

No Need For Travel Mugs: Earn Your Professional Development Credits Via Your Computer

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The Department of Teaching's Online Professional Development project is an outreach initiative that provides flexible delivery of learning for K-12 educators and cooperating teachers who supervise University of Northern Iowa (UNI) student teachers worldwide. Developing and delivering interactive Web-based professional development is designed to increase technological literacy of educators while demonstrating their increased understanding of subject matter and pedagogy.

All Web-based professional development activities focus on application and extension of basic classroom activities. Opportunities to revise, review, and reflect allow each participant to grow during the learning process.

The Web-based workshops cover a wide range of topics, including "Bullying in Schools: What Teachers, Administrators and Counselors Can Do", "Effective Classroom Management Strategies", "Teaching with a Multicultural Perspective" and "Inclusion: Strategies and Technologies For the Classroom," plus many more.

Participants from 38 countries, 37 states in the U.S., and 59 counties in Iowa have participated in UNI online professional development workshops. A large increase in the number of cooperating teachers who are signing up for online workshops, including teachers in overseas locations, in Department of Defense Schools and American International schools.

The program has proved a valuable professional development resource for teachers who, constrained by distance or time, cannot physically attend classes on campuses. Advantages include convenient hours, interactivity, and a highly collaborative environment. It's not like a class, where everybody talks fast and the bell rings at the end of the hour, and everyone gets in their car and drives home. Because this happens over 24 hours, seven days a week, classroom teachers have time to read what other teachers write via email postings, analyze case studies, and debate and discuss by logging in to the discussion several times weekly at hours that are convenient. Small group projects develop exemplary classroom lessons and teaching strategies for peer review and feedback, and help each participant think about how he/she might change what they're doing in the classroom.

The computer has become the classroom for an increasing number of cooperating teachers who supervise UNI student teachers, in a transformation that eliminates the boundaries of geography and scheduled class times. Computers provide virtual classrooms, cyber libraries and online chat areas where teachers can plug in to their continuing education from any location.

The ability to enroll in online workshops has opened the possibility of advanced training for time-starved K-12 teachers. Convenience of workshop activities and class discussions, combined with greater access to computers, has fueled the growth of the Department of Teaching's Professional Development Web-based offerings.

Frequently rural teachers are isolated from easily accessible professional development opportunities. One of the benefits of online classes is daily teacher-teacher and teacher-facilitator dialogue. Cross-cultural email discussions, lesson plan and data sharing, and polling/brainstorming activities encourage collaboration.

When asked, what did you like best about the online workshop, a Spanish teacher from Charles City, Iowa said:

“The virtual fellowshipping that occurred non-stop throughout the course. There were so many new ideas, and the variety of levels of expertise with which people entered the course made it even more challenging. I really felt for once that technology in the classroom was moving forward instead of standing still.”

The program, in its fifth year started in 1997 with 40 students and now has in excess of 675 teachers every semester. The attrition statistics are very low. Less than 10% of those that enroll drop the workshop before it is completed. The 2001 attrition stats include one unusual situation. 11 out of 22 in one online workshop did not complete the workshop because their superintendent paid their tuition and did not require each individual to turn in a grade or any demonstration of completion of the workshop. The instructor felt that it made a huge difference when individuals did not pay their own tuition and then request tuition reimbursement upon completion of the class.

Stats for summer 02 registrations asked: how did you hear about UNI online professional development workshops? Responses were: Word of mouth from a friend: (38.8%); Principal: (13.2%); AEA Tech Consultant: (5.9%); Curriculum Coordinator: (8.1%); Read about it on a listserv:(12.5%); Searched for online courses on the WWW:(9.6%); Other:(11.0%). The “Other” frequently had “email from a friend” or “UNI online newsletter” typed in as a response.

As an outreach effort for the University of Northern Iowa's Department of Teaching, the professional development workshops are facilitated by teachers, for teachers on topics that are vital to continued growth in teacher education. The online professional development instructors are veteran classroom teachers and leaders in their fields; they have spent years establishing their command of content and pedagogy.

The focus on expanding distance education programs is consistent with the University's mission of meeting the education needs of teachers around the world. Through the

program's growing online offerings, teachers now have more flexibility than ever to match professional development with their demanding teaching schedules.

The institution is committed to providing solutions for teachers that have a clear vision for using the Internet in new and innovative ways. UNI ProfDevOnline strives to be exemplary in its use of the Internet, and to increase the teachers' value to their districts.

For more information visit

<http://www.uni.edu/profdev/describe.html>