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SMU expands teachers' options

University says new school of education will 'focus on excellence'

07:14 PM CST on Tuesday, March 8, 2005

By KRISTEN HOLLAND / The Dallas Morning News

Stacy Clark believes that elementary school teachers can do a better job bringing the natural world into the classroom.

"It's something that's not really shared with kids," said Ms. Clark, a post-baccalaureate student enrolled in Southern Methodist University's Center for Teacher Education. "If you look at children as your future, which of course they are, and you realize how eager and sensitive they tend to be when it comes to environmental issues, it just makes sense that you combine them together."

Ms. Clark is one of a growing number of adults pursuing a state teaching license at SMU. There are 350 to 400 students right now, said Dr. Robert Patterson, dean of SMU's Division of Education and Lifelong Learning.

The demand for well-trained and certified teachers is part of the reason SMU plans to add a seventh degree-granting school.

The university's Board of Trustees recently approved formation of a School of Education and Human Development. The new school will combine existing education programs into three academic departments, turn certificate programs into graduate degrees and create new programs in human development.

Though it won't open with a building of its own, the new school will start operating June 1. Dr. Patterson, dean of the new school, said a separate facility will be built, but there's no timetable.



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He said that those in the school's education programs started dreaming about this day years ago.

"There was a real need to recognize education as a profession with a specific body of knowledge," Dr. Patterson said. "We continue to serve more and more people in the metroplex."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects teaching as one of the fastest-growing occupations beyond the next five to 10 years, with demand continuing to increase. Texas alone will need more than 82,000 new teachers by 2008, according to the Texas Workforce Commission. SMU offers several education degrees and programs, but they're not tied together. Its literacy and language acquisition programs continue to garner national acclaim, as does the school's Institute for Reading Research.

No existing program will disappear when the new school opens.

"We're not going to be all things to all people," Dr. Patterson said. "We're going to focus on excellence, the importance of bringing theory and practical application together" and research.

Most courses will continue to be graduate-level, with the focus on assisting teachers and other "helping professionals" such as school counselors to improve skills and advance in their careers.

Plans include offering master's degrees in dispute resolution and school and family counseling by 2006 and a master's degree and doctorate in literacy and language acquisition by 2007. Graduate programs in math and science will follow.

The new school excites Ms. Clark.

"One of the things I want to do is integrate this certification with my background in environmental geology to focus eventually on a master's in environmental education," said Ms. Clark, who's studying to be certified in early childhood education. "I really see the school of education as a way for me to refine my knowledge of the environment and apply it in the most constructive way possible to education."

Kathy Hargrove said the school will be a good recruitment tool.

"If nothing else, we're going to get our name in the paper," said Dr. Hargrove, associate dean of the Center for Teacher Education, which will be folded into the education school. "We've been very successful ... but I think having a school of education where we can hang our hat will help us."

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