

AU's Students Score Near-Perfect in State Certification Exams for New Teachers

9/09/99

Alfred, NY -- Between 99 and 100 percent of Alfred University's education graduates passed the state-administered teacher certification exams in 1997-98 -- one of the highest pass rates among colleges located in New York. The 1997-98 program year is the most recent for which the State Education Department has compiled figures. To gain certification to teach in the New York public schools (kindergarten through senior high), students must successfully complete all the required courses, and pass three state tests. The first exam, the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (LAST), is given after the student's sophomore year, explained Dr. Katherine D. Wiesendanger, chair of the University's Division of Education and assistant professor. The other two -- Elementary Assessment of Teaching Skills and Secondary Assessment of Teaching Skills -- are given after the student has completed all required courses for a major or minor in education. Although she heads the Division, Wiesendanger credits other people with AU's impressive performance on the accreditation tests. "It speaks to the high caliber of our students ... and the quality of our program," she said. The AU program has "a field-based component that enables our students to integrate theory with practical experience," she said. "We also ... have outstanding faculty members who have spent many years directly associated with the public schools." They include Dr. Sharon Morrison, whose 20-plus years of direct teaching experience at a wide range of grade levels have offered her "a thorough understanding of the complexities of the classroom," Wiesendanger said. "Likewise, Dr. Glenn Niles, our newest staff member and the coordinator of our secondary education program, has years of experience as both a public high school teacher and an administrator." Also, the University has coop programs with several area schools that allow its students to work in classrooms in their junior year, a practice unique among elementary education programs. Student teaching is usually done in the senior year. AU's test scores -- which rank among the top in New York, along with the scores of the best teaching programs in the state university system -- translate into jobs for graduates. "We place students in nearly all 50 states," Wiesendanger said. "Especially, there's a big demand for teachers in the Southeast and Southwest. There's a severe teacher shortage in California, and state officials predict that a high rate of retirement in the next year will lead to a wealth of job opportunities in New York as well."