

2013 CSOTTE Fall Teacher Education Conference

“Forging the Future: Shaping Teachers and Students through
Collaboration and Research”

Title of Session: One University’s Story of Online Teacher Education:
Reflecting Back and Projecting Forward

Preparation Programs: LeTourneau University and University of Houston – Clear
Lake (UHCL)

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*One University’s Story of Online Teacher Education:
Reflecting Back and Projecting Forward*

Online education continues to increase its landscape in higher education (Lin, Dyer, & Guo, 2012), and as a result, online degree programs and distance education classes continue to grow in popularity and credibility. In addition, it is estimated that 90% of colleges in the United States offer online courses (Olson & Werhan, 2005) and that one in ten faculty members teach online (Conrad & Pedro, 2009). With this growth, however, comes the need to ensure program effectiveness. As technology continues to expand, i.e. Web 2.0 tools and applications for smart phones and tablets, what was current and/or cutting-edge five years ago is no longer. The same can be said for course content, as teacher education, if it is to continue to be effective and reflect best-practices, must be consistently evaluated and “upgraded” in order for our students—in this case EC – 12 teacher candidates—to be as well-prepared as possible to enter 21st century classrooms.

In 2007, one group of teacher educators was charged with researching the possibility of building upon an existing, extremely effective traditional teacher preparation program with the goal of creating a totally online counterpart for those individuals seeking an undergraduate education degree and Texas teacher certification. One of the reasons for this challenge was to make available post-

secondary educational opportunities for the non-traditional student, e.g., those with families, work, or other responsibilities that would prohibit them from attending face-to-face classes at institutions that were often prohibitively distant from their place of residence. Distance education offers this opportunity and with a solid content base from which to expand, months of labor-intensive research, and much introspective soul searching, the challenge was accepted. In 2008, this university's first fully-online EC-8 teacher preparation / degree program was launched, followed in 2009 by an online M.Ed. program—which was the added challenge following the outstanding reception and success of the undergraduate program.

Five years later and with the program still going strong, those who played a major role in creating these programs and who have continued to be involved—both directly and indirectly—have realized that in order for growth and success to continue, a focused and purposeful examination into specific program components will hopefully yield information that can be used to further enhance and develop a consistently highly-ranked online teacher preparation program (SuperScholar Smart Choice 25 Best Online Colleges, 2014).

In the original program development, the areas of focus included: 1) Overall program design—We wanted to be competitive with competitor programs that were available to individuals desiring teacher certification; 2) Curriculum components—We wanted to assure that our course content was reflective of current best-practices without overlap or redundancy among courses and assignments; 3) Effective instruction—We wanted to ensure, to the best of our ability, our instructors reflected the same passion, student-centeredness, and necessary for effective teacher educators; 4) Content delivery / Availability—We wanted to provide our product in such a way that it was accessible to anyone anywhere who had the required Internet access and the desire to become a well-prepared, fully-equipped teacher. Our program evaluation focuses on these same identified areas and adds the aspect of student success as measured by state certification test scores and, to the extent possible, numbers of students who completed our program and are currently practicing teachers.

The concept of “backward design—beginning with the end in mind” (Wiggins and McTigue, 1998) was used as the reconstructive model for the initial online program development, and without interruption will be a large part of the framework for this project. Our desired end-product continues to be a program that effectively equips those desiring teacher certification to be able to enter the classroom and schools as well-prepared, confident teachers and administrators, with the addition of the online Master’s in Education program.

In conclusion, this presentation will share snapshots of our journey as we continue to model the necessity and value of teachers and teacher educators as lifelong learners. Audience input is encouraged and welcomed as we collaboratively share experiences and ideas to support our common endeavors.

References

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One University's Story of Online Teacher Education: Reflecting Back and Projecting Forward

From Humble Beginnings.....

The Challenge

- To create a totally online teacher preparation program
 - Initial resistance to gradual acceptance
 - Soul-searching resulted in philosophy shifting
- Designing the plan and setting reasonable goals

The Process

- Determining program and course content involved extensive research
- Implementing Wiggins and McTighe concept of “backward design”
- Digital Natives vs Digital Immigrants as a major technology consideration
 - Team-based thinking and planning “outside the box”
 - Creating quality web-based learning experiences
 - Identifying and equipping faculty

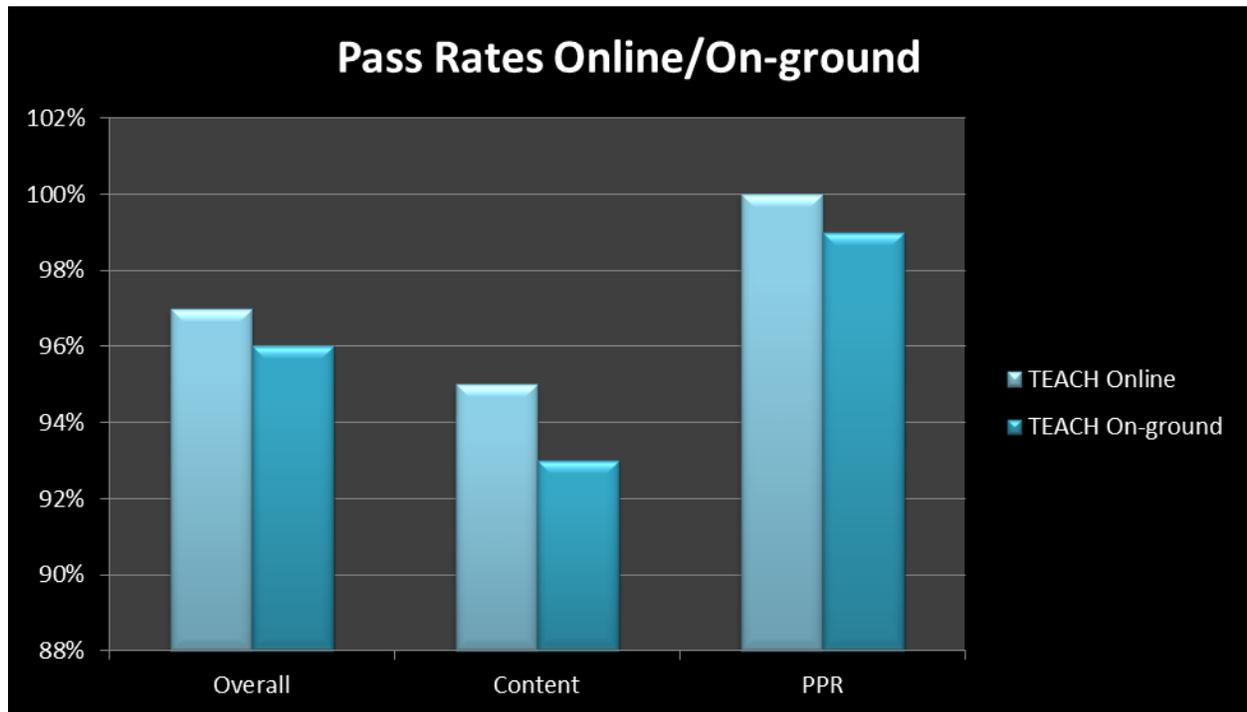
The Product: A slate of fully online EC-6 and 4 – 8 Teacher Education courses

The Implementation: Fully in place and operational within 18 months

Determining Effectiveness.....

The State of the Program—Determining Effectiveness:

- Statistics are determined on 800+ On-ground TEACH students since the inception of the program at LETU and 105 online TEACH students that have completed the program.
- Out of the 105 online students, 54 have been recommended, 22 Finishers, and 29 All But Clinical.
- 5 of the 29 ABC are completing student teaching or internship this semester
- Of the 22 Finishers, 14 have not tested at the state level
- Of the 29 ABC, 13 have not tested at the state level
- I am in the process of contacting students regarding their testing and we are re-evaluating our state permission testing process.



Future Directions....

Going and Growing

- Fully online Master’s in Education soon followed the undergrad teacher ed. program
 - Teaching and Learning (bachelor-degreed student seeking teacher certification)
 - Ed. Admin. (bachelor-degree student seeking principal certification)
 - Curriculum and Instruction (bachelor-degreed student seeking curriculum leadership education)
- Program Review
 - Design review, course alignment, success in state competencies
 - Proposal of additional courses and program components
- Course Reviews
 - Biggest addition to our original backwards design is “technology rich for learning (our students) and for teaching tools/strategies (their students)”

