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Regional

Teacher shortage is Oregon myth University cuts back education programs

By Brenda Heinsoo
Emerald Contributor

Students who plan to dive into the field of teaching next year should not hold their breath while looking for jobs—especially if they want to stay in Oregon.

The much publicized teacher shortage simply does not exist in most of Oregon—or in most of the nation, for that matter.

Last year, roughly 7,000 qualified Oregon teachers actively pursued the 1,200 available teaching jobs in the state, according to Sarah Davies, counselor for the University's Career Planning and Placement Service. These figures do not include applicants from out of state, so the ratio of teachers to job is actually even higher.

Most communities in Oregon have more teachers than jobs, Davies said. Various pockets of demand exist throughout the state, but these tend to be in the rural areas of eastern Oregon.

"Oregon is a very desirable place to live and a lot of people want to teach here," Davies said.

Roughly 1,200 teachers are certified to teach each year in Oregon. Many of these new teachers would like to stay in the communities they attended

school in because they must return to school periodically in order to remain certified. So communities with colleges often experience teacher surpluses.

Locally, the University turns out more than 200 teachers each year into a community that is already teeming with educators. Recent budget crunches and a decreased student population over the past few years have caused cutbacks of teachers in the schools.

The legislature has required state schools with teacher education programs to cut back on enrollments because of the teacher surplus, according to Kathleen Pyfer, coordinator for admissions and advising in the University's teacher education program. The University has cut their secondary and elementary education programs from 100 to 70 students in each program per year.

Recently, the number of applicants for the programs has increased due to the change from a four-year plan to a five-year plan and rumors of an upcoming teacher shortage in 1990, Pyfer said.

"Obviously the legislature doesn't believe the rumors of a shortage or they wouldn't have required the cutbacks," she said.

Substitute work is often a holding pen for people trying to get into teaching, but now even substitute work is hard to find. There are approximately 250 substitutes for Eugene schools, and the district has stopped taking applications from people wishing to substitute teach until a need for more substitutes arises.

The Eugene school district hired less than 30 first-year teachers for the 1989-90 school year, according to the human resources department of the school district.

Eugene has never been in the situation where concern was expressed about how much a teacher costs, which means more experienced teachers are

hired more often than first year teachers, according to the human resources department. Beginning teachers receive a salary of \$19,000 a year, with the pay scale rising depending on how much education the person has and the length of time they have worked.

"It's an example of market demand," said Greg Brown, a biology teacher who has been searching for a teaching job in Eugene for three years. "The district has all the teachers it could want to choose from. It's really frustrating trying to get started."

Last year North Eugene High School did have three positions filled by first-year teachers for the foreign language, business and home economics positions, but only one of those positions remains this year due to budget cuts.

Jobs can be found, but starting teachers might end up in rural places or urban, inner-city areas, Davies said.

In order to find a job, teachers need to be very competitive and start looking early, Davies said. They also need to be flexible and ready to move. The first job might be less than optimal, but getting experience is extremely important.

Pyfer agreed mobility is a key factor in finding a job. This creates a problem for many of the older, returning students in the education program who have families and are tied to the area.

"I certainly feel that the best and brightest are always going to be able to find jobs," Pyfer said. "You need to make yourself special."

One way to do that is to get a certificate in a specialty area. Right now, schools are crying out for special education teachers, said Pyfer. The mildly handicapped teaching program at the University has a 100 percent placement, she said.

Other areas that are more marketable right now are foreign languages, music, mathematics and the sciences.



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