

Rio Salado post-baccalaureate program lauded

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Rio Salado College spokeswoman E.J. Anderson writes about the schools post-baccalaureate program.

Autumn Miller learned some of her best teaching strategies watching videos. She observed master teachers interacting with special-needs students, classroom management skills to keep rambunctious students on task and how to run a productive parents meeting - all critical skills necessary in the teaching professions.

These days Miller is practicing those well-learned skills in a classroom as a gifted teacher in the Creighton School District.

A 2005 Rio Salado College post-baccalaureate teacher education completer, Miller earned her teaching credentials after graduating from Arizona State University Law School and completing the Rio program, which pairs in-person student teaching and "virtual practicum experience" with online course work.

Professionally recorded virtual practicums cover a wide variety of teaching skills critical to new teachers but hard to experience while teachers are doing their student teaching or observing a classroom, said Janet Johnson, Rio Salado College faculty chair for teacher preparation programs.

Rio Salado's innovative virtual practicum was named recently as one of five national WCET (Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications) Wow Award winners. The award recognizes outstanding innovation, quality improvement, or other achievements in using educational technology tools or technique to educate students.

"The WOW Award represents a way to recognize and celebrate the best and most promising practices within the WCET community," said Paul Wasko, WCET Awards Committee chairman and assistant director for e-learning services and relations efforts in the Academic Affairs Division of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

"This year's recipients reinforced the value of innovative solutions and the need to always keep in mind the needs of the students as consumers," said Wasko.

Using video to teach classroom techniques has proved popular with students.

Miller said, "They were awesome. I liked them because they provided great modeling of the strategies I was learning about in class. When you go into classrooms for the on-site practicum, it is the luck of the draw about what kind of teacher you will be observing. With the virtual practicums, I could watch master teachers in classroom settings effectively deliver instruction."

May 2007 post-baccalaureate completer Justine Gidaro was also impressed with the videos.

"I definitely had a positive experience with Rio's post-bacc program," said Gidaro, who now teaches fifth grade at Sandpiper Elementary School in the Paradise Valley Unified School District. "The virtual practicums were great because I could watch a master teacher in action at a time convenient for me. If something went too fast or if I wanted to study

The online Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Preparation Program is just part of Rio Salado's extensive education course offerings. The college also has early childhood undergraduate and professional development courses, specialty endorsement certificates, teacher-in-residence and classes for K-12 educators.

A new program added this semester allows students to earn 90 credits of education classes at Rio Salado and then transfer them to Northcentral University to complete their teaching degree online. The benefits include 90 hours at the community college cost, said Johnson.

The Rio Salado education program has a reputation for excellence.

"Most students start the program because of its affordability and convenience but once they begin they are amazed at the quality," said Johnson.

Students love the idea of earning a teaching degree online especially given the program's history of success.

"I loved doing the Rio Salado Post-Baccalaureate program. It worked so well for me since I was already working in a high school," said Tina Mortenson, who teaches at Coronado High School in Scottsdale.

Last year Mortenson received recognition as one of the top 20 teachers in America for JAG (Jobs for Arizona Graduates). Her program has also won state awards for JAG.

"I cannot thank Rio enough for making this possible," she said.

The post-baccalaureate program, started in August of 2001, is a popular one. In May of this year 216 students completed the program, up from an initial graduating class of 162.

Rio Salado College, in Tempe, has more than 450 online classes with start dates every two weeks. The college offers degrees and certificates in business, education, healthcare, law enforcement and more.

Registration and information: Call (480) 517-8540 or go to www.riosalado.edu/programs.

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