give teachers substantially more time to master the subject area which they will teach and allow them to get a solid grounding the subject matter, thereby eliminating misassignment of teachers.

Currently, it is common practice to pull, say, a gym teacher

to teach science or government, subjects about which the individual may be ill-suited to teach. The present certificate system would give them the right to lead a class in these subjects.

Under the current system, the study continues, many elementary teachers never take a college-level course in certain basic subjects, particularly math and science.

Not even secondary teachers are required to major in their endorsement areas. Current state law allows the certification of teachers who have taken fewer courses in their subject area than liberal arts majors who probably will seldom use their specialized knowledge.

A nine-month Masters in Technology program would mean roughly 45 graduate-level hours, and a 12-month program would translate into 60 graduate-level hours. The state Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, which approves all teacher training, requires only 36 undergraduate hours for the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers.

Considering the fact that barely half of all newly-certified Oregon teachers find full-time work, the committee suggests that schools of education should refrain from training so many people who want to teach full-time in their field, but have little or no chance of doing so.

The committee accuses statewide schools of education

of accepting many marginal candidates in order to boost enrollments. This means that less-qualified academic students are encouraged to seek careers in which, even if they found jobs, they could only perform on an adequate level of competency.

The crux of the committee findings states that an initial teaching license should be granted only to those candidates who have earned a baccalaureate degree in a particular field of study, completed a teacher education program based along the lines of a more specialized process, demonstrated knowledge of their endorsement area and completed a one-year internship.

These are the basic points of the committee suggestions, but many more details are involved.

One of the more interesting aspects of the committee is an alternate licensing program which would allow college graduates who have not completed a formal teacher education program the opportunity to teach. Such individuals would be required to possess a baccalaureate degree in the appropriate endorsement area, demonstrate knowledge of teaching principles and follow a course of furthering education.

The results would be a robust system of education staffed by the most innovative and dedicated professionals. And that would mean improved learning for Oregon's children.

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less than other groups. The weakest areas were in verbal skills and math.

If passed in bill form, the recommendations of the advisory committee would take full effect in Oregon in 1990.

Those recommendations include the elimination of the undergraduate in education, an admissions cap for state schools of education, a new system for teacher licensing and creation of a Masters In Teaching degree to replace the current education degree.

According to the recommendations, the present education degree would be phased out and

all prospective teachers would major in a regular academic subject. That means that math teachers would have degrees in mathematics, and science teachers would have degrees in the sciences.

New teachers would be licensed only after they have passed a proficiency test in the subject area and served a year-long internship under the direction of a mentor teacher.

Upon completion of the internship, those who successfully finish the graduate level program would be awarded a Masters in Teaching degree.

Currently, there is no

systematic effort among Oregon's schools of education to assess either the academic aptitude of prospective teachers or the teaching knowledge and skills of graduates. Additionally, the findings of the advisory committee state that no mechanism now exists to track the job experience of those students who graduate from statewide education programs.

The five bills now introduced into the House are expected to meet with stiff resistance from the Oregon Education Association, university schools of education and other teachers' lobbies.

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confirmation to determine competency.

Senator Marc Spence said he would like to see Wheeler come before the senate.

"The IFC is probably one of the most volatile places that anyone can be in student government. I would like to meet this person. I really can't just vote on a little piece of paper that has this little information on it," he said, referring to Wheeler's application, which was submitted with no references.

ASUO Vice President Caitlin Cameron, who was representing the Executive at the confirmation hearing said although she did not interview Wheeler, ASUO President Steve Nelson sent a good recommendation of Wheeler's qualifications.

The senate decided to postpone Wiener's appointment confirmation until the next senate meeting Mon., Mar. 2, after a debate that shifted from

the question of bringing Wiener before the senate to one of what the senate's role in the confirmation process actually is.

Senator Jon Kisling expressed concern that the senate was becoming more of a hiring rather than confirming body.

"It seems that we're still unclear as to what our position as a confirming body is," he said. "If we keep wanting to call these people in front of us, we take on more and more the appearance of a hiring body. These people have been interviewed already, and I don't see what the point is in bringing them here and re-calling all of their references. Seriously, what are we supposed to be doing?"

Spence said it is perfectly appropriate for the senate to sit down and determine if the person is qualified for the job.

"The Student Senate should have the ability to make independent assessment of cer-

tain narrow areas, and one of those is competency," he said.

The senate confirmed five members of the Board of Elections with little debate: Dorothy Cogdell, Timothy Mansfield, Douglas Stello, Carlton Clark and James Collins.

The senate also confirmed two members of the Health Insurance Committee: Katy Howard and James Chesemore.

Howard's final confirmation is still pending because of her position on the IFC, Cameron said. According to section 4.2 of the University Constitution, a student may not hold an elected and an appointed position simultaneously unless the Constitution Court determines there is not a conflict of interest.

The ASUO is expecting an official ruling from the Constitution Court within a week, and doesn't foresee the court determining a conflict of interest in Howard's situation, Cameron said.