

Program eases path to teaching

Beaufort County Community College is seeking recruits for a new program that makes it easier for participants to obtain an education degree and become teachers in area elementary schools. Partnership East will accept up to 24 students for its third class to begin in the fall, 2004.

Partnership East is a collaboration between the East Carolina University College of Education and community colleges throughout the university's service area with the goal of training more elementary school teachers.

It enables students to graduate from East Carolina University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education by completing the first two years of their degree at any one of the participating community colleges.

A student can then complete the last portion of the degree by taking online courses at ECU and receiving face-to-face instruction from ECU in New Bern at the Craven Community College satellite campus, according to Anne Faulkenberry, Partnership East's Coastal Consortium coordinator. The Coastal Consortium is the project that links ECU to Beaufort County, Carteret County, Coastal Carolina, Craven County and Pamlico County community colleges.

During their senior year, students participate one day a week in public school classrooms followed by the 15-week, full-time student teaching, or internship, component of an education degree. The yearlong involvement in a public school classroom is the same as that required of traditional, on-campus students.

Each of the partnering community colleges will initially be allotted slots for students entering in the fall, according to program guidelines. These slots will be reserved for a period of time and then unfilled slots will be filled with the remaining best-qualified applicants without regard to the community college they are attending.

Those who want to apply to participate in the program will have time to enroll this spring in the necessary required preparatory courses and to schedule an advising appointment with program officials, said Jane McCotter, lead instructor in BCCC's early childhood program and Partnership East coordinator at BCCC.

The program's goal is to make it easier for people to become elementary school teachers, particularly people living and working in rural areas, and, therefore, help prevent a teacher shortage in the future, McCotter said.

"There is a crying need for teachers in the area, particularly with a growing number of teachers reaching retirement age," she said. "There are a lot of people out there who want to teach and this program will make it easier for them to obtain the education necessary for them to do so."

Partnership East classes are offered at night and online, making the program convenient for students who work to also go to school to get a bachelor's degree. Other advantages to the program include savings on tuition and fees at ECU and smaller class sizes for participants, Faulkenberry said. Because students are enrolled in school part time, it takes an additional year to receive a bachelor's degree, she said.

'Students participating in Partnership East receive more personal service than they would get on campus,' Faulkenberry said. "This is just one of the good advantages of the program."

The state Department of Education estimates that North Carolina will need 80,000 new public school teachers in 10 years while colleges and universities are producing only 3,000 education graduates per year.

"The state's community colleges can and should play a role in meeting these needs," Faulkenberry said.

The central component of Partnership East is a bachelor's degree in elementary education grades K-6 with K-12 reading licensure. It offers advising for special education and middle grades education majors transferring to the ECU campus in Greenville.

McCotter hopes to increase the number of BCCC students who are participating in the program. To date, of 40 students seeking education degrees through Partnership East, only one has come from BCCC.

Applications for this class will be available February 1, 2004 from the coordinator's office, Brock Administration Building, Room 102 B, 800 College Court, New Bern, N.C. 28562.

All interested students should take the Praxis I (PPST) exams for reading, writing, and math at the end of the freshman year or upon completion of the required math and English courses. Registration information for Praxis I can be found online at www.ets.org/praxis . The most qualified candidates with acceptable grade point averages (2.5 or higher), the appropriate number of hours completed, and passing Praxis scores will be admitted first to the program.

For more information about Beaufort County Community College's participation in Partnership East, contact Jane McCotter, lead instructor in BCCC's early childhood associate degree program, at 252-940-6385 or by email at janemc@email.beaufort.cc.nc.us.