

# Developing a Framework For Distance Education

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# 2005 TEL Grant Overview – Developing a Framework For Distance Education

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## Abstract

The purposes of this project are (1) to provide a comprehensive research-based framework on distance education that can be used by faculty, administrators, and university support service people in providing effective distance education at the University of Minnesota Duluth (2) To develop an online course on distance education that will help prepare current and future faculty and public school teachers in how to teach effectively through distance education. This project will build on a research study that I will be doing during fall 2005-spring 2006 (I have been awarded a sabbatical for the 2005-2006 school year (9 months) to conduct the research that will provide the foundation needed for achieving my TEL project goals).

## Background to Project:

Picture this scenario:

As a faculty member, you have read and heard from colleagues and students about distance education, and are increasingly intrigued with the possibility of taking parts of or even whole courses that you teach and offering them online. You know the university is very interested in online course offerings, especially because they help alleviate the problem of insufficient classroom space for face-to-face classes and because they enable non-traditional students to be able to take classes outside the confines of the traditional school day time limits. You know that the whole area of distance education is not only here to stay, but it appears to be gaining rapid support and momentum across colleges – and even in pre-college education and the business world. You are aware of some of the tremendous possibilities (and feel the pressure of “lead, follow, or get out the way”), but where do you begin? Unlike classroom teaching, where you are familiar with many methods of teaching and assessment because of having been in countless college classes yourself, you have no experience yourself in taking online classes, so you don’t even have that frame of reference as a starting point. All you know is how to put your syllabus and other course materials online on your faculty website, and how to make limited use online discussion forums -- but that’s just to support your face-to-face, real-time classes. Taking the next step into teaching a whole class on line is a whole other story. You realize from what you have read and heard from those who have ventured into the realm of the “Virtual Classroom” that teaching and learning online is not the same as it is in the face-to-face classroom. But what do you need to know and be able to do to make this transition to teaching online?

This has become an increasingly common scenario on our campus at the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), and especially so in our [Education Department](#), where I am a faculty member. Our department has been one of the departments on our campus that has been a leader in using technology to enhance student learning. As part of this, over the past four years we have made significant changes in our [Master’s of Education program](#) so that it is now taught primarily online. Many of our faculty have been using some aspects of online teaching in their undergraduate courses, and are now looking to teach larger parts of courses, and also whole courses, online. Our first M.Ed cohort of students to take their entire degree through our online learning community model will complete their coursework at the end of this year. Previous cohorts have experimented with different distance learning options, including offering some classes via ITV, having significant components of the class discussions being via online discussion forums (using Web Crossing), and having some lectures offered using streaming video. We currently have six M.Ed cohorts being taught primarily online. As a result of all of the developments in distance education in our department and on campus, it has become increasingly important for us to find answers to these key questions, and it is these questions that will form the foundation of my TEL grant study:

1. What methods of online teaching and learning are most appropriate for different contexts (such as different types of learners, different types of courses, different instructor teaching and technology skills, different levels of administrative, infrastructural and technological support)?
2. How do we prepare faculty to teach effectively in these different contexts using distance education?
3. How do we prepare students to be effective learners in a distance education environment?
4. What kinds of administrative, infrastructural, and technological supports are needed for the successful delivery of distance education programs?

## Project Description & Objectives:

My project will build on the study described in my sabbatical proposal (see Appendix: Description of Sabbatical). I am seeking funding from the TEL Grant (in salary dollars) for the summer of 2006. My **project objectives** are to:

- 1) Develop a framework that summarizes methods of distance education. This will be in the form of descriptive framework that lays out all the different options and combinations of distance education (in the form of a detailed matrix) that anyone interested in distance education can use to make decisions about which method they would like to pursue based on their particular context. Specifically, this framework can be used to assist the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), individual colleges within UMD, UMD departments and individual UMD faculty in making decisions about:
  - a. Which courses or types of course would be appropriate to teach through some form of distance education
  - b. Which methods of distance education are best for different contexts (example of different factors to consider: type of course and desired course outcomes; instructor’s teaching style and technology knowledge and skills; student knowledge and skills; instructor and student access to the technology needed to support distance education; administrative and technological support)
  - c. What types of supports are needed for distance education courses to succeed?
- 2) Develop a web-based course for university faculty, public school teachers, and other educators on how to design and teach courses through various methods of distance education. I plan to begin teaching this course in 2006.

**Significance : Correlation of Project with TEL Grant Themes**

Because this project will be combined with my year-long sabbatical study, the project is very extensive in nature and addresses *all* of the themes for the 2005 TEL Grant:

TEL Theme	Correlation with my project
Programmatic appeal	The decision making framework can be used by faculty & administrators across departments, colleges and campuses to make curricula and support decisions about methods & implementation of distance education In-depth study of the effectiveness of distance education initiatives across departments and colleges first at UMD; then examining how these initiatives compare with other U of MN campuses and other universities identified in the literature as being exemplars of distance education
Improve educational access	Develop an online course designed to teach faculty and public school teachers how to teaching using different methods of distance education Framework can be used the public and by U of MN faculty, students and administrators to help them in making choices (for faculty these will be instructional and curricular decisions; for administrators these will be decisions about how to provide infrastructure and support; for students these will be about whether to take online of face-to-face course options, and if the former, how to make the most out of these types of courses)
Enhance community, making using of communication technologies	The decision making framework will assist faculty in designing courses that will make use of online communication technologies to enhance communication (such as online discussion forums, video web-cam discussions, instant messaging) in all areas (a – d). Examples web-cam and/or threaded discussions between or among: UMD Education Department students taking Human Diversity class in face-to-face class in Duluth, in our Study in Sweden Program, and our Study in England Program; UMD students & faculty within distance education cohorts; Face-to-face and distance education classes at UMD with international students and faculty (such as our collaboration between M.Ed and faculty members in Siberia); Inclusion of experts from community (local, regional, and international) as “virtual” guests speakers and discussion participants

**Project Approach, Timeline and Assessment:**

TEL Project Objective	Activities of Principal Investigator (no other investigators or personnel are directly involved)	Timeline	Assessment
Develop framework of distance education	a. Background research on distance education (see Attachment: Sabbatical Proposal) b. Analysis of findings from research and organization into a framework (most likely in the form of a matrix that summarizes the various options).	a. fall 2005 & spring 2006 b. June 1 – July 15, 2006.	As part of my research during my sabbatical I conduct a survey, follow-up focus groups and interviews asking participants (administrators, faculty, and students) what information, support, and training they need in order distance education to be effective at UMD. Following the development of the framework I will ask those who participated in the focus group to review the framework and provide feedback on how well it identifies the needs that they identified. I will also seek feedback from all who use the framework. I intend to modify and update the framework at the end of 2006 based on this feedback.
Develop web-based course on distance education	a. Using the findings from the research study of distance education (literature review, data collected from surveys & interviews, and summary of findings in the distance education framework) and based on my own experience, knowledge and skills, I will plan and develop an online course on distance education (to be offered in during 2006). b. Seek input from faculty involved in distance education on the proposed course. c. Final revisions to course and uploading to the web (on my faculty website)	a. July 15 – August 10 2006. b. August 11-20, 2006. c. August 21-Aug 31, 2006	a. Needs assessment of participants in surveys, focus groups, and interviews to find out what they would most like to learn in this course. b. Seeking feedback on the proposed course with UMD Distance Education Core Group, the IDS Tech Talk Group, and faculty identified as leaders in distance education for input and feedback on course design.
Teach web-based course on distance education	Offered as an online course to students in UMD M.Ed program, to UMD faculty, and to regional public school teachers	2006 (exact dates will depend on what will best meet the needs of the target group students. This will be determined as part of the needs assessment)	a. Pre-assessment: at start of course, have participants complete a questionnaire that assesses their knowledge of and skills in key course objectives, and also on their attitudes towards distance education. b. Formative assessment: During course, have participants provide feedback on what is working and what changes can be made to the course. This will be done by having students participate in a web log (blog) discussion on what they are learning as well as through anonymous feedback provided using the online TestPilot tool. c. Summative: Have participants complete the same questionnaire that they did at the start of the course (on knowledge, skills and attitudes) AND d. Final course evaluation: have participants evaluate the course and instructor using official UMD course evaluations form (TABS) at the end of the course.

**Payoff**

1) Fit with UMD Mission: The proposed project will provide UMD faculty and administrators with a framework that can be used to organize, improve, and expand the ways in which we offer distance education. This will help us improve existing traditional

degree programs and creating new, non-traditional approaches. The project has potential impact for all courses and curricula that use a distance education format. These courses will benefit both locally based students as well as expand our outreach opportunities for those students who are unable to take courses during the traditional framework of degree offerings.

- 2) Fit with the mission of UMD Continuing Education: As Lynn Burbank, Program Director for UMD Continuing Education notes in her support letter for this TEL Grant (see attached) “The project proposed by Dr. Helen Mongan-Rallis will have an immediate applicability for us: the knowledge gathered will help us design a much more cohesive, complete support structure for our faculty and students; and we will use the orientation to online teaching course as an integral part of our training for faculty and teachers.”
- 3) Fit with UMD’s Information Technology Systems and Services (ITSS) and Instructional Development Service (IDS) mission: Central to initiatives by both ITSS and IDS over the past few years have been efforts to help faculty learn about and improve their use of online teaching methods. The results of this project (both the distance education methods framework and the course on how to teach using distance education) will provide resources for both ITSS and IDS. I will also offer workshops and presentations for ITSS and IDS on the findings of my study.
- 4) Fit with the UMD Education Department mission: The UMD Education Department has moved to offering our [Master of Education \(M.Ed\) degree](#) through a distance education model of delivery. Many of our faculty already have significant parts of their course materials available online (although they teach primarily in a real-time, face-to-face model). There is increasing interest in the department to make more use of teaching online, even within our undergraduate licensure classes. My proposed project arose out of my realization of the urgent need in our department to provide training (knowledge and skills) to our faculty to support our initiatives in distance education.

**Expected results:**

- 1) The use of this framework should enable more effective and efficient decision making by all involved in distance education at UMD. Specifically, the framework of methods of distance education will be designed to be in an easy to follow format that can be used to assist the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), individual colleges within UMD, UMD departments and individual UMD faculty in making decisions about: (a) Which courses or types of course would be appropriate to teach through some form of distance education (b) Which methods of distance education are best for different contexts (example of different factors to consider: type of course and desired course outcomes; instructor’s teaching style and technology knowledge and skills; student knowledge and skills; instructor and student access to the technology needed to support distance education; administrative and technological support) (c) What types of supports are need for a distance education course to succeed within the given context.
- 2) The course on distance education should prepare people who take it to teach effectively (or more effectively) using distance education.
- 3) In addition to providing a written online summary of the distance education framework to interested parties at UMD and other University of Minnesota campuses, I intend to: submit the results for publication in an appropriate professional journal; present my findings at the annual Academy of Distinguished Teachers workshop (I am a member of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers); present my findings at workshops by UMD ITSS and IDS; present my findings within the UMD Education Department; use the knowledge I have gained to help my own teaching and to help me continue to mentor faculty within my department (Education Department).

**Sustainability**

Once I have developed the course on distance education, this can continue to be offered and funded as part of our M.Ed program electives to be taken by anyone eligible to take a graduate level course in our department (example: M.Ed students, faculty from UMD and the UM system, regional public school teachers taking courses through UMD Continuing Education).

**Budget Request & Justification:**

\* *already funded* \*\* indicates funding requested from CEHSP Dean to match TEL grant \*\*\* indicates funding requested from TEL Grant

Budget Item	Matching	TEL Grant
* <i>Sabbatical salary</i>	\$30,714 (UMD)	
* <i>Sabbatical salary supplement</i>	\$8,907 (UMD)	
* <i>Horace T. Morse Award</i>	\$1,500	
**Dean’s office TEL match	<b>\$10,000*</b>	
*** Salary dollars (funded by TEL)		<b>\$10,000**</b>
Total of all funding:	\$61, 121 (FY 05 Annual Salary Base = \$61,427)	

I am seeking funding in terms of salary dollars to support me during the three months of the summer 2006. Dean Paul Deputy of UMD College of Education and Human Services Professions has already indicated that he will match my TEL grant with \$10,000. The TEL Grant amount of \$10,000 will provide the remainder of my salary needs. I have already received a sabbatical (with sabbatical salary and sabbatical salary supplement) for the 2005-2006 school year (9 months).

**Appendices**

- (1) Overview of sabbatical (2) Letter of support from Lynn Burbank, UMD Continuing Education Program Director

## **Appendix 1**

### **Outline of Sabbatical for Helen Mongan-Rallis - 2005-2006 school year**

I have already been awarded a year long sabbatical for the 2005-2006 school year (fall 2005 and spring 2006 semesters) to conduct an in-depth research study of Distance Education at UMD. The elements of this research will be as follows:

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on distance education.
2. Survey of UMD faculty who have taught distance education classes, students who have taken distance education classes, and administrative staff who have provided support for distance education classes.
3. Conduct focus groups and interviews with (a) faculty (b) students (c) administrative support people as a follow up to the surveys.
4. Visit other universities who are exemplars of Distance Education to learn about their approaches to distance education.
5. Present my research findings through
  - a. a written report to the university
  - b. publishing my findings (in professional journal)
  - c. presenting findings to UMD forums such as: giving workshops for our Instructional Development Service (IDS) and Information Technology Systems and Services (ITSS); sharing findings at UMD's Tech Talk group.