

## The SMSU Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT): A Professional Alternative Route to Certification

August 2005

➤ *Alternative certification programs assist school districts by helping new teachers enter the classroom faster and enabling many who did not graduate with a teaching degree the opportunity to enter the teaching profession (Hawke et al, 1999).*

➤ *National predictions estimate a need for approximately 2.5 million teachers between 2000-2010 (Darling-Hammond, 2000).*

➤ *By the 2010 academic school year, Missouri schools may need as many as 21,000 teachers and administrators (Hough et al, 2002).*

### Background

National predictions regarding the number of teachers that will be needed in United States public school classrooms over the next decade have reached as high as 2.5 million (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This increased need for teachers is most commonly associated with teacher retirement, teacher attrition, increased class enrollment and the need to reduce current class sizes (Feistritzer, 1996). According to the *Missouri Teacher Supply & Demand Report* (Hough et al, 2002), it is estimated that over 21,000 Missouri teachers and administrators will be needed by the beginning of the 2010 academic school year, almost one-third of the entire teaching force. Such projected shortages have prompted several states, including Missouri, to support alternative certification programs in order to help new teachers enter the classroom faster. Such support has enabled many who did not graduate with a teaching degree the opportunity to enter the teaching profession (Hawke et al, 1999).

Southwest Missouri State University's (SMSU) Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) is a graduate level alternative teacher certification program intended for individuals seeking mid-career change or a second career after retirement. Initially developed and supported by a United States Department of Education Title II Grant awarded to the SMSU College of Education (COE) in 1999, the MAT program is designed to prepare skilled, certified teachers to meet needs in critical shortage academic areas and to coordinate efforts with public school districts, especially rural districts, to reduce the high teacher turnover rate and incorporate real-world experience into the classroom.

This alternative route to certification has been approved by the Missouri Coordinating Board of Higher Education, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the SMSU Board of Governors. In order for candidates to be accepted into the program, they must meet the following six requirements:

1. Hold a bachelor's degree in a field closely related to the area pursued in certification;
2. Have a transcript analysis completed by the College of Education Certification office;
3. Complete the appropriate Praxis II exam in the content area chosen for certification;
4. Submit a letter of interest, resume, and letters supporting their intent to enter the program;
5. Apply and be admitted to the Graduate College at Southwest Missouri State University;
6. Interview with University personnel charged with program administration.

## **Cohort Status:**

### **Cohort 1 (n = 8)**

***The MAT's inaugural cohort served 8 students who began their studies in June 2001.***

- 100% Completed
- 63% Currently Teaching

### **Cohort 2 (n = 32)**

***While 34 students began the MAT as part of the 2002 cohort, two have dropped leaving 32 students to date.***

- 72% Completed
- 28% Still Enrolled
- 65% Currently Teaching

### **Cohort 3 (n = 27)**

***Twenty-nine students began the MAT in June 2003, However, cohort 3 currently consists of 27 students.***

- 85% Completed
- 15% Still Enrolled
- 81% Currently Teaching

### **Cohort 4 (n = 26)**

***In 2004, 26 candidates began the program. Of these MAT students...***

- 38% Completed
- 62% Still Enrolled
- 46% Currently Teaching

### **Cohort 5 (n = 58)**

***A record enrollment of 58 students attending sessions on both the SMSU (n = 45) and MSSU (n = 13) campus.***

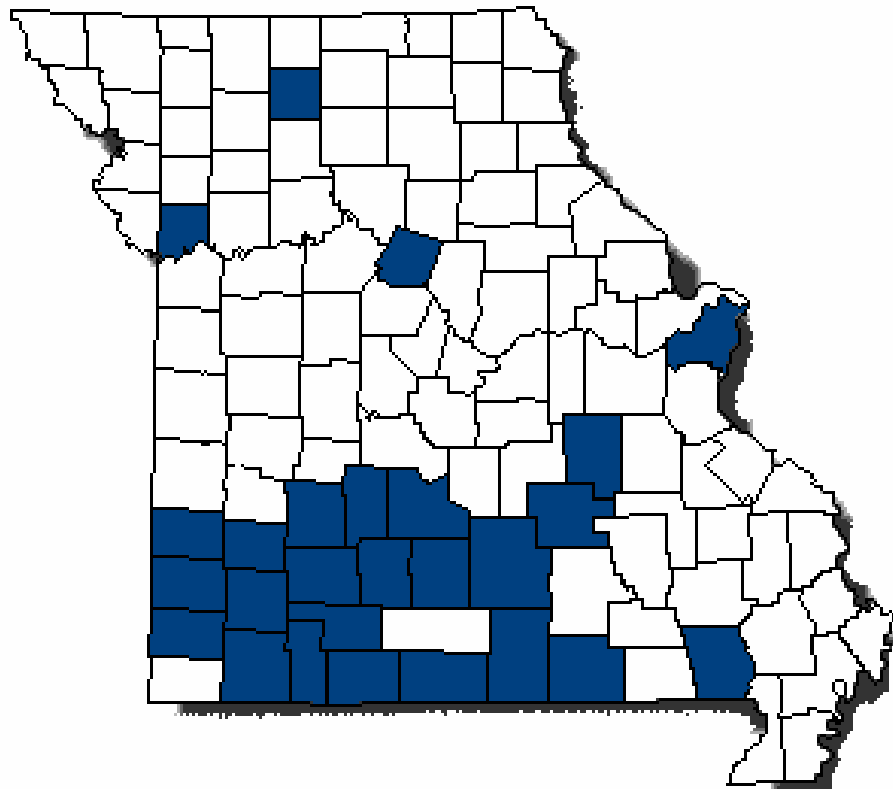
- 38% Plan to Begin Teaching, Fall 2005

## **Program Overview**

The pilot cohort of eight MAT candidates began their studies in June 2001. Currently, the MAT program is serving its fifth cohort of students (n = 58). Not only is Cohort #5 the largest group of students who have entered the program, they are also the most diverse in content area specialties and ethnic backgrounds with students from Mexico, Poland and Hungary. The summer 2005 also marks the first year the MAT program has offered classes outside of the Springfield campus with SMSU partnering with Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) in Joplin, Missouri.

Of the 304 applicants who have applied to the MAT program since 2001, 51% (n = 155) were accepted and began their graduate studies as a member of one of the five program cohorts 2001-2005. Over the five year period, only 3% (n = 4) of students who began the MAT have dropped leaving 151 current MAT graduate students in some phase of program completion and full-time teaching. Of these students, 58% (n = 87) began teaching in high need school districts early in their programs, some with only provisional certification. To date, the MAT program has maintained a 94% retention rate with 82 current students and program completers remaining in the classroom.

MAT students who are either currently enrolled in the program as well as those who have completed the program are teaching in twenty-six counties across Missouri. The counties that have been positively impacted by the MAT program are highlighted in blue as shown on the map below. These counties include: Barry, Barton, Butler, Christian, Clay, Crawford, Dade, Dallas, Dent, Greene, Grundy, Howard, Howell, Jasper, Laclede, Lawrence, Newton, Oregon, Ozark, Polk, St. Louis, Stone, Taney, Texas, Webster, and Wright.



## Who is attracted to the MAT program?

- *An accountant who decided to use her twenty plus years of work experience to help better equip high school students for working in the “real” world.*
- *A Hungarian physics teacher who wants to gain her Missouri teaching certification so that she can continue with a passion she left behind many years ago.*
- *A 35 year old chemist who believes that the MAT will provide her with “the skills needed to be an effective teacher.”*
- *A 46 year old artist who has traveled the world studying art and wants to share that knowledge with students.*
- *After a successful Broadway career managing productions such as “Riverdance,” this 34 year old decided to take his Bachelors degree in Theater and pursue a Masters degree in teaching so that he might share his passion for theater with high school students.*

## University Support

University and district partnerships have proven to be an effective method of identifying quality candidates who have an interest in becoming a classroom teacher. In addition, the success of the program relies on the continued partnership with districts in southwest Missouri and across the state. The cooperation between these districts and SMSU provide support networks for the training and mentoring candidates who begin teaching, and is crucial to the retention of quality staff. This support is ongoing and along with professional development helps ensure the new teacher’s transition to public school teaching is successful. Program success will be measured during the coming years by the number of graduates, the quality of the classroom teachers produced, and the achievement of students in each teacher’s classroom.

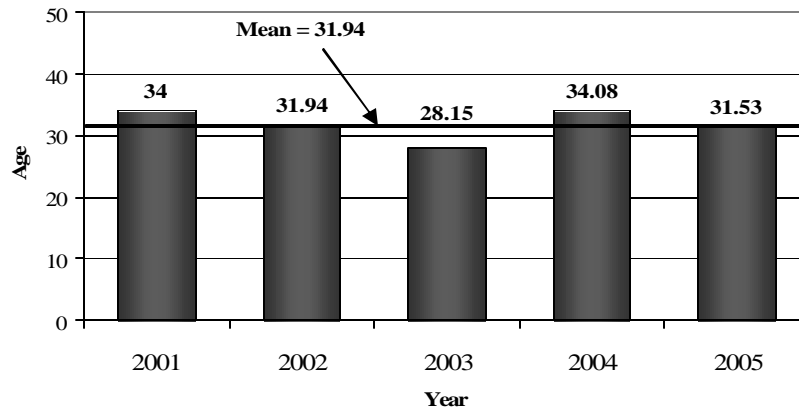
SMSU’s College of Education is committed to supporting only the highest quality alternative teacher education programs. During their internship semester, students meet with the MAT coordinator and COE faculty members for initial support and to discuss issues such as classroom management, professional ethics and best practices in teaching and learning. Included and infused in MAT students’ teacher preparations is the ability to skillfully facilitate and promote the learning of all students they encounter in the classroom. MAT students attend graduate classes staffed by SMSU professors who are committed to a conceptual framework designed to provide educational opportunities that enable candidates to develop a capacity for scholarly inquire, critical reasoning, and a life-long pursuit of learning.

## MAT Cohort Demographics

### *Average Age*

Figure 1 displays data regarding the average age of MAT students for the cohort years 2001 through 2005. The average age of a typical MAT student is approximately 32 years, however students’ ages range from 22 to 50+ years. Fifty-five percent (n = 83) of MAT students enter the program in their mid to late twenties with 21% (n = 32) entering the program at the age of forty or older after spending several years in another employment setting.

*Figure 1. Mean age of current MAT students identified by academic year (n = 151)*



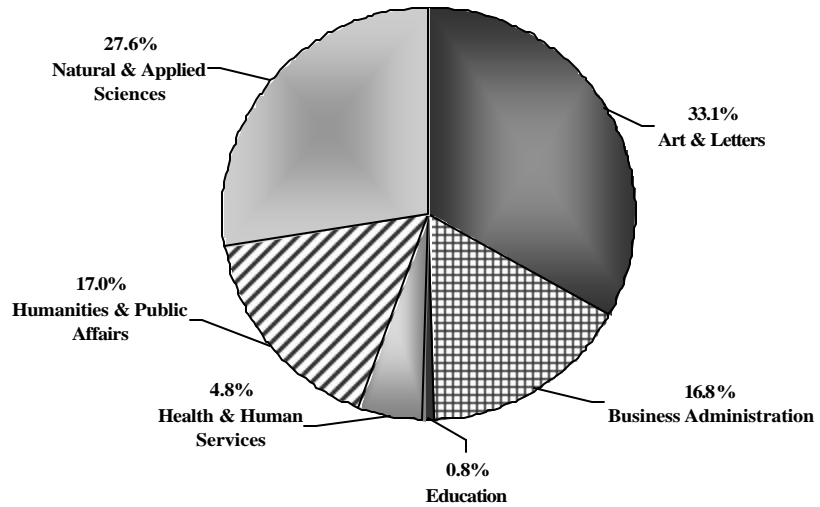
**What types of degrees to MAT program participants hold?**

- Biology
- Social Work
- Theology
- Dietetics
- Chemistry
- Mathematics
- French
- Spanish
- Geology
- English
- Communications
- Economics
- Business
- Earth Science
- Zoology
- Studio Art
- Computer Science
- Political Science
- Philosophy
- Marketing
- Finance
- Criminal Justice
- Accounting
- Animal Science
- History
- Music
- Engineering

**Undergraduate Degree**

Figure 2 depicts undergraduate degrees of MAT students in the six SMSU academic colleges. Overall, the majority of students (61.4%) entering the MAT program (2001-2005) represent undergraduate degrees in fields from the College of Arts and Letters (33.1%) and Natural and Applied Sciences (27.6%).

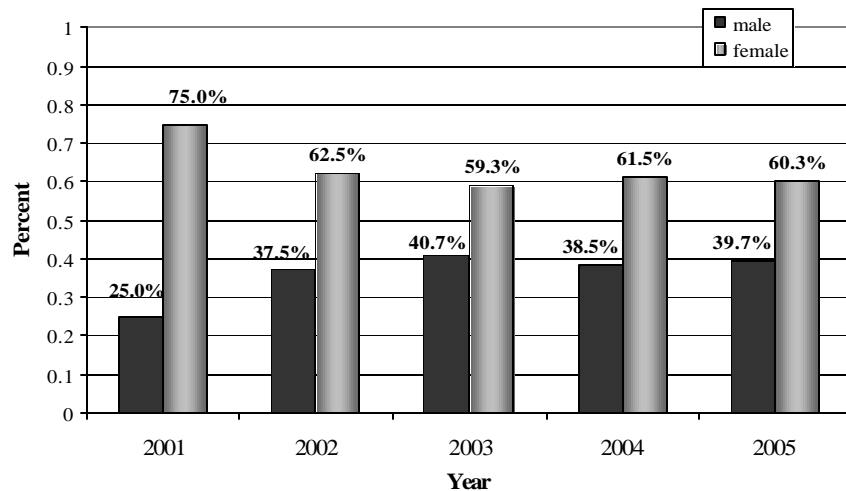
*Figure 2. Percent of current MAT students identified by undergraduate degree [All cohorts combined (n = 151)]*



**Gender**

Of the 151 MAT students, the majority of participants have been female (61.6%, n = 93) with males representing 38.4% (n = 58) of MAT participants. Figure 3 displays these data by cohort year.

*Figure 3. Percent of current MAT students identified by gender and academic year (n = 151)*



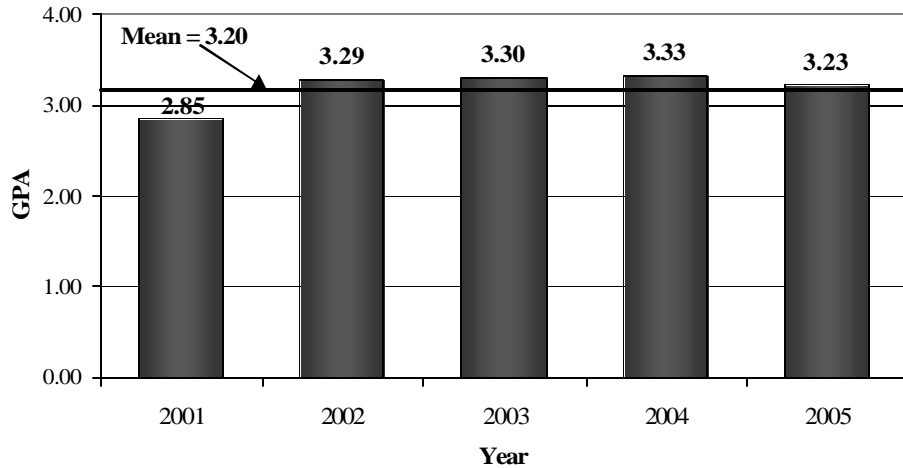
**Why do students select an alternative program such as the MAT?**

- After living in four different countries and visiting more than 23, this MAT student wishes to share his experiences and knowledge of modern history and geography with high school students.
- While working as a substitute teacher this former member of the U.S. military decided not to pursue his Masters degree in Business, but instead to enroll in the MAT. He believes that as a teacher he can be a positive role model for his students in the same way many of his teachers were for him.
- With her Bachelors degree in Social work, this student chose the MAT program because of the “kind hearts of the educators” with whom she has worked over the years.
- Several MAT students are already working in schools within their communities. The MAT program offers them the chance to receive certification and continue in a setting they enjoy.

**Average GPA**

The overall mean GPA of all 151 MAT students is **3.20** (on a four point scale) across the five cohort years. Figure 5 shows the average GPA for each cohort year.

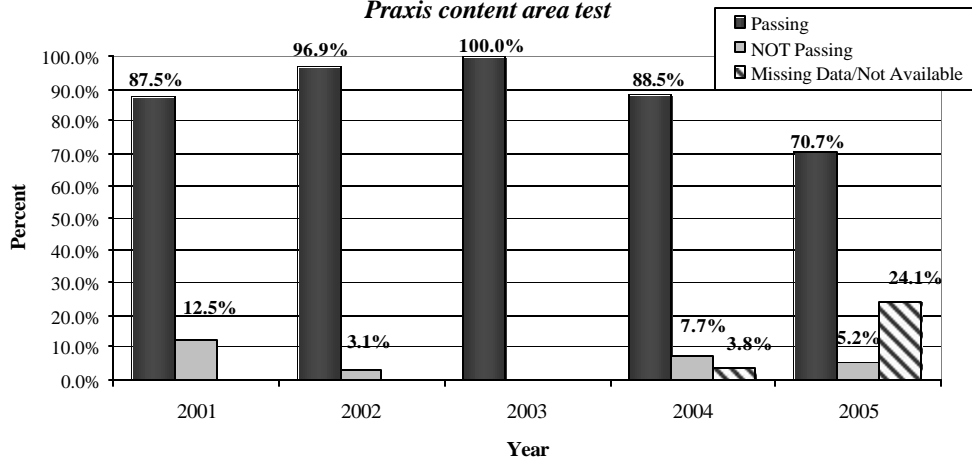
**Figure 3. Average undergraduate GPA of current MAT students identified by academic year**



**Praxis Test Scores**

On average, 85.1% (n = 126) of MAT students have passed the Praxis for their specific content area. However, as a state requirement, 100% of students completing the MAT must pass their Praxis in order to receive certification. Figure 5 displays the Praxis pass rates for each cohort (2001-2005) upon initial entry into the program. Praxis score data were not available for 15 MAT students (10.4%), one student in the 2004 cohort and 14 2005 cohort participants. These data will be included in a subsequent report.

**Figure 5. Percent of current MAT students' passing their respective Praxis content area test**



**Sample Program of Study**

***MAT Student***

***Summer (first)***

- SFR 691 9 hrs.  
Education Workshop

***Fall (first)***

- SEC 683 3 hrs.  
Internship in Teaching I

***Spring***

- SEC 684 10 hrs.  
Internship in Teaching II  
(Student Teaching)

***Summer (second)***

- SEC 685 1 hrs.  
Internship in Teaching III  
(Portfolio/Research)
- SPE 610 2 hrs.  
Introduction to Special Ed.

***Fall (second)***

- EDC 686 2 hrs.  
Problems in Education

***Additional Coursework***

- PSY 603 3 hrs.  
Human Growth & Development
- RDG 677 3 hrs.  
Reading in the Content Field
- SFR 690 3 hrs.  
Educational Research
- IMT 562 3 hrs.  
Instructional Technology

**Total Program Hours = 39**

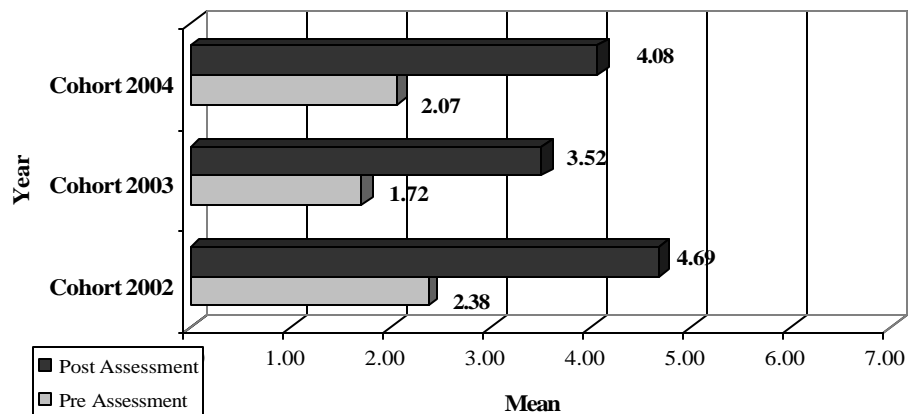
**MAT Curriculum**

Students accepted into the MAT program must follow a program of study that includes an eight-week education workshop/seminar that takes place prior to students' fall teaching internship. The eight-week summer program provides students with an introduction to the policies and procedures of school settings. The curriculum for the nine credit hour summer induction course includes topics such as:

- Learning Theory
- Lesson Plan Development
- Student Motivation
- Student Learning Objectives
- Classroom Management
- Assessment & Evaluation
- Instructional Techniques
- Special Needs Students
- Parent/Community Involvement
- Legal Issues
- Educator Resources
- Crisis Planning/Prevention
- Administrative Policies/Procedures
- Board Policies/Procedures
- Course Outlines & Syllabi

Students entering the summer seminar report their understanding of the above topics to be limited, but that changes significantly over the course of the eight-week induction program. After completing the eight-week education workshop, students report their level of knowledge to lie somewhere between "somewhat knowledgeable" and "more than adequate amount of knowledge" across all curriculum topics covered. Figure 6 depicts 2002-2004 student cohort perceptions on a pre/post survey assessment regarding their overall level of knowledge of the fifteen curriculum topics introduced during their first summer in the MAT program.

**Figure 6. Overall mean scores on the pre/post assessment of students knowledge of MAT curriculum topics (n = 151)**

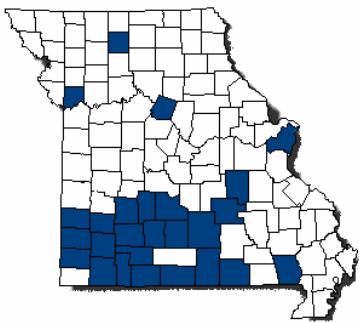


Scale: 0 = No Knowledge, 1 = Very Limited Knowledge, 2 = Limited Knowledge, 3 = Somewhat Knowledgeable, 4 = Adequate Amount of Knowledge, 5 = More than Adequate Knowledge, 6 = Significant Knowledge, 7 = Extremely Knowledgeable

### Program Impact

**82 Missouri classrooms in the following counties are currently staffed by the MAT graduate students:**

**Barry  
Barton  
Butler  
Christian  
Clay  
Crawford  
Dade  
Dallas  
Dent  
Greene  
Grundy  
Howard  
Howell  
Jasper  
Laclede  
Lawrence  
Newton  
Oregon  
Ozark  
Polk  
St. Louis  
Stone  
Taney  
Texas  
Webster  
Wright**



### Program Sustainability

As with other federally funded initiatives, program sustainability must be addressed. With grant funding from the Title II Teacher Quality Initiative ending September 2005, the College of Education began the process of planning for the sustainability of the MAT in the fall of 2004. From this initial planning, there have been three outcomes that will lead to the continued support and success of the MAT program.

First, the University has approved a new position, Director of Special Programs and Accreditation for the COE. The duties associated with the position include directing the MAT program, facilitating accreditation efforts for the COE and Professional Education Unit (PEU), directing secondary education for the teaching courses as appropriate, and coordinating other special programs, as assigned. SMSU's efforts to create such a position demonstrates the commitment to continuing an alternative route to teacher certification that provides valuable support to southwest Missouri school districts in need of highly qualified content area teachers.

Second, the SMSU Board of Governors and Coordinating Board of Higher Education has just approved a collaborative effort between SMSU and Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) in Joplin, Missouri to provide MAT students opportunities to take coursework on the MSSU campus as well as on the SMSU campus. The summer 2005 cohort was the first group of MAT students given this opportunity. Currently, 78% (n = 45) of Cohort #5 are taking the coursework on the SMSU campus with 22% (n = 13) opting to take courses on the MSSU campus. This partnership is yet another example of SMSU's commitment to supporting this alternative certification program.

In addition, efforts have also been made by the College of Education in coordination with the Mexican government to begin an exchange program for graduate students in Mexico who are interested in pursuing their Master's degree in education. Utilizing the MAT program, these students would not only be able to receive their degrees from an accredited American institution of higher education but they would provide a valuable service to rural districts in southwest Missouri with high immigrant population. While working on their MAT, these students would serve as classroom teachers in districts with a high percentage of non-English speaking students.

### References

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