Preparing Teachers for Digital Distance Education
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ABSTRACT

Teachers today are required to integrate technology into their lessons at an ever-escalating rate. Teacher education institutions must prepare their students to teach in tomorrow’s classrooms. Today’s teacher education students will teach their students as they are taught in their universities today. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Task Force on Technology and Teacher Education, a group of educators from diverse institutions and backgrounds, was assembled to consider ways that NCATE can provide leadership and support initiatives to meet the technology challenge facing teacher education institutions. The first recommendation of this Task Force was to stimulate more effective uses of technology in teacher education programs.

Teachers in K-12 classrooms have an obligation to prepare their students for a successful transition from the college classroom into the real world of the 21st Century. The convergence of high-speed communication and Internet-based digital technologies is creating new platforms for the delivery of instruction. The University of Virginia’s (UVA) Curry School of Education has developed an outstanding model for this recommendation through it’s course offering entitled Introduction to Digital Distance Education. For the past two summers, the course has been offered simultaneously in a classroom at the Curry School, connected to a classroom at the UVA School of Continuing and Professional Studies Northern Virginia Center.

Learners in the class are increasingly able to use a wide variety of methodologies for collaborative education, such as streaming video and audio, online discussion forums, interactive simulations, and case evaluation. The course provides an introduction to these technologies for application in synchronous and asynchronous learning environments in education, business, and government. The course focuses on the proper application of these technologies to enhance the interactive learning experience of the students. The “new” role of the instructor is addressed, as the shared learning experience provided through the use of advanced digital technologies requires the teacher to become part of
the learning experience as a participant along with the students in the class. Practical examples of these instructional technologies are provided, including videoconferencing, electronic whiteboards, courseware tools, and discussion groups. Internet-based collaborative connections between UVA classrooms in Northern Virginia and the grounds in Charlottesville are used to model the process and provide practical experience for the student in the class.

Learning activities that have proven beneficial during the course include Web-Quest development, student reports applying chapter material from the text (Peloff, R. and Pratt, K. (1999). *Building learning communities in cyberspace*. Jossey-Bass), use of digital technologies for teaching the class and demonstrating through application of material in the class website (http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/curry/class/edlf/589_idde/).

The presentation will focus on critical course development and delivery issues that the authors have discovered. Summary recommendations will be presented to help those interested in providing similar course experiences.