

Notre Dame establishes school of education

When College of Notre Dame of Maryland dean of education Sister Sharon Slear arrived at the school 18 years ago, there was only traditional undergraduate coursework offered for potential teachers. The School Sister of Notre Dame saw possibilities for vast amounts of growth.

Gradually, the department added master's and doctorate programs, along with weekend undergraduate courses under the Sister Sharon's watch. In recent years, it has become a player in education among higher education institutions.

The boldest step yet was taken Oct. 30 when the Baltimore college's board of trustees voted to establish a school of education starting for the fall of 2009. Notre Dame expects to invest \$3.8 million in the school over five years, which should be offset by tuition and fundraising efforts.

"When I came, we had the undergrad and probably five faculty members and about 17 undergrad students," said the School Sister of Notre Dame. "At the time there was not a demand for teachers."

The school is unfurling several different new programs, including the Catholic Teacher Leader master's track, which hopes to develop leaders in practitioner-based learning. Another master's program called Liberal Studies is designed for post-baccalaureate students wishing to extend their learning through an interdisciplinary approach. A five-year bachelor of arts and masters in teaching degree with four certifications will start next fall as well. Five graduate studies programs are expected to be introduced by 2013.

There is now a shortage of teachers in Maryland. Notre Dame, one of the largest independent teacher education providers in the country, was the first independent college or university in Maryland to be fully accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. Sister Sharon estimated that there are currently 200 undergraduate students and 2,000 pursuing graduate studies.

Notre Dame hopes it can diminish the large void in education.

“Just as the college has stepped forward to address critical workforce shortages in nursing and pharmacy, we are expanding our education programs to meet the need for educators throughout Maryland,” Dr. Mary Pat Seurkamp, the school’s president, said.

All admissions for the school will be handled through the school, Sister Sharon said. The school of education will continue to operate out of Gibbons Hall on campus as it hires eight new faculty members, five new staff members an associate dean and a chair of the school.

“We feel very excited because we feel what we’ve been doing has been leading up to this,” Sister Sharon said. “We really see this as really appropriate for what we need to do in the future.”