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# 2C

## Action

### *Professional Services Committee*

### **Initial Institutional Approval**

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## **Agenda Insert**

**Executive Summary:** This agenda item presents one program sponsor for initial institutional approval by the Commission.

**Policy Question:** Has Bard College met the Commission's requirements for initial institutional approval?

**Recommended Action:** That the Commission discuss the institutional eligibility of Bard College to offer educator preparation in California and take the action it deems appropriate.

**Presenter:** Cheryl Hickey, Administrator, and Teri Clark, Director, Professional Services Division

#### **Strategic Plan Goal: 1**

#### **Promote educational excellence through the preparation and certification of professional educators**

- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the preparation and performance of professional educators and for the accreditation of credential programs

March 2012

**Bard College, Master of Arts in Teaching Program  
Delano, California Campus**

**External Review Report**

Submitted by

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February 23, 2012

Visitation Dates: February 1 – 3, 2012

## ***Purpose of the Visit***

At the request of Dr. Norton Batkin, Vice President and Dean of Graduate Studies at Bard College, an ombudsman was invited to conduct an independent review of the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) on the Delano, California campus. More specifically, the review focused on a range of issues that surfaced beginning during the summer quarter of 2010 and resulted in numerous challenges for the first cohort of students enrolled in the MAT program. This report summarizes the outcome of three days of interviewing which included 2010-2011 graduates, 2011-2012 current students, faculty and staff members.

In addition to interviews, numerous documents, student brochures, and handouts provided during the Administration's meetings with students were reviewed. These communications are noted in the report and discussed further where applicable.

Prior to the visit, the new Director of Bard MAT Delano campus, Carla Finkelstein, sent an email to all current students and graduates of the program informing them of Bard's decision to bring in "an independent ombudsman to speak with MAT students, graduates and faculty with regard to issues surrounding credentialing, communication, and student advising". A schedule of interviews was prepared; students interested in participating who preferred a more convenient location than Paramount Bard Academy were given the opportunity to select an alternative location. Students or graduates who did not initially respond were sent reminders.

## ***Interviews***

During the three-day visit, interviews were conducted with ten graduates, ten current students, two faculty members who worked with both cohorts of students (graduate and current), Dean of Student Support, Program Administrator and Director of the Delano campus. All individuals who volunteered to be interviewed were assured of anonymity in the final report. Six graduates were interviewed individually, four graduates were interviewed in pairs; current students were interviewed in two small groups of five. Individual interviews were 35 to 60 minutes in duration; small group interviews were conducted over an approximate 50 minute timespan.

All graduate and student interviewees were provided an opportunity to answer four open-ended questions:

1. Why were you initially drawn to Bard's MAT program at the Delano campus?
2. What aspects of the MAT program met your expectations?
3. What challenges did you encounter in the program?
  - a. Which were resolved?
  - b. Which remain unresolved?
4. Is there any additional information you would like to add?

The three faculty and two support staff members interviewed individually were asked to provide their perspectives on the various issues facing each of the cohorts. Both the Program Administrator and Director were interviewed several times to help clarify certain statements, validate various timelines and documents, and provide context for some of the statements made by graduates and current students.

### ***Documents Reviewed***

- October 5, 2011: Meeting of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing: Agenda Item: 3D Action (Bard College)
- December 9, 2011: Meeting of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing: Agenda Item: 5D Action (Bard College)
- December 9, 2011: Meeting of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing: Agenda Item: 5D Action - Insert (Bard College)
- Vice President and Dean of Graduate Studies, Norton Batkin's remarks to the Commission
- Review of Video Record Testimony
- Teacher Quality Partnership Grants: Teaching Residency Program, Agreement to Serve
- Resnick Scholarship Addendum
- Paramount Bard Academy: Mission and Educational Philosophy
- 2011-2012 Graduate Student Handbook, Master of Arts in Teaching Program at Bard College: Previous and Current Versions
- 2012-2013 Bard MAT Catalogue Supplement - Delano Campus: Previous and Current Versions
- State of California, Commission on Teacher Credentialing: Institution's Evaluation for Staff Appeal (RGA-16)
- Student Handouts Provided During Cohort / Administration Meetings
  - Bard MAT California Program and Credential Requirements/Timeline 2011-2012
  - Bard MAT California Program Requirements/Timeline
  - Commission on Teacher Credentialing "Checklist"
  - Commission on Teacher Credentialing: Single Subject Requirements for Teachers Prepared In California
  - Technology Certification Program Proficiency Checklist
  - CalTPA – Four Tasks
- August 8, 2011 Email. From Leticia Garza, To: [matcastu13@bard.edu](mailto:matcastu13@bard.edu), Cc: Ric Cambell: Subject: Bard MAT Program status
- Dean Ric Cambell's August 8, 2011 attachment to email sent to All Bard MAT Students, Class of 2012
- Dean Ric Cambell's October 7, 2011 Letter to MAT Students, California Campus
- Bard MAT student Business Meeting, October 7, 2011
- Vice President and Dean of Graduate Studies, Norton Batkin's January 26, 2012 letter to current MAT students and graduates

## *Findings (Interviews/Documents)*

### *WHY BARD COLLEGE?*

Graduate and student responses to this prompt were consistent across both groups. The primary reason for selecting Bard College centered around the University's mission to prepare teachers to be able to meet the need of underserved student populations in the local region of the Central Valley. The MAT program goal of preparing highly skilled professionals in a rigorous academic program that would equip teacher candidates with the necessary skills and training to increase student achievement across all groups in the region was perceived by many of those interviewed as matching their own goals.

Other reasons for selecting Bard included: the University's rigorous study of subject matter (the disciplines); a program design that allowed students to receive both a teaching credential and masters degree within one year; and, the financial stipends/scholarships to assist in covering costs for tuition and living expenses. Also embedded in student responses was the program's location on a K-12 school campus, Paramount Bard Academy (PBA), creating unique opportunities to strengthen their preparation. More time in actual public school classrooms would allow more experience to work with students.

### *WHICH ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM MET EXPECTATIONS ?*

A majority of responses to this prompt clustered around four themes: 1) academic rigor; 2) engaging theoretical approach; 3) quality of faculty; and, 4) quality of classes. Several graduates and current students commented on how their depth of understanding and expertise had increased in their own discipline areas because of coursework in the program. They indicated subject matter courses were thoughtfully organized, academically challenging, and effectively taught. As a result, their own preparation to teach related courses in secondary schools was strengthened. Some of those interviewed commented on how the theoretical approach used in the program stimulated their thinking and also complimented faculty members who made explicit connections between discipline curriculum at Bard and application of these ideas in secondary schools.

Although students who had graduated and current students both provided positive responses regarding the program, the group of current students reflected, overall, a more favorable perspective on both coursework and program design than those of the graduates. Differences in the two cohort perspectives appear to be based on two distinctly different experiences. In the second year of the program, faculty did not need to adjust the curriculum as frequently as in the first year. One faculty member noted the opportunity to refine the second year course curricula based on experiences from the first year helped improve the curricula and program continuity.

## *CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE PROGRAM?*

The three areas Bard College officials asked to be explored were issues surrounding credentialing, communication, and student advisement. As data were analyzed it became clear, communication remained a consistent theme; however, issues with credentialing and student advisement crossed over several broader areas, in particular programmatic and administrative/leadership challenges. Subsequently, the categories listed in this section of the report titled: 1) Programmatic Challenges; 2) Communication Challenges; and, 3) Administrative/Leadership Challenges reflect this slightly different breakdown.

Additionally, a second pattern became clear in reviewing the interviews with graduates and current students. While some data overlapped, the majority, though not all, of the challenges noted came from the experiences of the first cohort, now graduates. When the two groups' perspectives coincide, it has been noted in the report. A third of the graduates interviewed did not identify the majority of issues listed for which a further explanation is also provided. Finally, each of the categories that follow exhibit crossover with the other two. An attempt has been made to identify challenges most pertinent to those areas.

### Programmatic Challenges

Graduates commented numerous times on the differences between the program description provided to them during the recruitment phases of their experience and the program they entered their first quarter, Summer 2010. A consensus perspective on this topic emerged from interviews of graduates: the necessary time and planning to begin a quality program had not taken place prior to their arrival. Several graduates commented, the Delano Campus was not prepared for the first cohort and it appeared faculty were figuring out some of the programmatic elements as the cohort moved through the first several quarters.

The primary reason for these perspectives appears to be closely connected to the early experiences of 2010-2011 students who did not learn about the various state requirements for credentialing until well into the first part of the year. According to students in the first cohort, both the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET) and the California Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) requirements were explained to them in the midst of the second quarter. Faculty members involved in preparing students for these assessments also commented on reworking curriculum during the fall quarter to embed and align the TPA with their course curriculum in order for students to be better prepared for these assessments. As one faculty member stated, the first two (of four) TPAs were hurried into the curriculum; the second set were readied prior to delivery of the winter and spring courses. This issue reinforced the students' beliefs that the gaps in their preparation to teach were caused by the quick pace to get the curricula up and running.

It is important to note, this specific issue did not surface for 2011-2012 students. For the most part, the curriculum presented to them had been prepared the previous year.

However, an administrative decision made during the summer quarter did create an early negative impression for some students in the second Cohort concerning their program. During that summer, Bard administration determined 2011-2012 students would be prepared to receive a New York rather than a California Teaching Credential upon successful completion of the program. While this change did require faculty to again readjust aspects of their course syllabi it apparently was not, from a faculty perspective, as disruptive to the coursework as the required changes during the first year.

Both graduates and current students identified programmatic and curricular issues that, in their opinion, could be strengthened. These included: assignment of students to Mentor Teachers at Paramount Bard Academy; and, more clearly defined expectations of Mentor Teachers in the regional schools (clarity of placement requirements).

Those graduates now working as first year teachers also commented on the need to strengthen the program's instruction in three specific areas: classroom environment (classroom discipline); strategies for working with English Language Learners; and, strategies for working with Special Populations. These identified areas parallel the reviewer's own experiences working with many other teacher preparation programs; they are frequently mentioned as areas to be strengthened and did not seem unique to Bard College. Similar to many teacher preparation programs, Bard will need to continually revisit and strengthen curricula in these three areas.

#### Resolved

Program curricula have been completely developed. While refinement of course curricula will be ongoing, these changes occur to strengthen student learning opportunities. Adjusting program curricula after the academic year has begun is no longer an issue: curricula for both a New York or California teaching credential have been developed. The only programmatic decision prior to an academic year will be to determine which pathway will be used to prepare students for the appropriate teaching credential.

#### Unresolved

None.

#### Communication Challenges

A significant number of issues identified by both graduates and current students concerned issues of communication between students and the administration. Communication issues for some members of the 2010-2011 cohort included perceptions of providing vague, misleading, or inaccurate information. When asked for specific examples several students identified: status of program accreditation; earning California teaching credentials; and, stipulations of the Resnick Fellowships and the Rural

Residency Program (TQP) Scholarships. Regarding the fellowships and scholarships, students felt they needed more information on: how Bard College would provide support to find jobs in qualified schools; specific qualifying characteristics of high needs schools; and, payback stipulations. Following a review of the documents, it was evident the first two issues had some merit; however, the need to understand how grants would be paid back over time did not have a strong basis for support as the materials and contracts pertaining to fellowships and scholarships provided very specific detail on financial stipulations when agreeing to accept funds.

The major communication issue cited by graduates involved the status of Bard College's California accreditation status and whether graduating teacher candidates would receive a California Preliminary Teaching Credential. Recruiting brochures and emails to students suggested accreditation had been secured and California credentials would be offered. The reasons these statements were communicated to students as they were is not completely clear. Based on conversations with the faculty and staff, however, there appears to have been an assumption that California accreditation would occur during the 2010-2011 academic year and communications were based on these assumptions. Students were frustrated by the lack of accurate information from Bard's administration on accreditation status and as a result this issue lingered throughout the year. It is also apparent this one issue tainted other aspects of the students' experiences.

Members of the 2011-2012 cohort also expressed misgivings about the manner in which issues of accreditation and credentialing were communicated to them. Their concern, knowing about the experience of the first cohort of students, was whether they would receive a Californian Preliminary Teaching Credential. To the credit of the Bard College administrative team, an early decision was made not to put the second cohort through the uncertainty of the previous cohort on this matter. Though not prior to admission of the 2011-2012 cohort, it was determined early in the academic year students would pursue New York's credentialing path and then require students apply for a California credential under an agreement of reciprocity between the two states.

There are differing views on when this decision was made and how it was communicated to students. More than one student, not just in the current cohort, but among graduates as well, cited the "August 8, 2011" email as another example of Bard College misleading them. This email contained a letter in the form of an attachment from the dean of the MAT program. It was meant to clarify earlier information provided to students on Bard College MAT Program's current status as a credentialing program in California. It discussed credentialing options under consideration if a further delay were to be encountered in the accreditation process.

Bard officials insisted an email had been sent to students on that date; students insisted they had not received the communication. In fact, both were correct. After tracing the sequence of events it became apparent a technological issue was the reason for both perceptions. Following an email trail it was clear an email to all students was sent to the list-serve on August 8, 2011. Unfortunately it was not discovered until later the sender of the email, the newly appointed Program Administrator, had not been authorized, at that

point, to use the list-serve distribution as she believed. As a result, though the email was sent to the list-server, it was never distributed to the cohort. Bard College's genuine effort to avoid a repeat of the previous year's lack of clear communication resulted in an unfortunate opposite effect, reinforcing student perception of poor communications.

### Resolved

The majority of Bard College, Delano Campus 2011 graduates have received their California Preliminary Teaching Credentials through the RGA-16 process. Those few who experienced delays understand the reasons for those delays, typically a lack of certain paperwork and were informed when their applications were complete and submitted.

Current students are aware of their credentialing process for this year and are being prepared to meet the requirements of the state of New York for their credentials.

When asked about their understanding of scholarship requirements, current students acknowledged understanding the terms of accepting the grant funds and knew what they were signing in the offered contract.

### Unresolved

Several 2011 graduates were not able to find employment in fall 2011. According to their perspective, at least one influencing factor was the absence of a California Teaching Credential. The method of redressing this specific problem remains to be determined, though Bard College is actively involved in offering assistance to graduates seeking placements.

The 2011-2012 current cohort has expressed concerns about the reciprocity agreement between California and New York. Their issue is expressed primarily as a lack of detailed information to more clearly understand the reciprocity process and what will be expected of them to apply for a California Preliminary Credential.

### Administrative/Leadership Challenges

A number of graduates offered perspectives on lack of a strong administrative presence during Bard's first year of operation in California. Several students noted it seemed no one was deemed in charge or able to answer questions directly. Others indicated lack of a point person with authority to address questions and issues as well as the ability to make decisions in a timely manner. These perceptions were partly based on their observation that leadership was shared on campus between two part-time directors and the dean of the campus was not located at the Delano site. Several 2010-2011 graduates came to believe information provided by the leadership team was reliable and then were often frustrated with late information or that which altered previous decisions.

Though significant changes have been implemented with a full-time director appointed, a few current students remain concerned future decisions cannot be made on site and must be approved by the New York campus. However, a significant number of current students already observe a difference since the permanent director was named. These students experience open communication with the current administration as well as regularly scheduled meetings with the director providing other communication opportunities.

### Resolved

A full time director of the Delano campus is currently employed. Most communication issues are dealt with in a timely manner. While transition of leadership on the site created a few gaps, efforts of the new Director and Program Administrator focus on ensuring timely and open communication with students. Current students spoke of the new administration as willing to listen to students critique the program and consider their experiences with an openness to changes in order to improve identified issues.

### Unresolved

There remains a lingering “mistrust” of the administration in the minds of a few current students. Though difficult to pinpoint, it seems to tie back to the decision to apply for their credentials through New York. The previously discussed problem with the August 8, 2011 email did not help with repairing past issues of mistrust.

## OBSERVATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The experiences previously detailed, occurring during the 2010-2011 academic year definitely created numerous learning opportunities for Bard’s leadership team. These experiences did not go unnoticed. Bard College administrators on both the New York and California campuses have made numerous changes to past practice in order to correct many of the issues identified by the first two cohorts of students who have been or are currently being trained on the Delano campus.

The series of interviews with graduates, current students, faculty and staff members involved with Bard’s MAT Delano Program indicated the first year of operation was not as successful as envisioned. While several graduated students expressed their understanding that this was essentially a pilot program and anticipated problems surfacing during the year, they did not foresee as many of the central issues that confronted them. In retrospect, if more time had been taken prior to accepting a cohort of students, the number of issues during the first year may have been reduced. A good example of this assessment is the attempt by faculty and staff to prepare in a short period of time accreditation documents, curricula, alignment with TPA demands, and opening a new campus program. Multiple demands for a start-up program proved problematic,

adding an additional layer of stress and concern to students when they encountered delays.

Findings during the February visit to the Delano campus indicate a concerted effort has begun to improve students' experiences and strengthen Bard's MAT Program in several key areas. Improving communications with students at all stages of encounter with Bard is a good example. Those being recruited for the third cohort receive updated brochures with current and accurate information. Students currently in the program are experiencing a full time administrative team dedicated to working with them to ensure a good experience, and importantly, Bard is reaching out to graduates of the 2010-2011 program to determine what steps might be taken to redress issues continuing to linger with this group.

Gaps in practice identified by both students and faculty within the MAT Program have been mitigated. Faculty have had time to revise course curricula and syllabi based on previous experiences and knowledge of the credential pathway for the current cohort. Should the Commission on Teacher Credentialing and Committee on Accreditation approve initial accreditation for the Delano campus, the program will certainly be strengthened further by feedback from the Initial Program Review.

Based on information that emerged during review of data, a final question was asked of graduates, including those most critical of their experiences while attending Bard. The question was, based on their own experiences with the program, whether or not the issues of concern were so significant they warranted shutting down the MAT Program in Delano. The answer was a unanimous no, even from those most critical of their experience in the program. Graduates stated if the problems encountered during their experience were corrected and the program was offered with "no surprises", Bard should continue preparing teachers to strengthen the education of students in the Central Valley. These students, despite their misgivings, were able to look beyond and understand potential significant impact graduates of Bard's MAT Program in Delano could provide to underserved students.

It should be noted, a small number of graduates who continue to have very specific concerns with their experience throughout the 2010-2011 academic year with Bard College administrators. The independent reviewer spoke directly with one student and communicated via email with another. Their issues included in this report were those in common with their cohort colleagues. Other issues, very specific to their experience, were not included. Prior to the visit, Bard College communicated to the independent reviewer they were conducting an internal review of those students' primary issues in an attempt to resolve them. These were not explored during the February visit.

In the final analysis, based on time spent with graduates, current students, faculty and administrators, the independent reviewer concluded Bard College has accepted responsibility for the difficult year experienced by the first cohort of teacher candidates. The institution has corrected the majority of problems cited by graduates of the pilot year and it continues to attempt to redress any lingering problems. Two of the primary

changes made by Bard College included: 1) program curricula have been completed and now offer teacher candidates a more seamless learning experience; and, 2) a full time, onsite administrative team is in place at the Delano campus resulting in improved communication with the current group of teacher candidates as well as a stronger focus on program details.