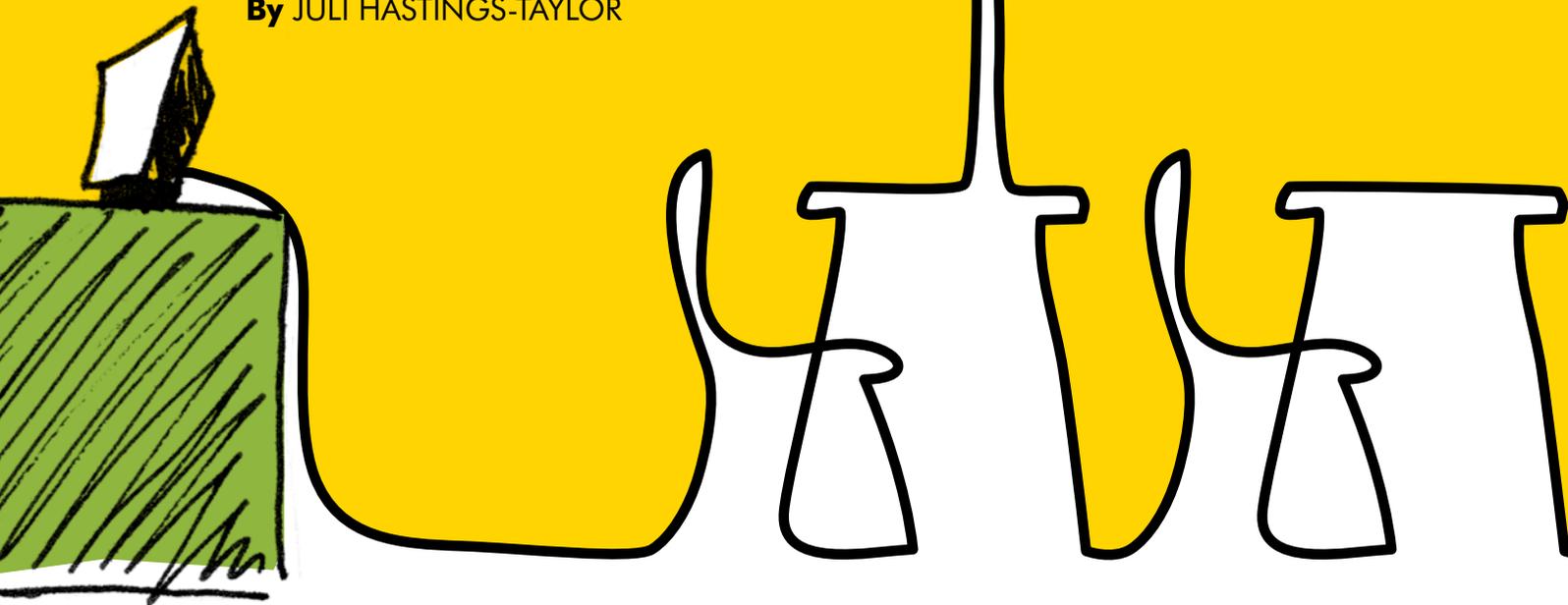


# Traditional Yet Progressive: A

By JULI HASTINGS-TAYLOR



**DEVELOPING THE CTET CURRICULUM TO BE DELIVERED ONLINE WASN'T JUST A FLY-BY-NIGHT DECISION. AS ANY MAJOR CHANGE CAUSES A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES, BELIEFS AND GOALS, SO DID THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING CTET COURSES FOR ONLINE DELIVERY.**

**A**t the University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout), students can work toward earning a Bachelor of Science in Career, Technical Education and Training (CTET) without leaving home. Since 1918, UW-Stout has been a pioneer in preparing quality instructors for CTET environments. In the summer of 2006, the School of Education put a new twist on postsecondary career and technical teacher preparation; it began offering the 35-credit professional core of the degree online. Using technology for teaching is one way the program embraces UW-Stout's special designation as Wisconsin's Polytechnic University.

The bachelor's in CTET is a degree completion program for individuals with associate degrees or technical diplomas hoping to teach in technical and community colleges or serve as trainers in business and industry. The program requires 124 credits to gradu-

ate. Transfer students earning the degree must complete a minimum of 32 semester credits through UW-Stout which they achieve by completing the required core of courses online. Students may continue to transfer general education courses from other institutions throughout the duration of the program. Learners may pursue the degree on a full-time or part-time basis.

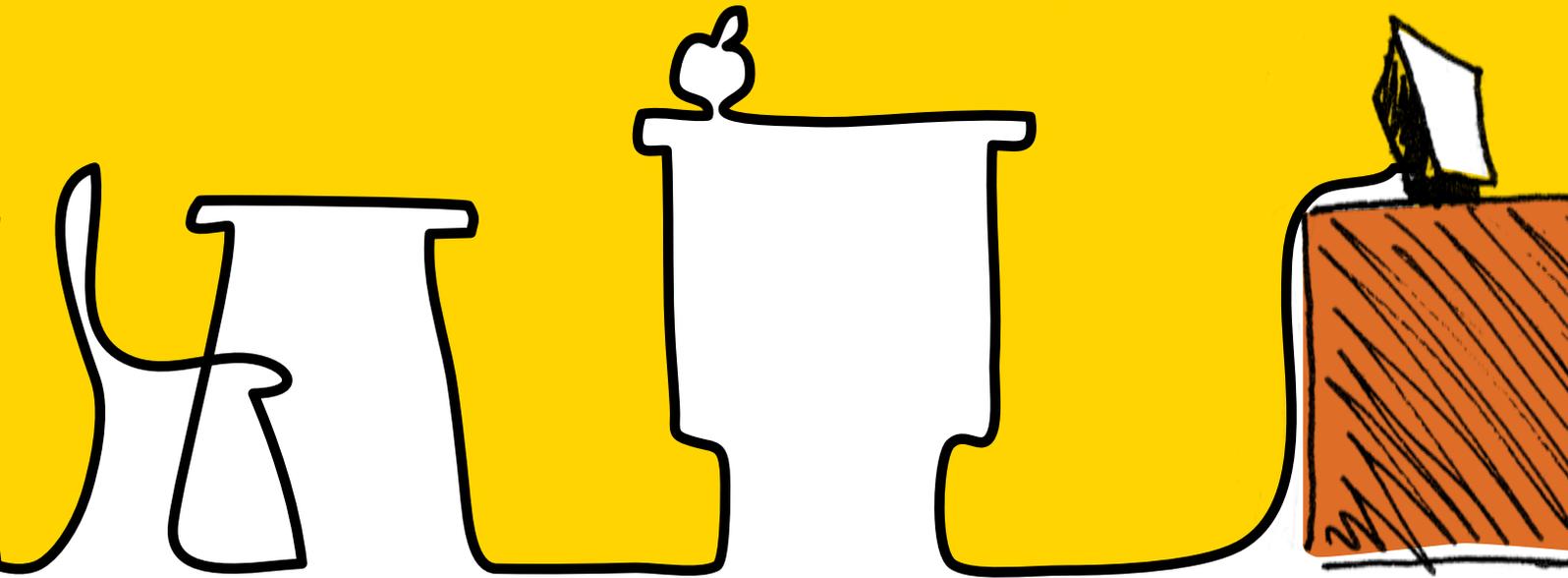
The online cohort is set up to be completed in two years, but the timeframe will differ depending on the number of courses students transfer in, and the number of credits taken each semester. Graduates teach in diverse postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) areas such as auto body repair and maintenance, welding, building construction, food service, accounting, supervisory management, computer networking systems, and dental assisting and hygiene.

As technical college programs must be responsive to the needs of the regions they serve, the CTET program must also be responsive to the needs of teachers. The program brings individuals from these diverse technical areas into a community of active learners focused on enhancing their teaching practices. The program targets

Juli Hastings-Taylor

is program director of the Bachelor of Science in Career, Technical Education and Training at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. She can be contacted at [taylorju@uwstout.edu](mailto:taylorju@uwstout.edu).

# Twist on Teacher Preparation



individuals who are currently teaching in technical and community colleges and need to obtain their bachelor's degree. It is, however, also an attractive alternative certification option for secondary CTE teachers in many states. In addition, individuals who have worked in business or industry and now want to share their expertise through teaching at the postsecondary level pursue this degree.

Data from the 2005 Wisconsin Technical College System District Employment Report indicated that in the 2003-04 academic year, 8,270 of the 11,462 teaching faculty were part-time faculty. Teaching certification courses are included in the required professional core of classes within the CTET program which allows new and part-time teachers to prepare for their classroom roles and responsibilities. Being able to take classes without being in the classroom is frequently cited as a reason for choosing the new online degree completion option. The online format also allows students to balance the demands of work and family obligations more easily than either on-campus or weekend cohort learning can. A recent study conducted about the program revealed that 56 percent of online learners are female and 44 percent are male.

Developing the CTET curriculum to be delivered online wasn't just a fly-by-night decision. As any major change causes a critical examination of current practices, beliefs and goals, so did the process of developing CTET courses for online delivery. The program director believed it was important to maintain program integrity and uphold standards of quality that have been the backbone of the program for almost 90 years. Included in those standards are the rigor, relevance and relationship elements that have made the

bachelor's in CTET the premier program for postsecondary teacher preparation in Wisconsin. Below is a discussion of some of the key components of rigor, relevance and relationships that are fundamental to the quality of the online CTET program.

## Rigor in Online Courses

There is a common misperception that many online courses are easy; but courses in this program are rigorous and students are held accountable for meeting the learning objectives of the course, just as they would be in a face-to-face environment. Online courses do not have to be seen as an easy alternative to traditional delivery methods. Mark Puig, a Chippewa Valley Technical College instructor in computer networking and a participant in the degree-completion program, is excited about being a member of the online cohort because he is able to participate remotely. However, he says, "Just because online courses are convenient, they are not easy."

Learners in the online CTET cohort over the past three semesters reported that the course content is rigorous. More than 96 percent of learners said the assignments and discussions encouraged them to think critically and that there was an open environment which allowed them to voice their opinions and ask questions. Among the strategies used are question prompts from CTET instructors which ask learners to elaborate on the topics, issues or problems that are discussed.

## Relevant Course Content

One of the challenges of teaching online is learner disengagement

# Program Development, Implementation and Evaluation:

in the course content.

Instructors need to recognize and make accommodations for individual learning processes and styles so that learners become engaged and stay engaged in the online course content. Instructors in the CTET program have learned that every participant has his or her own learning curve for “learning how to learn online.”

Before each course begins, learners are provided with a variety of electronic resources which offer tips and strategies for success in online learning. Learners are reminded of those strategies throughout the assignment documents and as part of feedback on discussions and assignments. In addition, CTET instructors deliver online content using a variety of delivery tools and techniques to accommodate learner differences. Many instructors use Camtasia Studio and Audacity to provide audio feedback on assignments and create online mini-lectures or podcasts, in addition to presenting content in various written formats. Instructors also pay close attention to the amount and quality of contributions to online discussion boards and encourage learners to apply their past experiences to the theories and context of the course.

A 2002 report suggested that a pitfall in online learning environments occurs when learners disengage because instructors fail to contextualize learning activities. Ninety-two percent of CTET cohort learners said they are more engaged in online classrooms when they can apply what they are learning. CTET learners are often given options for completing some assignments which allows them opportunities to be creative and to customize the course to fit their background, experience and learning needs.

## Online Relationships

Perhaps the most critical component to success for online learners is the relationships that develop in the online environment. Because technology itself does not promote interaction, human interactions in online environments must be shaped and nurtured. Therefore, instructors in the CTET program carefully design and plan activities that will encourage and support learner interactions to ensure learner success. Instructors in CTET believe that it is important to establish personal relationships and begin forming the community of learners before the online course begins.

One technique learners appreciate is when in-

If you are considering developing or participating in an online program like the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Bachelor of Science in Career, Technical Education and Training program, here are some elements to consider.

## Program Development

Do the program developers have experience in distance learning philosophies and techniques? Consider asking what or how much experience the course facilitator has in applying distance education learning methodologies. It takes skill and finesse to develop and deliver effective online learning experiences, not just converting and offering face-to-face classes for online environments. If you are considering developing online learning, is there sufficient time to construct an online class? Does the program have a systematic plan for the development and use of various materials and methodologies? Do sufficient resources, including economic, design expertise and labor exist to assist you in your endeavors? If the answer is yes, you will be able to build stable and effective online programs.

If any of these elements are lacking, you might have trouble during the developmental phase. If there is not sufficient economic support to allow faculty the time they need for the developmental phase, the course might not have all the elements necessary for a truly effective learning experience. Preparing online learning requires well-planned, organized and structured activities

Jodi Olmsted

is academic staff with the University of Wisconsin-Stout's online Bachelor of Science in Career, Technical Education & Training program. She can be reached at [olmstedjo@uwstout.edu](mailto:olmstedjo@uwstout.edu).

# Lessons Learned at the University of Wisconsin-Stout

that actively engage learners in the process of discovering answers during exposure to various educational processes. If the individual or individuals developing online courses do not have the support of an instructional design specialist who can assist in transitioning various course experiences from face-to-face formats to online learning, the course delivery might not be smooth or effective for the facilitator or learner alike.

Finally, the transition to online programming and course delivery depends on having the human capital necessary for offering the various content areas. No one person is a content expert for all courses required within online programming; it is imperative to the success of any online endeavor that faculty and staff employ teamwork and collegiality during the development of required program coursework.

## Implementation

Once courses are developed, it is important to consider piloting them to assure that all the elements of the course are functioning correctly. Small pilot groups can provide formative input for the course facilitator regarding what is and isn't working as part of their learning experience. For example, directions for an assignment or an evaluation rubric might be unclear. Correcting these design flaws and providing clarity prior to the full course running can help avoid potential problems.

As a learner, you have an opportunity to give crucial input into the design process, which can ultimately enhance your own learning experience. The intrinsic rewards of this process can be immense while knowing that you have shaped a program or course offering for those participants who follow. As future teacher educators, it can be extremely satisfying to experience the various

By Jodi Olmsted

processes firsthand, and to recognize that they are the same processes you will undertake during your own course development or teacher preparation.

Ultimately, implementing programs over time, such as launching one or two courses each semester, can help avoid potential problems. Modification and improvement to online materials can be completed during these phases. Realistically, program cost-effectiveness is enhanced using online coursework. Other types of offerings, such as old-fashioned, spiral bound, or correspondence courses, can be phased out of use.

## Evaluation

A key to sustainability is the evaluation of program data over time. It is important to consider gathering and analyzing data for each cohort that participates in online learning programs or courses. National benchmarks can be used as evaluative tools, including quantifiable evaluation of course grades and grade point averages for courses in the program core content areas. This assures that learners are performing at or above national standards for a similar course offered in a traditional, face-to-face format. Qualitative data also provides a sharp focus on the development of deeper learning through participant comments. This data is collected through a series of reflective papers and activities built into the online coursework, and reviewed by the program director and course facilitators in an ongoing, evaluative process.

Another key element to consider relating to the evaluation of programs and courses is a focus on the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning experience.

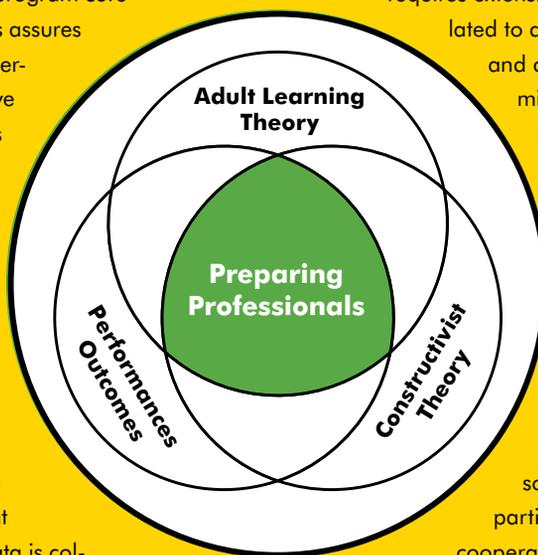
Programs and courses should self evaluate following guidelines established for quality in online learning environments. If it is identified that there are missing elements, or that the program or course does not meet quality guidelines, modifications to the program or course need to be made to assure that learners are receiving high quality educational experiences. Learners have the unique experience of observing and applying these similar skills in their own educational area for skill development.

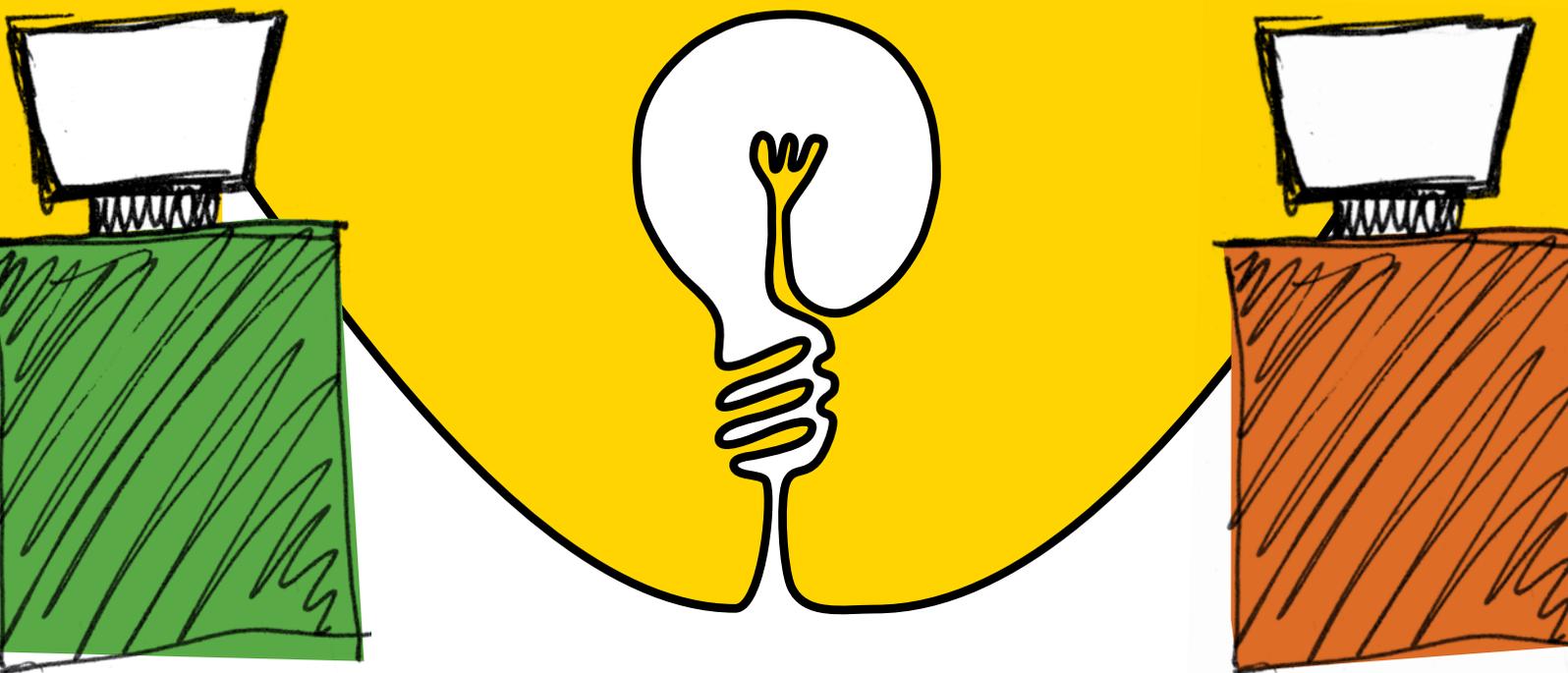
## A Theoretical Framework for Teacher Educators

Preparing professionals in our online teacher preparation program relies on a theoretical framework merging the concepts of adult and constructivist learning theories with performance outcomes. Online learning encompasses these three bisecting concepts.

It is important to note that online learning is not for everyone. If an individual requires extensive guidance related to defining coursework and assignments, they might be best served participating in traditional face-to-face courses. Online learners need to be self-directed and motivated, able to critically think and creatively problem solve, while actively participating in various cooperative, team-based activities—all within a given time-

frame for course completion. If individual teacher educators do not meet these criteria, they might find the online environment challenging. Additionally, if these are difficult skills for online learners to develop, they might also not be suited to become educators themselves as these key skills are required of all teachers. **T**





structors call each participant on the telephone to personally welcome them to the course, provide a brief course overview like that described in the welcome e-mail, and answer any initial questions participants may have before they dive into the first assignment. When instructors do not get to speak personally to each participant, they leave a message on a telephone answering machine so that participants are able to put a voice to the name that will be on the other end of the computer. Depending on the duration of the course, another telephone interaction may be initiated by the instructor after a few units have been completed. Instructors find that such interactions encourage learners to ask questions and seek assistance later via e-mail or telephone when needed. In turn, learners report that the telephone calls influence their level of on-line engagement.

A recent study of UW-Stout's online CTET learners revealed that 100 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed on four key areas of instructor influence on learner engagement: instructors have high expectations of students; they want students to succeed; they challenge students to think in depth about topics; and students are more willing to participate in class when they feel that their instructor respects them. This data supports the fact that CTET instructors genuinely care about learners and learner success. Moreover, these qualities can shine through when online relationships are properly developed and fostered.

Learner-to-learner relationships in online environments are just as important as instructor-to-student relationships. Research shows that activities must facilitate collaboration as well as a sense of connection and membership among participants. Many CTET instructors assign group research projects or presentations in online environments. One online learner commented, "Classmates are interacting with each other and learning from one another also." Another stated, "I sense a closeness among those learning online." When students feel the instructor is engaged and interested, it is certainly more likely that the students will be engaged in return.

Better student engagement leads to a higher quality learning experience and, consequently, better prepared teachers.

Another critical component to learner success in online environments is the quality of and the timeliness of feedback. One learner commented, "The individual detailed feedback on assignments I have received from instructors has made me feel that I am important in their classes." Adult learners have an intrinsic need for prompt performance feedback. They need to know if they are "on the right track" before they complete the next assignment. Written feedback is commonly provided using the inking function and the pen tool on a table PC or using the comment feature in a word processing program. What is readily apparent is that students need specific feedback on their papers, regardless of the type of electronic feedback. Current research proves that using best practices does increase student engagement. In addition to instructor feedback, advice from peers is also essential. Peers exchange their views via postings on the discussion board. Many CTET instructors also require peer critique of draft projects and papers before learners submit the final version to the instructor.

### **Serving a Vital Need**

Indeed, as online learning opens up possibilities for degree advancement or completion to an entirely new group of learners, it offers great possibilities for collaboration, for both students and instructors. Software and technical support help make online degree-completion for teacher preparation both a viable and a rigorous option because it strengthens the conduit for better connectivity from place to place. Options like the new online bachelor's in CTET program serve the needs of learner and instructor and provide both quality and career-oriented teacher preparation; this has long been and continues to be UW-Stout's mission. **I**

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To learn more about the online cohort option, visit [www.uwstout.edu/programs/bsctet](http://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bsctet).