

An Editorial Regarding Alignment

Over the last twenty years or so, I've taken part in many efforts to align teacher education programs within UA. None of those efforts have resulted in lasting collaboration and alignment between campuses. Based on this experience, I think it's critical that this review team makes a clear and bold statement regarding alignment of programs. I'd like to describe one example of alignment that resulted in a high quality, flexible program offered through UAS, UAA and UAF. The collaboration has long since expired, but for several years, the Reading Specialist Program (Endorsement and M.Ed.) was a model for alignment in our system.

In 1998 Commissioner Shirley Holloway asked the Professional Education Center at UAS to facilitate the development of a statewide endorsement program for K-12 teachers for reading. We brought together faculty from the three main campuses, and several rural campuses. We also invited reading and language arts specialists and teachers from school districts to participate. Over the course of a year, the group selected standards from the International Reading Association (IRA) and developed a series of courses that were aligned with these standards. There was spirited debate throughout the process, but in the end UAS, UAA and UAF all hired faculty and offered the same courses on all three campuses. A few courses were offered through distance, but all of the courses were offered during the summer on the three main campuses. Teachers could select from courses on any campus and they would count towards either the endorsement or the M.Ed. I would like to argue that the collaboration was successful because the programs were aligned with professional standards and embodied the core principles set out in the charge from the commissioner (statewide, transferability, flexibility, emphasis on teaching all students).

I've also participated in alignment efforts where faculty came together in an effort to bring existing programs, often with very different structures and approaches into a shared curriculum/program design. For example, it's next to impossible to align a cohort-based program, where students move as a group through a course sequence (often at an intensive, accelerated pace) with a traditional open enrollment model, where students take courses according to their preference for scheduling, course-load and degree completion. It's difficult, if not impossible to align these programs without significantly impacting one, or the other. Secondly, there are fundamentally different approaches to teacher preparation within UA. There are clinically based models, much like the medical profession, where interns learn to teach through teaching and structured feedback and evaluation. And, there are traditional course-based programs where the emphasis is on the application of academic knowledge about teaching and learning, primarily from university courses. Without a shared vision for teacher preparation, alignment could result in dysfunctional programs that are aligned with each other, but without alignment to guiding principles and belief systems.

Like everyone on our team, I've heard the cry for alignment from Alaskans for many years. However, alignment of courses, course numbers and programs, could potentially have the desired effect of clarity and flexibility for our students in the admissions process. But, it could also have the unintended consequence of eliminating innovative, effective and efficient programs. It all depends on What is Aligned with What.

I know that much of our conversation so far has been around governance and administrative structures. The reason that I volunteered to serve on this team is a genuine desire to fundamentally improve the quality and content of teacher education programs at UA, while dramatically increasing the number of Alaskans teaching in Alaskan schools.

Lastly, I would like to suggest that the review team develops a set of guiding principles and beliefs that will serve as the framework for alignment. If all teacher education programs align with core principles, then we can have clarity and multiple paths to certification and professional development.

Here is a short list of possible ideas for the framework: (some of these are already in place to some degree)

UA Teacher Education Programs

- enact the Alaska Teacher Standards as the foundation for curriculum and assessment
- emphasize culturally responsive teaching and place-based education (Alaska Cultural Standards)
- set tangible goals for the recruiting, development and retention of Alaska Native faculty
- set tangible goals for the recruiting, development and retention of Alaska Native students to become teachers and administrators
- employ a clinical model for initial teacher preparation, featuring a year-long, full time internship in an Alaskan school (elementary, secondary and special education)
- collaborate with Alaskan school districts to support interns and mentor teachers in professional learning communities
- collaborate with Alaskan school districts to develop Professional Development Schools in urban and rural settings
- collaborate with Alaskan school districts and the Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development to establish alternative paths toward certification to address teacher shortages
- employ faculty with extensive experience as Pre-K-12 teachers and/or administrators

If we align teacher education programs to core principles, the clarity around courses, programs and options for students will follow.



Scott Christian
Program Administrator
Secondary Education Programs
University of Alaska Southeast
office: 907-796-6563
cell: 503-539-0922
skype: schristian_
<http://www.uas.alaska.edu/education/programs/mat-secondary.html>