

## **ADDRESSING THE TEACHER CERTIFICATION SHORTAGE THROUGH COLLABORATION AND DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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Teacher shortages are occurring across disciplines and across the entire nation. With statistics clearly indicating the trend to continue, an effort was begun in Texas to address the supply/demand/preparation issues for Family and Consumer Sciences Education. A project was begun with leadership from the Texas Education Agency to establish a statewide inter-institutional system for providing web-based distance education courses for pre-service education. Ten universities that have teacher preparation programs in Family and Consumer Sciences created a system called the Family and Consumer Sciences Distance Education Alliance (FCS Alliance, [www.fcsalliance.org](http://www.fcsalliance.org)).

The Family and Consumer Sciences Distance Education Alliance has the following purposes: 1) to address the shortage of certified teachers for Family and Consumer Sciences Education; 2) to enhance existing campus-based teacher preparation programs by providing web-based course options to accommodate scheduling needs of campus-based students, customize courses reflecting content needs that are unique to teacher certification specializations, and offset infrequency of campus-based course offerings resulting from low enrollments and 3) to allow individuals otherwise unable to obtain family and consumer sciences certification due to schedule and proximity constraints to pursue a degree plan including a full complement of content specialization and discipline-specific professional development courses available through distance delivery arrangements cooperatively offered by institutions across the state.

Another function of the alliance was to develop a user-friendly registration process to allow students easy access and registration to all courses, regardless of the university offering the course. These processes were established collaboratively among the universities.

Forty-eight hours of family and consumer courses were developed through competitive grants funded through the Texas Education Agency to the universities. In addition, a grant from the USDA awarded to Texas Tech University, Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Women's University, provided for development of six additional courses to further enhance the teacher preparation courses offered through the Alliance.

The courses offered through the Alliance are based on competencies necessary to teach family and consumer sciences, as specified by the State Board for Educator Certification. Texas requires statewide proficiency exams as a component of all teacher certification programs, thus the program designed meets the standards as set forth by the State Board.

A course matrix, showing course offerings, was developed for dissemination and marketing. Courses are required to be offered through the Alliance once a year for the next five years. The matrix allows potential students, current students and advisors the opportunity to plan for completing certification in a timely manner.

Courses taught through the Alliance are evaluated through the process established by each university. In addition, USDA Challenge Grant participants developed assessments to collect data on students taking courses to meet the three basic purposes and ensure that the overall purposes of the Alliance are being achieved. These data are continually being collected as courses are taught.

The Alliance began work toward the goal of on-line instruction to enhance the certification process in 1999. Logistical supports for inter-institutional course sharing and development of 22 family and consumer science online courses have been completed through a collaborative process. Marketing the project is the next step and is currently being planned using a multi-faceted approach. Representatives of the Texas Alliance currently are working with the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance to develop a plan for offering online FCS teacher certification course nationwide