The development of the Associate of Arts in Teaching degree in Maryland represents an outcomes-based, statewide articulation of the two-year degree in elementary education to public and private four-year institutions.

A New Degree for the Community College: The Associate of Arts in Teaching

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In a May 3, 2001, memorandum to the Maryland Education Policy Committee, the state secretary of higher education, Karen Johnson, described an important change to the state education code, saying, in part:

Following two years of extensive work, the Associate of Arts in Teaching (A.A.T.) degree is ready to be implemented at Maryland public community colleges. . . . The work to make the A.A.T. degree a reality required many individuals including: the Teacher Education Articulation Committee of the Maryland Intersegmental Chief Academic Officers, the Community College Presidents, Deans of Instruction, and Faculty, the Deans and Directors of Teacher Education, four-year faculty, and both two-year and four-year Chief Academic Officers. Without the work of all these various segments and personnel the A.A.T. would not be ready to implement in Maryland. The A.A.T. degree will significantly improve and ease teacher education student transfer and help meet the enormous current and future need for teacher educators in Maryland [Johnson, 2001].

With these words the role of the Maryland community colleges in teacher education was changed in a dramatic way. This chapter will examine the development of the A.A.T. degree, the role of statewide articulation efforts in developing the degree, and the current status of teacher education articulation in Maryland.
The Role of the Community College in Teacher Education

Redesign of Teacher Education in Maryland

In 1994, a statewide task force addressed issues pertaining to teacher preparation in Maryland. The report produced by the task force included recommendations about substantive preparation in content areas, especially math and science, and clearly supported the movement toward professional development schools designed as training centers for preservice teacher education students. The report also included language with a direct bearing on the role of the community college in teacher preparation. For example, the report recommended that teacher education programs accommodate “early deciders,” individuals entering either a four- or two-year institution having already made a commitment to teaching as a career.

The report also emphasized the importance of diversifying the state’s teacher corps. With the community college as the entry point for many minority students in Maryland and elsewhere, this basic principle of the redesign presented a major challenge and opportunity for community college teacher education departments to step up their efforts to be true partners in the preparation of future teachers (Maryland Higher Education Commission, 1995).

The Charge

In the fall of 1999, the Maryland Chief Academic Officers Intersegmental Group appointed a Teacher Education Articulation Committee (TEAC) comprising eight teacher educators from four-year institutions and six teacher educators from community colleges. The TEAC was cochaired by one four-year university representative and one community college representative. The committee makeup was important, because the argument that the A.A.T. degree was solely a community college initiative could be readily refuted. The charge, given in a memo to the committee, had four parts:

1. To establish a coherent articulated teacher education curriculum that would identify courses to be taught at both types of institutions and to address the issue of methods courses, content and general education courses, and internship experiences. Initially the committee concentrated on courses, until it became clear that focusing on outcomes would allow institutions the flexibility to determine which courses would address the outcomes. A course-by-course statewide articulation was not considered to be feasible.

2. To align the proposed curricula with Maryland State Department of Education policies and PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II. Praxis I is an assessment of reading, writing, and mathematics skills that are considered basic for all students considering majoring in teacher education. In Maryland the successful completion of Praxis I is required for entry into teacher education programs at four-year institutions. Praxis II
measures content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge. Praxis I and II replaced the National Teacher’s Exam (NTE).

3. To address the issue of recruitment of high school students and returning adults into the teacher education curricula.

4. To address the issue of retention of students in the teacher education curricula.

In short the mission of the TEAC was to establish a plan for the seamless transfer of teacher education students who began their preservice education at a community college with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution to earn the required baccalaureate degree and state teacher certification. With such a plan in place the community colleges could then serve as a rich source of prospective teachers, who could move on to the four-year institution without losing credits or repeating courses.

Although individual two- and four-year institutions had previously crafted and implemented course-by-course articulation agreements in specific areas like early childhood education, the idea of a statewide articulation arrangement was considered provocative, even by the TEAC members in the beginning. The argument in favor of a statewide articulation was strongly supported by the community college membership, who made the case that (1) under the existing system, students beginning their preservice education at a Maryland community college needed to identify their four-year transfer institution in the very first semester lest they lose credits in transfer due to a disparity between recommended courses and the transferable courses accepted by the four-year college or university; (2) the generic statewide articulation system was not always accurate and reflected the transferability of general education courses but not of teacher preparation courses; (3) a coherent statewide transfer pattern would make a powerful recruiting tool for prospective teacher education students; and (4) especially in community colleges that had teacher education students in all areas of teacher education (early childhood, elementary, secondary, and special education), faculty and staff did not have the time to devote to creating and updating individual articulation agreements. The committee agreed at the onset to strive to achieve a workable statewide transfer agreement, focusing on elementary education transfer students in the first iteration of what would become the A.A.T. degree.

**Initial Response to the Charge**

Recognizing that the currency of transfer is course credits, the issues of course titling and numbering were dealt with at the beginning of the TEAC deliberations. Rather than attempting to align course-by-course patterns and to debate the name and number of appropriate foundational teacher education courses to accompany general education requirements, the committee decided to identify learning outcomes typical of the first sixty hours (the
freshman and sophomore years) of teacher preparation for elementary education majors. This shift changed the focus of the development of the associate degree away from the names and numbers of courses and toward the things a successful rising college sophomore teacher education student in elementary education should know, understand, and be able to do. The working hypothesis was that the first sixty hours would reflect the same outcomes achievement for both transfer and native teacher education students. How the outcomes would be met would be left to the individual institutions of higher education to determine. This approach created consistency of program content without imposing a cookie-cutter model that might threaten the autonomy of any institution. Thus the question that became the centerpiece of the development of the A.A.T. degree was, “What should the elementary education major look like, academically, as she/he enters the junior-level of teacher preparation, regardless of where she/he completed the initial two years?”

It was understood that this new approach to articulation would force two- and four-year institutions alike to review their teacher education programs to achieve agreement and consistency in the first two years of teacher education.

In searching for a logical set of outcomes on which to base the first two years of teacher preparation for elementary education majors, and ways of writing the curriculum to address these outcomes, the committee reviewed the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Program Standards for Elementary Teacher Preparation. This review, and the subsequent adoption of the NCATE standards as the grounding for the A.A.T. degree, proved valuable for several reasons. First, the NCATE standards are required of all approved teacher education programs in Maryland. By familiarizing the community college representatives with these nationally recognized standards, the committee had identified a common language that both two- and four-year teacher educators could and would use in the development of the foundational degree. Second, the standards were broken down into eight content areas, and for each one a writing committee reviewed national standards and created a set of outcomes pertaining to that area. Finally, the NCATE standards were broken down in such a way that those appropriate to the first two years of teacher preparation were readily identifiable and those that did not apply to the foundational preservice experience remained the responsibility of the four-year institution. This separation of standards appropriate to each type of institution helped to allay concerns on the part of some four-year teacher educators that community colleges were entering content areas, like methods and assessment, best left to the upper division years. It also reemphasized to the teacher educators from the community colleges that their mission was strictly foundational, consistent with the transfer function of two-year institutions.
Emergence of the Maryland Association of Directors of Teacher Education at Community Colleges

Although much of the response to the charge to develop a pattern of seamless transfer for teacher education majors was performed by the TEAC and subsequent curriculum writers, it is important to note that parallel to the emergence of the TEAC, the Maryland community college teacher educators organized themselves into an affinity group: the Maryland Association of Directors of Teacher Education at Community Colleges (MADTECC). The purposes of this organization were (and are) to support the work of the TEAC, to share information pertaining to teacher education in general and the role of the community college in particular, and to provide community college administrators with information about the ways teacher education in community colleges was rapidly expanding as the teacher shortage became more critical locally and nationally.

The first meeting of MADTECC took place in January 2000, attended by representatives from ten of the sixteen Maryland community colleges. The minutes of that and following meetings reflect the commonality of issues and concerns faced by the state’s two-year institutions in promoting their teacher education programs as viable partners in the process of preparing the state’s future teachers (McLaughlin, 2000). By the next meeting (February 2000) MADTECC membership had been extended to representatives from the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland (USM). The representatives from the first two organizations could play a politically valuable role by reinforcing the work of the TEAC and introducing the state’s teacher education policymakers to the problems and promise of the community colleges’ teacher education leadership. Through USM representation the four-year institutions had a voice in the proceedings.

The formulation and publication of the first MADTECC report, in June 2000, caught the attention of administrators from both two- and four-year institutions, as it provided a coherent plan of action for Maryland’s community colleges to clarify and strengthen their role in teacher preparation. The report also served to inform the Maryland Chief Academic Officers Intersegmental Group that their support of their institutions’ teacher education programs was vital to those institutions’ continued success as full and respected participants in teacher preparation.

Work of the Outcomes Writing Committee

With financial support supplied through grants funded by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Pew Foundation (through the University System of Maryland), the writing of the outcomes for the first sixty hours
began in earnest in June 2000. All two- and four-year colleges and universities in the state were invited to send representatives to assist with the writing. Thirty-nine faculty and administrators participated, including eighteen representatives from four-year institutions, nineteen from two-year institutions, one MHEC representative, and a representative from a local public school district.

Committee members were asked to volunteer for one of the eight content areas identified as appropriate to the curriculum for the first two years of preparation of elementary teachers. The content areas were social and psychological foundations, language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, arts, physical education, and diversity/behavioral foundations.

The outcomes included those pertaining to a candidate’s ability to know and understand the content inherent in each of the eight areas; outcomes involving the application of the concepts were only minimally included. Because the first two years of teacher preparation are foundational, each candidate’s ability to use or to apply the content remains the focus of the integrated methods courses offered at the junior and senior levels. Praxis II is one national standard; the student teaching (in Maryland referred to as the internship) assessment is another.

A model template was provided to each of the writing content subcommittees, with four columns in which to indicate the outcomes, indicators, assessment types, and assessment tasks inherent in each of the content areas. A major advantage of this model was that it fostered consistency in curriculum development across all content areas yet allowed the writers to share and include best practices assessment samples from their experiences. A sample of the model, from the work in the social and psychological foundations content area, appears in Table 4.1.

When the writing subcommittees had completed their work, smaller subcommittees met during the fall and winter of 2000–01 to refine each committee’s document to achieve coherence and consistency. This work was mostly stylistic because the substance had been provided by the larger writing committee.

When this phase of the curriculum writing was completed, the USM posted the outcomes on a Web site for all institutions of higher education and state education agencies to review. Comments were invited. The few comments that were posted were reviewed by the appropriate writing subcommittee; if needed, appropriate adjustments were made. Community colleges were free to apply to the MHEC to offer the A.A.T. degree, provided that their respective teacher education faculty and college administrators were confident that the college’s teacher education curriculum met the desired outcomes or that in those areas where this was not the case the curriculum could and would soon be adapted to meet all the outcomes. Outcomes-based approaches are not new, but creating a degree around a set of outcomes and then adapting course curricula around them is creative. In the case of the arts, for example, the National Standards for Arts
Education guidelines indicate that teacher education candidates must be able to communicate at a basic level in all four arts disciplines—dance, music, theater, and the visual arts. Clearly, adding four courses in the humanities to the A.A.T. degree would not be feasible, so the TEAC recommended that a model integrated arts course be developed and adopted by the community colleges electing to offer the A.A.T. degree and by the four-year institutions as well. This was done in fall 2001, and several two-year institutions have already created the course and have added it to their first two years of elementary teacher preparation.

**Response to the A.A.T. Degree**

By spring 2002, eight community colleges in Maryland had been granted permission by the MHEC to offer the A.A.T. degree. The response to this new degree has implications both at the individual institutional level and at the statewide teacher education community level.

At the institutional level it is apparent that the development of the A.A.T. degree and the changes deemed necessary to create consistency at the four-year institutions necessitated involvement of arts and sciences faculty. It is impossible within the scope of this chapter to analyze the responses by each and every arts and sciences faculty that assisted in the writing, reviewing, and implementing of the degree and its transfer implications. However, at both TEAC and MADTECC meetings, members heard anecdotal evidence of positive collaboration between and among teacher education faculty and arts and sciences faculty. Curriculum has been revised

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**Table 4.1. Standard 3b (Social and Psychological Foundations). Adaptation to diverse students—Candidates understand how elementary students differ in their development and approaches to learning, and create instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse students.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Assessment Types</th>
<th>Assessment Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher candidates will specify how issues such as justice, social equality, ethnic relations, language &amp; literacy, or family and community organization relate to teaching &amp; schools.</td>
<td>a. Define justice, equality, etc.</td>
<td>Analysis of case studies</td>
<td>Interview of community member about her/ his educational experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Explain how class differences, race, and language impact learning.</td>
<td>Analysis of interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Describe accommodations teachers may make for differences in language and culture.</td>
<td>Analysis of interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and continues to be revised at both two- and four-year institutions so that each outcome in the degree can be satisfied, and in some cases by more than one course. Each of the community college A.A.T. degrees is unique, and the range of credits in what was originally hoped to be a sixty-hour degree is between sixty-two and sixty-nine. Administrators of teacher education programs at several four-year institutions have indicated that they have made revisions to their programs to allow the seamless transition that remains the goal of the initiative. Whether this effort is consistent among all four-year colleges and universities remains to be seen. The first A.A.T. graduates completed the degree in December 2002; their progress, as well as that of subsequent A.A.T. degree holders, will be closely monitored by teacher educators from both the two- and four-year institutions to determine the viability of the degree as a true reflection of the first two years of teacher preparation at baccalaureate institutions.

At the state level, MSDE and MHEC will also be watching the progress of the A.A.T. degree to see how many students take advantage of the degree and are successful in achieving a smooth transfer. A subcommittee of the original TEAC was formed in fall 2001 to review assessment procedures for the A.A.T. degree. Several state-level organizations had representatives on that committee, which concluded that quality control for the A.A.T. degree was inherent in the degree requirements of a 2.75 GPA, passage of PRAXIS I, and the portfolio that accompanies each A.A.T. student as she or he transfers from the two- to the four-year institution. It is safe to say that the first cohorts of A.A.T. graduates will be closely followed as they transfer, as they sit for the PRAXIS II exams, and as they enter the teaching profession.

Next Iterations

The 2001–02 work of the TEAC focused on curriculum for the A.A.T. degree for secondary-level teacher candidates. Using the same outcomes-based model, arts and sciences faculty were recruited and wrote curriculum for mathematics, science, Spanish, and physical education. Technical education, business education, family and consumer sciences, English, and social sciences curricula were written in spring and summer 2002. Because secondary-level teacher candidates must have a content major, the involvement of arts and sciences faculty is arguably more critical for this iteration. To date, the Web-posted outcomes have received considerably more attention and responses from arts and sciences faculty than the elementary education outcomes did. Some of the concerns have to do with the outcomes-based language, which appears to be unfamiliar to some content specialists. It will be the responsibility of the TEAC to assure arts and sciences faculty that the language of outcomes translates into courses and that if the A.A.T. degree for elementary teacher education serves as an example, the curriculum in selected courses will become stronger to accommodate the standards-based outcomes. It is a delicate balancing act to prepare, for example, a math major who is also
a secondary math teaching major. There should be no zero-sum option here; quality of content preparation must go hand in hand with quality of teacher preparation.

Selected community colleges in Maryland were expected to begin to apply for the A.A.T. degree for secondary education students in 2002. Obviously those that have made a successful application for the A.A.T. degree in elementary education are familiar with application protocols and will probably be among the first to submit for permission to grant the secondary iteration. An A.A.T. degree in special education and one in early childhood education are slated to follow; the outcomes-based model will be applied to those as well.

Conclusion

Maryland community colleges and their four-year counterparts were granted a unique opportunity to make a significant difference in the transfer process for teacher education students in an era of critical teacher shortage. If the A.A.T. degree serves its holders well in their transfer and professional development, the initiative will be judged a success. If the pipeline can be expanded so that community colleges recruit, retain, and transfer more teacher education students in all areas of teacher preparation, those who supported or contributed to the initiative can proudly claim that they responded creatively to a challenge at a time when such a response was badly needed. In short, if the A.A.T. degree works in all iterations, it will serve as a possible national model for teacher preparation and as a testimony to the valuable goal that a collaboration among community colleges, four-year institutions, and state agencies can achieve.

References


McLaughlin, E. Minutes of MADTECC (Maryland Association of Teacher Education at Community Colleges) meeting, February 2000. Available from chairperson, emclaughlin@aacc.edu.

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