Universities still learning how to better train teachers

By KATY SMITH
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Teaching teachers to teach takes more than four years of a regular college education, said the head of USL’s College of Education.

Because of that, most universities in Louisiana are moving toward extended teacher training programs, according to Dr. Robert Alciatore, Dean of the College of Education.

But they are still debating which type of program to use, he said. LSU proposes offering only graduate degrees in education, while USL’s current bachelor’s degree program takes 4½ years to complete, Alciatore explained.

The main problem with the extended program statewide, the first such program in the southern states.

“The deans recognize that quality teaching for Louisiana schools requires innovative and rigorous preparation that can no longer be accomplished in the present four-year program,” a Council spokesman recently said.

The program, however, may take two years to develop and will require approval from the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Proposals for extended teacher training programs were prompted by recent reports issued by the Holmes group and Carnegie Corp. Both reports urged the elimination of under-graduate degrees for education.

LSU proposes requiring prospective teachers to get a bachelor’s degree in the subject they plan to teach and then go graduate work for their teachers’ certificates, said Charles W. Smith, dean of LSU’s College of Education. Then they would complete a one-year paid internship as the final step of the six-year program.

Alciatore criticized LSU’s proposal for keeping prospective teachers from having contact with a classroom until their fifth year of college. Also, he said, students with a bachelor’s degree in another subject would be tempted to start a career rather than continuing for an education degree.

Also, reforms in teacher education during the past five years need to be given a chance to work before they are thrown in the waste basket in favor of other untried reforms, Alciatore said.

USL already crams enough classes for a regular degree in addition to education courses into its education degree program, Alciatore said. That’s why it takes four years plus a couple of summer semesters or five school years to complete, he said.

“We have a strong content program in Louisiana,” he explained.

A high school French teacher, for example, is required to take the same classes as French majors, and a math teacher would take 27 hours of mathematics classes like a math major. Their education classes take up about one fourth of their course loads.

In 1983, USL was cited by two researchers for having one of the top 11 teaching programs in the nation. One of the researchers is from England.

The two surveyed 902 programs on 24 “criteria of excellence,” which included accreditation, administration and student-teaching experiences. USL met 20 of the 24 criteria.

All of USL’s students complete a semester of student-teaching before they graduate, Alciatore added.

USL’s plan also calls for establishment of “professional development schools,” which would be similar to “teaching hospitals,” Smith said.

Alciatore said he favors moves for additional support for beginning teachers.

“The first year is the hardest,” he said. “If we lose people, we lose them in the first three years of teaching, and half in the first year.”