



The Post-Standard

Taking Exception

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By Edward Caffarella
SUNY Cortland

Former Columbia University Teachers College President Arthur Levine recently released a report entitled, "Educating School Teachers," that criticizes teacher preparation Programs, particularly those at the nation's masters' level institutions such as SUNY Cortland.

He makes a number of "broad brush" statements and implies that all teacher preparation programs have serious problems.

While his findings may be reflective of other institutions around the country, Levine's assertions could not be further from the truth when directed at SUNY Cortland, the largest teacher preparation program on the East Coast.

One out of every 19 education graduates in New York state comes from SUNY Cortland. We take that responsibility seriously. We have done so since we first started educating New York's educators after the end of the Civil War, so I feel compelled to respond to Levine's generalized conclusions about our teacher education program.

Levine maintains that students are "graduating without the skills and knowledge they need to be effective teachers."

At SUNY Cortland, where more than 4,000 students major in teacher education, we had 99.76 percent of the graduates pass the Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written Test and 99.29 percent pass the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test that are required for teacher certification in New York state.

Levine maintains that there is a "chasm between theory and practice, and limited field work." SUNY Cortland students spend at least 740 clock hours in field experiences, with a minimum of 100 hours in the schools preceding 16 weeks of full-time student teaching.

Moreover, at least one of those student teaching placements is done in a "high needs" school, where our student teachers confront some of the most pressing educational concerns facing our society today.

Levine maintains that the faculty members are disconnected from the teacher education programs, and that there is a "lack of continuity from one course to the next and insufficient integration between coursework and field work."

At SUNY Cortland, arts and science coursework is carefully integrated with teacher education coursework, and all field work is tied directly to a specific course.

With 60 percent of SUNY Cortland students studying to be teachers, every faculty member on our campus is engaged in teacher preparation.

Levine maintains that there are "low admission standards" and that education students'

standardized test "scores are 100 points below the national average."

SUNY Cortland is a highly selective institution that had 10,100 applications for 1,075 seats for the fall semester. Our incoming education majors have a mean 89.9 grade point average and a mean 1,076 SAT score.

Our teacher education students are 50 to 70 points above the national average on the SAT.

Levine maintains that teacher preparation programs have "low graduation standards." All teacher preparation students at SUNY Cortland must have a minimum 2.5 grade point average before student teaching and graduating.

Levine maintains that there is insufficient quality control of teacher preparation programs. A few years ago, the New York State Board of Regents required that all teacher education programs be accredited by December 2004.

SUNY Cortland met that deadline. In fact, the Teacher Education Candidate Assessment System (TECAS) developed by SUNY Cortland has been a model for institutions around the country as they monitor the quality of their programs.

SUNY Cortland is one of many high-quality teacher preparation programs within the State University of New York. All of us can and should be proud of these programs.

Edward Caffarella is dean of SUNY Cortland's School of Education.

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