

TO: Members of the Higher Education Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Mary Beth McNulty, Vermont Department of Education ROPA Consultant

ITEM FOR ACTION: One-Year Update: Bennington College

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators vote to accept Bennington College's One-Year Update and grant approval in accordance with the Higher Education Committee's recommendations.

MOTION:

I, _____, that the VSBPE accept Bennington College's One-Year Update. I further move that, based on the Report and its accompanying documentation, the VSBPE grant continued full approval to the following undergraduate and graduate educator preparation programs:

Theatre Arts (7-12)

Art (7-12)

English (7-12)

Social Studies (7-12)

Mathematics (7-12)

Science (7-12)

Modern and Classical Language: Spanish and French (preK-12)

Early Childhood Education (Birth through grade 3)

Elementary Education (K-6)

Music (preK-12)

These approvals will be effective through the completion of the next ROPA Review of Bennington College's educator preparation programs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Review Team conducted a full ROPA review of the educator preparation programs at Bennington College during April 9-12th, 2006. The review was conducted in accordance with Vermont's ROPA program approval standards and process. The team chair was N. Carlotta Parr, Associate Professor, Department of Music, Central Connecticut State University. The team would like to thank the faculty and staff of Bennington College for their hard work preparing documents, organizing the Exhibit Room, and arranging interviews for the team.

The Report and Recommendations of the Program Review Team were approved by the VSBPE on September 20, 2006. A one-year report was approved by the Board on November 13, 2007. A two-year report was approved by the Board on October 17, 2008.

STAFF AVAILABLE: Mary Beth McNulty, ROPA Education Consultant and Marilyn Richardson, Higher Education Liaison.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE

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September 28, 2009

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Dear Mary Beth and Standards Board members:

I am writing now in response to your request for a one-year update of Bennington College's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program and will address the revisions to our two literacy courses. I will also provide an update on the current status of the MAT program's collaboration with the Early Childhood Center.

In September of 2006, the ROPA report of the program review team raised concerns about the small number of our literacy offerings, particularly for those students seeking early childhood and elementary-age endorsements. As an initial response, literacy course requirements were expanded from one course titled *Literacy and the Love of Words* to two courses, *Introduction to Literacy Learning and Teaching* and *Adolescents and their Literacies*. These courses addressed the age ranges our students teach. The current revisions shift the focus of the courses to learning about the wide range of tools for teaching literacy in one course and, in the other course, learning to apply those tools given the needs of the students they are teaching. To reflect that change, the MAT program will now require that all students take *Principles of Developing Literacies* (to be offered in the spring of 2010) and *Practices of Developing Literacies* (to be offered in the fall of 2010). Tentative course descriptions are attached.

Due to economic exigencies, the Early Childhood Center at Bennington College was closed in the summer of 2009. While this represents a loss for Bennington College students, it does not diminish our commitment to educating early childhood teachers. In the past ten years we have averaged one early childhood candidate each year. Initially, those candidates did all of their student teaching at the Early Childhood Center. More recently, candidates have done their student teaching at the EEE preschool program at the Molly Stark School. The EEE program serves children ages three through five with an emphasis on those students in need of special education services. In this way, it is an ideal training ground for preservice teachers. In addition, there is a Head Start program in North Bennington, which is within walking distance from campus. Students at Bennington College are able to apply their Federal Work Study grants to wages they earn from Head Start, thereby gaining valuable experience working with young children.

Those students interested in Early Childhood education are able to gain access to rich and varied field experiences to complement the course work they do at the College.

It is my hope that this letter addresses any questions and/or concerns that you might have regarding the most recent changes in the MAT program.

Sincerely,

Carol Meyer

Carol L. Meyer
Director of Programs in Languages and Teacher Education

cc: Elizabeth Coleman, President
Elissa Tenny, Provost and Dean

Principles of Developing Literacies

Literacy has been associated primarily with learning to read the written word. More recently, questions have been raised about what we mean by literacy, the nature of texts themselves, and how to best develop students' literacy skills. What constitutes a text – a bus schedule, a Shakespeare play, a Basal reader, a web page? What are the ways students learn to decipher them - by sounding out all of the words, by focusing on meaning, by having specific content knowledge? This course will be an exploration of these questions in an attempt to understand the underlying principles that guide how educators – from the classroom to the policy board - think about and, at a more concrete level, approach texts.

Practices of Developing Literacies

In this culture is it assumed that everyone learns to read and write; yet, the reality is a little more complicated. The National Center for Education Statistics, in an extensive study entitled *Adult Literacy in America*, found that 21% to 23% of adult Americans demonstrated only basic literacy skills such as identifying specific information in a simple text or locating a time or place of a meeting on a form. They also identified different levels of reading proficiency, demonstrating that there is a range of what people are able to gain from texts. These statistics beg the question of just how one becomes a proficient reader. The job of developing proficient readers has been relegated to the schools, which raises questions such as: How can students be helped in the learning to read? How should teachers think about the range of texts (from dirt-biking magazines to a classic such as *The Scarlett Letter*) to which the students are exposed? What role does writing play in the development of literacy skills? The goal of this course, then, is to help prospective teachers and others interested in education to apply some of the strategies that all teachers use to help students learn to read and write.