

The State of Teacher Training for K-12 International Education

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at Duke University

Abstract

Intrigued by press reports about shortcomings in teacher preparation and drawing on previous research and twenty-five years of experience in administering Title VI grants, the author, supported by a Title VI research grant, conducted 174 interviews, using structured but open-ended protocols, with deans, faculty, student advisors, students, and senior administrators at twenty-four institutions with programs for training secondary school teachers. In addition, views were received from 65 current teachers with international interests. The results contribute to preliminary findings about the international components (and lack thereof) for teacher training in the United States and recommendations that could make a difference in preparing teachers for our increasingly interconnected world.

The findings and recommendations from the study touch on curriculum and certification issues, foreign language study, programs for study and internships abroad, faculty resources, the roles of offices of international programs, funding sources, and, most important, student advising. Recommendations are directed to state governments, accrediting agencies, professional associations, institutions of higher education generally, schools, colleges, and departments of education, outside funders, and future researchers.

The undergraduate curriculum for prospective teachers usually requires many general education courses and a liberal arts major in addition to the education courses and practice teaching needed for certification; foreign language requirements, if any, are likely to be minimal and study abroad programs for prospective teachers, like overseas internships, have seemed rarely feasible. Education faculty may have experience with foreign travel, but there has been little encouragement to them to incorporate their international experience and understanding in their teaching.

Among the strategies for improving the international exposure for undergraduates planning to be teachers are, perhaps most importantly, improvements in student advising systems, particularly for the first two years when courses of study are planned, for students planning to teach and for students in the arts and sciences, with international interests, who might be interested in teaching careers. Institutions' offices of international programs, whose services may be incompletely understood in schools of education, could facilitate improvements in the advising systems and in further faculty and curricular development. Such offices might also be useful in fostering course development and related faculty re-tooling, as well as providing information about funding sources for such initiatives. Funding agencies, in turn, need to encourage applicant interest in a full range of innovative initiatives that could lead to infusion of international content and other exposures to different cultural contexts as part of the training of elementary and secondary school teachers.
