# Integrating online and residential master's programs in education

## Integración de programas de máster online y presenciales en educación

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## Abstract:

Online Principal Certification and Advanced Teacher Degree programs have taken up an incresingly larger share of graduate enrollments in U.S. colleges of education. This paper discusses how a major educational leadership department expanded its residence programs to incorporate online leadership degrees. Having started in 2008, the program now has current enrollments of over 80 students including students from outside the U.S. The paper discusses overcoming obstacles such as faculty resistance, meeting state licensing and accreditation requirements, staffing online courses, funding and marketing. Leadership for the program came from the department and college where online learning was increasingly seen as a priority.

**Keywords:** program reform, organizational change, degree programs.

## Resumen:

Los programas *online* para la Titulación Avanzada de Profesor y la Certificación como Director representan un porcentaje cada vez mayor de las matriculaciones de posgrado en las facultades de educación de Estados Unidos. Este artículo analiza cómo uno de los principales departamentos de liderazgo

educativo ha ampliado sus programas presenciales para incluir titulaciones *online* sobre liderazgo. Iniciado en 2008, el programa cuenta ahora con más de 80 estudiantes, incluidos alumnos de fuera de Estados Unidos. El artículo examina tanto los obstáculos superados como la reticencia del profesorado, el cumplimiento de los requisitos estatales de acreditación y concesión de licencias, la dotación de personal para los cursos *online*, la financiación y el *marketing*. Los administradores del programa procedían de la facultad y el departamento, donde el aprendizaje *online* se veía cada vez en mayor medida como una prioridad.

**Descriptores:** reforma de programas, cambio organizativo, programas académicos.

## 1. Introduction

School leadership programs at university level in the U.S. have undergone a massive shift. Principal certification programs that were previously residential, and often emphasized night or weekend courses, have increasingly moved online. The 2018 Babson Group Report (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018) documents the fact that while residential enrollments in education programs continue to dwindle, online enrollments are increasing. Over the last two decades, programs that emphasize teacher leadership have also arisen (Wenner & Campbell, 2017), and leadership programs increasingly emphasize the idea of *distributed leadership*. In addition, many states have altered certification requirements for both principals and superintendents. Some of the larger districts in the U.S. have created their own leadership programs. This has resulted in a complex, patchwork of programs that aim to train future school leaders.

Despite this proliferation of programs and certification requirements, the U.S. appears to face a *leadership* shortage — but this shortage is largely driven by high attrition rates for principals. As (Fuller & Schrott, 2015) noted, principal turnover, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields is high. This indicates the need for new and innovative ways to train principals. While «online education is one of the largest and fastest growing segments of higher education,» and thus, program enrollments have rapidly expanded, it is not clear that these programs have taken advantage of the most important findings in online education, nor is it clear how best to integrate online programs with residential programs (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016, p. 4).

*Blended* programs — programs that offer a mixture of online and residential instruction — may have great appeal to some practitioners, but it is not yet clear what is the ideal combination of or balance between online and traditional learning components. Similarly, as schools recognize the need for many different types of leaders (principals, superintendents, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, etc.), would various district and building level leaders benefit from similar training? Should they receive distinctly different training that provides specialized skills? Any university contemplating offering online degrees in educational leadership needs to confront these daunting questions.

This paper discusses the current enrollment trends and pressures facing U.S. colleges of education, and then describes how the Penn State University launched its online teacher and principal degree programs. Penn State is a land-grant university, and trains large numbers of both teachers and principals within the state. The educational leadership program is ranked in the top ten in the nation by the *U.S. News and World Report*[1]. Penn State also has a long history in experimenting and expanding distance and online education, with many of its World Campus programs receiving various national awards. The Penn State model of online instruction focuses on high quality program-level development. Rather than offering a plethora of short courses taught by non-tenured, adjunct faculty, Penn State's World Campus emphasizes the creation of complete online certification or degree programs, developed and staffed by a mixture of tenured and non-tenured faculty. These programs satisfy the same requirements as the residential courses. Course and instructional development is supported by a variety of curriculum and instructional designers. However, development and continual improvement of these programs is not without its challenges. The paper highlights the difficulties inherent in moving programs that were traditionally residential to online formats, and how these issues were addressed.

## 2. Growth of online learning and decline of residential education

Universities once relied upon education, specifically teacher training programs, as «cash cows» that could reliably produce a steady stream of revenue. Over the last 40 years, undergraduate enrollments in the education majors that once dominated undergraduate Bachelor's degrees, have now shrunk to a small percent (see Graph 1). In 1970, education majors comprised almost a fifth of total Bachelor's degree enrollments in the United States, but by 2010 this had reduced to just over 6%. Dramatic growth in other majors such as business, health professions or communications can explain some of this shift, but relative to other degrees (such as English or Biology), Education has lost *market share* of enrollment.

GRAPH 1. Education degrees as percent of total U.S. bachelor's degrees: 1970-2010.

| Year | Percent |
|------|---------|
| 1970 | 22% |
| 1975 | 17% |
| 1980 | 12% |
| 1985 | 9% |
| 1990 | 11% |
| 1995 | 9% |
| 2000 | 9% |
| 2005 | 8% |
| 2010 | 6% |
| 2014 | 6% |

Source: NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), 2014, 2017.

While teacher education continued to dominate undergraduate offerings at most colleges up through the early 2000s, colleges increasingly sought to expand their graduate programs and professional development offerings. This included many switching to an MA as opposed to an MS degree. This market, however, has recently undergone a sharp decline. Clinefelter and Aslanian (2016) report that, in 2014-2016, graduate enrollment in education programs dropped from 22% of total enrollments to 14%, although educational administration continued to be among the top five graduate majors. This data suggests that continued issues with dropping enrollments may put pressure on colleges in the foreseeable future. Specifically, while residential programs may feel pressure from ceasing to thrive, online programs may also feel pressure to grow and compensate for shifts in learning methods.

Not only has enrollment at the undergraduate level decline; enrollments have shifted to online programs. In the United States of America, it is now possible to obtain a wide range of degrees and certifications purely online. Becker, Gereluck, Dressler, & Eaton (2015) report that 24 U.S. universities offered full online bachelor level degrees in education in 2015. Given the state-by-state nature of teacher certification, these pro-

grams have tended to enroll within state students. The rankings of these universities indicate that the schools with the lowest ranking and status have been the most affected by these market pressures. However, now that some large public universities like Central Michigan have opened pure online education programs, it is likely that more and more colleges will offer online courses, if not whole online programs, in teacher education. The real growth in enrollments, however, has been at the master's level.

Sloan Foundation reports (e.g. Allen & Seaman, 2016) have estimated growth rates of over 10% per year for online programs enrollments nationally. US News and World Report lists 311 universities with «online graduate education programs.» These universities tend to be concentrated in major population centers, and this presents a problem for large rural states. The vast majority of teacher preparation programs are still *traditional* — i.e. provided by colleges or universities — but a growing number are no longer based in colleges or universities. These would include programs operated independently by large school districts, or programs that are partnerships between large districts and universities (see Boggess, 2008). In both traditional and alternative programs, online classes and programs may increasingly be part of the curriculum.

One obstacle facing online programs are faculty concerns within higher education about the overall quality of online instruction. While some previous studies indicated that online courses were inferior to residential courses, Stack (2015) argues that these studies do not account for the great variation within both residential and program quality. Studies have attempted to isolate the qualities that determine effective online instruction, but it remains an open question as to what conditions or practices make online education more or less effective than residential education (Dede 2006; Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, & McCloskey, 2008). Some aspects of educator preparation, such as field placement, may be challenging to orchestrate online. Kennedy & Archambault (2012) found that little over 1% of teacher education programs used online methods for the field experience. Additionally, research, specific to leadership preparation and online/blended learning, is sparse, and without the benefit of a more robust research base, we will likely continue to see «educators and policymakers implement online learning environments without much guidance from the scholarly literature» (McLeod & Richardson, 2014, p. 285). Thus, online education practices, for both teacher and leadership preparation, need to better align with the goals of advanced training in teaching and leadership.

However, faculty attitudes have also changed, opening up the range of possibilities for online education. The Babson Survey Research Group has been tracking overall trends in online higher education since 2002. From 2003 to 2015 the percent of faculty surveyed who thought online education was somehow inferior

to residential education has dropped from nearly 50% to under 30% (Allen & Seaman, 2016). This attitudinal change may mean that faculty are more likely to experiment with online degree programs. Penn State has responed to these ongoing quality issues by creating a faculty development program for online instructors (Boggess, 2020).

Online education has profoundly affected US teacher education and teacher professional development by offering low-cost, alternative routes to certification during a period when public university tuitions experienced high levels of increase and the profession was subject to poor portrayals in the media and a systematic political movement to deregulate teaching credentials or certification. Faced with the prospect of large student debt, a low-status profession with relatively flat professional trajectories, and high initial drop-out rates, low-cost online programs (regardless of their quality) offer many students a way to enter teaching. Investment in expensive university teacher education programs has become less appealing, and the long-term decline in education as an undergraduate major will likely accelerate under current conditions.

Online programs appear to be changing the nature of leadership education even more rapidly than most academics have understood, and yet, a scholarly research base has yet to develop for development of these online and blended learning programs (McLeod & Richardson, 2014). Dede (1995) argued with conside-

rable foresight that technology would rapidly change implementation of instruction in higher education. His work also documents the kinds of effective professional development for teachers that online programs can present. In the last twenty years, traditional distance education (correspondence courses, radio and television programming) have dwindled, while online programs in the U.S., Australia, and other countries have grown exponentially.

## 3. Transitioning to an online environment

Established in 1998, Penn State's World Campus (Penn State Online) was a pioneer in the world of online education among major universities. The online teacher leadership degree[2] originated at the same time that the Educational Administration program was attempting to merge faculty from Curriculum and Supervision to form a new Educational Leadership Program. After an initial successful few years of strong enrollments from largely local districts in the early 2000s, the program faced severe financial difficulties. In 2008, the existing program was suspended and reorganized. It was then re-launched in 2012 as a Masters in Educational Leadership program with emphasis either in Teacher Leadership or School Leadership.

The early failure of the program was linked to conflicts inherent in the curricular and staffing needs of residential versus online programs. Traditional ou-

treach models of professional development typically use a cohort model based on alternative, face-to-face meetings, which does not mesh well with the online environment. The original teacher leadership program was conceived as a cohort program drawing on a local population of teachers. Thus, the program was locked into a local base and suffered declining enrollments as local teachers passed through the program. Additionally, as a cohort model, new entrants were restricted to a single opportunity for admission and thus time of entry into the program. This severely limited interest in the program. Instructional costs soon outpaced revenue, and the program had to be suspended until it could be reconstituted as a non-cohort, open-enrollment program that could draw on state-wide, national and international populations alike.

Dropping the cohort model and moving outside the local school base allowed a broader range of educators to enroll in the program. Rolling admissions (three times a year) meant that educators could enter the leadership preparation program in a time line that best aligned with their professional goals. To accommodate faculty concerns about scaffolding the curricular content, a three-level course model was employed, so that students could enroll in different Tier 1 courses instead of adhering to a specific course sequence. This allowed more flexibility in staffing, as each course did not need to be offered each semester, but still allowed students to progress from basic core instructional

material, to electives, to a final culminating capstone project.

The World Campus was also working to standardize its expectations for courses and programs at this time. The following list specifies some of the common features of courses and program scheduling that faculty needed to accommodate. The basic rules required faculty to adjust their expectations for admission (students can begin in any semester), work schedule (weekly, not daily assignments), and interaction (synchronous activities were all optional). As students could enter in any semester, scheduling of the program courses became more complicated than residential scheduling (where students typically began at the start of fall semester). The online model required more intentionality from program coordinators to record and project enrollments.

Common features of online educational programs:

– Each course in the degree program is offered at least twice a year.

– Gateway courses — those that are prerequisites to other courses — are offered three times a year.

– Students have multiple entry points to start the degree program. They can begin in any semester. If they have to stop taking classes for a semester, they don't have to wait a year before re-starting the program.

– Enrollment caps on the courses are set at 20 students for each course offering. A second section may be opened when course enrollment exceeds 20.

– The faculty members in all the online education programs abide by the University schedule for late drop and late add periods. The faculty must accommodate all students who register through the first week of the class, provided there is space available.

– All online education programs must have group activities, discussions and projects built into the weekly schedule, however, there are no daily assignments or requirements for participation: courses have weekly due dates, not daily due dates.

– Any synchronous activities such as live chat or live video/audio conferencing are strictly optional — and are options that are chosen through the consensus of individual work group members. (Scheduling live chats or audio calls becomes a problem for students (international students) who reside in a different time zone.

Another obstacle in moving forward with the online program arose from the unique structure of Penn State. As a *single university, geographically distributed*, Penn State has 24 distinct (satellite) campuses within the state. Several of these campuses had large teacher and principal preparation programs. Again,

this structure functioned well under an older model of outreach education when physical presence in a geographic region was critical to providing student access. As the university shifted emphasis to online offerings, rather than outreach, programs at some satellite campuses were closed. Subsequently, much of the initial planning for program approval of the teacher leadership and school leadership programs were affected by ongoing negotiations about faculty and program roles in the larger context of shifting university priorities. There was significant conflict over coordinating the staffing and resource distribution of programs. Specifically, different campus leaders had conflicting views on the roles the faculty would play in the new online program (e.g. which courses they would staff and develop) as well as how revenue would flow to the different campuses.

Negotiating these changes took extensive time, and multiple trips to hold face-to-face consultations with faculty at different campuses. This situtation, while arising from Penn State's unusual campus structure, highlights how online development may be affected by other resources issues within the university. Given the ongoing decline in traditional teacher educator programs at the undergraduate level, it is likely that the development of online programs at other universities may well be affected by broader resource conflicts within the university. Administrators promoting online program development must then prepare to deal with broader conflicts

over resources that are not directly related to the costs of transitioning to an online program.

Since World Campus has a different tuition and revenue structure to the residential program, confusion and conflict arose over income from these new online programs. As the budget structure was unclear, it was difficult for administrators to estimate what their budget would be, and ultimately, faculty felt that more money should be returned to the program. Unlike residential education, where funding for programs and faculty salary are de-coupled from enrollments, the World Campus model reimbursed programs on a per-capita basis. The more students on a course, the more income generated. Conversely, when enrollments fall past a certain point, it is difficult to pay for full-time faculty, with required and regulated course loads, to teach courses. The solution that evolved over time required a new funding model that was more market-based and could reflect shifting enrollments. Over time, a model evolved wherein the World Campus and the College of Education split the tuition dollars. Following that split, the College allocated a certain percentage of the dollars back to the department and program. This allowed greater transparency, and also made clear the enrollment-driven nature of online programs.

Another key resource issue in the transition to online education was course scheduling. Here, we encountered multiple problems. Online programs function best when students can apply on a rolling adminissions basis. Thus, courses need to be offered more often, and this strained faculty ability to staff both online and residential courses. Initially, to accommodate student's schedules, many courses were offered on a shorter, 13-week schedule. However, to comply with U.S. federal laws governing student aid eligibility, all courses in the program had to be revised to a 15-week format in order for students to qualify for student aid. Since this revelation came just as some faculty were concluding final revisions of courses, it delayed the finalization of courses. It also created a morale problem, in that faculty felt that they were being asked to engage in seemingly endless course revisions. Issues of curricular offering and content development continue to be a major resource consideration for online programs.

## 4. Curricular content

Certification, for both principals and superintendents in the U.S, is distinct from certification for teachers in most states, and the course requirements differ significantly. The inclusion of an online teacher leadership component in a program focused on school leadership preparation raised both curricular issues based on philosophies of school leadership as well as venue (e.g. residential vs. online). The restructuring of the program appeared to be a window of opportunity to move faculty into new areas of instruction and implement new theories of leadership about how schools might operate (Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011).

These changes met considerable opposition on both sides. Those trained in traditional educational administration practices were not receptive to increased leadership roles for teachers, except in the area of instructional supervision. Faculty on the teacher education side did not see enough emphasis on the curriculum, and expressed concern that increased leadership duties could overburden teachers. Some faculty expressed a concern that teachers and principals should not be taking courses in the same class, reflecting the divisions of traditional K-12 staffing where the majority of teachers are unionized and administrators are considered to be management. We found that some faculty members were concerned about overcoming issues of *us vs. them* — as traditional school roles tend to cast administrators as «supervisors» and teachers as «workers.» Growing acceptance of shared leadership models has helped to alleviate some of these differences of opinion to some degree.

Other faculty felt that the interaction between future building leaders and future teacher leaders was beneficial, providing each group with an opportunity to learn the perspectives of the other. A few faculty felt this was inappropriate, as the they viewed the role of administrators as antithetical to the ethos of self-empowered teacher professionals. This difference seemed to reflect a tension between the Professional Development School model of teacher professional development, and the incorporation of a teacher leadership degree within a program that had histo-rically educated principals and superintendents. These differences of opinion, specific to the goals of the program, underscored differences in what competencies faculty thought teachers would need. For example, the ideals of inquiry (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010) as the core of teacher leadership were reflected in the program by a heavy emphasis on curriculum inquiry projects. Over the course of the program, students engaged in inquiry projects in multiple courses. This meant that there was less time in the curriculum for issues of leadership development.

In working to create and maintain this program, faculty dealt with issues such as how theories related to the distribution of leadership align with, or are not in accordance with, the needs of teacher leaders. Additionally, as teacher leadership prioritizes inquiry and promotes student engagement as a critical component of successful engagement, this served as a new emphasis that required re-thinking the curriculum, and ascertaining what core knowledge students should receive. The lack of clear institutionalized roles for teacher leaders in U.S. public schools hindered the development of clear curricular goals. There appeared to be an unstated difference between the goal of training teachers to take on a leadership role in their school and the goal of helping teachers attain the status of a leader among peers. Some faculty seemed to see leadership as a distinctive social position, while others emphasized leadership that seemed to flow from mastery acquired by powerful inquiries.

Another obstacle for faculty was the lack of flexibility in online curriculum. The asynchronous model of distance education requires a high degree of activity planning, and far less room for last-minute reassignment of topics and readings than the traditional graduate seminar. Initially, it was difficult to find experts or models that could help faculty prepare for this environment. Over time, the World Campus developed significant faculty resources (Boggess, 2020) that aided faculty in thinking about course design. Also, recently hired junior faculty were far more comfortable working in online environments, having experienced some of these courses in their own education.

Taken together, the university has benefitted from serving as a pioneer in the world of online instruction, via partnership and collaboration with Penn State World Campus, confronting many organizational, structural, instructional, fiscal, and philosophical obstacles along the way. On the program and department level, this benefit was offset by considerable costs in time as faculty were forced to wrestle with issues of staffing, budget and course offerings all at the same time. Also, given the rapid evolution of the field of online instruction, within a few years, the program looked remarkably different to that which was originally conceptualized. Current faculty now must deal with the demands of maintaining a high quality online program (in a marketplace saturated with online programs) while struggling to maintain residential program enrollments. Ongoing revisions of state certification for both principals and teacher leaders create more challenges, and the program faculty must consider new modes of service that can address the needs of school leaders adequately.

## 5. Venue and work roles

Faculty varied greatly in their reaction to moving to an online environment. For some faculty, working at a distance from students, and utilizing various online technologies (e.g. online course management systems, web-conferencing, etc.), posed little problem. Others felt that online interactions were inherently inferior to those found in residential education. Some were of the opinion that sustained intellectual interaction is possible only in face-to-face instructional spaces. Those critical of online education cited lack of contact between instructor and student as well as limited student-student interaction. Time, experience, and research-based (specific to instructional design) continual improvement would demonstrate this to be more a problem of course design rather than online learning methodology. At the time, those objections to online learning appeared to be common (while not unanimous) amongst veteran faculty. Many appeared uneasy with moving to a completely online instructional environment.

Two factors appeared salient in this regard. Faculty who had had more exposure to professional development educa-

tion and distance education appeared to grasp the principal that the online content could be integrated into the busy lives of working professionals more readily than residential education, which imposed the significant time constraints of travel. Also, faculty that were aware of rapid developments in video-conferencing and video exchange also understood that new technologies had eased the difficulty of communicating at a distance. Part of the job of the departmental leadership was to demonstrate these technologies in meetings as support for using these new tools for instruction and to provide budgetary support for updating existing classroom technology.

Blending the use of technology with residential courses appeared to have positive effects. Even residential students, especially those unable to travel to each class, requested virtual participation in classrooms. More and more faculty meetings also began to allow for the virtual participation of peers who were traveling, at conferences, or at research sites. The move from telephone conference calls to full screen video participation of peers or students in residential meetings was swift and impactful. These changes taken together began to demonstrate a model for how online education could approximate the interaction of a residential classroom. The integration of online meetings into the department workspace helped to normalize the use of online environments for instruction.

## 6. Preparation and facilitation

Online education also required a different preparation and engagment from instructors. For asynchronous courses to be successful, the readings, assignments, grading rubrics and goals of the course must be clearly defined ahead of time. Under the Penn State model, given that students are not required to be logged on at any specific or common time, changes in instructional content after the course has opened to the class are discouraged. This was a sharp departure from the traditional graduate seminar model where the instructor provided a list of readings and could make substantial shifts in content or direction each class period. Faculty needed to re-think their role and shift more emphasis to planning and articulating the interrelations of readings, class goals, and outcomes. Planning and scaffolding sequences of learning within the course became a key concern.

The online environment also makes for challenges specific to field supervision in educator preparation programs. Typically, U.S. universities partner with local school districts to provide a supervised teaching experience for undergraduates pursuing teacher certification, or a supervised administrative experience for graduates pursuing principal certification. For online programs, this means that students working far from the campus must seek out, and faculty must approve, mentors that can supervise and support development of practice for candidates in the field. In addition, these mentors must be com-

fortable working online, as mentors must be willing to provide reports about student progress and coordinate with the supervising faculty online. Working with mentors at a distance required faculty to gain skills in technologies like web conferencing and email communication, in order to create the necessary liaison with field supervision.

## 7. Lack of flexibility

As noted above, traditional graduate seminars in U.S. universities offer a high level of interaction and maximum flexibility for instructors. Faculty can alter the course content on short notice, and also introduce timely topics for discussion that may be covered in the news media. The primary focus of such seminars is the sustained intellectual interaction between students and faculty. As such, for many faculty members, the flow of these graduate seminars traditionally represents the most productive type of class. Flexibility in class flow is highly prized by many faculty.

In sharp contrast, online courses seemingly constrict the amount of material that faculty can introduce, and the order in which it can be introduced. Although the course management system, used by the World Campus, allows the addition of new materials (both readings and assignments), faculty need to plan these additions well in advance of delivery, and often before the course commences, so that students have access to course materials and have both the time and course spaces for sharing their thoughts on-

line. In courses where students are all in the same time zone, faculty can re-create some of this flexibility by scheduling synchronous discussions, but when a wide number of time zones is a reality for students (nationally and internationally alike) in the course, special measures and strategies must be determined and applied.

## 8. Student views of online education

In response to some faculty concerns that the program would not be able to adequately assess student experiences and needs, student surveys were developed and administered. Students did indeed voice concerns about some aspects of the program. Two key points identified included:

– Better integration of the courses and inquiry project.

– Leadership outside the classroom.

Since students take courses within the program, as well as electives outside the program, not all instructors are aware of the final project that teacher leaders are required to undertake. The program has tried to achieve greater integration by aligning the goals and objectives of the core courses. These aspects suggested that the final project for teacher leadership and for principal leadership needed to be distinct. The teacher leadership project would need to incorporate a great deal of inquiry, and the principal project needed enhanced

field supervision to meet state requirements.

Leadership outside the classroom arises in many forms. The need to provide better recruitment and mentoring for teachers from under-represented groups is a major issue in the U.S. Outreach to communities, particularly communities of color that have been traditionally underserved by schools is another major aspect of leadership that has not been addressed in many traditional school leadership programs. The faculty continue to revise the courses and seek out material and activities that can develop teacher and principal knowledge of these issues, and create a broader awareness of the importance of a social justice perspective among leaders.

## 9. Responses and implementation

Curricular content was the most critical issue facing the integration of the teacher leadership program. In order to move courses online, faculty needed to work closely with an instructional designer who could integrate the instructional content (assignments, readings, assessments, etc.) into a coherent course that fit with World Campus templates for course spaces. While the World Campus provided instructional designers to work with new programs, the faculty found the amount of time allotted to be insufficient. The department was initially unable to hire its own instructional designer due to issues between the co-

llege and the World Campus. The resolution of this staffing issue provided a major step forward in the online translation.

To meet the needs of the different emphases in teacher versus school leadership, the program created final projects that would meet the graduate school's requirements for the master's degree, but, at the same time, allow students to engage in projects that were relevant to their focus. The teacher leadership students undertake and present an inquiry project related to their instructional practice, while school leadership students (aspiring principals) work with an onsite mentor to document their supervised internship experiences online, under the supervision of a faculty member.

For the principalship, this meant creating a new supervisory course and setting up an online structure so that administrative mentors could log in regularly to provide assessments of student progress. A good deal of this work can now be accomplished through software designed to create online work portfolios. This required communicating with mentors and supporting students at a distance, while engaging them via online methods. For the teacher leader emphasis, this meant creating a core curriculum including specific courses that provide students with knowledge and skills for conducting inquiries and understanding the ways in which teachers can support and provide leadership in schools, and one that culminates with

a capstone course for completing a final project, informed by literature, with practical application to their career goals and leadership aspirations.

The program continues to monitor student views about the program. Most students seem satisfied with their education and the quality of interactions. Efforts are now being focused to create more specific specialties or certificates within the program. These include developing a a specific certificate in teacher leadership and STEM leadership. The program faculty continue to work with local districts in order to assess how practitioners perceive the need for leadership education.

## 10. Discussion

Administrative leadership can play a crucial role in managing the transition from residential to online programs within an academic department. As in any organization, opportunities for change and innovation may not occur under optimal circumstances. The shift to online learning in U.S. university educational programs has occurred during a period of declining enrollments, increased privatization of teacher and administrator certification, and a lack of a strong regulatory oversight or accreditation of online programs. Like our department, units may find themselves trying to achieve multiple goals with a move to online learning (e.g. increasing enrollment through easier access, offering new programs or certification, and ad-

justing to increased competition from other universities).

Sadykova and Dautermann (2009) provide a model, based on international online distance education, that focuses on separate discourses: host institution, technology, student learning models and faculty teaching models. In this case, all but the student learning model provided significant challenges for the implementation of the program. As Sadykova and Dautermann (2009) note, these are distinct areas of discourse; they are inter-related, but within each area, leadership must respond to the distinct problems and rules. Sadykova and Dautermann provide an example (2009, p. 92) of how institutional discourse creates unforeseen problems:

Policies that are applied to all students on a campus regardless of full time or part time status can also present difficulties to distant online students. The State of New York, for instance, has a requirement that any student in its universities and colleges must show proof of immunization against certain diseases particularly prevalent in college age populations. Other systems have mandatory health insurance fees for students who register. Program directors in New York were able to get the immunization requirement waived only for students who never set foot on the campus under any circumstances. The institutional discourse of a residential campus that underlies many of these examples may depend on long held assumptions about campus life and may require careful negotiation of traditional institutional practices.

As noted above, Penn State itself had to work out processes for funding, supporting and expanding programs. The models introduced by the World Campus did not always fit with those in place for residential instruction and required department leadership to engage in considerable negotiations within and across the colleges. Essentially, this means re-negotiating or re-configuring some of the university's core processes — e.g. how classes are staffed, and how faculty get paid.

The second major area of discourse was the technology itself. World Campus provide a basic course management system, but initially many faculties were not familiar with this. Over time, the university has improved the Course Management System (CMS) and adopted a single CMS for residential an online education. New technologies (like Zoom meeting rooms) now offer faculty better ways to supplement communication within the online environment. Department leaders can support the integration of these technoogies in classes by also integrating them into the academic department's work flow.

Finally, the discourse around faculty learning models proved to be the most difficult set of issues to solve. Faculty needed to have working mental models for how they could provide online education. This means that faculty must be able to see how the online environment can afford them similar levels of contact and intellectual rigor as residential education. *Similar* is the key term here, as online education requires substantially different faculty work (e.g. front-loading course development, and limiting spontaneous changes during class time). It can also be disorienting and even feel isolating for faculty used to residential interactions to implement instruction online for the first time, and beyond. Another way to provide this support is to increase access to competent instructional designers. As collaboration is critical to the development process of a comprehensive and high quality online course, and therefore ultimately to overall opinions of online instruction, the interaction between instructor and instructional designer proved critical in improving faculty estimation of the viability of online programs.

One way in which department leadership can support development of viable online programs is by connecting faculty with colleagues from other programs who've already achieved success developing their existing programs. Additionally, program leaders must be able to connect issues across these domains of discourse. For example, education programs are typically subject to accreditation reviews by an outside organization. The lack of guidelines and rubrics for online accreditation and standard alignment may mean that presentation of the online program to the accrediting agency is lost in tanslation from one venue to another. There is a clear lack of studies examining how states should regulate online preparation for educators, although Kennedy

and Archambault (2012) offer some limited policy recommendations.

## 11. Conclusion and recommendations

Online education and professional development are expanding in many nations. In Europe, the e-Twinning (www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm) program has dramatically reshaped teacher professional development. Online education for teachers offers the prospect of highly adapted curriculum delivered directly to teachers that can be exceptionally responsive to teacher professional development needs. Yet, with such rapid development and expansion, it is also possible that online learning may not address critical needs for professional education (McLeod & Richardson, 2014). Additionally, it leaves open the question of how nations are to effectively monitor the quality of the certification offered and maintain high standards for the national teaching force (for models of national teaching force development and improvement see Akiba & LeTendre, 2009; LeTendre & Wiseman, 2015).

Organizational change often happens at times that are less than optimal. Leadership plays a critical role in making change successful, by working to utilize available resources, and by supporting faculty in responding to difficult situations. Facing a long-term decline in residential enrollments, our faculty were under significant pressures to move to an online venue, there-fore this transition was hindered by: resistance to online education, the integration of teacher leadership within a program that had previously focused solely on administrators, lack of department level support for online curriculum development, and a host of issues that arose from dealing with the institutional logics of the university.

In the day-to-day operation of a large academic unit, it can be easy to forget to step back and consider the issues at hand, and to reflect on theories and studies that might provide insight. In the case of the leadership program at Penn State, it was clear that problems with discourses around technology, instructional practice and institutional rules and procedures frequently intermingled and caused delays and difficulties in implementing the program. Much of the work of a leader in this system is to keep the discussions distinct, and to help faculty and staff focus on discrete tasks with concrete goals. In short, some basic rules can be applied:

– Make the transition to the largest feasible audience. Online programs for local or regional audiences only are likely to have too small a population base to be sustainable.

– Assess the ability to integrate hybrid offerings for local groups with online courses for geographically dispersed populations.

– Set out clear expectations for faculty involvement in course development.

– Hire instructional designers that can work inside the program and department level.

– Discuss issues of institutional rules, funding and other issues with faculty early, and where possible, engage faculty as decision makers.

Online programs in higher education are swiftly gaining traction, especially from within leadership preparation programs comprised of students working full time as teachers in schools while simultaneously trying to balance their graduate work. As noted by McLeod and Richardson (2014), literature that informs preparation of aspiring leaders for practice is sparse. We recommend that future research be conducted and prioritized by education scholars in ways that serve to build and grow this necessary research base. Such studies may begin, as we have done here, to document what existing programs are doing to develop and grow their online/blended learning programs for preparing leaders. In this way, documenting the progression of such programs and preparation may serve to inform development of future programs and the preparation of future leaders.

## Notes

[1] https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/search?program=top-education-schools&name=&specialty=education-administration

[2] https://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/degrees-and-certificates/educational-leadership-masters/overview

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