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Armstrong Atlantic State University and Savannah State University A Teacher Education Collaboration That Works

Because the number of African Americans completing teacher education programs has been declining at an alarming rate over the past twenty years, Armstrong Atlantic State University and Savannah State University, both in Savannah, Georgia, have collaborated to develop a Cooperative Teacher Certification Program on the Savannah State University campus. Although this joint program enables trainees to gain a degree and State certification in areas of general education, the model is relevant to collaboration among campuses to prepare personnel in special education and other disciplines. The progress and features of this collaboration are described in this paper.

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Inception: 1991-1994

The Cooperative Teacher Certification Program on the Savannah State University (SSU) campus began in 1991 through the initiative of Armstrong Atlantic State University (AASU). The purpose of the program has been to bring professional education courses to the campus of Savannah State University, an Historically Black institution (HBCU) which offered some teacher education courses but did not have a teacher education program. The partnership initially enabled students to receive a baccalaureate degree in Education from Savannah State University, while being recommended for certification to the State Professional Standards Commission by Armstrong Atlantic State University.

During the first few years, although cooperative agreements were in place between the two universities, no single person was responsible for overseeing the program. Despite the fact that the program operated at that point with no additional resources, it was successful in attracting six to ten students per year into teacher education from 1991 to 1994. At that early date, the potential productivity of the collaboration was recognized but barely tapped.

Development: 1995-2000

In 1995, the University System of the Georgia Board of Regents awarded Armstrong Atlantic State University and Savannah State University a strategic allocation grant to fund "The Preparation of Minority Teachers: A Collaborative Effort" that focused on secondary education majors. The primary purpose of this grant was to enhance the partnership between the two schools and provide opportunities for additional students from under-represented populations to enter the teaching profession. This funding also allowed AASU to hire a faculty member to direct the program.

During the first two years of the collaborative grant (1995-1997), emphasis was placed on awareness of students and faculty on the Savannah State University campus about the program, on developing programs of studies, and on building relationships among individuals associated with the relevant offerings at SSU. Flyers were distributed, department heads were briefed, and, in general, the program was marketed. As a result of these efforts, substantial new bridges for students and faculty were built between the schools. As soon as the administrative presence became available on the SSU campus, the number of students inquiring about and entering the program increased significantly. Additional accomplishments during those two years included increasing the number of classes taught, advisement of more than 200 students, creation of a brochure, streamlined registration procedures, more and better articulation with key players, and an increase in the number of AASU faculty members teaching on the SSU campus. At this point, the teacher education curriculum prepared students in eight secondary education subject areas.

Because the program was growing so rapidly, during the second year of the grant cycle (1996-97), additional grant monies were requested for expansion. The additional funding was used to add a middle school preparation curriculum on the SSU campus. Funds were allocated for the addition of an AASU faculty member and an AASU education advisor who would be on the SSU campus three days each week. Two additional offices were allocated by SSU for use by AASU faculty and staff. As a result of these efforts, students became able to take most of the classes leading to middle school certification on the SSU campus while receiving an AASU degree in middle school education. The addition of this program led to further increases in the number of students interested in becoming teachers.

During the third year of the grant cycle (1997-98), the classes offered on the SSU campus more than tripled. Students were coming to be advised not only for secondary areas and middle grades but also with an interest in completing preparation in early childhood education, despite the fact that early childhood education classes were not taught on the SSU campus. Students wanting to become teachers of young children were encouraged to stay at SSU for the core curriculum and then transfer to AASU to complete their degree programs. This pattern continued during the third and fourth years when, again, additional emphasis was placed on recruitment and advertisement of the program.

Features of University-University Collaboration

As the partnership between Armstrong Atlantic State University and Savannah State University has grown, the essential characteristics of this collaboration have remained as follows:

* The partnership functions as a *collaboration* among a predominantly African American institution, a predominantly white institution, the Professional Standards Commission, and the University System of Georgia Board of Regents;

* The focus is on *preparation for general education roles*. An initial teacher education curriculum leading to licensure in eight secondary education areas (English, music, history, political science, chemistry, biology, business and math) later expanded to include licensure in middle grades education. (Although students interested in early childhood education receive advisement and may enter the AASU program after exhausting relevant courses at SSU, early childhood education is not a programmatic part of the collaboration because only a few AASU courses are brought to the SSU campus.)

* Programming is delivered at both campuses through *convenient scheduling* that provides alternating day and night courses. This gives students at both locations the opportunity to take classes when their schedules permit.

* Televised *distance education* has been used to make classes available to students on the SSU campus. Although AASU continues its televised courses (particularly to reach trainees in such places as Camden, Vidalia, and Rome, Georgia), SSU and AASU are only 30 minutes apart and students generally prefer to travel to the campuses to have direct interactions with instructors. The more recent addition of internet-based coursework has, however, been popular with both local and remote trainees.

* *Practica* are organized either by the class instructor or by the Office of Professional Lab Experiences at AASU. Supervision is carried out by the instructor or by college faculty members assigned to trainees during their student teaching placements. Essentially, if a practicum is related to a particular class, then the instructor is responsible for supervision; for student teaching, a college supervisor with expertise in the teaching area is assigned to the student.

* *Advisement* takes place in a variety of ways. Professional advisors spend two to three days each week at SSU assisting students in all facets of the program, and the program's coordinator also advises students, as well as the other faculty members assigned to SSU. In addition, AASU faculty who teach at SSU often answer advisement questions and help students to make decisions about classes.

Outcomes and Evidence of Effectiveness

Now beginning its sixth year as a full-blown program in fall 2000, this collaboration continues to provide a valuable service to students at SSU who want to become teachers. Additionally, it helps to address the shortage of teachers from historically under-represented populations. Students continue to fulfill the requirements of their seamless programs of study while completing the requirements for teacher certification. Accomplishments to date include:

- * Successful implementation of nine programs of study: secondary English, music, history, political science, chemistry, biology, business, and mathematics, and middle school education.
- * Thirteen to fourteen classes on the SSU campus each semester;
- Assignment of two full-time faculty members to the SSU campus plus the presence
- of four to five additional AASU education faculty during each semester;
- * The continuing presence of an education advisor for 16-24 hours per week, in addition to faculty members who spend an additional 20-25 hours weekly at SSU;
- * Continued communication with department heads on the SSU campus;
- * A refined system for reporting grades and assuring correct class roles;
- * Arrangements where by AASU classes taken by SSU students are included when figuring their grade point averages.
- * Advisement of more than 450 students included in the program since 1995;
- * Continued growth of the program, with the continuing goal of serving students more effectively and preparing a more diverse pool of teachers.

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