The International Research Foundation
for English Language Education

Title of Report: UMBC (University of Maryland Baltimore County) ESOL Online
Case Report Author: John Nelson
Organization: University of Maryland Baltimore County[1] – Baltimore, Maryland, USA
Date of Publication: February 2013

1. Identify and describe the PDO (Professional Development Opportunity).

UMBC is a Maryland state university, located in Baltimore County, Maryland, between Baltimore City and Washington, DC. The UMBC ESOL Programs include a Masters Degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Graduate Certificate. Both PDOs are offered face-to-face on campus and online. The program began in 1979. The online classes were first offered in 2005. The program has three full-time faculty, and approximately sixteen part-time instructors composed of staff from UMBC's Education and Modern Languages and Linguistics Departments, and adjunct instructors.

The program has two Co-directors, one of whom serves as the Graduate Program Director for the University. It is housed in the Department of Education, which is headed by a Department Chairperson and served by Department support staff. The PDOs serve the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) K-12 ESOL teacher training needs, as well as training for domestic and international students interested in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching careers. The program's online students are designated as separate from the face-to-face students by the University's Graduate School. However, the ESOL program does not treat the two groups of students differently. Online students do take occasional face-to-face (ftf) classes, and ftf students frequently take online courses as well. Program objectives are the same for the two methods of delivery, and program data are not tabulated for the two branches of students separately.

2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.

UMBC ESOL classes are offered only at the graduate level. Applicants must have a BA or BS in any subject. They must have a 3.0+ GPA (Grade Point Average), better than average scores on either the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) or the Praxis I Examination, two letters of reference, and a Statement of Purpose. Applicants must meet these program standards, but enrollment is not limited to a specific number of admissions. Prior teaching experience is not required. Program students include those interested in K-12 teaching opportunities, in teaching adults and college students both domestically and internationally, and in working in administrative positions in ESOL instructional programs.

---

[1] **Terms of Use and Disclaimer:** TIRF is providing this information as a service to our constituents, and no endorsement by TIRF of the program described in this case report is intended or implied. The information is made available free of charge and may be shared, with proper attribution. If you have reprint questions, please contact the training organization identified above.

Students range in age from 23 to 70. Most are Maryland residents, but some come from around the US and from foreign countries as well. Currently the program has students from China, Indonesia, Korea, Russia, Spain, Thailand, and Uzbekistan. Those students who choose the online options for the programs include those who live away from campus and those with busy professional schedules. Students officially classified as Online must take 80% or more of their classes online to receive reductions in student fees. "Regular" students can take online courses and nearly all of them do, but they are required to pay the full fees. The MA Program has approximately 65 students, 22 of whom are online. The Certificate Program has approximately 50 students, 37 of whom are online students, including 24 current Maryland teachers taking the program as an online cohort.

3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.

UMBC's ESOL Programs are marketed largely through its direct contacts with state and local instructional programs, bi-national centers in Latin America, teacher training programs in Korea, the Fulbright Program, and the United States Peace Corps. It has developed promotional brochures that are widely disseminated, and the program has its own website. The program is not aggressively marketed, but its enrollment has been maintained through the efforts mentioned here. It appears that the online parts of the programs are increasing more rapidly than the ftf program parts.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made.

The basic MA program includes the following ten courses: Instructional Systems Development, Human Learning and Cognition, Methods of Teaching ESOL, Cross-Cultural Communications, Reading/Writing for ESOL Teachers I and II, the Grammar of American English, Linguistics for ESOL Teachers, Testing and Evaluation for ESOL Teachers, and Theories of Second Language Acquisition. In addition, students take a Project Seminar course and an Internship course. MA students can choose a thesis option requiring six credits of thesis preparation, and/or a state certification option requiring 100 days of internship in Maryland Public schools. All of these courses are offered both ftf and online.

Certificate students have two required courses, Methods and Cross-Cultural Communications, and they can choose any two electives from the courses listed above for the MA. The nature of the courses listed has been the result of the evolution of the program. Program coordinators have developed the syllabi based on local demand, professional judgment, MSDE requirements, student feedback, and ongoing program experience.

5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The goals of the program are to provide its students with the knowledge and skills they will need to be effective, practicing ESOL teachers. As the program is designed for a range of student interests, ongoing, individualized advising enables students to work toward their specific, professional goals. The opinions of program graduates and of their employers are consistently canvassed to assess the effectiveness of the programs. We address MSDE and the Council on the

Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, formerly National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE]) standards to ensure that they are incorporated into our courses and that students meet the expected outcomes through key assignments established to reflect the required standards and program goals. The program also has a comprehensive examination that all MA students must pass to receive their degrees. There is no equivalent task for Certificate students.

6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.

Each individual course in the UMBC ESOL programs follows its own design with its unique set of presentations, projects, tests, and discussions. Each online course has its course shell containing the materials and lessons to be presented, the projects for the students to undertake, the key assignments to be completed, the rubrics to be used for assessment, and specific evaluation materials. Instructors use PowerPoints and other programs to present material to their students. Discussions are supervised and summarized. Course tasks include working with English Language Learner (ELL) informants, creating instructional materials, making lesson plans, visiting ESOL instructional programs, and making presentations to the class. These tasks are sometimes group tasks and other times are individual projects. Instructors are free to modify the shell to incorporate their own instructional ideas, but each instructor is responsible for ensuring that the content of the shell is covered, and that the students are accurately assessed. Our online courses are delivered through Blackboard as the Learning Management System (LMS), which is maintained by UMBC. Student work and test responses are collected through a program called Tk20 which is maintained by the UMBC Education Department. Online students evaluate their courses using a department-made questionnaire designed specifically for online classes.

7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local contexts in which they are studying so that they can work together with others in the global context of your online PDO.

Students gain access to local and international ELL instructional sites through their own connections and through program connections. UMBC has an English Language Institute, which program students can access to both observe and teach. Local K-12 and adult program classes are available for students as well. The program also maintains close communication with ESOL programs in Bolivia, Ecuador Mexico, and Peru and enables program students to teach in these programs. Student access to all of these programs is arranged by program staff. Our Cross-Cultural Communications course educates our students on concerns related to cultural bias.

The Department has a staff of three technological graduate assistants who work with our program students to address their technical needs and problems.

8. Describe how the PDO helps prepare students for the local contexts in which they will work.

All MA students must take an internship course. They are required to spend a minimum of 40 hours in an ESOL instructional situation where their involvement is monitored and evaluated. These internships can be done anywhere. Students are assigned to sites based on their interest and availability. Preparation for these placements is largely done through class work which must be completed before the internships take place. Individualized orientation and advising about the students' participation in these placements is done on a case-by-case basis. Course assignments are general enough in individual courses that the tasks can be tailored to the students' areas of interest. For example, Grammar course students are required to analyze the English speech of an ELL informant, whom they choose for the task can be based on the kind of ESOL student they plan to work with professionally.

9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.

Two of the Program's full-time staff members have PhDs in the field of ESOL. The third one has an MA in TESOL and is currently working on her PhD degree at UMBC. One Co-director has taught ESOL in Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the US. He has taught EFL to children, secondary school students, pre-college students, and adults. The other Co-director is widely published in the fields of linguistics and bi-culturalism. The third staff member since earning her TESOL MA has had K-12 teaching experience in Maryland Public Schools. Two program instructors from the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics have PhDs in Cross-Cultural Communication and Second Language Acquisition Theory. Two more part-time program instructors, from the Department of Education, hold PhD degrees in Educational Psychology and Instructional Systems Development. The remaining instructors all have MA degrees in ESOL and related subjects. All of the instructional staff have had considerable direct teaching experience. The program encourages part-time staff by giving them ownership of the courses they teach. As a result, nearly all instructors have taught their individual courses for several semesters.

10. Describe the non-teaching support staff in the PDO.

The PDO has limited support staff. The Department hires a graduate assistant specifically for the ESOL programs. This person works 20 hours per week during the academic year. The Department also employs students help to run the Resource Center for Literature and Culture (RCLC), which is an ESOL Program library that has been maintained by the program for more than 25 years. The RCLC contains a rich collection of resource materials specifically on subjects related to ESOL. It is available to the general public but it is used primarily by program graduate students and ELI students. It is associated with UMBC's main library. Online students can access the collection from off-campus electronically.

Beyond the specific program staff, the support staff of the Education Department serves program administrative needs. These staff members include technical assistants, internship placement specialists, and some secretarial support. A ratio of support staff to students is difficult to compute since most support staff members do not serve the ESOL programs alone. Nearly all student-advising is done by the three full-time program staff members.

11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.

Certificate students complete the program and earn their certificates by completing the four required courses. Each course has its own assessments, but all are carefully monitored and students receive individual grades in all of their courses. A 3.0 GPA for the four courses is required for achieving the Certificate.

MA students need to complete a minimum of twelve graduate courses, each being three academic credits. They too must have a GPA of 3.0 or better. In addition, MA students must pass the Comprehensive Examination given to them during their last semester in the program, and complete the planning of a project through the Project Seminar course. Thesis and Certification students have additional requirements. Thesis students must complete and submit their theses to academic committees for approval following guidelines established by the University's Graduate School. Certification MA candidates must complete their 100-day internships, and successfully compile and present their teaching-folios. All students are matriculated by the Graduate School of the University.

12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.

UMBC's ESOL Programs are evaluated by the MSDE and CAEP through Specialty Program Area (SPA) reports of the program, which include program specifics and students' work. These SPA reports are specific to our programs, and are evaluated on their own content for program evaluation. The process of evaluation is done in conjunction with the Education Department's evaluation, also done for both MSDE and CAEP. These evaluations were conducted in 2004 and again in 2011. In both evaluations, the ESOL programs were evaluated as strengths in the overall Department's offerings. The ESOL programs were given top evaluations on both occasions.

13. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.

The online ESOL programs of UMBC have been in operation for seven academic years. In that time each course has been offered on several occasions, and has been improved by the processes of tabulating and analyzing data from program course evaluations, student scores on Praxis II tests, student grades, and student feedback, both spontaneous and systematic. As new technology has become available, it has been incorporated into our classes. Servers have improved in the ease with which students can function in their courses. Initially there were Information Technology (IT) problems for both students and administrators, but these have been worked out. The online programs require constant and ongoing supervision, but they are functioning well. Teachers and students provide feedback but, it is rarely of a negative or problematic nature.

14. Describe the successes of the PDO and explain how they are documented.

In evaluating our overall program, we have not differentiated between our online graduates and our ftf graduates. Therefore, the following statements refer to online and ftf students collectively.

The program has conducted student and graduate surveys on three occasions since 2004. Each time, the results have been strongly positive, and lacking in any major criticisms. Administrators of programs in which our graduates work have given solid feedback on the preparation of our students. The latest of these surveys was done for our CAEP evaluation in the fall of 2011. Responses from the two counties surveyed indicated that their top teachers were graduates of our program.

Recently one Program Director was given a lifetime-achievement award by the local TESOL affiliate in recognition of the quality of the program and its contributions to ESOL instruction across Maryland. The program is widely recognized as the best ESOL teacher training program in Maryland by K-12 ESOL supervisors across the State, and by Adult Education supervisors across the State as well. Our graduates are considered leaders in the field.