

# VI and O&M Preparation

Information about how to become a VI teacher or O&M specialist

JANUARY, 2008

## Teachers for Visually Impaired Students and Orientation & Mobility Specialists Certification Training in Texas

### What is VI Preparation in Texas?

The collaborative VI preparation programs in Texas are part of a collaborative project which links consumers, regional education service centers (ESCs), Texas Tech University and Stephen F. Austin State University, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), TEA, and the Division of Blind Services for the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DBS/DARS). The overall goal is to provide enough quality VI professionals (VI teachers and O&M specialists) to meet the needs of children with visual impairments in Texas.

For more information about this flyer, or about any of the Project areas listed above, please contact:

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### Who should read this?

Have you been thinking about a career change? **Are you interested in teaching, but want a non-traditional setting and job assignment?** Do you have an interest in working with children with visual impairments (VI)? Have you considered being a VI teacher or an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist, but don't know how to get certified or get training? Are you an independent worker who is active in teams, a good problem-solver, and eternally curious? Then a career as a VI professional might be the path for you.

This newsletter will provide you with information about VI professionals and how to become a VI teacher or O&M specialist through a university. If you are interested in certification as a VI teacher through an alternative certification project and live in or near Corpus Christi or Region II, you should contact Rachel Hoff at (361) 561-8521 or via email at [rhoff@esc2.net](mailto:rhoff@esc2.net).

## What is in this packet?

Beginning your career as a VI teacher or O&M specialist through a university program has at least two steps: being accepted in a participating university and registering for specific courses. Stephen F. Austin students must also be accepted into the *Project Vision* program. This packet has the following information you need to begin this process:

1. *VI Teacher and Orientation & Mobility Certification Training Continues* (this document),
2. *Characteristics of the Distance Learning Experience* (ivory), an overview of distance learning issues. This will help you evaluate whether you have the computer equipment needed, and provide information on the distance learning experience, and
3. *Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals* (white). Read this prior to submitting the university application.

## What are my career or training options?

As a VI professional you have two options:

- teacher of students with visual impairment (VI teacher, or TVI),
- orientation and mobility specialist (O&M specialist).

To learn more about these professions, please read *Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals*, which is the white document included in this packet.

Training for VI professionals takes place via distance learning (see below), outreach (when the instructor travels to a site off the university campus) and traditional on-campus programs. This newsletter provides basic information about distance learning and outreach options.

## What are the training prerequisites?

You may seek certification as either a VI teacher or an O&M specialist. Each is a separate profession with separate professional standards. The prerequisites will vary depending on the training option you choose:

### VI TEACHER

- Teaching certificate, preferably in special education, elementary, or secondary education, and
- Bachelor's degree from an accredited university

### O&M SPECIALIST

- Bachelor's degree from an accredited university

**NOTE:** Stephen F. Austin has an undergraduate program in VI and O&M. The program is conducted on their campus in Nacogdoches. Contact SFA staff for more information.

## What will I be studying?

The specific program of study will depend on the training option (VI or O&M) and on other additional factors. Below is a basic listing of course topics. Exact course titles will vary by university and training option.

### COMMON COURSES (FOR ALL VI PROFESSIONALS)

All students will take the following courses:

- Foundations in Visual Impairments
- Structure and Function of the Visual System (Anatomy)
- Methods for Students with Multiple Impairments
- Basic Orientation and Mobility

### VI TEACHER

In addition to the common courses, the VI program of study includes:

- Braille
- Academic Methods, and
- Internship/Practicum.

If you are not certified in special education you must complete a survey of exceptionalities course. There may be additional requirements. You will need to coordinate this with your university advisor. University contacts are listed on the first and last page of this newsletter.

### **O&M SPECIALIST**

In addition to the common courses, the O&M program of study required additional coursework. SFA and TTU address the same competencies, however they arrange their courses a bit differently.

#### **TTU**

- O&M Seminar (6 credit hours)
- ‘Blindfold’ or ‘Cane’ (6 credit hours)
- O&M Internship (350 supervised hours)

#### **SFA**

- ‘Blindfold’ or ‘Cane’ (6 credit hours)
- Beginning Internship (3 credit hours)
- Intermediate Internship (3 credit hours)
- Advanced internship (6 credit hours, 350 supervised hours)

If you already hold a VI certificate and were trained at a university and have already taken the common courses, you will not need to take them again. O&M specialists are not required to hold any educational certifications.

If an alternative certification program issued your VI certification and you want O&M certification you will need to get university recognition for the common courses, usually by taking them again. This is a requirement of the organization that certifies O&M specialists: Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP). You can visit their website for more information ([www.acvrep.org](http://www.acvrep.org)).

## **How much will the program cost? Is financial assistance available?**

Significant financial assistance is available. Both SFA and TTU have funds to assist with the cost of tuition. Each university distributes funds according to university program guidelines. The specific method used and amount of stipends vary by university. You should discuss it with your faculty advisor. You will be responsible for ordering and paying for your books.

If travel to either university is involved, **funds may be available** to facilitate the travel. The amount and specific method used to administer those stipends varies by university. You should discuss this with your faculty advisor.

You may be able to receive additional assistance from your district or your educational service center. You are encouraged to contact your special education director and your educational service center.

## **How are courses offered?**

Courses are offered through a blend of distance learning strategies, such as interactive television (ITV), Internet, and face-to-face activities. The exact blend will depend on the university and the specific course. For more information, you should contact the universities listed on the first and last pages of this newsletter.

## **What are “distance learning” and “ITV”?**

Basically, distance learning means the instructor and the learners are not in the same room. There are many kinds of distance learning opportunities. VI programs in Texas primarily rely on two systems: an interactive **television system (ITV)** and the Internet. These are supplemented with email, chat and/or discussion rooms, phone conferences, and face-to-face meetings.

A sample of interactive television system is the Texas Educational Telecommunication Network or TETN. During an ITV session and/or class, all of the participants travel to the TETN room at the participating ESC. During the class people are able to see, talk to each other, and participate in class projects and presentations.

Another facet of distance learning is the Internet. All of the courses will have some reliance on the Internet; some courses will be entirely based on using the Internet. During Internet courses each participant will determine the 'time and place' for class. Even though participants have the flexibility to set their own schedule, for successful completion it is important that you set and maintain a schedule.

One face-to-face course is offered by Texas Tech University each semester during the academic year. This course meets every other Saturday at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Austin. For this schedule, please check with the faculty at TTU.

#### **THE BENEFITS INCLUDE:**

- The opportunity to receive instruction and course credit from well-known universities.
- The opportunity to take courses (relatively) close to home.
- The opportunity to take courses on weekends (or possibly evenings) without leaving your family or job.
- Mentor assistance in your home region.
- The opportunity to develop lasting relationships with fellow preservice professionals as you jointly complete this intense, exciting training option.

## **Should I contact my regional education service center?**

Each regional service center has at least one VI contact. You are ***strongly encouraged*** to contact the VI consultant at your regional service center (ESC) for various reasons.

- The VI person or team will be a source of support and resources for you in the future. Why not start the relationship early?
- If you take courses that have an ITV component, you *must* make sure that your region is participating.
- Most VI programs at your regional service centers have resources that may be helpful. These may include reference materials, journals and specialized equipment.
- VI programs sponsor workshops at the service center. They also help support professional development for VI professionals in their region. "Support" may include travel assistance to attend statewide conferences.
- Someone at the ESC may be your mentor. Start the relationship on a positive, pro-active note by letting them know about you.

If you would like to find out about more about regional VI services, the VI staff or other information, go to the TSBVI website and click on your region. You can find a map and a link to the list of VI professionals at the regions at: [www.tsbvi.edu/Education/esc.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/esc.htm)

## **Who should apply?**

Of course, you must have an interest in and a commitment to working with children with visual impairments. Most VI professionals work as itinerant professionals. Therefore, as a VI teacher or an O&M specialist you must be prepared for on-the-job travel.

In addition, you must realize that this is an ***intense*** program. The instructional content is exactly the same as traditional courses on campus. While the length of instruction is the same, ITV courses will have fewer meetings (but for more hours each time). Internet courses also require a substantial time commitment.

## **How do I apply?**

Each university has specific requirements and procedures. You must contact the faculty at the university or visit their web site for information. You can find more information at the following sites:

### **SFA**

[http://faculty.sfasu.edu/mercerdixie/program\\_page/home.htm](http://faculty.sfasu.edu/mercerdixie/program_page/home.htm)

**NOTE:** SFA only accepts students into the VI program in the spring of each year. These new students take all of their courses together, starting in the summer of 2008 and are referred to as a “cohort”. The deadline for application to the 2008 -09 cohort is **March 24, 2008**.

### **TTU**

[www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants\\_projects/RATP/default.htm](http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants_projects/RATP/default.htm)

Certification-only students must complete the College of Education Special Education Program Certification Application. Go to <https://educfmk.educ.ttu.edu/ssl/pbapp/> and complete the Post Bac application. Students who want to also get a master’s degree will need to complete the College of Education Master’s application and take the GRE. Certification-only students do not need to take the GRE for acceptance. In addition, it is necessary to complete the university application to the Graduate School: <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/>. You must also apply to the Reach Across Texas program (RATP) to be considered for a stipend award. You will find information and the application on the website above.

**NOTE:** You should order an **official copy of your university transcript(s)** to be sent directly to the university as soon as possible – even if you have not completed your university or program application. Sometimes it takes time to have your request processed and sent. Don’t let this hold up your application.

## **Can I get a master’s degree?**

Getting a master’s degree is an important and admirable goal. It should be considered fully. Both Stephen F. Austin and Texas Tech universities offer master’s degrees in education (M.Ed.).

The courses described here will contribute to certification as a VI professional; either as a VI teacher or O&M specialist. The courses will not provide all of the requirements for a master’s degree in either of those areas.

If you want a master’s degree you must meet the following conditions:

- Take (or have taken) the Graduate Records Exam (GRE),
- Comply with other university entrance requirements (will depend on specific university),
- Declare your intention to that university, and
- Complete course work beyond the field of visual impairments, possibly on the campus of the university in which you are enrolled (TTU students will be able to complete most of their courses on-line. SFA students may be required to spend time on-campus. Contact SFA for more details.)

If you are considering this, please contact faculty at either university. Please note the grant provides support for certification courses. Students seeking a masters degree will need to seek funding elsewhere.

## **What if I am VI certified through an alternative certification program (ACP) and want O&M certification?**

Texas is unique in many ways, not the least of which is our non-traditional, ESC-based training programs. Although regional names vary, statewide these are known as alternative certification programs (ACP). These are innovative, non-traditional courses provided by ESCs in an array of disciplines. People certified in VI through an ESC-based program are fully certified and competent to be VI teachers in Texas. However, the training hours are not recognized by the national organization that certifies O&M specialists. O&M specialists receive their certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP).

Orientation and mobility specialists and VI teachers share a set of common courses. However, due to the non-traditional nature of these programs and the extensive variance in such programs across the country, the Academy (which certifies O&M specialists) does not recognize the competencies gained through an ACP.

The VI teachers who were certified through a regional program and want O&M certification will need to receive university credit for the common courses. This is not a reflection on the training or competencies taught.

If you are interested in an O&M certificate and were certified as a VI teacher through an alternative certification program, please call Mr. Barry Stafford (936-468-5348), or Dr. Nora Griffin-Shirley (806-742-1997 ext. 247).

## **What if I am not certified in special education?**

### **VI TEACHER**

If you do not have a special education certification you are still eligible and are encouraged to begin your career as a VI teacher. However, if you have not already done so, you must complete a 'Survey of Exceptionalities' course. These courses are available from a large number of universities. You will consult with your university advisor for additional information. You do, however, need to have some type of initial teaching certificate to add the VI Supplemental Certificate.

### **O&M SPECIALIST**

O&M specialists are not required to have a teaching certificate of any kind.

## **What are the acceptance criteria?**

**The goal of this program is to train and employ VI professionals to work with VI students. Therefore, in order to be accepted, you will have to make a commitment to work with children with visual impairments.**

Each university has specific acceptance criteria and procedures. These are also affected by whether you want certification-only, or want a master's degree. Also, each university has timelines for submitting documentation.

**You must contact the university of your choice for requirements and timeline information.** Contact information is on the first and last pages of this newsletter.

## **Can I get an emergency or probationary certification?**

### **VI TEACHERS:**

Reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was signed into law in November 2004. This new reauthorization of IDEA made changes to professional requirements for those working with children with disabilities. Emergency permits are no longer being issued. However, it may be possible to get a probationary certificate.

TTU and SFA have a VI probationary certification program that requires the completion of two specified courses and enrollment in a third before applying for the probationary certification. This program allows individuals to serve as a TVI in their district with the agreement that they will then complete the remainder of the courses required for full certification as a TVI.

Contact SFA or TTU for information about their probationary certificate program.

### **O&M SPECIALISTS:**

No emergency certification is available for O&M specialists

## **How will the didactic portions of the courses be taught?**

The courses are a blend of didactic (or lecture-type information) and skill-based learning. The didactic portion will be taught through a blend of the following methods: Internet, ITV and face-to-face meetings. More information about the skill-based training follows:

### **ITV/TETN**

ITV (interactive television) sessions will require you to travel to a participating ESC. Please note that not all ESC participate in ITV courses. ONLY SFA uses the ITV system. You should contact your service center prior to sending your application to SFA. For the instruction you will sit in a room with other students and participate in discussions via an interactive audio-visual device that looks like a TV. You will be able to speak directly to the instructor and students at other sites.

### **INTERNET**

The Internet is used throughout the programs; either for all of a course or some part of all courses. The instructor will be available via phone, discussion and/or chat rooms, email, and correspondence.

You will be able to participate in the Internet-based courses and activities at your convenience. Specific deadlines will be set for each module or unit. You must meet the deadlines; this isn't an independent study course. It will be very important for you to develop and stick to a schedule. Because of the large amount of information included in these courses and demands on our time that we all face, getting and keeping a schedule will be an important part of your experience. If you don't do this, you will find it difficult to complete your requirements in a timely fashion.

### **FACE-TO-FACE**

Unless you are participating at an outreach site such as the TTU Saturday classes at TSBVI, the face-to-face components will be limited and may be restricted to the skill-based portion of the training.

## **What will I need to access the Internet for course work?**

Being able to use the computer is an integral part of being a VI professional, especially for those in rural areas. These courses are NOT designed to teach you how to use the Internet. It will be assumed that you have access to the Internet and skills to function in that environment.

Every course will have some Internet component; some courses will be entirely over the Internet. If the course is taught via the Internet, prior to the class you will receive information about your instructor and the procedures. If the course is a blend of Internet and ITV, you will get information on the Internet activities when you get your course syllabus.

A complete listing of the required and recommended computer equipment and skills is included in *Characteristics of the Distance Learning Experience*, an overview of distance learning issues, which is the ivory document included in this packet. **This is critical information. Please read it and evaluate your readiness.**

## **How will the skill-based portions of the training be taught?**

The Basic O&M (taken by all VI professionals) and the Cane (taken by O&M specialists) courses have skill-based components that are taught face-to-face.

### **BASIC O&M**

During Basic O&M students will meet with a facilitator for approximately 20 hours of instruction. Scheduling will vary from site to site. The skill-based training will be conducted at a university or an outreach site. Please talk to university faculty about the possible locations of the outreach sites.

### **CANE COURSES**

O&M specialists take 6 credit hours of instruction on how to use the cane while under blindfold. SFA offers a single 6-hour course, and TTU offers two separate 3-credit courses.

The cane courses (Cane I and Cane II) must be conducted on a face-to-face basis. These courses will be offered at the TTU and SFA campuses and in any region (or combination of regions) that has sufficient students. **Pending availability to funds** students who attend these courses **on-campus** will be provided with a stipend to cover **some** of their tuition and assistance for housing and/or travel.

### **PRACTICUM OR INTERNSHIP**

The VI and O&M training options both require field experiences, known as either a practicum or internship. These will be arranged on an individual basis. When possible, the practicum/internship will be in the local area. However, each practicum/internship experience must meet certain basic requirements. **As a result, it may be necessary to travel from your existing job location for a portion or all of the practicum/internship. It is possible that O&M specialists will need to go out of Texas.**

#### **O&M internship**

In O&M, the field experiences (internship and practicum) are completed under the supervision of an Academy certified O&M specialist who meets the criteria for internship supervisors and who has been selected by the university to do so. Internship involves providing orientation and mobility services on a full-time basis. **This important experience usually happens away from your home community.** Faculty will make all arrangements.

#### **VI practicum/internship**

VI teachers complete a practicum/internship, which will be supervised by an experienced VI teacher who has been designated by the university to do so. During that period you will need to work as a VI teacher, completing a series of professional experiences. It is possible that you will need to travel beyond your district for a limited period of time in order to complete those experiences. For example, if there are no braille readers in your district, you may need to travel to a district that has braille readers to observe and interact with students who read braille. . Some students in the probationary certification program already have a job as a TVI and are able to do some or all of their internship hours with their own caseload on the job.

## **If I start in the Summer or Fall what will be offered?**

The answer to this question will depend on several factors, including your training option. Remember, in order to register for a course, you must **FIRST** be admitted to the university and meet other program enrollment deadlines.

A *tentative schedule* for both universities is on **Page 12**.

## **When will courses be taught?**

### **INTERNET**

Internet courses and activities have deadlines, but no specific dates for classes. You will determine the specific times when your learning occurs. However, it is very important that you set a schedule and stick to that schedule.

### **ITV**

The only courses that will use the ITV system are being taught by SFA. These courses will require you to go to participating ESC on specific dates. Contact SFA faculty for specific schedules.

## **Does it make a difference which university I attend?**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Both university programs address the same set of professional competencies, respond to the same set of accountability measures, and offer training which will enable you to be certified as either a VI teacher or O&M specialist.

There are differences. You must evaluate both programs and determine which best meets your needs. Stephen F. Austin only admits new students in the summer semesters. This block of students, known as a cohort, take classes together via the Internet and ITV systems. Texas Tech University accepts new students year round and offers courses predominately via the Internet.

**IMPORTANT** additional information is available from both universities. You should contact both universities to determine which is the best for your situation. You can find information on their websites. The addresses are:

### **SFA**

<http://faculty.sfasu.edu/swiftfrank>

### **TTU**

[www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants\\_projects/RATP/default.htm](http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants_projects/RATP/default.htm)

### **MASTER'S DEGREE STUDENTS**

If you are interested in getting a master's degree as a VI teacher and/or an O&M specialist, you must discuss this with the faculty at SFA and TTU. Each university has different requirements. SFA students *may* need to complete some of your semester hours on the university campus. Contact them for more information. TTU students will be able to complete most of your coursework via on-line courses.

In order to help you make that decision, you should contact each university to discuss their application and acceptance policies. It will not be necessary to declare whether or not you are seeking a degree during the first semester; however you should be actively exploring this possibility as soon as possible. If you are at all interested in seeking a degree, you should start as a "degree seeking" student. It is easier to move from "degree seeking" status to "certification only" status than to do the reverse.

If you are enrolled in one university and decide to get a master's degree from the other university it is possible to transfer 6 hours. However, you may not transfer more than 6 hours.

## **I heard braille is hard. Is it?**

Braille is a new code to most pre-service professionals. As such, it can be a challenge. Learning braille is like learning a new code; not another language, but a new system for English. The key to mastering braille is the necessity for *daily practice*, every day, even on weekends. Sighted VI professionals learn braille visually, not tactually as a student with a visual impairments does.

All VI teachers must learn braille in order to be fully certified, and have access to a probationary certificate. You will be required to take a Braille TExAS exam. You will be able to take the Braille TExAS exam shortly following the completion of the Braille course.

Like all of the courses in the sequence, the Braille course is **EXTREMELY RIGOROUS** in any situation, and even more so when taught in a condensed fashion, such as during a Summer Session.

If you are considering taking the Braille course over the summer, the course will be condensed. If you will not have several hours to devote to braille each day (including weekends), it would be advisable to wait until the course is offered during the long semester. If you take it from SFA over the ITV during the summer, plan on traveling to the ESC two times a week.

## **How will I get my textbooks?**

It is important that you have all your textbooks **before** the first day of class. Students will need to purchase their own textbooks. Your district or ESC may be able to help with some of the costs. The textbooks will then become part of your permanent professional library.

You must order your own textbooks and materials. This makes it critical that you register for each course as soon as possible. A list of required textbooks is available from each university. You will be at a significant disadvantage if you start the semester without your books. Even missing a single class will put you behind.

## What are the deadlines for enrollment?

Remember, there are at least **TWO** steps you must complete:

- Applying and being accepted by the university,
  - Being accepted into the College of Education Post Bac Certification Program at TTU.
- AND**
- Being accepted to the *Reach Across Texas* Program at TTU or *Project Vision* as SFA,

These are separate procedures. You **MUST** complete all of the steps according to the chosen university's procedures. To learn more about the steps for enrolling in the university visit the websites for the VI programs at SFA and TTU.

### TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY (TTU)

Texas Tech accepts students throughout the year although the majority of TTU students begin the program in the fall semester. You must apply to the university no later than **April 1, 2008 for the summer sessions and June 15 2008 for the Fall semester**. Once accepted, you must register for the designated courses. For more information visit: [www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants\\_projects/RATP/default.htm](http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants_projects/RATP/default.htm)

### STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY (SFA)

At SFA VI professionals take their courses as a group, or cohort. This means that everyone starts together and takes their classes together. The cohort is accepted in the spring of 2008 and start courses the first summer session. You must apply no later than **March 24, 2008**.

For more information visit: [http://faculty.sfasu.edu/mercerdixie/program\\_page/home.htm](http://faculty.sfasu.edu/mercerdixie/program_page/home.htm)

**SFA – DEADLINE FOR ADMISSION TO THE 2008 VI & O&M COHORTS: MARCH 24, 2008.**

**TTU – DEADLINE FOR ADMISSION FOR SUMMER 2008 – APRIL 1, 2008**

**TTU – DEADLINE FOR ADMISSION FOR FALL 2008 – JUNE 15, 2008**

## Will I need to get my transcripts?

Yes. You will need to arrange for a copy of your official transcripts to be sent to the university of your choice. The holder of your transcripts (previously attended universities) will send them directly to SFA or TTU. Since it may take time for your request to be processed, you are strongly advised to start this process **as soon as possible**. **Do not wait!** You might miss a deadline!

## Will I have a mentor?

We are committed to the mentor program. This means that all participants will be paired with a trained, experienced professional. To the degree possible, the mentor will be from your home region.

Together you will complete a series of experiences designed to further enhance your learning and your understanding of children with visual impairments. Your mentor will also be available for questions and concerns.

This is a non-evaluative mentor program. This means that your mentor will not be called upon to provide an evaluation of your skills, either by the university or your district. This is a person to whom you can turn when you have questions and/or concerns about content or skills.

## When will courses be offered?

### Texas Tech University

#### Summer I (May - June)

Cane I & II (TTU campus in Lubbock)

#### Summer II (July)

Braille (Internet)

VI Internship (Off campus; sites vary)

O&M Internship (Off campus; sites vary)

#### Fall

Foundations (Internet & TSBVI)

Braille (Internet)

Academic Methods (face-to-face at TSBVI/Austin)

Basic O&M (Internet + on-campus weekend)

Intermediate O&M Seminar (Internet)

O&M Internship (Off campus; sites vary)

VI Internship (Off campus; sites vary)

#### Spring- TTU,

Braille (Internet)

Academic Methods (Internet)

Basic O&M (face-to-face at TSBVI/Austin)

Eye Anatomy (Internet + on-campus weekend)

Visual and Multiple Impairments Methods (Internet)

Advanced O&M Seminar (Internet)

VI Internship (Off campus; sites vary)

O&M Internship (Off campus; sites vary)

### Stephen F Austin

#### Summer

Anatomy

Braille

Practicum in O&M (3 to 6 hours)

Advanced Clinical Practicum in O&M (6 hours)

#### Fall

Foundations

Methods in visual and multiple impairments

VI Practicum

Practicum in O&M

(3 to 6 hours)

Advanced Clinical Practicum in O&M (6 hours)

#### Spring

Basic O&M

Academic Methods

Practicum in VI

Practicum in O&M (3 to 6 hours)

Advanced Clinical Practicum in O&M (6 hours)

## Let's review your action steps

1. **Read** the enclosed documents. Both have critical information to help you make your decision.
  - a. *Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals* (white)
  - b. *Characteristics of the Distance Learning Experience* (ivory) an overview of distance learning issues.
2. **Determine** which university program fits best with your lifestyle and learning style, and other factors. Contact each university for more information.
3. **Send** for an OFFICIAL copy of your transcript(s). You may choose to have the transcripts sent directly to the university.
4. **Apply** to the university of your choice. You will find links so that you can apply online at:
  - a.SFA: [http://faculty.sfasu.edu/mercerdixie/program\\_page/home.htm](http://faculty.sfasu.edu/mercerdixie/program_page/home.htm)
  - b.TTU: [www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants\\_projects/RATP/default.htm](http://www.educ.ttu.edu/sowell2/grants_projects/RATP/default.htm)
5. **Talk** to your advisor at the university. This is likely to be one of the university faculty listed below.
6. **Register** for the first course.

TTU students: Your advisor will help you to understand what course and the procedures for completing this step on-line.

SFA students: Do not register. SFA will do the student registering for you.

7. **Complete** all of the scheduled activities.

## How can I get more information?

If you want more information, or have a special circumstance, *please do not hesitate to contact:*

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# **Characteristics of the Distance Learning Experience (Or How I can survive this change in learning environment)**

Developed by KC Dignan, PhD

Distance learning has been around for a long time. Some people will claim that smoke signals were a form of distance learning. This is probably an exaggeration. However, it is true that correspondence courses have been around since the 1800's. Now the distance learning experience tends to be a blend of various technologies.

## **What is “distance learning”?**

Distance learning is generally defined as any situation where the instructor and learner are separated by either time or distance. According to Barry Willis, Ph.D., “At its most basic level, distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, and print), often in concert with face-to-face communication, is used to bridge the instructional gap.” ([www.uidaho.edu/evo/dist1.html](http://www.uidaho.edu/evo/dist1.html))

## **Distance learning methods**

A wide range of technological options is used. Some separate the instructor and learner over space and some over time. There are many ways to provide distance learning and endless ways to combine methods. The various methods can be grouped into five categories. Each has its strengths and limitations.

### **Voice**

Instructional tools include the telephone, conference calls (also known as audio conferencing), and audiotapes.

### **Video**

Instructional video tools include slides, film, videotape and interactive video. One interactive, or compressed, video system used by regional service centers is known as the Texas Educational Telecommunication Network, or TETN. In this type of system, users go to designated places. Using telephone lines participants are able to see and talk to each other in “real time.”

### **Data, or computer-based systems.**

These systems rely on computers to send and receive data. The learner may work independently on web-based activities or courses. Sometimes the learner participates in chat rooms, or submits information to discussion boards. Information will be received and submitted via email or fax machine. It may be necessary to watch video clips via your computer.

### **Print**

The first distance learning methods used print in correspondence courses. Print formats include textbooks, study guides, workbooks, course syllabi, and case studies.

### **Outreach**

Outreach involves university faculty and students traveling to a specific site, such as a regional service center. At that site the faculty may employ traditional methods or any combination of the above methods.

When the learner and instructor are interacting *at the same time* it is called **synchronous instruction**. When the learner and instructor are interacting at different times, it is known as **asynchronous instruction**. Below are samples of synchronous and asynchronous types of distance learning.

**Sample of Synchronous instruction.**

- Computer chat rooms
- Interactive video instruction (ITV)
- Outreach instruction
- Face-to-face classroom instruction

**Samples of Asynchronous instruction**

- Computer discussion boards
- Web-based instruction
- Correspondence course
- Computer-assisted instruction

### **Why use distance learning methods?**

Most people, but not all, would rather attend classes in traditional settings. However due to budget, time, geographic, or other considerations, many are not able to attend a traditional classroom. Financial considerations, family obligations, or work requirements also impact this decision. In Texas only two universities and one regional service center provide training leading to certification as a VI teacher, O&M specialist or training as a deafblind specialist. These programs are at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas Tech University in Lubbock, and Region II in Corpus Christi. As a result, VI programs are very reliant on distance learning.

### **How can I be successful in this new style of instruction?**

Learning through distance methods can be a change, and sometimes it is a difficult adjustment. In addition to learning a large block of information, you must also adjust to a new learning modality. Before you begin, it is necessary to review the prerequisites, consider your personal work styles, and reflect on strategies for success.

#### **Prerequisites**

The world of computers is ever changing. Computers get more powerful almost weekly. It is impossible to say precisely what type of computer system you will need; however, it should meet the minimum requirements listed below. Additionally, distance learning methods will call on a different set of skills. Read these prerequisites carefully. Make sure you can meet the requirements. Our past experience has indicated that the equipment and skills listed below are critical for your future success in these classes.

#### **1) Equipment**

- a) Processor
  - i) **Required:** 200 MHz or Macintosh System 8.1 or better
  - ii) **Preferred:** Pentium or AMD equivalent.
- b) Memory
  - i) **Required:** 64 megabits of RAM
  - ii) **Preferred:** 256 megs. This is a situation where more is better.
- c) Printer

- i) **Required:** quality ink jet or laser printer with adequate ink or toner supply
  - ii) **Preferred:** since you may be called upon to print graphics, you may prefer a color printer.
- d) Modem
- i) **Required:** 28,800K baud modem. This is a *bare* minimum. You will have a hard time downloading photos and programs. However it is possible.
  - ii) **Preferred:** 56,600K baud or faster modem, such as a cable modem, DSL or other high-speed connection, especially for downloading graphics.
- e) Internet service provider (ISP)
- i) **Required:** any reputable and reliable service.
  - ii) Note: some people have had problems with AOL. Other people have had problems with busy signals from small companies. However, any ISP will work for the purposes of your courses and activities.
- f) Browser and related programs
- i) Either Netscape or Internet Explorer will work.
  - ii) **Required:** Adobe Acrobat Reader. This is a *free* downloadable program. If you do not have it you can find it and download it at:  
[www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readmain.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readmain.html)
  - (1) Depending on whether you take Internet or ITV courses, you may be required to download PerkyDuck and Quicktime. Your instructor will advise you.
  - iii) Note: you may also need to download a free video and/or sound program from the web. If so, your instructor will advise you.
- g) Email service
- i) **Required:** any *reliable* service. Note: some services place restrictions on attachments or size of emails.

## 2) Skills

- a) Internet skills
- i) **Required:** ability to find and navigate through any website
  - ii) **Required:** ability to copy and paste information from a website to another document.
  - iii) **Required:** ability to download information from the web.
  - iv) **Required:** ability to print information from the web.
  - v) **Note: it is critical that all students be competent Internet users. Conducting research and completing course activities via the web will be a significant part of this program. If you do not have these skills you MUST take a class or workshop immediately. You will not get instruction in how to use the Internet in this program.**
- b) Email
- i) **Required:** ability to send and receive email
  - ii) **Required:** ability to send and open attachments.
- c) TETN meetings
- i) **Required:** willingness to communicate via this system; to speak out to get your needs met. At any given time, the instructor can only see one site; the last person who spoke. She or he will not be able to see your “questioning eyebrow.”

- ii) **Required:** willingness to listen to the instructor and not participate in “side-bar” discussion. This distracts the others in the room and obscures the information being delivered while you are talking. While sidebar discussions can be annoying but not intrusive in traditional classes, they can be *destructive* in this format.

### **It sure looks easy, but....**

It does look easy. Just sign up for the class, go to the service center a few times, (not very many times), and check out a website. How hard can that be? Remember, these courses are **real graduate** courses. Additionally, the vision courses are **very content dense**. That is, you must be responsible for a lot of information and skills each semester. The following questions may be useful in helping you to evaluate your readiness for the distance learning experience. For more information read the article by Charlotte Thomas “Are you a Candidate for Distance Learning?” at [www.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/articles/distancelearncandidate2.asp](http://www.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/articles/distancelearncandidate2.asp).

Further, you should ask your self the following questions:

- What is my motivation for learning?
- Can I set a schedule and stick to it?
- Am I an independent learner?
- How do I learn best – listening, reading, looking?
- When given the option, do I prefer synchronous or asynchronous activities or courses?
- Can I take responsibility to ensure that my needs are met; to get the advising needed, to order textbooks on-line, to access reference and other student support services?
- Will I be able to ‘speak up’ in class, even if the class is conducted via an ITV system or electronically?

And MOST importantly:

- Do I have the persistence and determination necessary for a distance learning experience?

### **Tips for Successful Distance Learning**

Like all new experiences, it is nice to know what to expect and to get hints for success. Below is information taken from the Petersons’ website ([www.Petersons.com](http://www.Petersons.com)). Petersons has long been recognized as an important resource for connecting learners to institutions.

#### **Tools**

Before enrolling in a course, make sure you have access to the tools necessary to complete assignments. A word processor can help you to organize your work and communicate your thoughts more clearly. If your lessons appear through cable television, you'll want to know how to program your VCR to record the programs to refer back to. Access to a fax machine, and a computer with adequate hard disk space and modem for e-mail transmission are "musts" for many classes.

#### **Schedule**

Set aside a regularly scheduled time for study. If you have not been involved in academic pursuits recently, you may find that your career, family, hobbies, social and civic commitments leave little time for studying. To help you fit studying into your schedule, keep a record for a week of how you spend your time, and then decide what you are willing to give up. Schedule your studies for a time when you are mentally fresh and able to devote at least one hour to your work. Think of the hour as "reserved time." If you miss too many study periods, revise your schedule.

## **Where to Study**

You will find it easier to focus in an appropriate environment for study. Find a place that is free from distractions. You might consider work place--before or after hours and on your lunch hour-- a public library, or a separate room in your home.

## **Reading Skills**

You must comprehend and retain what you read for real learning to take place. Reading skills can be developed by concentrating on what you read and by taking frequent pauses to organize and review the material in your mind. At the end of a study session, review everything you have read, making special notes of important points. Reading a computer screen can be hard on your eyes; it may be necessary to download hard copies of reading assignments and communications from your instructor and co-workers.

## **Communication Skills**

It can be intimidating to speak into a microphone in a video or conference call, but your communication skills are an important part of any assignment--on the job, at home, and at school. Distance learning provides the opportunity to enhance these skills. Pay careful attention to instructions and be certain that you understand what is being asked. It often helps to develop a brief outline before responding to questions whether they are submitted in writing, via e-mail, orally, or on video/audio tape. Organization, grammar, and the appropriate style are important whichever medium you choose.

([www.petersons.com/dlwizard/code/default.asp](http://www.petersons.com/dlwizard/code/default.asp))

## **Links to other sites**

There is not adequate room in this document to list all of the available, high quality sites, but a few are listed below. If you want more information, you may want to check out the sites listed below.

### **Distance Education: A consumer's guide.**

Information from the Western Cooperative for educational telecommunications. This is a clearinghouse of information on distance learning.

<http://wiche.edu/telecom/resources/publications/conguide/conguidl.htm>

### **Distance Education at a Glance**

Basic information on an array of topics. Useful for those new to the distance learning experience. Includes 12 short articles or guides and a distance learning glossary.

<http://www.uidaho.edu/evo/distglan.html>

### **Petersons.com**

Peterson's has a large clearinghouse of information on colleges or universities. The link below is to their home page for adult distance learners. Includes information on finances, study tips, and more.

<http://www.petersons.com/dlearn/index.html>

### **Center for Disease Control's Primer for Distance Learning**

According to its Introduction, the intention of this primer "to provide this primer as a 'baseline informational source'." It includes information about delivery options, concepts and strategies and

other pertinent information.

<http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/phtn/primer.asp>

# Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals

Taken from *Quality Programs for the Visually Impaired*, developed by Nancy Toelle

The **Teacher of Visually Impaired Students (TVI)** has the following roles and responsibilities:

- o Has primary responsibility for specialized instruction and services required to meet the unique educational needs of her visually impaired students.
- o Possesses the skills and abilities necessary to provide and coordinate this specialized instruction.
- o Assists the student, parents, special and regular education personnel, and the student's sighted peers in
  - understanding the unique educational needs and learning characteristics of visually impaired students,
  - becoming aware of services and support available from local programs for visually impaired students,
  - acquiring information regarding local, state, and national resources for the education of visually impaired students, and
  - interpreting the visually impaired student's specific eye condition, the educational implications of the visual impairment, and the results of functional vision and learning media assessments.
- o Consults regularly with the classroom teacher, other regular and special education personnel, parents, and others to coordinate programs and services for the visually impaired student.
- o Assists the site administrator and teachers in making environmental adjustments for the student in the school.
- o Shares responsibility with classroom teachers in the identification of instructional areas in which the student requires assistance.
- o Assures that large-type or braille texts, supplementary materials, educational aids, and equipment needed by the visually impaired student, and the classroom teacher, are provided in a timely manner to ensure the student's maximum participation in all classroom activities (appropriate educational materials may be prepared or adapted by the VI teacher, or they may be obtained from educational, clerical, or transcriber services.)
- o Provides instruction in the development and maintenance of skills to meet the student's unique educational needs in the following areas, as indicated in the IEP:
  - low vision and visual efficiency skills,
  - concept development & academic skills,
  - daily living skills,
  - career and vocational education skills,
  - communication skills (these skills include braille reading and writing as appropriate),
  - social/emotional skills and abilities, and
  - sensory motor skills.

- o Prepares sequential and meaningful instruction geared to the student's assessed needs, IEP goals and objectives, functioning, and motivational levels. This instruction should be reflected in weekly or monthly lesson plans, as appropriate.
- o Provides assistance to the classroom teacher in academic subjects and activities of the classroom that, as a direct result of the student's visual impairment, require adaptation for the student.
- o Provides initial and ongoing assessment:
  - consults with assessment team to determine appropriate testing materials and modifications needed,
  - assists with assessments when needed,
  - interprets assessment results when needed.
- o Conducts functional vision/learning media assessments and produces written reports.
- o Attends ARD and IEP meetings for students with visual impairments.
- o Schedules time efficiently for assessment, instruction, planning, preparation of materials, travel, and conferences with relevant school and other key individuals.
- o Maintains ongoing contact with parents to assist them in the development of a realistic understanding of their child's abilities, progress, and future goals.
- o Provides in-service training programs for school personnel and students and education for parents regarding the needs of visually impaired students and adaptations, programs, and services for these students.
- o Makes available pamphlets, films, and other public information materials that may be useful in developing realistic and unprejudiced attitudes toward visually impaired students.
- o Coordinates with other personnel, such as transcribers, readers, counselors, O&M specialists, career/vocational education staff, and rehabilitation counselors.
- o Maintains a current reference library of professional materials and resources.
- o Acquires information and training about current research, development, and technology.
- o The Classroom Teacher (regular, special class, or resource specialist has the following roles and responsibilities:
  - o Provides instruction in appropriate academic and non-academic content areas to the visually impaired student in the classroom.
  - o Works cooperatively with the teacher of visually impaired students to

- identify the student's areas of educational need, including unique education needs,
- coordinate instruction and services to meet these needs,
- provide, in a timely manner, classroom materials that need to be reproduced in another medium,
- determine mutually convenient times during the school day for scheduling the teacher of visually impaired students to work with the student,
- modify classroom procedures and environment to meet the specific needs of the visually impaired student for participation in classroom activities, and
- exchange information concerning the visually impaired student with parents and other individuals on a regular basis.

The **Orientation and Mobility Specialist** has the following roles and responsibilities

- o Instructs the visually impaired student in the development of skills and knowledge that enables him or her to travel independently, based on assessed needs and ability.
- o Teaches the visually impaired student to travel with proficiency, safety, and confidence in familiar and unfamiliar environments.
- o Consults regularly with sighted peers, parents, classroom teachers, physical education teachers, and/or other special education personnel to assist in home and classroom environmental modifications, adaptations, and considerations and to ensure reinforcement of appropriate O&M skills that will encourage the visually impaired student to travel independently in these settings.
- o Works with the teacher of visually impaired students to conduct the functional vision assessment as it relates to independent travel.
- o Conducts assessments that focus on both long and short-term needs of the student.
- o Includes in the assessment report the needs and strengths of the student and an estimate of the length and frequency of service necessary to meet identified needs.
- o Prepares sequential and meaningful instruction geared to the student's assessed needs, IEP goals and objectives, functioning, and motivational levels. This instruction should be reflected in weekly or monthly lesson plans, as appropriate.
- o Prepares and uses equipment and materials, for example, tactile maps, models, distance low vision devices, and long canes, for the development of O&M skills.
- o Transports the student with parent permission to various community locations, as necessary, to provide meaningful instruction in realistic learning environments.
- o Is responsible for the student's safety at all times and in all teaching environments while fostering maximum independence.

- o Evaluates the student's progress on an ongoing basis with progress reports each 6/9 weeks as required.
- o Keeps progress notes on each student.
- o Participates in necessary parent conferences and meetings.
- o Provides inservice training to regular and special education personnel, sighted peers, and parents concerning the O&M needs of the student and
  - appropriate methods and procedures for interacting with the visually
  - impaired person that will foster maximum independence and safety.
- o Provide O&M instruction, where appropriate, in a number of specific areas: body imagery,
  - laterality,
  - environmental concepts,
  - gross and fine motor skills related to independent travel,
  - sensory awareness, stimulation, and training,
  - spatial concepts,
  - compass direction concepts,
  - sighted guide procedures
  - basic protective and information-gathering techniques
  - orientation skills
  - map skills
  - cane skills,
  - use of residual vision
  - low vision devices related to travel skills
  - urban, suburban, and rural travel,
  - travel in business districts,
  - procedures for crossing streets including how to deal with traffic control signals,
  - use of public transportation systems,
  - procedures for use of the telephone for information gathering and for emergencies,
  - procedures for interacting with the public
  - knowledge and application of community address systems,
  - procedures for travel and independent functioning in places of public accommodation,
  - skills of daily living,
  - sensory/motor skills in coordination with the physical or occupational therapist and teacher of visually impaired students, and
  - skills for independent living.