

Online courses meet teachers' recertification needs

In their quest to meet recertification criteria mandated by the Maryland State Department of Education, teachers have an alternative to spending \$1,500 per graduate level course at a state or private college.

Labeled "the best kept secret" by adjunct professor Teri Wilkins, the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Educational Technology Leadership Program is delivering convenience and quality via online courses at affordable costs directly to teachers' computers.

For \$135 per three credits, teachers can register for a slew of online courses, some taught face-to-face in archdiocesan schools. The average time to complete them online is eight weeks - courses are not self-paced. Many of the summer classroom courses can finish in a 45-hour week.

"You can either go to a college and pay a lot of money or you can go through this program which is much more accessible," said Ms. Wilkins. As an instructor of effective classroom management, she is able to teach "from my home or anywhere there's an Internet connection. Most of the interaction is through a discussion board. I list the topic and students have to respond. Teachers can be in their bathrobe and post a response. I can keep a record of how many times they are logging on to meet state requirements."

Survey responses after two semesters reported teachers' appreciation of the flexibility in Ms. Wilkin's course and that the workload wasn't excessive. "I try to make it so there's no heavy lifting," she said.

According to Dr. Carole Redline, director of academic technology, who spearheads

the Educational Technology Leadership Program, all teachers need six credits every five years, which equates to two three-credit courses.

“The idea is to provide continuing professional development using technology,” she said. The six-year-old program was formerly partnered with Goucher College, in place on their Towson campus; for the past two years, it has belonged solely to the archdiocese.

The Maryland Distance Learning Association recently honored the online program as the best distance learning program for 2006-07. “It’s significant because it’s the only award of its kind in the state,” commented Dr. Redline. “We were also in competition with colleges, especially community colleges who are the biggest users of online courses.”

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