

## **Designing a professional development school program for non-traditional students**

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### **Abstract**

The Collaborative Learning And School Success Professional Development School (CLASS PDS) program is a teacher preparation program at the Lewiston-Auburn College of the University of Southern Maine. The program prepares students in teaching at the K-8 grade levels while they matriculate in a degree program. The four and one-half year program provides content and pedagogical opportunities to the pre-service students and upon completing the program and their college degree, the students receive a Bachelors Degree in a content area, K-8 teacher certification, and 36 graduate credits toward a Masters in Teaching and Learning.

In recent years, an increase in the number of non-traditional students expressed interest in the program but found the structure prohibitive for various reasons. Some of these include the length of the program, the non-acceptance of previous academic credits, the scope and sequence of the program, and the difficulty in transferring an associate degree to the university from the local community college.

This paper examines the adaptations the CLASS PDS (also known as CLASS) program implemented to respond to the increasing interest in pursuing a teaching certificate by students who transfer credits to the university or students wishing to complete the program in a faster period.

**Keywords:** Professional Development Schools, Non-Traditional Students, Teacher Preparation

## **Introduction: What is the CLASS PDS?**

Based on the Holmes Group Report (1986) and John Goodlad's (1990) model of teacher preparation, the Collaborative Learning And School Success Professional Development School (CLASS PDS also known as CLASS) is a nine-semester site-based pre-service education program. Its fundamental beliefs and processes reflect the quantitative and qualitative research findings that support improved teacher quality (Neapolitan, J.E., 2004); (Hooks, L. M. & Randolph, L., 2004); (Ventimiglia, L. & Reed, T., 2004); (Leonard, J., Lovelace-Taylor, K., Sandord-Deschields, J., & Spearman, P., 2004); (McDonald, L. & Randolph, L., 2004); (Ridley, D. S., Hurwitz, S., Hackett, M. R. D., 2005); (Graham, B., 2006); (Trachtman, B., 2007); (Yendol-Hoppey, D., Jacobs, J., Gregory, A., League, M., 2008); (Doolittle, G., Sudeck, M., Rattigan, P., 2008). The basic tenets of effective Professional Development School programs:

- Provide a context for continuous, embedded learning by interns, in-service teachers and higher education faculty
- Support the process for change, data driven decision-making, and collaborative planning and professional development
- Upgrade the content mastery of all educators.

The students work with mentor teachers, site coordinators, and university faculty while concentrating on a major field of study. Upon completion, the graduate receives a Bachelor of Science Degree, is a fully certified Kindergarten-8 grade teacher, and receives 36 credits toward a Masters Degree in teaching and learning.

Since its creation in the fall semester of 1998, the CLASS admission and retention process differed from traditional teacher preparation programs due to the educational background of the students at the University of Southern Maine, Lewiston-Auburn College. Eleven years ago, most were non-traditional students matriculating for the first time in a college program. Many were parents of school-aged children seeking a program that would allow them to complete the requirements over an extended period. Although the regular full-time schedule of CLASS is four and one-half years, many students chose to study part-time and complete their studies over five to seven years.

Recently, more traditional-aged students entered the university and desired to complete the program in the normal amount of time. Along with these students, transfer students came to the university and wanted to join the CLASS program. Nevertheless, the strict admission standards and schedule proved to be prohibitive thus preventing many worthwhile candidates from becoming teachers. These situations challenged the administration and faculty of the CLASS program to re-examine the admission and retention requirements.

**The Original Scope and Sequence**

Below, in Table 1, is the Scope and Sequence schedule for full-time students majoring in Social Behavioral Sciences, one of the academic majors at Lewiston-Auburn College. This shows the schedule the students need to complete the university core courses, the major course of study, and the CLASS program. Designed mainly for students entering college for the first time, the Scope and Sequence requires students to take as many as eighteen credits per semester. The program recommends that students take at least one or two courses during the summer term. Those students entering college with transfer credits applied toward their major or core courses, must still fulfill the CLASS requirements in four and a half years. Because CLASS is a developmental program, students could not combine education courses, but rather, complete them sequentially. Thus, those students with several incoming credits or an associate degree were required to continue their studies for another four and a half years.

Table 1

Overview of CLASS PDS Program Curriculum: Scope & Sequence for the Social and Behavioral Sciences Major

<b>Term</b>	<b>Academic Major Credits</b>	<b>Core Requirements (LCC)</b>	<b>Education Courses and Field Experiences</b>	<b>Total Credits</b>
1	(3)	LCC 100 Language and Literacy (3)  LCC 250 Thinking About Art (3)	CPI <sup>1</sup> 110 Individual Learning and Development (2) CPI 111 Seminar (1)  HRD 200J Human Growth and Development (3)	(15)
2	(0)	LCC 130 Biology of Human Health (4)  LCC 200 Creative Critical Thinking (4)	EDU 120 Language and Literacy Development (3)  EDU 200 Education in the U.S. (3)  MAT 108 College Algebra (4)	(18)
	(0-6)	Summer Academic major coursework recommended		

<sup>1</sup> Center of Pedagogy and Inquiry.

3	(6)	LCC 150 Statistics (3)  LCC 200 U.S. Democracy (3)	CPI 211I Middle School Experience (3)  EDU 220 Middle School Seminar	(18)
4	(0)	LC 310 Science and Technology (3)  LCC 320 Sustaining Democracy (3)  LCC 350 Global Past and Present (3)	LCC 000A Middle School Seminar (0)  EDU 320 Applied Skills Teaching (3)  SCI 250K Applied Physics (4)	(16)
	Elective (3)	Summer Academic major coursework recommended		(3)
5	(9)	LCC 370 Toward a Global Ethics (4)	LAC 340 Literacy Acquisition (3)	(16)
6	(0)	LCC 430 Place & Community (3)  LCC 410 Aesthetic and Political Dimensions (3)	EDU 562 Teaching Science (3)  EDU 565 Reading Development & Instruction (3)  LAC 410 Science and Reading Seminar (3)	(15)
	(3)	Summer Academic major coursework recommended		(3)

7	(0)		<p>EDU 551 Teaching Social Studies (3)</p> <p>EDU 505 Teaching Mathematics (3)</p> <p>LAC 000B Mathematics and Social Studies Seminar (0)</p> <p>SED 540 Exceptionality (3)</p>	(15)
8		Electives (6)	<p>EDU 541 Seminar Teaching, Learning &amp; Assessment I (3)</p> <p>EDU 544 Internship (3)</p> <p>EDU 566 Writing Process (3)</p>	(15)
		Academic and Core Coursework must be completed at this time.		
9	(0)		<p>EDU 542 Seminar Teaching, Learning &amp; Assessment II (3)</p> <p>EDU 644 Internship (9)</p>	(12)

It is evident from Table 1 that the CLASS program is intensive because of the combination of common core courses (LCC), the major requirements, and the education requirements. The total number of credits is 146 including 35 at the undergraduate level and 36 at the graduate level. Due to the nature of the graduate level courses in the program, students must complete these courses at a high level of proficiency and knowledge beyond many traditional undergraduate educational programs.

**Matriculation and Retaining of Students**

In terms of admission to the CLASS program, several university students expressed their frustration on having to take another four and a half years of classes even when they previously completed several credits. In addition, those students wanting to accelerate their progress in the program could not do so because of the developmental nature and philosophy of the program. This led to small numbers of students entering the program each year.

The rigorous nature and extensive time commitment led to a high attrition rate as well. Administrators and faculty of the CLASS PDS were initially comfortable with this rate as the program provided students opportunities to see for themselves the true nature of the teaching profession. Many applicants made the decision to enter teaching based on mistaken perceptions or other motivations. These students, when faced with the reality, dropped out of the program. However, the number of students who demonstrated their potential as excellent teachers and still dropped out increased as well. Many non-traditional students who showed much promise found the program too demanding while trying to maintain their personal and family responsibilities. Other students transferred from CLASS to alternative teacher preparation programs offering the same outcomes as CLASS but in a shorter timeframe.

The time commitment cited as the primary reason for leaving CLASS also presented fiscal concerns to the students. Financial aid offered support for four years. Students desiring to complete the program in a longer period could not do so at the risk of putting their families in financial straits. Since CLASS is a four-and-a-half year program, it affected all students who struggled to finance their education.

The high number of students leaving the program put the CLASS program at risk in terms of its sustainability. This trend of losing students raised concerns about the efficacy and stability of the CLASS program.

Table 2 shows the number of students who completed the program since its inception. A cohort represents a group of students entering CLASS for a specific year.

Table 2

*CLASS PDS RETENTION RATES 1998-2009*

<b>Cohort 1 - 13 students (Entered CLASS in 1998)</b>
15% (2) completed CLASS program (2002)
<b>Cohort 2 - 17 students (Entered CLASS in 1999)</b>
12% (2) completed CLASS program (2003)
<b>Cohort 3 - 16 students (Entered CLASS in 2000)</b>

18.75 % (3) completed CLASS program.
<b>Cohort 4</b> - 10 students (Entered CLASS in 2001)
40% (4) completed the CLASS Program
<b>Cohort 5</b> - 16 students (Entered CLASS in (2002)
19% (3) completed the CLASS Program
<b>Cohort 6</b> - 14 students (Entered CLASS in 2003)
36% (5) Completed the CLASS Program
<b>Cohort 7</b> – 15 students (Entered CLASS in 2004)
20% (3) Completed the CLASS Program
<b>Cohort 8</b> – 10 students (Entered CLASS in 2005)
30% (3) Will complete the program in 2009
<b>Cohort 9</b> -9 Students (Entered CLASS in 2006)
67% (6) Remain in the program
<b>Cohort 10</b> -10 Students (Entered CLASS in 2007)
30% (3) Remain in the program

Table 2 shows a small number of students from Cohorts 1 through 7 completed the program (21.8%). Compared to the state of Maine percentage of all students receiving their degrees (28.9%) and nationally (27.8%) (National Council for Higher Education Management Center, 2009), the percentage is below the norm. Assuming that those students in the remaining cohorts (8, 9, and 10) complete the program, the percentage rises to 26.2% making it more comparable to the state and national statistics.

Of the 22 students who completed the program, only three were traditional students entering the university immediately from high school. The remaining non-traditional students included parents, grandparents, military veterans, people looking for a change in their careers, mothers returning to college after their children have grown, and those who decided to enter college several years after graduating from high school.

Administrators of the CLASS program saw a need to assist the majority of its students in achieving their educational and career goals by developing alternative paths to

success while maintaining the integrity of the program. With exit surveys and faculty and advisor questionnaires, it was decided that the program could grow and remain viable if it allowed students with transfer or previous credits to enter the program and complete it in a shorter period. Data also showed that students wanted more flexibility in completing the required course work.

### **Changes in the CLASS PDS program**

With this information, the CLASS PDS personnel developed two plans to improve the admission and retention of students. The first is the Modified Program for those wishing to enter CLASS with a significant number of college credits. The second is the JETT (Joint Education and Teacher Training)/CLASS program based on an articulation agreement between the Central Maine Community College (CMCC) and the CLASS PDS. Implementation of this curriculum began in the fall semester of 2005.

The Modified Program is primarily a change in the standard Scope and Sequence whereby a full-time transfer student can complete the program in less than four and one half years. The Program allows each individual to prepare and complete a specific plan of action to meet his or her academic and teaching goals.

The process includes the basic application procedures for all students and with the recommendation of the university advisor, the CLASS PDS meets with the student to create a comprehensive individualized educational plan. Some students may be able to combine the CLASS preparation courses, currently offered over a two-year sequence, into one year, thus possibly completing the program in three and a half years. Other students may have enough education credits to forego the first year of the CLASS course of studies and essentially enter the program in the second year of the sequence. These alternatives depend on the number and type of transfer credits. Those with specific education credits can benefit the most from the plan. For all cases, there is no guarantee that the student will complete the program in the time desired, especially without the full cooperation of the student. He or she must stay within the modified scope and sequence or risk extending the period of study.

The JETT/CLASS program is for students matriculating in an Associates Degree program at the local community college, Central Maine Community College, to take CLASS courses during their two years of study. Upon completion of their degree requirements, they transfer to the University of Southern Maine and enter the CLASS program in the third year focusing on pedagogy and practicum. The requirements and stipulations of the agreement between the college and the university are as follows:

1. Students must be jointly accepted into both CMCC's education program and USM/LAC's CLASS program as full-time students.
2. Students will be assigned to an academic advisor at each institution.
3. Students accepted into the JETT/CLASS program are considered to have dual matriculation status. That is, they are enrolled at both CMCC in the JETT program and LAC in the CLASS program.
4. CMCC and LAC agree to institute an informal consortium agreement establishing financial aid reciprocity with CMCC acting as the "home" institution.



5. Students must achieve a grade of “C” or better in all their coursework. Students failing to maintain “C” or better in each class will be withdrawn from the JETT / CLASS program immediately.
6. JETT students are required to take two laboratory science courses while attending CMCC.
7. Students who have fulfilled CMCC’s JETT program requirements, graduate with an associate degree in education and remain in good academic standing, will be recognized as juniors in LAC’s CLASS program.

Table 3 shows the scope and sequence for this program in the first two years of matriculation at CMCC.

Table 3

*Scope and Sequence of JETT/CLASS Program*

**SEMESTER I**

<b>CMCC ED Program</b>	<b>CLASS PDS Program</b>
ENG 101 College Writing (3)	CPI 110 and CPI 111
EDU 101 Introduction to Education (3)	Individual Learning and Development(3)
PSY 111 Developmental Psychology (3)	
MAT 122 College Algebra (3)	

**SEMESTER II**

<b>CMCC ED Program</b>	<b>CLASS PDS Program</b>
PSY 101 Introduction to Psychology (3)	EDU 120 of Language and Literacy Development (3)
EDU 185 Fundamentals of Educating Students with Special Needs (3)	
SPE 101 Speech & Oral Communication (3)	
BCA 120 Intro to Computer Applications (3)	
Humanities Elective: ENG III; PHI 101 PHI 151; HIS 110; HIS 131; HIS 132 (3)	

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 CLASS PDS Interview Process Occurs  
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**SEMESTER III**

<b>CMCC ED/CLASS Courses</b>	<b>CLASS PDS Program</b>
MAT 135 Statistics (3)	CPI 211 Culture & Community and Seminar (3)
EDU 261 Fundamentals of Literacy Education (fulfills LAC 340 CLASS requirement) (3)	
Lab Science Elective: BIO 101/1102; BIO 115/116; CHY 101/102 (4)	
Humanities Elective: ENG III; PHI 101 PHI 151; HIS 110; HIS 131; HIS 132 (3)	

**SEMESTER IV**

<b>CMCC ED/CLASS Courses</b>	<b>CLASS PDS Program</b>
SOC 200 Issues in Diversity (3)	LCC000A Middle School Field Experience(0)
SOC 220 Sociology of the Family (3)	EDU 200 Education in the U.S. (3)
Lab Science Elective: BIO 101/102; BIO 115/116; CHY 101/102, or SCI250K, Applied Physics/Lab at LAC)	
Humanities Elective: ENG 111; PHI 101; PHI 151; HIS110; HIS 131; HIS 132 (3)	

Students can replace several CLASS courses with their CMCC courses while studying for their Associates Degree. The JETT/CLASS program prepares the student to begin the third year of study as a full-time CLASS student working toward a Bachelors Degree and a K-8 teaching certificate.

### **Challenges to the CLASS belief system and early results**

The CLASS PDS philosophy supports the developmental process of instruction and cooperative learning. From the inception of the program, students were required to follow the developmental nature of the CLASS courses and work together as a cohort. These are tenets of a true Professional Development School (Iceman Sands, D. & Goodwin, L. D., 2005); (Harris, M. M. & van Tassel, F., 2005); (Marlow, M. P., Kyed, S., Connors, S., 2005); (Snow-Geron, J. L., 2005); (Shroyer, G., Yahnke, S., Bennett, A., 2007); (Brindley, R., Lessen, E., Field, B. E., 2008); (Teitel, L., 2008). Allowing students to complete the teacher preparation program through the Modified Program and the JETT/CLASS Program potentially compromises the character of the cohort system and puts to question the developmental nature of the scope and sequence.

Compared to the early cohorts, Cohorts 8 through 10 predict a completion rate of 41.3%, nearly twice the rate for the first seven cohorts. This small sample shows a change in the program in terms of selecting appropriate students and keeping them in the program. With intensive advising and matching students' needs to appropriate paths in the CLASS program, we predict that this percentage will remain the same.

### **The future of the CLASS PDS program**

Although the early results of the Modified and JETT/CLASS programs show promising numbers of achievement, the University of Southern Maine recently decided to end the program due to budget cuts. A similar PDS program is offered at another campus of the university for those students wishing to enter the education field. The current students in CLASS will continue in the current program until they complete their studies.

Data from Table 1 show 30% of the incoming students in Cohort 10 remain in the program. Before the announcement of the termination of the program, there were twenty applicants to the program potentially increasing the number of students in that cohort to the highest level of any cohort in the history of the program. This is an indication that the alternative paths to the CLASS program appealed to a greater number of students. The added flexibility helped in achieving the intended goal of preparing more future teachers in a Professional Development School environment.

The end of the CLASS PDS program comes at a time when data show that the number of matriculating students increased while the dropout rate decreased. This also leaves Lewiston-Auburn College of the University of Southern Maine without an education program. The CLASS program provided highly qualified educators in the local communities. However, as with many colleges and universities at the present time, the University of Southern Maine receives less money from the state, tuition income is down, and outside revenues and resources are lacking. The decision to end the CLASS program was a difficult one, but there now exists an established process to apply lessons learned to effectively attract and retain excellent students to future teacher preparation programs.

The alternatives provided by the program demonstrate that there is a viable and practical path to teacher education for non-traditional students. The hope is that funding and financing continues for smaller programs (in terms of the number of matriculating students) such as CLASS. As more non-traditional students enter colleges and

universities it is imperative that all disciplines and programs consider different courses of study to support these individual academic goals. These include alternatives such as the CLASS Modified and JETT/CLASS scope and sequence methodologies that provide students opportunities in a quality education without sacrificing the integrity of the program.

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