

Providing Technology Teachers
Through the Military Career Transition Program

by
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Teacher shortages are appearing across the country. Estimates by Recruiting New Teachers Inc. (May 1996) have projected that the U.S. will need 2 million additional teachers by the year 2006. The field of technology education has projected similar shortages. A study by Weston (1997) indicates that 13,089 additional technology teachers will be needed by the year 2001. These projections show that the shortages will be caused by increasing enrollments at the secondary level and by the number of teachers who will be retiring in the next decade.

Where will the United States get its future technology teachers? Many organizations across the nation are downsizing. This is especially true of the military. Where do these highly skilled professionals go in search of a second career? Many see teaching as a welcome change of venue for continuing in a new form of public service. How to make this transition has been a challenge for many service members due to their busy duty schedules.

The United States military has long recognized the need to provide programs to improve the educational level of their personnel and to meet the challenge of an ever increasing technical work force. As a result of the downsizing (or right sizing) of the military, many more personnel are pursuing an education program that will lead them to a second career. Increased use of tuition assistance, class enrollments, and participation in counseling services are but a few of the data elements showing dramatic increases in the past few years. Therefore, voluntary education programs have taken on a new imperative...preparing military personnel for transition. The Navy's program, through its Navy Campus, offers a full range of educational services, including counseling, testing, degree planning, and financial assistance, through a tuition assistance program and/or Veterans' benefits, with on base educational programs that meet the specific needs of the personnel stationed on their installations.

Since 1992, the Navy has reduced its numbers in the largest downsizing of the military since the post World War II era. There have been reductions in personnel, numbers of ships, numbers of aircraft and numbers of Naval installations. From 1985 to 1995 the Navy has reduced its personnel by over 140,000. The number of ships has dropped to 373 from 435 just two years ago. With a projected drop of another 15 ships by the end of 1997, Naval personnel have to prepare themselves for an alternative career. While many will serve for 20 or more years, many more will not and will transition to a second career outside of the military.

As one way to meet the demands for teachers and meet the need to downsize the military, Old Dominion University created the Military Career Transition Program (MCTP). Program personnel believe that women and men leaving the military represent a significant source of potential educators. They represent a pool of talented professionals with all the key traits needed for teaching. They have confidence in their abilities since many have already successfully completed a full military career. Additionally, they are mature, have a keen sense of responsibility, know the importance of teamwork, and understand the importance of community. Other beneficial traits include their relative youth, developed counseling skills, ease in communicating their ideas, practice in the use of technology, application of training skills, and extensive training and application of multi-cultural sensitivity.

To reach this transitioning group of qualified personnel, the Military Career Transition Program established specific program goals. First, it was targeted to train retired, soon to retire, or separating military members to become teachers. Second, the program provided counseling and advising to the military student as they made the transition from one career to another. Third, the teacher training program was designed to meet each candidate's specific career goal and to incorporate that individual's military training and education into their program. Fourth, the program provided placement and credential seminars to assist the candidates as they prepared to seek teaching positions. And finally, the program conducted follow-up seminars to assist candidates with career induction and other career paths in education. Today the program has expanded the same goals to downsized defense workers and NASA personnel.

To get the word to the military community, coordinated briefings and advising sessions are required. In addition, the faculty must realize that these individuals bring with them skills and a lifetime of experiences. This requires flexibility on the part of the university to accept the students where they are, provide them credit for what they know, and offer the best education and nurturing to prepare them to become our future teaching force.

As implied, the Military Career Transition Program is actually an "umbrella" description for a variety of teacher licensure and degree programs. The primary programs prepare students to teach the core subjects of English, math, social studies, science and special education at the elementary, middle, and high school

levels. Old Dominion University divides certification areas into early childhood or elementary (NK-4), middle school (4-8), and high school or secondary (8-12). The above programs are intertwined with a Masters of Science or Certificate of Advanced Study in Education, so the student leaves the program with licensure and a graduate degree.

To address the shortage of technology education teachers in the southeastern region of the U.S., Old Dominion University began its military transition M.S. program for the preparation of technology teachers in Fall 1994. The M.S. program accepted qualifying students who had earned a bachelors degree and were preparing for a second career upon leaving the military ranks. The program combined licensure requirements with the necessary credit hours to earn a M.S. degree. After the faculty designed the curriculum especially to instruct technology at the middle grades level, it had to seek special approval from the Virginia Department of Education for this alternative certification program. Virginia does not have a standard certification for middle school technology education only.

The M.S. program includes 36 graduate hours and 15 undergraduate technical hours. Seven courses provide students with the technical orientation to teach middle school technology education. Five of the courses are offered at the undergraduate level. The remaining courses provide the philosophical basis for technology education, pedagogical skills necessary to teach at the middle school level, and develops the research competencies needed to earn the M.S. degree. Currently, 60+ individuals are enrolled in the M.S. middle school licensure program.

With the initial success of the middle school program, the B.S. program was proposed to the naval community. This unique program prepared graduates to teach technology to the 6-12 population. It also had direct reciprocity with 27 other states including all southeastern states.

The curriculum built upon an associates degree, either the A.A. or the A.S. which can be earned through Saint Leo College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautics University, or the Virginia Community College System. Faculty then provide the majority of technical and pedagogical courses at Naval Air Station, Oceana. The military B.S. program mirrors the on-campus technology education program.

All courses are scheduled in the evenings or on the weekends. Special seven week, weekend courses are popular with the student body. As an example, information and communication technology, OTS 351, has been taught during a seven week format, four hours Friday evening and eight hours Saturday. This required special commitment from students and faculty alike. Currently 45 students continue to be enrolled in the B.S. program.

Military Career Transition Programs graduates are a highly sought after resource. These individuals have been successful in their first careers, 20 to 30 plus years of active service and earning rank as officers and senior enlisted personnel. They bring with them maturity, technical competencies, and a yearning to aid our youth during their school years. To begin a program of this nature requires advanced planning, the scheduling of classes into cycles, and a personal commitment by faculty (off-campus advising, off-campus teaching, weekend instruction, and working with students who also have full-time careers).

The Military Career Transition Program is an example of innovative thinking where a demonstrated public need for more teachers has been matched against skilled human resources in search of a new professional calling - the military member. Thoughtful programs like the MCTP prove the point that alternative designs for teacher preparation can be a success when they are designed to meet student needs and the cooperation of all parties has been obtained (state, university, and military). Changing economic conditions suggest we keep an open mind regarding alternative ways to assure a strong and vital pool of qualified teachers as we face the 21st century.

References

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