Best Practices for Developing an Online Master of Arts in Teaching Program

Abstract: Distance education and online course work present unique challenges for delivering academic programs to non-place bound student enrollments. The programmatic dynamics of a Master of Arts in Teaching degree program, requiring K-12 to post-secondary linkages further complicates development and delivery of teacher education programs in the online format. Best practices for online program development and teacher education program guidelines should be explored as a blueprint for developing, implementing and evaluating online teacher education programs.

Online Program Development
My institution has successfully developed award winning online programs, in less than a decade we have experienced enrollment growth, while maintaining quality standards and retained students at an average rate of more than 80% per term. Much of our success resides in the strategic decision to use several best practice in online learning frameworks as a guide for developing and implementing the programs. The best practices have served as a clear pathway for anticipating problems, reaching consensus on difficult matters and for articulating our direction for the programs during the developmental phases. This roundtable is a work in progress to open a dialog around the potential for aligning best practices with program standards as a means for developing an online teacher education program.

Aligning Best Practices with Program Standards
Throughout the development stage of planning a distance education program, strategic decisions are critical to successful program implementation. In the case of a Master of Arts in Teaching degree program, planning for online delivery of the program must take in to consideration development of the course work, the field component, supervising teacher dynamics, school administrator involvement, account for complex monitoring and communication between sponsoring schools and colleges offering the programs online. This complex scenario combined with the potential for a student body spread across the country, working in wide range of schools and educational settings poses a number of challenges for the students, host school, supervising teachers, college faculty and accrediting bodies.

Identifying best practices in online and distance education is a sound way to guide good strategic decisions in many aspects of planning an online program. During the roundtable a discussion on best practices and the extent to which they should serve as a guiding force or outline for policies that shape online programs will be discussed. Examples of regional accrediting agencies, distance learning organizations and professional groups will be shared with participants.

The standards for teacher education programs in my state will be shared as an example of programmatic expectations. A planning matrix that we developed at my institution outlines best practice principles relative to the state standards will be shared with participants and discussion around the programmatic requirements being met in an online format will be discussed in relationship to matrix plan document.