

By *Gina  
Shkodriani*

Shkodriani is a senior research associate with JBL Associates, Inc.

Education Commission  
of the States  
700 Broadway, Suite 1200  
Denver, CO 80203-3460  
303.299.3600  
Fax: 303.296.8332  
ecs@ecs.org  
www.ecs.org



## Teacher Education Baccalaureate Degrees at Community Colleges

### Introduction

Community colleges have begun offering baccalaureate (BA) degrees in fields such as education, health and technology, which raises a host of concerns. Unsurprisingly, these new programs have generated mixed reactions. The majority of community college officials, as well as industries and employers, welcome this addition. Some established institutions and state officials, however, express concern that community colleges are not prepared to embark on this new mission. Even proponents of community colleges fear that adding a BA degree will dilute the traditional community college mission and generate conflict with existing baccalaureate institutions.

The idea behind a BA at a community college is to expand educational opportunity for students who have:

- Full-time employment
- Families
- Limited options for commuting
- Limited options for attending college during regular business hours.

Baccalaureate degrees at community colleges also provide opportunities for students who have obtained associate degrees and are comfortable staying in the community college environment, and for older students who may be uncomfortable attending four-year institutions that enroll predominantly younger students. In addition, community colleges provide a conduit to higher education for students from low-income and rural communities.

The community college BA has evolved at three types of institutions:

- The community college that continues to offer primarily associate of arts (AA) degrees, but includes a few BA degree programs
- The community college that morphs into a four-year college and is renamed, even though it may continue to offer AA degrees
- The four-year institution that offers BA degrees in partnership with a community college, with classes on the community college campus.

This overview discusses community colleges that independently offer BA programs in education without a four-year university partnership.

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### States with Community College Teacher Education Baccalaureate Degrees

In addition to serving the needs of local students, teacher education BAs at community colleges serve the needs of school districts that need new teachers who come from the community and understand its problems. The following are four state examples of community college offerings in the area of teacher education baccalaureate programs:

- **Nevada.** Elko is a rural town in Northern Nevada, hours away from the nearest baccalaureate-granting college. Many students in the small towns of this region cannot afford the time or cost to continue their education past that offered by the local community college, *Great Basin College (GBC)*. Historically, one of the problems resulting from geographical isolation was the trouble Northern Nevada had in retaining teachers recruited from other states or urban parts of Nevada. When efforts to get a university to offer a program in the region failed, leaders at GBC moved to develop baccalaureate-level programs in education, and other fields, in response to the need to increase student access, address local workforce needs, provide specialized training and contribute to the economic stability in local communities.

GBC created a committee of teachers from various departments in the college and superintendents from local school districts, who worked together to design a four-year teacher education curriculum that maximized field experience in the local schools. GBC began offering their baccalaureate programs accredited by the Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools in 2001.

Students entering the program must complete the associate of arts in elementary education degree. They can then concentrate in language arts, math, science or social studies. The program includes technology and assessment techniques, and collaborates with five local school districts that provide students with clinical and field experience. As part of their education, they have early and frequent clinical experience and attend faculty meetings, training and other teacher activities that allow them to judge the working culture of the school.

Prior to the introduction of this program at GBC, local districts recruited candidates from outside the area. Now GBC is able to produce teacher candidates from the area who are familiar with the community and its schools because they live in the area. Local school districts believe homegrown candidates who become teachers are more likely to stay than those hired from outside the region. They also find that teachers who have trained in the local community colleges are highly qualified.

In addition to a BA in education, the college offers baccalaureate programs in business and technology, and soon plans to offer a BA in nursing. The Great Basin approach to teacher education also is being followed in the new State College at Henderson.

Based on the positive results at GBC, Nevada has made it possible for other community colleges to petition to offer the BA degree. This is a formal application process with review by the state higher education board and the state universities.



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- **Florida.** Florida lawmakers have been trying to increase access to four-year degrees for a decade. In 2001, their efforts resulted in the creation of a single board responsible for all levels and types of education institutions. Since then, community colleges have been allowed to petition for BA degrees. One concern of four-year institutions has been that community colleges might duplicate their programs. The benefit of the new single board is that it can monitor program offerings, which makes it easier for community colleges to originate new programs.

Governor Bush supports the decision to offer BA programs at community colleges because they provide “greater access to bachelor’s degrees for nontraditional students in fields where we are experiencing critical workforce shortages.” Florida is third in the United States in the number of associate degrees it produces, but 47th in BAs. The state has more teacher positions open than employees to fill them. Eduardo J. Padron, president of *Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC)*, sees this discrepancy as an opportunity for his institution to fill a niche.

In 2001, *St. Petersburg Junior College* was the first community college in Florida approved to offer BAs, filling a need that seemed to be unmet by research universities. The college now plans to hire at least six additional faculty members for its new upper-division education courses in pedagogy, science and math. As part of this process, the college dropped “junior” from its name to reflect its new status and is now identified as St. Petersburg Community College.

In May 2002, the Florida Board of Education approved bachelor degrees at MDCC for prospective teachers of the physically and learning disabled, through a separate school of education. Miami-Dade also requested approval for programs in early childhood and elementary school education, but the Florida Secretary of Education said there was no “critical shortage” in those areas. According to local officials, the teacher shortage in the Miami area is “dire.” Although 1,800 teachers graduate from four-year programs in the state annually, the area needs three times that number. Even with this shortage, local four-year colleges and universities are finding it difficult to increase enrollment in those much-needed subject areas. Most baccalaureate programs offered at community colleges in Florida are in teacher education. MDCC will add secondary math and science, and special education programs beginning in fall 2004. The college also plans to offer four-year programs in nursing and technology.

Although some believe that the introduction of a BA dilutes the mission of a community college, Miami-Dade officials insist that this will not change the community-centered character of the college. In fact, the president believes that the college is enforcing its mission by “responding to our community’s workforce needs.” Nevertheless, to gain accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Miami-Dade must drop “community” from its name because SACS considers an institution a four-year college once it begins to offer an upper-division program.



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- **Utah.** Utah also has opened the door to community colleges becoming baccalaureate institutions. In part, this has been done to expand access without building new campuses. Three campuses in the state award both associate and baccalaureate degrees. One of them, Weber State, is a four-year school that offers associate degrees. The other two are community colleges that have added baccalaureate degrees.

*Utah Valley State College*, formerly Utah Valley Community College, is the fastest growing institution in the Utah System of Higher Education. During the past 10 years, the number of full-time equivalent students has increased by 117%, while the number of faculty members has grown by 86%. Utah Valley State College began offering a BA in elementary education in 2000, and has since added the following BAs in education: early childhood, English, math, biology, chemistry/physics, earth science, history and business/marketing.

The Utah State Legislature granted a name change and baccalaureate degree status in 2000 in recognition of the growth of *Dixie State College*, which grew from approximately 2,500 students in 1990 to 7,000 students in 2000. There, students can enroll in an elementary education program after obtaining an associates degree. Upon completing the education program, students obtain a Utah State Level I Educator License, and are allowed to teach grades 1-8. Graduates of the program start their teaching careers with a mentorship or practicum.

- **Arkansas.** The *University of Arkansas at Fort Smith*, formerly Fort Smith Junior College, began offering several programs through its University Center in 1998. The University Center currently offers a bachelor of science degree in several programs, including early childhood education P-4, middle childhood education with emphasis in math/science, and biology with life/earth science teacher licensure. Fort Smith awards roughly half of its associate of arts degrees in education. Although it is now a university, very few baccalaureate degrees have been awarded.

- **Other States.** It should be noted that while just a few state examples exist of bachelor-level teacher education programs at community colleges, more states have community colleges offering BAs in other subject areas, such as information technology management and business administration. These states include:

- ▶ Georgia
- ▶ Louisiana
- ▶ Vermont

Currently considering proposals to allow two-year colleges to offer four-year degrees are:

- ▶ Texas
- ▶ California



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Florida, Nevada, Utah and Arkansas also are among those that offer baccalaureates in areas other than teacher education at community colleges.

### Implications

The traditional mission and role of community colleges are blurring as new institutions are developed and old ones evolve. Adding BAs in education in community colleges is only one indication of a larger phenomenon. Kenneth Walker, president of the five-year old Community College Baccalaureate Association, which now has 63 members from 21 states, notes that the community college mission changed several years ago, to include more technical and vocational programs aimed at furthering careers, and the sector intends to keep adding programs to improve the economy and assist in workforce development.

Walker also notes that charter colleges, e-colleges and proprietary colleges are essentially community colleges with BA's. "The title 'community college' will no longer be synonymous with two-year college," the number of which has "declined by more than two hundred during the past 50 years." The trend operates in the other direction as baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities have adapted to market demand by offering associate degrees. The clarity of institutional missions is further convoluted by the emergence of digital technology education delivery options that can provide offerings from multiple institutions across a state.

By offering BA programs in education, community colleges are responding to the needs of a changing student population. The majority of community college students take longer to complete programs because they are older, enroll part time, are usually employed, and often have families. These students are likely to have employment experience and life skills that could add to their value as educators.

As traditional universities become both more expensive and more selective, community colleges continue to respond to the needs of a broad base of students by providing open access and low tuition. They are often better situated to meet the needs of nontraditional students than are more conventional universities, which primarily provide classes to younger students who attend full time. Community colleges offer off-hour classes, and have a faculty that is attuned to the community and lives of their students. For example, Edison Community College in Florida appeals to nontraditional students because of its course sequencing and scheduling options, which make it easier for these students to keep up with family and employer responsibilities. A survey there found that 80% of its students would like to stay there because of accessibility, convenience, affordability and small class size. In addition, community college faculty members, whose sole responsibility is teaching, are more available to students, while those at universities, with other interests such as research, spend less time teaching. All this adds up to a very different academic environment in the two types of institutions.

Although community colleges work with four-year universities to help students transfer from two- to four-year degree programs in education, it is difficult for working students



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with families to have long commutes, in addition to their other daily responsibilities. These students find it easier to succeed at local community colleges. This is especially true in rural communities with little access to four-year institutions, and in states where enrollment growth exceeds the ability of four-year institutions to add new campuses.

### Policy Challenges

The primary challenges to teacher education BAs at community colleges are concerns over their quality and duplication of programs at four-year institutions. Secondary are concerns about changes in the traditional role and mission of community colleges. Once approved, challenges within community colleges revolve around equitable teaching loads and compensation for faculty of new upper-division courses.

The following provides more information about the primary and secondary concerns:

- **Program quality.** Community colleges may not be well-equipped to offer content-specific upper division courses. Many arguments against BAs at community colleges question the ability of community colleges to offer quality upper-division courses.
- **Recruiting quality faculty.** Questions arise about the quality of education that a community college can deliver. In some cases, community colleges may have trouble attracting qualified education faculty members. Quality faculty may not be available to community colleges if they do not offer the same salaries, teaching load, or prestige that would be available at a recognized baccalaureate college.
- **Duplicate programs.** Leaders in four-year institutions are concerned about the possibility of duplicate teacher education programs at community colleges that may take students from their programs. Duplicate programs will not address the problems of teacher shortages in specific areas such as math, science and special education.
- **Institutional roles.** A central issue is whether BAs offered by community colleges will draw enrollment from established colleges and universities in the state or attract new students who would not otherwise continue their education. Furthermore, there is some debate on whether adding a BA degree dilutes or expands the traditional community college mission.
- **Tuition and state funds.** Another set of issues revolves around finance. Most of the community colleges with a BA program plan to charge higher tuition for BA programs than AA level classes, but less than public universities in the state. It costs states less to support students in community colleges compared with other institutions because they have higher teaching loads and no research. Estimates indicate that it costs roughly half as much to deliver a BA at a community college than at a public university. Adding a BA in education to the community college is one way to expand capacity at a lower cost than expanding existing BA institutions. This raises the issue of how the state funding formulas should treat these mixed mission institutions.



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- **Teaching load and salary.** Adding upper-division courses at community colleges raises internal questions of differential teaching loads and salaries among faculty teaching at the upper and lower levels. State leaders will need to determine if upper-division teachers should have a lower teaching load and higher salary than those teachers who teach lower-division classes.

### Policy Recommendations

The following are recommendations for states to consider before embracing baccalaureate degrees at community colleges, particularly degrees that lead to entry into the teaching profession:

- **Assure quality and accreditation.** Adopt high standards and quality review processes that reflect the same expectations for quality in the community college program as those for any other teacher preparation program. Before new degree programs are created, there should be a review of the institution's ability to prepare new teachers in both subject matter and teaching skills. Teams of persons from the best programs in the state should conduct these reviews. In addition, the appropriate accrediting agencies must acknowledge and accept the change in mission.
- **Maintain community college mission.** Ensure community colleges do not change their overall role and mission upon offering BAs. Serving the community workforce needs is highly valued and should continue to be a central role.
- **Avoid duplicate programs.** Coordinate offerings among various education institutions within the state to reduce duplication among programs. One approach is to centralize governance into a single board for approvals, making oversight easier. This also would include being selective about programs approved. Establish guidelines that only allow for programs in areas of worker shortages or areas unavailable at traditional institutions.
- **Consider geographic needs.** Determine geographic areas with most dire need of teachers. Duplicate programs may be approved when certain locations have high demand. For example, a duplicate program in a rural area may be acceptable if all other higher education institutions in the state are beyond commuting distance.
- **Resources for upper-division courses.** Ensure community colleges have the resources necessary to offer BA degrees, including funding for upper-division courses. State leaders will need to develop new funding formulas for community colleges that offer BAs.
- **Salary and workload.** Leaders must establish clearly defined salary schedules and teaching loads before approving baccalaureate degrees at community colleges. Consider changes to faculty workload and compensation. Also consider internal faculty morale and relations between those who teach lower- and upper-division courses.



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- **Articulation from AA to BA.** Examine the relationship between a community college's programs, ensuring the BA programs build upon the AA programs. In addition, the AA degree requirements should easily fulfill prerequisites for upper-division courses.

### Resources

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