



## College of Education

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Research Highlights of Current Faculty Projects

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### CTER OnLine: Evaluating an Online Master of Education Program

CTER OnLine, a master of education program developed in 1998 at the College of Education, is geared toward practicing K-16 teachers and administrators interested in issues concerning curriculum, technology, and education reform. CTER graduated its first set of 26 students in May 2000, all of whom continue as elementary and secondary teachers or school district technology coordinators. College researchers Sandra Levin and James Levin, instrumental in developing the program, together with Gregory Waddoups, now of Brigham Young University, conducted an evaluation of CTER OnLine over its first two years. They identified five groups of stakeholders, including university, college, and department level administration, college faculty, and students. Stakeholder concerns were referenced in the surveys, interviews, and observations used to measure program effectiveness and the development of program capacity for long-term viability.

#### What this research tells us:

CTER Online weaves together multiple technologies, including web pages, commercial and custom communication tools, and electronic portfolios, along with multiple learning approaches, to create a multifaceted learning environment. Online asynchronous discussions create time flexibility for students. Opportunities for practicing teachers to implement coursework in their own classroom practice, simulations on sensitive topics, various grouping arrangements, and the use of "ePortfolios" of course work all demonstrate incorporating current educational theories on learning into practice. Student course ratings were high. Student technical skill self-ratings rose, and attitudes toward technology remained positive. Students came to value lecture-based instruction much less, to appreciate their own abilities to budget time and prioritize, and to believe more in the effectiveness of the web. Informal support groups, strong communication channels, ongoing feedback mechanisms, and program flexibility appear to be reasons why no students have withdrawn from the CTER Online program to date. Faculty reported satisfaction in either implementing ideas based on their own technology interests or in developing new technology teaching skills, though this may matter less as more faculty members with research interests in other domains become involved. Faculty discovered that adult learners in online courses are more willing to challenge faculty members; students' ability to "shop around" for courses and programs may affect the future directions of universities and of education. Whether popular interest in online education would translate into a viable online program was unknown initially, but CTER Online applications and inquiries have run high. University trustees have addressed economic viability issues by establishing a higher professional tuition rate for online courses. Departments have made key efforts to increase instructional capacity, supporting new course offerings and resolving new issues about teaching load, salary, and incentives. Institution-wide resource combinations have provided crucial resources, including technology skill development, student services, faculty collaboration, and teaching assistants.

#### What this research suggests for online teacher education:

- ⇒ Use introductory group-building techniques to incorporate students into a larger online program.
- ⇒ Maintain students' sense of belonging to the group by designing interactivity in courses; offering substantial and timely technical, administrative, and social support; and providing easy access to program administrators.
- ⇒ Use multiple methods, formats, activities, assessment methods, program evaluation techniques, and learning contexts to enable students to acquire a range of understandings and ideas.
- ⇒ Employ project-based course activities that make explicit connections between new ideas/knowledge and students' existing teaching context.
- ⇒ The "student" role is one of many for online learners. Consider the constraints placed upon student involvement and maintain the flexibility that attracts students to the convenience of online programs.
- ⇒ For all educational programs using new media, build in systematic guidance and corrective feedback.

#### To learn more about this research:

Levin, S., Levin, J., & Waddoups, G. (2000). *CTER OnLine: Evaluation of an online master of education focusing on curriculum, technology and education reform*. Available: [http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ed-Online/cter/about\\_CTER/morecter.html](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ed-Online/cter/about_CTER/morecter.html).

#### We invite your response...

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