



Title of Report: Graduate Certificate in TESOL at The Pennsylvania State University

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

The Professional Development Opportunity (PDO) described in this case report is The Pennsylvania State University's Online TESOL Certificate Program (OTCP). The program is designed for individuals who are interested in becoming teachers in post-secondary or adult English language programs in the US or abroad. The OTCP includes four introductory, graduate-level courses with integrated practical field experiences in each course that enable candidates to gain essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching adult English language learners (ELLs) in diverse contexts throughout the world. It is designed to be a stand-alone program, but it can also serve as a step-up program to the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA-TESOL) at Penn State. If students choose to enter the MA-TESOL program after completion of the OTCP, they will have to complete only two or three semesters of on-campus learning. Maximum flexibility is maintained by the program in an effort to meet both the professional needs of individual students and academic quality standards. The PDO is supported by four instructors and two administrators.

2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.

The target audience for this PDO is anyone who has earned a bachelor's degree and is interested in teaching adult ELLs in the US or abroad but has little or no previous teaching experience. This audience might include students seeking an entry-level English language teaching credential and/or individuals looking for an alternative career. MA-TESOL students at The Pennsylvania State University may also enroll in the OTCP courses during the summer months because the credits count toward their degree. In general, 15-20 students are enrolled in the PDO each year. The majority of these students are from the US with a few international students from China and Korea. While we do not ask for the ages of our students, they seem to range from 25-45 years of age. Generally, the older students are professionals seeking a career change and the younger students are recent college graduates. Regardless of their ages, the students enroll in this PDO in order to teach adult ELLs in their communities, to travel overseas to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL), or to improve their knowledge of issues in TESOL and their abilities as teachers of English.

3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.

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Students are recruited through several venues. First and foremost, students enroll in the PDO through [Penn State World Campus](#), the online education division at Penn State. The University has a history of 100+ years of distance education, more than a decade of experience in online learning, and strives to create an online learning environment that is as close to the face-to-face (ftf) experience as possible. This site is the main marketing venue because it is most often the first place potential students look if they are interested in pursuing online courses at Penn State. Students are also recruited to the PDO through the online course offerings in the [College of the Liberal Arts](#). In addition to the University websites, the PDO is advertised through the [TESOL International Association](#) website. Prospective and currently matriculated Penn State MA-TESOL students are also informed of the PDO. The focus of the marketing for the PDO is on the quality of the learning experience, in particular, the practical field teaching and learning experiences required in each of the four courses, experiences designed to create a balance of theory and practice.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made.

The initial idea for this PDO as well as its overall structure and course requirements were designed by Dr. Karen E. Johnson, a leading world scholar in TESOL teacher education. Because the curriculum can serve as a first step toward Penn State's MA-TESOL degree, the courses are patterned from existing resident courses in the MA-TESOL program. Like resident classes, the online curriculum engages students in the practical application of theoretical concepts addressed in the classes. To allow the instructors ample opportunity to engage one-on-one with the students, the teacher-student ratio ranges from 1:4 with a maximum of 1:20 students. The courses include the following:

- (1) APLNG 802 Focus on English: Teaching Form, Meaning, and Use, which develops an understanding of the various domains of the English language as relevant for adult English language learning and teaching.
- (2) APLNG 804 Focus on Learners: Identity, Community, and Language Learning, which explores how individual identities shaped by cultural differences, social positioning, and institutional roles and structures influence adult English language learning and teaching.
- (3) APLNG 806 Focus on Classrooms: Planning and Supporting Language Learning, develops a critical awareness of one's teaching practice and highlights instructional planning and classroom interactions with adult English language learners.
- (4) APLNG 808 Focus on Instruction: Teaching and Assessing Language Learning, develops an understanding of and ability to use effective teaching and assessment practices that support adult English language learning.

As mentioned previously, the courses include a practical component, which means students must have access to a community of nonnative speakers of English in order to participate. For example, individuals may be required to do one of the following: tutor a nonnative English-speaking student, teach and/or observe a class for nonnative English speakers, or interview a group of nonnative English speakers. OTCF students must also complete a



capstone experience in which they create a professional TESOL e-portfolio that demonstrates skills and competencies learned in the required course work.

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

The over-arching goal of this PDO is to prepare individuals to teach adult ELLs in the US and abroad. As such, the objectives are designed to engage students in reflection on and practical application of the theoretical concepts addressed in the classes through integrated practical field experiences. The objectives are to:

- (1) analyze various domains of language (e.g., phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic) in relation to adult learner language development and apply these understandings to adult English language teaching;
- (2) design, adapt, and evaluate curricula, technology, media, and other resources that meet the specific instructional and language-related needs and abilities of adult English language learners;
- (3) develop an understanding of the multilingual/multicultural contexts within which adult English language learners live and work and the role of learning and using English in an increasingly globalized world;
- (4) demonstrate effective instructional strategies for one-on-one tutoring, classroom teaching, and learner assessment; and
- (5) create a professional TESOL e-portfolio as a final capstone project.

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

Because this PDO is designed to engage students in understanding and applying theoretical concepts, each course includes twelve lessons with readings from class texts and journal publications, individual, partner, and group activities that involve collaboration and communication among and between classmates, and projects that require students to engage with adult English language teachers, learners, and teaching contexts. This PDO is asynchronous, which means there is not a designated day and time for instruction. Students have 24-hour access to course materials and the flexibility to complete their work at their convenience. It is, however, the responsibility of the students to adhere to all deadlines and due dates.

The online applications used to support this PDO include [ANGEL](#), which is Penn State's learning management system, and PLONE, which is the online application through which the courses are presented. The course syllabus, course calendar, lessons, grades, drop boxes for assignments, and other resources are available through these systems. Also available through ANGEL are the course email system, course announcements, and threaded, online discussion forums. In addition to ANGEL and PLONE, students use VoiceThread, a collaborative, multimedia web portal that allows students to upload and share images, documents, and videos and leave written or spoken comments on one another's work. Students create a web page that includes a blog space where they post entries and comments in response to lesson activities. The web page is also the site of their e-portfolio, the capstone project for the PDO.



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.

In each course, students are asked to complete a survey and write an initial introductory blog through which they introduce themselves, share their cultural backgrounds, and express their interests in English language education. Through these initial activities, students begin to know and understand one another and their local contexts. In addition, the weekly reflective blogs, in-class activities, and other course materials promote ongoing opportunities for students to work together and share their thoughts and experiences with classmates from across the globe. Through interactive course activities, current and future English language teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural biases with others and develop intercultural competence.

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

The course readings and activities ask students to reflect on and share their thoughts on their local contexts, how they might utilize the resources of their local communities in their language teaching, and how to adapt their teaching to those contexts. In addition, each course includes assignments (e.g., interviews, biographies, classroom observations, tutoring, and other hands-on teaching experiences) that require students to interact with individuals, teachers, and adult ELLs, and other citizens in their local contexts. These required opportunities to engage with adult learners, teachers, and others provide ways for students to begin to understand the strengths and challenges of English language education programs in their local contexts. Follow-up activities include reflection on their outside assignments and sharing their experiences and thoughts with their classmates through blog postings, VoiceThreads, and other in-class activities.

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

Each of the teacher educators in the OTCP has a PhD in Applied Linguistics or related discipline with a focus on language teacher education. These teacher educators have prior experience teaching adult ELLs as well as English language teachers in both resident and online classes.

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

As mentioned previously, Dr. Karen E. Johnson is the developer and director of the PDO. She has many years of experience using online technology in the classroom as well as a widely recognized background and publication history in language teacher education and applied linguistics. Other critical support staff members for this PDO include an administrative assistant who serves as the student services contact person and two web-technology specialists who manage the courses and trouble-shoot technical issues the students might encounter. Other forms of non-teaching support available to students include access to resources at the University (e.g., Penn State Library online services, free software downloads, online university workshops) as well as all other services resident students enjoy.



11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDOs.

Learning assessments used in this PDO are based on the objectives of the course and may include in-class activities such as course blogs, quizzes, and VoiceThreads through which students reflect on and integrate concepts learned in the lessons. The courses differ in the type of final project required (e.g., Teaching Project, Critical Cultural Analysis, Tutoring Experience, and Language Use in the Classroom). The Final Capstone Project for the PDO requires students to draw from the numerous assignments completed in their courses to develop a professional teaching e-Portfolio. Participants can choose to include any items that demonstrate the professional expertise acquired in the OTCP, such as blog entries, video/audio recordings, samples from their students' work, teaching materials they have developed, photographs, a teaching philosophy, thank-you notes from students, their résumé or curriculum vitae, and a statement of professional goals.

12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.

The PDO is evaluated through two mechanisms, the participants and the program supervisor. The students evaluate their teaching and learning experiences in each course at the mid-point and the end of the semester, and their evaluations are reviewed by the instructor and program supervisor. The program supervisor conducts an annual evaluation of the PDO, and together, these evaluations inform future revisions to course content, assignments, and activities.

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

The most formidable challenges with this type of PDO include balancing academic rigor with practical field experiences, ensuring that instructor-student and student-student interaction is substantive and meaningful, and making sure all course assignments are substantive, meaningful, and do not exceed a reasonable amount of time to complete. Another challenge involves helping the students feel comfortable with navigating the various online platforms. Having an effective online support system like the one currently in place for the PDO is critical for streamlining this process.

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

The most apparent success of the PDO is the increasing enrollment numbers each semester even though the program has been available for a relatively short amount of time, only since January 2011. We will also measure success by tracking our graduates' progress in securing jobs in TESOL. Our first group of OTCP students is about to graduate from the program, and consequently, this is a procedure we are just beginning to implement.