

Topic Area: Distance education in a Teacher Credential Program

Evaluation of Online Learning in Teacher Credential Program in Special Education

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Many students are choosing to complete their education online. Internet-based online programs are commonly available across the country (The Sloan Consortium, 2002). A review of the research suggests there is no significant difference between learning on-campus versus learning online (Caywood and Duckett, in press; Russell, 1999; Schulman and Simms, 1999). This study is an in-depth exploration of students taking classes online to complete a credential in special education in the state of California. The current number of active students completing their credential program online, at least in part, is approximately 600. This is 31% of the current students completing the program across the state. Research questions explored in this study include: 1) Who are the online students? 2) Why are they completing a teacher preparation program online? 3) What is their experience and how does it compare to their other learning experiences? 4) How do the online students compare to the on campus students on standard measures? 5) How do their learning experiences online relate to their current and future teaching experiences in the field? These questions are answered through a variety of data collection procedures, including: a) Review of the demographic data of those completing classes; b) Development and completion of an online survey instrument exploring background information and current online learning experiences, especially as they relate to credential standards; c) Telephone interviews from a random sampling of students across the state; and d) A comparison of standardized measures of those completing the program online versus on campus. By

January 2003 the collection of demographic data and an initial run of the online survey will be complete. A future exploration of case students is anticipated to help provide examples and an explanation to these figures. This comprehensive review of students and their experiences in learning online will help to elaborate upon the increasing phenomena and success of students taking classes and completing credential programs online.

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