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Grand Valley's Innovative Online Master's Degree

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Grand Valley State University will offer its first completely online program—a master’s degree in educational technology through the College of Education. By means of this program, educators at all levels will learn how to integrate and maximize technology use in instructional settings.

“We created this online program to reach students who might not benefit from existing Grand Valley offerings, due to living at a distance from our campus,” said Andrew Topper, associate professor of education. “When we designed this new program, we started by building on the high quality of our existing degree. This degree is focused on providing our students with research-based ideas, drawing on theory related to learning and instruction, and also providing students with opportunities to apply what they learn in their educational setting.”

The master’s degree is meant for those living outside of Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties. The program is also offered as a hybrid (online and face-to-face) option for those who reside in or close to the Grand Rapids area. The program will allow teachers to access cutting-edge information and build ongoing learning communities and networks.

“I create community in my online classes,” said Sean Lancaster, associate professor of education. “That social component contributes to a positive online learning experience. The anytime-anywhere learning aspect of our online program also allows for the kinds of flexibility that busy adults need.”

The program prepares teachers and leaders to enhance the academic and personal potential of their students and to evaluate the social and ethical implications of educational policies and practices. Content covers the educational application of technology, such as computers and the Internet, for professional and instructional purposes.

According to Topper, “We emphasize professional links and connections for our student assignments and encourage students to find projects and activities that help them professionally. So if a H.S. Math teacher is in our program, he/she can develop curricular materials for Algebra, for example, that integrate technology and satisfy the National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers (NETS-T). Dr. Lancaster and I spent three years crafting the program to equal or exceed our current hybrid program and to hone in on combining theory and practice in the program.”

Elaine Collins, Dean of the College of Education, said the state requires all high school students to have online learning experiences and take a course in an online format. Therefore many teachers need greater preparation to develop strategies for this type of instruction.

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