


Evaluating a Master's Degree Program via Distance Education

TTVN Conference
Galveston, TX
January 18, 2006

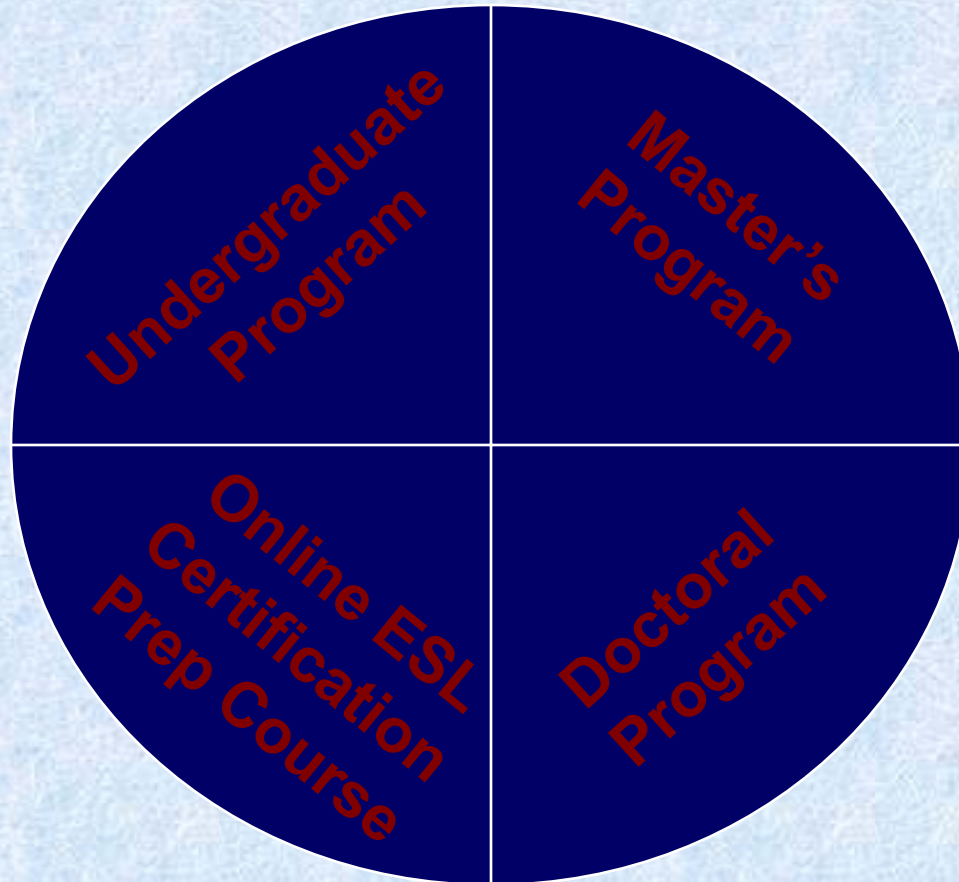
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Texas A&M University Bilingual Education Programs





- **Bilingual Certification Online Program**
 - PK-4
 - Texas Oral Proficiency Test (Spanish) included
- **ESL Certification Intermediate and High School Levels Online Program**



Texas A&M University Bilingual Education Programs

- **Undergraduate Program**
 - Currently 105 undergraduate students working toward teaching degree and certification in Bi/ESL
- **Master's Program**
 - First Master's Degree in Bilingual/ESL Education in the nation offered totally via distance
 - Served over 20 school districts since 1999
 - Currently delivers instruction to 4 different sites across Texas
 - Region VIII ESC, Mt. Pleasant
 - The University Center, The Woodlands
 - Blackland Research Center, Temple
 - TAMU, College Station






Texas A&M University Bilingual Education Programs

- **Doctoral Program**
 - PhD in Educational Psychology with a Specialization in Hispanic Bilingual Education
 - Prepares graduates for university positions or leadership positions in the field of Hispanic bilingual education
- **Online ESL Certification Course**
 - In partnership with the Office of Continuing Education & Public Outreach
 - Distance education course to prepare teachers for ESL certification
 - Started Phase I in the fall of 2004






Overview

- The TAMU Bilingual Program was awarded in September, 2000, three training grants to address the shortage and training of bilingual and ESL teachers working with English Language Learners.
 - \$3,260,000 from the USDOE was received to implement different kinds of training programs.
 - Dr. Rafael Lara-Alecio has been the project director and principal investigator for these three training grants.
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The Three Grants

- ***Nontraditional Field-Based Bilingual/ESL Teacher Education Project (Project NFBTE)***
 - ***Bilingual/ESL Educators Serving LEP Students in Texas (PROJECT BEST)***
 - ***Awareness, Advocacy & Development in Support of Learning for Limited English Proficient Students (PROJECT AAD)***
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The Grants

- All the grants focused on the use of computer technologies and field-based (school and community) methodologies as mechanisms for a diverse group of individuals to complete teaching degrees and obtain state certification.





Coursework

EPSY 610 Hispanic Bilingual Assessment and Monitoring Students

EPSY 611 Dual Language Programs Methodologies

EPSY 612 Content Area Instruction for Hispanic Bilingual Programs

EPSY 613 Spanish/English Biliteracy


EPSY 614 Bilingual Curriculum Development

EPSY 616 Spanish for Bilingual and Dual Language Classrooms

EPSY 636 Techniques of Research

EPSY 689 Qualitative Research

Additional coursework combines with these classes to equal 36 hours of study.





NOTES OF IMPORTANCE

- Faculty were committed to teach using high tech (Trans-Texas Videoconferencing Network, TTVN) and WebCT.
- Students in the program submitted their assignments using WebCT technology.
- Each graduate course included a CD with all the readings, assignments, and syllabus for the course.
- Distance between centers varied. For example, the distance between Galveston and Mt. Pleasant is almost 450 miles. Thanks to this technology, interaction took place in a matter of seconds.





Sites

- Coursework was delivered via interactive television (TTVN) and online format (WebCT) to six different sites:
 - Texas A&M University-Galveston,
 - The University Center at Woodlands, Houston,
 - TAMU-College Station,
 - Blackland Research Center in Central Texas,
 - Jacksonville Independent School District, Jacksonville,
 - Region Service Center VIII in Mt. Pleasant,






Sites

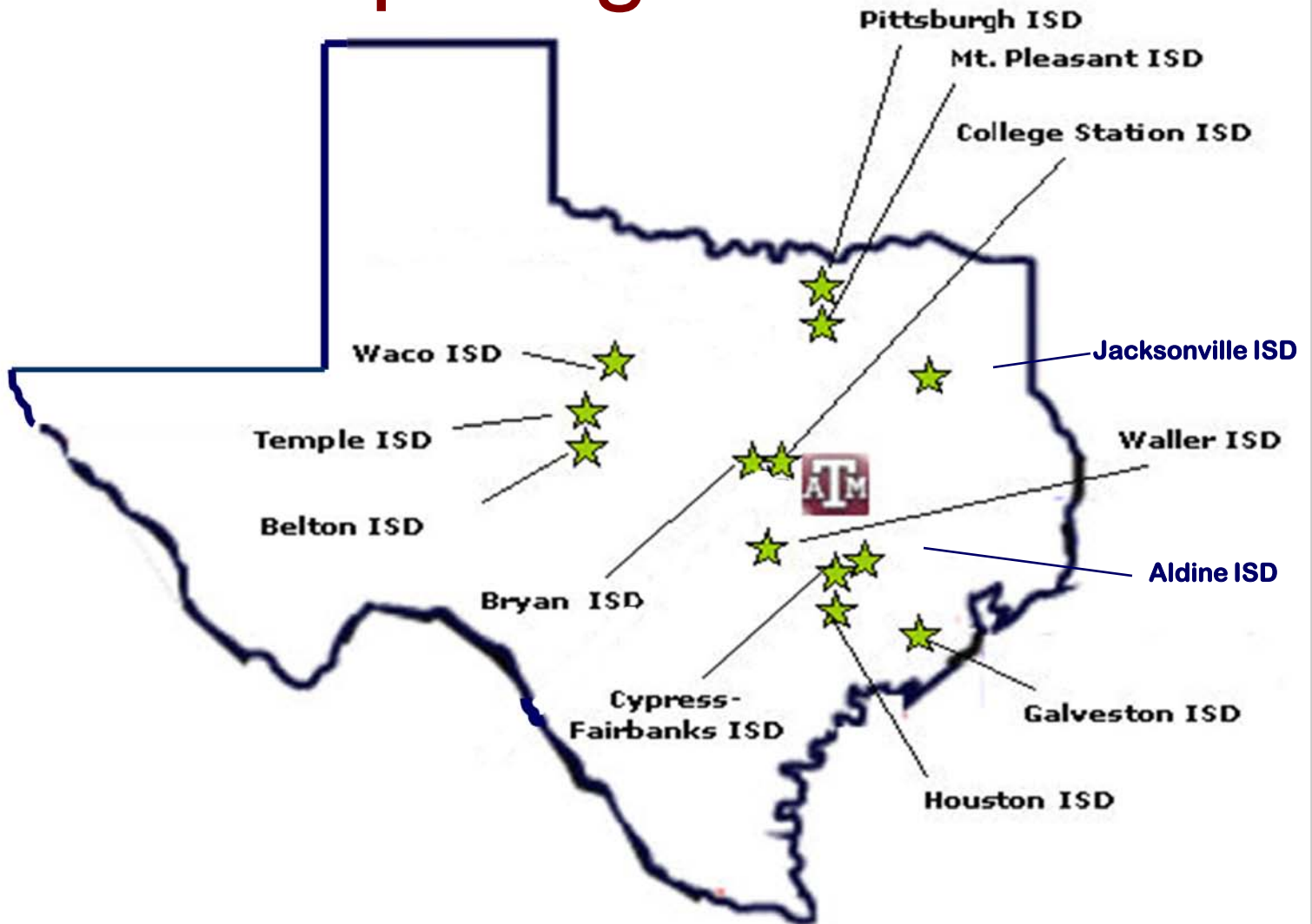
These distance locations were chosen to provide access for our underserved partner school districts.

Two of the districts are in federally recognized Empowerment Zones.

These facilities were equipped with Distance Learning Equipment with some in-kind contribution from Texas A&M University System and the College of Education at College Station.



Participating ISDs





Are we meeting the goal?

- The five-year goal was to graduate 40 students through the grant programs.
- To date, over 65 in-service teachers have been served in the project, and 59 students have received Master's Degrees. Some included certification in bilingual and ESL, if the student did not already have that certificate.






Research Question

- How effective was distance instruction delivered via electronic sources as perceived by the participants?






Design: Instrument

- The instrument was designed to determine how well the participants perceived the distance education program. It targeted the course content, objectives, assignments, and effectiveness of the professors.
 - The survey consists of 26 questions, 22 of which were to be answered using a Likert scale.
 - one question requested an estimated % effectiveness response
 - three questions were open-ended
 - the first eleven questions apply to the evaluation of any type of course
 - questions 12 through 25 apply to distance courses.
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Design: Sample

- Fifty-nine former distance students were contacted via email and requested to respond to an attached questionnaire.
 - Repeated emails, personal phone calls
 - Return rate was 44%.
 - Extent to receive replies: email attachments in PDF, word doc., pasted email, faxes, even over-the phone response
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Findings

- The students all **strongly agreed** that the course content, objectives, and assigned work including feedback was achieved via this technology.
 - The students were asked if taking the courses via distance education was a challenge. The students responded “**moderately disagree**” to this. They perceived the technology was a challenge at first, but once learned, they believed the coursework via distance education was not a challenge.
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Findings

- The students were able to connect with the professors and the assistants via the technology and felt **strongly** that they were treated with respect.
 - They **strongly agreed** that the course was taught effectively via this technology.
 - The students believed that via technology the procedures for grading were appropriate.
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Findings

- The students **strongly agreed** that the professors, via technology, provided opportunities for the students to demonstrate understanding of learning, ample time for participation, and provided feedback.
 - The students believed **strongly** that their interest was stimulated in the topics using the technology.
 - The students **strongly agreed** that the delivery mode allowed students to learn from each other.
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Findings

- Students tended to **moderately agree** that email was effective. They agreed more **strongly** with the interactive television and WebCT.
 - Students **strongly agreed** that they learned as much in this setting as they would have in a face-to-face classroom.
 - Students believed **strongly** that the professors and assistants had a command of the technology.
 - The students **agreed** that the various sites were visited amply by the professors.
 - The students **agreed** that the technology delivery was clear.
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Findings

- **65%** of the respondents indicated that they would not have been able to take the course, because they worked full time, had a family, and/or lived away from the main campus.






Comments about Distance from Students

- I would not have been able to take this coursework without the distance education. I cannot thank TAMU or Dr. Lara enough for the opportunity. It has already made a big difference in my life.
- I would not have taken these courses because the distance and time required to travel after working all day would have been unmanageable.
- Working full time (with two children) it would have been impossible to travel to CS regularly. I enjoyed becoming familiar with the participants from all the other sites and from different areas of the state. It was a great experience!





Findings

- **96%** of the students responded that a professor rotating sites was critical.
 - Some representative responses were:
 - *Yes, it is more motivating and makes you feel important to have the professor visit. The TTVN is wonderful, but face-to-face interaction with a professor occasionally is a nice change that keeps you more connected.*
 - *It was very motivating to have the professor at our site. It provides a time for more casual conversation and discussions about our students, our courses, and our challenges*
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Findings

- Students **rated the effectiveness** of this type of delivery, including electronic delivery and instruction, as **100%** effective.





Findings- Other Comments

- I was surprised at the level of class cohesiveness that was achieved, especially in the classes where the instructor was most comfortable with the delivery system.
- I truly enjoyed participating in the master's program through TTVN. I was not at a satellite site, but my experience was enriched by the inclusion of teachers from across Texas. Teachers from each site were able to share their experiences and expertise. We learned so much from sharing the different trends, problems, issues, and discussions of the different regions that we represented. This would not have been possible without TTVN and WebCT.






Findings: Other Comments

- I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to participate in the program. I am so glad that I was able to learn, use, and experience the TTVN technology (for example ELMO), which is now being used more frequently on campuses. I feel like I have an advantage because I am familiar with technology I otherwise might not have learned.
- This type of delivery gives us an opportunity to improve and to advance academically.





Miranda from Galveston

- The most impacting aspect that was developed was the dynamic interaction. I always went home to search for more information by digging in books and by talking to colleagues the next day.
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Jacksonville Student

- Thanks to this type of interactive meeting, people from different areas had the opportunity to know the similarities of the problems and to share enthusiasm for effective solutions.





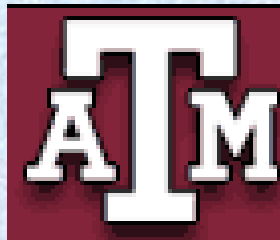
Mt. Pleasant



Belton

Personal Anecdotes


College Station ↔ **Mt. Pleasant**



Coastal Bend, Texas



Comments from Dr. Lara-Alecio, Professor and Project Director

- For me, through this type of delivery, we are securing access for schools away from main campuses that would not be possible by any other means.
 - Working with in-service teachers from different school settings gave me the opportunity to update our objectives and content in bilingual/ESL education. This was accomplished through hearing the real-life classroom issues across a broad group of teachers.
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Dr. Lara's Comments

- I know that this type of delivery requires more preparation and time especially if we are committed to rotate as professors among campuses. In the end, this effort is highly rewarded by the quality of students we meet.
- The students were committed and completed with high GPAs.



Dr. Lara's Comments

- I was extremely impressed observing groups of students interacting about assignments and requesting information about new literature to address the complexity of our field.





From a Visiting Professor: Curriculum Development for Bilingual Education and Research Methods for Bilingual Classrooms

Visiting Professor, Dr. Beverly J. Irby, stated about the technology:

The opportunities that this delivery mode via TTVN offers students is varied. It provides a closure to the chasm of distance so that students from urban, suburban, and rural schools can come together for rich discussions about issues of bilingual/ESL education and how those issues are handled in the differing locales. It provides me, the professor, an opportunity to teach students from the different locations – to teach students who never would have crossed my path in face-to-face classrooms. Distance education for bilingual educators is important as advocacy for ELLs is built across the miles.












Conclusion

- Based on the survey results, we conclude that the distance education program delivered by TAMU for bilingual/ESL education at the master's degree level **has been successful.**





Implications

- It is important as a future agenda to make this type of delivery happen.
 - More and more there is a proliferation of distance education programs. It is important to maintain quality and commitment in such programs.
 - For those institutions that have doctoral programs, there is a great opportunity to identify potential candidates for the doctoral program.
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Final Thoughts

In 1999, I wrote:

- We must realize that we are experiencing increasingly diverse classrooms culturally, economically and linguistically. Texas is but a microcosm of what is to come in the nation. Conditions such as these call forth responsible and informed actions from educators which rest on praxis and reflection. Educators are here to serve mankind, to teach a new generation to think critically, and be a part of the transformation of the world and herein lies our charge.

Rafael Lara-Alecio

Professor & Director of Bilingual Programs





Final Thoughts

- Perhaps this type delivery can assist our educational system to improve quality education for the Hispanic/Latino population that day-by-day increases beyond arithmetic proportions.

