The Educational Technology Minor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

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Until recently, the education program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) has not been unlike many teacher preparation programs throughout the United States. For example, a recently released report from the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that less than a quarter of new teachers reported feeling well prepared to use technology in their teaching. Additionally, the CEO Forum on Education and Technology concluded that many teachers do not know how to put the new gadgetry to good use. The Forum noted that many college teaching programs are ‘failing to train the next wave of teachers adequately.’ K. Kay, executive director, observed that “We’ve got to make sure we have a strategy in place in school to bring teachers up to speed to use this technology and make sure we don’t graduate another teacher from a school of education who doesn’t know how to use technology in the classroom” (Mendels, P. New York Times, 2/24/99).

Recognizing the need to address the issue of improved technology training for pre-service teachers, UWSP introduced the Learning Technologies minor in 1998. The minor, the first of its kind in the state of Wisconsin, is designed to prepare future teachers to integrate technology in their classrooms and to become technology leaders in their schools. The first cohort of pre-service teachers to complete the minor will student teach and begin the search for a teaching position during the 2001-2002 school year.

Concurrent with the development of the minor, the Dean of UWSP’s College of Professional Studies worked closely with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to institute a Learning Technologies certification category for elementary teachers. The new certification became effective at approximately the same time as the UWSP minor passed through university governance. The DPI is currently considering a proposal to expand the certification to K-12.

The program at UWSP is noteworthy in that it offers a 24-25 credit inter-disciplinary minor in contrast to the single educational technology course offered in many teacher education curriculums. In addition, our program differs from many in that we require that our pre-service teachers begin working with students early in their education, their first experience coming as early as the freshman year. We are convinced that this early and extended field experience serves our students and ultimately their students well. Moreover, the minor contains a strong technical component, including required courses in computing fundamentals, the rudiments of computer programming, and computer hardware and network architecture. We believe that the extensive integration and field experience and the strong technical background provide graduates with the confidence, credentials, and the credibility necessary to serve as effective technology leaders in their schools and in their districts.

The authors developed the Learning Technologies minor and co-teach the minor-specific courses, the curriculums of which are guided by the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Information Literacy and the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS). The paper/presentation will describe the minor, the content of the minor-specific courses, provide excerpts from the field experiences, and share the insights gleaned from the experience of our students and graduates working as pre-service technology teachers in the K-12 school environment.