Meeting the Needs of Early Childhood Educators

By 2014 at least 50 percent of all Head Start teachers nationwide in center-based programs will be required to have an associate, baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education or an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in a field related to early childhood education, with experience in teaching preschool children.

The University of West Alabama has created a program to meet the needs of that job requirement. The Bachelor of Science Degree in Early Childhood Development contains specifically designed coursework for early childhood centers, Head Start and Early Start centers.

The program is pending final approval by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

UWA plans to begin offering the Early Childhood Development Baccalaureate Degree, which will include 60 hours of basic studies and 60 hours of professional studies. The non-certification ECD program will be offered through traditional campus settings, as well as completely online.

This will be the fourth undergraduate degree program offered completely online by UWA, the first in the College of Education. UWA currently offers three baccalaureate business degrees online.
It Began With a Baker’s Dozen

The University of West Alabama began offering courses online in the 2002 Fall Semester with 13 students, program continues to grow

What started as an exploratory debate between colleagues in the Provost’s Conference Room almost a decade ago has evolved into The University of West Alabama Division of Online Programs, the most dynamic, fastest-growing division at UWA. “All of those at the table were from traditional academic settings, and thus there was a high level of skepticism about teaching online,” UWA Provost Dr. David Taylor said. “After thorough discussion and debate, though, we agreed that we would try web-based courses, and if we all concluded that such delivery could be done with absolute integrity, we would look at growing the program.”

So what began on April 10, 2002 as a discussion to consider launching an MSCE program via the Internet has turned into something larger indeed. In Fall 2002, the first online courses at UWA were launched with 13 students enrolled.

By 2007 online enrollment had topped the 2,000 mark and over the last eight years online enrollment has increased over 200 fold. Today, over 2,500 online students are enrolled and pursuing 21 master’s or education specialist degrees or three undergraduate business degrees completely online. “Many professors had to be convinced that the online enterprise was a legitimate and worthy one, but over the years most all have come to support the online delivery,” Taylor said. “Not only has the online program not been a detriment to the on-campus experience, but over the years most all have come to support the online delivery could be done with absolute integrity, we would look at growing the program.”

The Division of Online Programs was established in 2007 to house the burgeoning program. Dr. Martha Hocutt took the reins as dean of the division in August 2009 and there are now four full-time advisors, an administrative assistant and several student workers.

“The Division of Online Programs aides in the University meeting its mission of providing quality education programs to residents of the Black Belt region and the nation,” Hocutt said. “The future in higher education lies with meeting student’s needs, which includes alternatives to the traditional on-campus offerings. “We are continually implementing new technologies to enhance course design and faculty availability,” Hocutt said.

Online students and faculty utilize Skype for video calls and file sharing, lecture capture software such as Tegrity and the Secureexam Remote Proctor, which enables testing for online courses to maintain the same exam room integrity found in a proctored classroom. Web 2.0 tools are commonly used and every effort is underway to increase faculty availability through virtual office hours.

Programs in early childhood and elementary education, secondary education, special education, school counseling and library media populate the list of 21 graduate level courses taught by an online faculty of which 90 percent have terminal degrees and six are national board certified. Many adjunct faculty members also teach in a traditional classroom and online courses are designed and presented in the same manner as traditional on-campus programs.

Education specialist degree programs in Collaborative Special Education (K-6 and 6-12), as well as Early Childhood, Instructional Leadership and Teacher Leadership have been developed and are expected to be approved. A Master of Science in Continuing Education with a concentration in College Student Development has also been developed.

The BBA Degree in Accounting was offered this fall and joined the BBA in Business Administration and the BS Degree in Technology as baccalaureate programs offered totally online. A BS Degree in Early Childhood Development has been developed to meet recent legislative demands requiring Head Start teachers to hold degrees and is awaiting final approval.

From visions of utilizing a Vianet facility and program delivery via VHS tape then to cloud computing now, UWA continues to carve its niche among a new generation of college students while continuing to maintain its core belief in the on-campus experience. “The growth of the online program is not meant to replace the on-campus experience,” Taylor said. “The University believes that, particularly for the undergraduate, a residential experience is desirable because the undergraduate student often learns as much from extracurricular activities and social interactions on campus as he or she does in the classroom.”

Classrooms in Bibb Graves and Wallace Halls, Foust and Brock, still host some of the brightest and best from the Black Belt and beyond as they have for 175 years. Only now the scope is widening.

Now there are UWA students from 48 states and across the globe whose classroom may be at an office or library, or at a desk just off the family room. For those, the experience is still the same as their contemporaries in Wallace or Bibb Graves. There’s just nobody to borrow a stick of gum from before class begins.

Online Spotlight: Dr. Nisha Warbington

Dr. Nisha Warbington holds a Ph. D in Counselor Education and a M.H.S. in Human Development from the University of Alabama. Most of her professional career has been spent in the area of public education in Alabama.

Prior to joining the faculty of UWA, she served as a school counselor at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She also served as the Director of the Hoover Coalition, a branch of the Hoover City School System that is designed to bring the school and community together to combat drug and alcohol abuse by teenagers in the Hoover area.

Dr. Warbington is a National Certified Counselor (NCC), and a Nationally Certified School Counselor (NCSC). Dr. Warbington also has experience in the community counseling area. She has maintained a private practice in the Tuscaloosa area since 2002. She is an LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) in Alabama. She is a member of Chi Sigma Iota, and served as President of the Rho Chapter at the University of Alabama. She is also a member of the American Counseling Association and Alabama Counseling Association where she has previously served as Secretary for Chapter I.

Additionally, she is a member of the Alabama School Counseling Association where she has served as Ads Chairperson. Dr. Warbington is a member of the International Association for Play Therapy, the Alabama Play Therapy Association, Kappa Alpha Pi, and Phi Lambda Alpha.
R U Addicted to Social Media? 20 Signs You May Be

You might be addicted to social media if:

1. You are following 10,000 persons on Twitter but have not spoken to your mother in two weeks.
2. You speak in sentences of 140 characters or less.
3. You randomly “poke” coworkers on the way to the restroom.
4. Your LinkedIn profile boasts “Successfully promoted to level 932 of Mafia Wars.”
5. You judge your self worth on how often you are retweeted.
6. You stood in line for an Apple iPad for 24 hours just so you could update your Facebook on a bigger screen.
7. You inform folks that you are a farmer on Farmville.
8. A thumb down for your Stumble Upon site puts you into depression.
9. You cannot remember your debit card pin but you know all your passwords for your networking sites.
10. You argue that you are a member of “only” 100 social networking sites.
11. When you bgn to type like this.
12. When you say lol instead of actually laughing out loud.
13. You check every five minutes to make sure nothing misses you.
14. You are holding on to that MySpace account just in case it gets popular again.
15. Your social media account friends seriously outnumber your real life friends.
16. You’ve ever attended a “tweetup.”
17. You’ve been reminded by more than one person that they don’t actually want to know how you spend your every waking moment.
18. You missed your loved one’s birthday but wished a friend who is a friend of your friend a happy birthday.
19. You are going to spend the Christmas holiday with @grandma and @grandpa.
20. You join a social network for social network addicts.

Do You Have What it Takes?

Minimum Computer Requirements for UWA Online Programs:

- Microsoft Windows XP, Windows Vista or Windows 7 (32 bit & 64 bit operating systems).
- Remote Proctor does not support non-English operating systems.
- Mac OSX 10.5 & 10.6 are supported.
- 512 MB RAM
- 20 GB of free hard drive space
- Minimum screen resolution of 1024 x 768
- High speed Internet connection (DSL, Cable or LAN) are required. Dialup, cellular high speed and satellite Internet service is not supported for use with the Remote Proctor system.

IMPORTANT DATES
Mark Your Calendar

- Nov. 8 Last day to drop courses or withdraw w/out academic penalty.
- Nov 12 Online Comprehensive Exams for all Master’s Degrees
- Dec 1 Last day to file application for degree to be completed at the end of Spring Session One.
- Dec 9 End of Fall Session Two
- Dec 11 Fall Commencement
- Dec 12 Christmas Break begins
- Dec 23 Deadline for application for Spring One Session
- Jan 9 Christmas Break Ends

Questions and Answers for Online Students

Q: I am getting close to graduation. Do I have to apply for graduation, and if so, when?

Online students must file an application for graduation just like traditional students. The deadline for a degree to be completed at the end of Spring Session One is December 1, 2010. The deadline for Spring Session Two degree completion is January 31, 2011 and the deadline for Summer Session is April 19, 2011. Applications for graduation made after those deadlines will incur a $25 late fee. Applications do not roll over from session to session.

All candidates for degree will receive a letter from Dr. Tina Jones, the Dean of Educational Outreach, in either mid-October or mid-March requesting your intentions to participate in commencement activities. If you do not respond to Dr. Jones’ letter it will be assumed that you are graduating in absentia and UWA will mail your diploma.
Upcoming Professional Exhibits

November 3-5
South Carolina Science Council Annual Conference  Myrtle Beach, SC
Dr. Martha Hocutt, Kent Partridge

November 4-6
South Carolina School Counselors Association Annual Fall Conference  Greenville, SC
Dr. Barry Green-Burns

November 7-9
Southern Association for College Student Affairs  Panama City, FL
Dr. Lee Thomas

November 17-18
Alabama Counseling Association Annual Conference  Mobile, AL
Dr. Nisha Warbington

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