

PREPARING

CTE Leaders Online

BECAUSE OF THE HIGH QUALITY OF THE COURSES, THE COHESIVENESS OF THE COHORT MODEL AND CLOSE FACULTY SUPPORT, THE COMPLETION RATE FOR THE FIRST THREE COHORTS HAS BEEN MORE THAN 90 PERCENT—WHICH IS PHENOMENAL FOR ONLINE PROGRAMS.

By Bill Blank and Victor Hernandez

Like most institutions offering programs for career and technical educators, the University of South Florida (USF) has experienced the impact of changes in the field. Thirty years ago there were undergraduate and graduate programs in career and technical education (CTE) at every university in the Florida state system involving more than 50 full-time faculty. Over the years, support for such programs dwindled, faculty ranks shrunk, and some programs even disappeared. Today, there are about 10 full-time faculty statewide operating programs at only four institutions.

Since its inception in the late 1950s, USF (which now has 45,000 students on several campuses) has always had the largest career and technical program in Florida with as many as 12 full-time professors. Presently, there are three professors operating a master's degree and a doctoral program. Late in the 1990s, we came to terms with the reality of limited program resources and the fact that the pool of prospective students had changed. To remain viable and relevant, we needed to rethink our efforts. To maximize available faculty resources, USF closed undergraduate teacher education programs in industrial education, technology education and business education.

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Concurrently, efforts were refocused on retooling the institution's graduate programs and serving an emerging pool of practitioners interested in part-time graduate education and online coursework. With institutional support and funding from an innovation grant, Career and Workforce Education (CWE) professors at USF pioneered online education with both graduate programs being offered online. Student satisfaction has been overwhelming and the institution is using online technology to help develop the next generation of leaders in the field.

The Online Master's Degree in Career and Technical Education

The master's program was renamed CTE, updated, and relaunched as an online program in 2003. A technology grant allowed the conversion of courses to an online format. A new cohort of 20 students is accepted each fall and completes the two-year (36 semester hours) program as a group. Participants are CTE teachers, leaders or support personnel in middle schools, high schools, technical institutes or community colleges. Those who aspire to leadership positions benefit from courses required for administrator certification, and there is an option for students interested in preparing for National Board Certification. The program is approved through the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Academic Common Market, and participants in SREB states pay Florida in-state tuition. Guiding Principles for Distance Teaching and Learning, developed by the American Distance Education Consortium, were used for online course design including: an emphasis on stand-alone units that are compatible with short bursts of learning, practical experiences, a variety of media, problem-based learning, and learning experiences based on interaction and collaboration. The program's online courses are based on relevant, contemporary outcomes appropriate for operating modern CTE programs. They also include a variety of learning resources such as streamed videos, government reports, journal articles, multimedia presentations, podcasts, Web sites, and selected book chapters.

To this end, the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is a valuable source of information for participants, who are required to join the Association and their state affiliate upon enrollment. Through the ACTE Web site and *Techniques* magazine, students keep abreast of legislative changes and current trends and issues in the field. Participants come to the Tampa campus three times each year for initial program orientation and start-up and wrap-up of courses. Most assignments are useful to participants in their programs. Examples include writing a letter to newspaper editors articulating the need for CTE, creating a marketing product for their program, and generating a detailed plan for enhancing their curriculum.

Participants submit a portfolio upon the completion of the program rather than taking a comprehensive examination. Because of the high quality of the courses, the cohesiveness of the cohort

model and close faculty support, the completion rate for the first three cohorts has been more than 90 percent—which is phenomenal for online programs. Feedback from graduates is facilitated through an anonymous survey and has been extremely positive. Here's a sample of a typical comment:

"I feel that this method is great for working professionals. The resources such as instructors, other cohort members and university sources are available if you need extra assistance, but the program was definitely beneficial when fitting it into a busy schedule."

Fredi Cary, assistant department manager of marketing and public relations at Learey Technical Center in Tampa, told *Techniques* that being able to earn her master's degree at her own pace through this distance learning format was a real draw. She worked full-time as a school career specialist while she was in the program (and held down another job too). But the hard work paid off. After she completed the program she got a promotion into a supervisory administrative position. She notes that the concepts she learned in USF's CWE program have been very applicable to her work, and she is using the projects and papers she developed while in the program in her new position. She adds that though she may have had some notion that the online format would be easier, that myth was quickly dispelled as soon as she entered the program.

"It is not easier just because it is online," she said.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PH.D. PROGRAM INVOLVES A CORE CURRICULUM ADDRESSING UNDERLYING ISSUES IN CWE, CORE RESEARCH PREPARATION, AND SPECIALIZATION TRACKS TO HELP PARTICIPANTS MEET THEIR INDIVIDUAL CAREER GOALS.

The Ph.D. in Career and Workforce Education

Considering the dramatic changes in the field over the past decade, it was evident the existing Ph.D. in Vocational Education at USF needed to be completely redesigned to meet new demands and developments in the field. Thus, the program was put under moratorium for a few years before its reactivation in the fall of 2006. The program name was changed in the spring of 2006 to Career and Workforce Education, and coursework was updated to reflect contemporary issues and needs in the field. The Ph.D. in CWE is a research degree that provides professionals in the field with the preparation needed to address important research questions related to the planning, organization, delivery and evaluation of systems and components connecting education, work and economic devel-

opment in the CWE continuum. Program graduates typically seek positions involving faculty research and teaching in universities in CWE-related areas (e.g., adult education, human resources, CTE); research and administrative positions in state and national workforce education agencies; research and other policy and planning positions within school districts; and institutional research, teaching and leadership positions in community and technical colleges.

The structure of the Ph.D. program involves a core curriculum addressing underlying issues in CWE, core research preparation, and specialization tracks to help participants meet their individual career goals. The goal is for students to gain the preparation that best fits their career objectives and previous experience in CWE settings. The core preparation in CWE provides the shared principles, understandings and focus for program participants. Students in the program take 18 credit hours of coursework with complementary emphasis on the rationale for career and workforce education, curriculum and instructional concepts and practices supporting CWE, variations in the implementation of CWE systems, and evidence supporting the impact of CWE on student outcomes. Based on individual interests, each student selects a specialization track that clearly builds upon the core emphasis in CWE. The selected specialization track allows students to further their expertise in an area of interest in the CWE continuum.

The following tracks represent a sample of potential areas

of specialization: Cognitive and career development associated with students and programs grounded in CTE in secondary schools; workforce education in community/technical colleges and the implications for economic development; education and training in the workplace/community; management and applications of instructional technology in CWE context and the impact on teaching and learning; and workforce organization and economic development. Other specialization tracks can be configured as needed to meet individual student goals.

A strong research preparation is facilitated through a core of research courses supporting the completion of dissertation work. The doctoral program builds upon the lessons learned from our experience delivering the online master's degree program and features online coursework and a cohort approach to program participation. Depending on individual areas of concentration, it is possible for doctoral students in the program to complete the majority of the coursework online complemented with on-campus orientation sessions. Similar to the master's program, the Ph.D. program's online component was designed following standards for online instruction, and is approved as an online degree for in-state tuition throughout the SREB consortium. By using an innovative online delivery format that offers students the education they need to succeed, USF is helping to cultivate the next generation of leaders in CTE. ■



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