

Professional Advising Leadership (PAL) Fellow Report
Washington DC/Baltimore/Los Angeles
May 9-22, 2008

Helen Reidy
U.S. Consulate General, Sydney

Executive Summary

Project:

Best practice in online training and education

Objectives:

- To look at online training resources and providers with the aim of identifying “best practice” in the online education environment;
- To review the DOS-ECA EducationUSA online course for new advisers and provide feedback to the designer based on identified “best practice”

Findings:

- Since 2000 online learning has grown an average of 30 per cent a year in the US. This trend will continue.
- Flexibility is the advantage that online learning provides.
- Technically literate learners (those aged 35 and younger) are demanding more online education opportunities
- Motivation lies with the learner. It is independent learning undertaken, individually in isolation. Students need to be self-motivated learners who are comfortable working at their own pace.
- Technology is central to the delivery of online programs and needs to be accessible 24/7.
- Programs and materials need to be age appropriate
- Online content should be supplemented by hardcopy information
- Mini-tests or review questions should be incorporated within each section/chapter to track understanding
- Screen text needs to be supplemented by audio
- Material needs to be repeated within the program.
- Students need to be able to move backward and forward within the program
- Create bulletin boards or yahoo groups to provide a forum for those undertaking the training. This student interaction provides learning opportunities
- Include real life examples, case studies or scenarios
- Validate any test included in the program by pre- and post-testing
- Provide a glossary (hyperlinks to definitions)
- Keep language simple; avoid jargon
- Present the information in an attractive format
- Make the program easy to navigate
- High band width is crucial for users
- Online programs enhance career, academic, and personal growth opportunities through lifelong learning.
- Best for visual learners, not kinesthetic learners.

Background:

Online training and learning is a form of distance education delivered via the Internet providing educational opportunities for people who cannot or choose not to be in the same physical location as those delivering the course.

The Internet has prompted the rapid growth of online learning because it provides convenience and ease of access. Since 2000 online learning has grown an average of 30 per cent a year in the US (Bock: 2008). The University of Phoenix Online, founded in 1989, was one of the first accredited universities to provide college degree programs via the Internet. Many higher education programs, such as the University of Maryland University College, now offer extensive distance education programs.

The growth of online learning is not just within the higher education sector. U.S. school districts have embraced online learning. The National Center for Education Statistics reported a 60 per cent increase from 2002 to 2005 in the number of students enrolled in online programs (Shapira: 2008) In Michigan, it is a high school graduation requirement that a student participate in an online course. In 2008, the Florida Legislature passed a bill that mandates every school district to offer some type of online education program by 2009.

Online learning requires self-motivation. Students need to be disciplined enough to sit down at the computer and work on their own. Online students also need to be able to follow written instructions and communicate in writing. They need to feel comfortable with the technology of email, the Web, CD/DVD, and opening and sending file attachments. Students require regular access to a computer with sufficient memory and a reliable Internet connection.

Best practice in online training:

My PAL project focused on best practices in online training (refer to Appendix 2 and 3 for my PAL Program Schedule and Letter requesting appointments). The genesis of this program was the development of ECA's online training program for entry level advisers. EducationUSA has 450 centers throughout the world with advisers located in various offices (Fulbright Commissions; U.S. Embassies and Consulates; universities; NGO) with varying levels of expertise and exposure to U.S. higher education.

While the Department of State provides U.S.-based training programs for mid-level advisers (the USBT for those with 3-5 years experience) and senior advisers (the PAL Fellowship for those with 5+ years), a program for entry-level advisers that provides a foundation of core advising principles and topics does not yet exist. The online training course developed by ECA seeks to address this need.

The ECA program converted the hard copy College Board/USIA advising manual, *Advising for Study in the United States*, into an online program accessible via the Internet with the aim of delivering a professional, up-to-date, and easily accessible training and development tool for EducationUSA Advisers throughout the world. The primary goal is to provide a core knowledge set amongst advisers.

Online education and training organizations -- Lessons learned:

My initial research identified several organizations as leaders in delivering online training programs to geographically dispersed populations. These organizations included:

- *Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Department of State* – FSI develops and delivers online courses for Department of State personnel, a geographically dispersed population. FSI provides over 450 courses to more than 50,000 enrollees each year from the State Department and more than 40 other government agencies and military service branches.

The Institute's programs include professional development training for: Foreign Service administrative, consular, economic/commercial, political, and public diplomacy officers; specialists in the fields of information management, office management, security, and medical practitioners and nurses; Foreign Service Nationals (FSN's) who work at U.S. Posts around the world; and Civil Service employees of the State Department and other agencies.

Background on FSI can be found at: <http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/>

Note: FSI is currently developing a program for Cultural Affairs Officers/Public Affairs Officers on administering the Fulbright program. The program is designed for Posts where no Fulbright Commission exists. It may be advantageous for ECA to liaise with FSI program developers to incorporate information on the role of EducationUSA in the training program.

Key lessons from the meeting at FSI:

- Use examples and case studies to reinforce materials;
 - No more than 7 points per page with 2-3 main points;
 - Modules should not take longer than 50 minutes to complete;
 - Create Yahoo groups for users to interact;
 - Include workbook and activity sheets;
 - Review content every year.
- *Connections Academy*. Headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, Connections Academy is the first National K–12 virtual public school provider to be recognized by the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA). CITA is the most rapidly growing educational accreditation agency in the world. Connections Academy operates schools under management contracts from charter schools or school districts in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Wisconsin.
Note: Students located outside the U.S. can take courses offered by Connections Academy. This may be especially useful for U.S. students overseas who want to take subjects not available to them including US history.

Key lessons from the meeting at Connections Academy:

- Repetition of key messages and the ability to move backward and forward within the program are fundamental concepts for online learning
 - Online programs should aim to replicate the classroom not a book.
- *UCLA Extension.* UCLA Extension was established in 1917 to serve students in Southern California. It is now one of the largest and most comprehensive continuing higher education providers in the U.S. A pioneer in distance learning, UCLA Extension first introduced online programs in 1996, providing courses to more than 35,000 online enrollees from all 50 U.S. states and 80 foreign countries. Online programs now comprise 20 per cent of the total enrollment of UCLA Extension.

UCLA Extension offers the only Online College Counseling Certificate Program in the U.S., which provided a point of comparison for the ECA course. The UCLA Extension program is intended for college and career counselors in a high school setting who want to develop their professional competencies; high school guidance counselors who want to acquire this specialized knowledge and training to transition into the role of college counselor; college admissions personnel who want to become more familiar with high school processes and other institutions' protocols; junior high and middle school counselors who want to provide their students with a head start in planning their post-secondary options; and teachers who want to be better informed about the options available for their students. The online courses include modules which address:

- The College Admission Process
- Financial Aid Fundamentals
- Testing/Career Assessment
- Using the Internet for College/Career Counseling
- Special Issues in College Counseling
- Counseling and the College Bound Student

Online lecturers for the course include Dr. Esther Hugo who presents the module "College Admissions Process". I met with Dr. Hugo at Santa Monica College, where she is the outreach coordinator. Twenty-five students are enrolled in the nine week course module, which includes field activities such as visiting a college campus and writing it up as an entry in *The Fiske Guide*, and completing the Common Application for a fictional student.

The main difference between this course and the ECA course is the interactive element. During each module students form a discussion group that is monitored by the course lecturer. These forums provide the means for information exchange and interaction amongst participants, a learning environment itself.

Note: In Fall 2008, UCLA Extension online will offer the Advance Placement courses and exams online. This will be advantageous for international students who do not have AP offered in their own schools and who may gain credit or advanced standing for performing well on the AP exams.

Background on UCLA Extension courses can be found at: www.uclaextension.edu/

Background on the UCLA Online College Counseling Certificate can be found at: www.uclaextension.edu/index.cfm?href=/departmentalPages/index.cfm&department=/collegeCounseling

Key lessons from the meeting with UCLA Extension and Dr. Hugo:

- Successful online programs include online discussion forums for participants – either threaded discussion, blogs or wikis, and need to have a moderator to referee the discussion (if necessary);
 - Programs need to look attractive, be easy to navigate and be technically supported (personnel to answer participants inquires; deal with technical issues)
- *LeapPoint, LLC*. Established in 2006 LeapPoint, LLC was contracted by the Department of State to design and develop the EducationUSA *Beginning Advisers Online Training* program for ECA. The company specializes in the design and development of online training programs and had previously worked with the Department of State in developing the Mission Activity Tracker Online Training (MAT) program. LeapPoint was responsible for the design of the EducationUSA online course, working with content provided by Margo McCoy Howe, College Board Consultant and former high school guidance counselor. Howe edited and updated material from the hard copy printed manual for inclusion in the online course.

Key lessons from the meeting with LeapPoint LLC:

- Online training programs need to be visually engaging;
 - Begin each module with a short, summary statement indicating the goal of the lesson;
 - Incorporate multimedia and visual resources into online modules where appropriate. Have material reviewed by peers.
- *North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL)*. The North American Council for Online Learning was launched as a formal corporate entity, in September 2003, as an international K-12 non-profit organization representing the interests of administrators, practitioners, and students involved in online learning in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The purpose of the organization is to facilitate collaboration, advocacy, and research to enhance quality K-12 online learning. Having evolved from a diverse group of over 100 educators into a policy making body guided by a board of directors, NACOL is focusing its organizational objectives to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the online learning community.

In February 2008 NACOL released a set of voluntary standards for online educators, *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching*, a publication designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online teaching.

My meeting with NACOL President Susan Patrick was scheduled, cancelled and rescheduled, but did not eventuate.

Key lessons from reviewing NACOL materials:

- Instructors need to experience online learning from the perspective of the student;
- Programs need to utilize synchronous and asynchronous tools effectively (asynchronous tools being discussion boards, chat rooms);
- Instructors promote learning through group interaction.

Outcomes of my PAL Project:

- Completed a peer review of ECA's *Beginning Advisers Online Training* course.
- Provided feedback to ECA and LeapPoint LLC on the *Beginning Advisers Online Training* course based on findings from my PAL Fellowship (see Appendix 1)
- Will provide content and updates for the ECA's *Beginning Advisers Online Training*.
- Will communicate information to the EducationUSA network regarding UCLA's online AP courses and the availability of Connection Academy's courses.

References:

Bock, J. (2008) "Missouri's virtual school gears up for summer classes, second year", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 9, 2008

North American Council for Online Learning (2008) *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching*, North American Council for Online Learning, Vienna, Virginia

Oram, F. (2006) *Guide to Online Learning*, Thomson Peterson's, Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

Shapira, Ian (2008) "For More N.Va. students, the Classroom Is on the Computer", *The Washington Post*, July 23.

Appendices:

1: Review of EducationUSA online course

2: Reidy PAL program individual schedule

3: Letters requesting appointments and sample background information attachment

Appendix 2: PAL Program schedule

**Helen Reidy
PAL Schedule
Washington DC, Baltimore & Los Angeles
May 15-22, 2008**

May 13

12:30-4:00pm Lunch + Meetings + Tour
American University
Evelyn Levison, International Admission
4400 Massachusetts Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20016-8130

May 15

AM Depart DC by train for Baltimore

11:00am Meeting w/Barbara Dreyer, President, Connections Academy

Address: 5th floor, 1001 Fleet Street, Baltimore.
410 843 6302 (work); 410 336 8589 (cell)
bdreyer@connectionsacademy.com

Directions: The train station is only about 15 minutes away and there are plenty of cabs there. Come into the lobby and tell the security guard that you are going to the 5th floor. He will call us to come and get you or will use his card to give you access to the 5th floor.

Background: Connections Academy, LLC provides a new form of free public school that students attend from home. It is a service provider for the Baltimore County Virtual Instruction Program (BCVIP).

Followed by lunch

Early Afternoon Depart Baltimore by train for DC

3:30pm Meeting with Sandra Ospina, LeapPoint LLC and Bernie Burrola, Program Officer, Europe and Eurasia, US Dept. of State re ECA online training course.

Contact for Sandra: sospina@LeapPointLLC.com
Tel: 703.380.7790; www.LeapPointLLC.com

Address: Offices of the College Board
1233 20th Street NW, Suite 600

Background: Sandra is the State Dept consultant implementing the online course

May 16

AM

Orange Line Metro to Dunn Loring. Taxi to -

10:00-11:00am

Meeting with Susan Patrick and/or Alison Powell
North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL)

Address: 1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350, Vienna, VA 22182; tel:
703-752-6216 Fax 703-752-6201

www.nacol.org

POC for meeting: Linda Wood

PM

Orange line Metro to Ballston. Taxi to FSI.

2:00pm

Meeting with Caryn Danz, FSN Training, Dara Dozier, Deputy
Director of PD Training and Karen Audant, Instructional Systems
Designer/Project Manager, Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Department
of State

POC: Caryn Danz, FSN PD Training Officer, Rm F-3101

Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State; tel: 703-302-6897

Address/Directions:

The Transition Center is part of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) at the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC). The NFATC is located at [4000 Arlington Boulevard](#) (also known as Route 50), Arlington, Virginia, between Glebe Road and South George Mason Drive. Many online maps show the location as "Arlington Hall," its historical name.

Traveling by **METRORAIL**, the closest stop is Ballston on the Orange Line. From the Ballston Metro Station, take the 22A (Pentagon) bus to the NFATC entrance on George Mason Drive or the 10B (Hunting Towers) or 23A (Crystal City) bus to the intersection of S. Glebe Rd. and Arlington Boulevard (walk up Arlington Boulevard to the NFATC entrance on the access road). From the Pentagon Metro Station, take the 22A (Seven Corners) bus. From the Rosslyn Metro station, take the 4A (Culmore) bus traveling west. At the bus stop on Arlington Boulevard take the pedestrian tunnel under the highway or walk across the overpass, enter the facility at the main gate on Arlington Boulevard.

Background:

FSI are in the process of developing several distance learning courses for PD FSNs. Dara Dozier, the Deputy Director of PD Training, is coordinating the development of those courses. She is working very closely with Katie Sprang, the Director of FSI's Instructional Support Division, which takes the content we give them and puts it into a distance learning platform. .

May 17

Travel to LA

May 18

Free day

May 19

12:00 –2:00pm

Lunch followed by meeting with Dr. Esther Hugo, Santa Monica College (HUGO_ESTHER@smc.edu), tel: (310) 434-4955

Address: Santa Monica College, 1900 Pico Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90405 USA

Background: Ms. Hugo is an instructor for the UCLA Extension Online College Counseling Program for the module "College Admissions Process". Also works on international admissions at SMC

2:30pm

Tour of Santa Monica College

May 20

10:00-11:00am

Meeting with Rich Dawson, International Admissions, Pepperdine University

11:00-12:30pm

Tour of Pepperdine campus

May 21

09:30am

Meeting with Gloria Nathanson, Associate Director, Undergraduate Admissions, UCLA
Address: 1147 Murphy Hall, Los Angeles
Tel: (310) 206-1005. Email: gnathans@saonet.ucla.edu

10:30am

Meeting with Dr. Kathleen McGuire, Director, Distance Learning Programs, UCLA Extension
Tel: 310.825.2648; kmcguire@unex.ucla.edu

Address: UCLA Extension, 10995 LeConte Avenue,
Rm 714, Los Angeles, CA 90024

POC: Lynette Cooper Isreal, Project Assistant /Instructor Recruitment
Cord, Distance Learning Programs, UCLA Extension, tel: (310) 825-
2648

Background:

Dr. McGuire originally designed and continues to administer the
UCLA online College Counselling program.

Has worked with DoS on several programs including: 1) Graduate
School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA , under the
sponsorship of a Fulbright grant, which brought together 13 high
school English teachers each from India and Pakistan for training in US
educational protocols. They were here for a five-week institute, and
then we continued their education and information sharing online for an
additional four months after they returned to their home countries. It
was, without a doubt, a successful outreach; embedded in the program
was an articulated module on conflict resolution.

2) In addition, we have written and are administering (and teaching, in
my case!) "American Studies Online," a 22-week mostly self-paced
class for *au pairs* through the American Institute for Foreign Study/Au
Pair in America. The State Department was interested in providing an
academically sound education program for these participants, and so
we were approached to design an online course of study which would
meet their multiple requirements.

12:00-1:00pm

Lunch at UCLA with Gloria Nathanson, Associate Director,
Undergraduate Admissions, UCLA

2:00-3:30pm

Tour of UCLA

Appendix 3: Letters requesting appointments

1.

Ms. Barbara Dreyer
President
Connections Academy
1001 Fleet Street
5th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

Via Email: bdreyer@connectionsacademy.com

Dear Ms. Dreyer:

I am writing from the EducationUSA Advising Center at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney, Australia. I will be traveling to the U.S. in May to participate in the Department of State's Professional Advising Leadership program (PAL) during which I will be undertaking an independent study program examining best practice in online training and learning.

I have recently read about Connections Academy in an article in the *Baltimore Sun* -- "Virtual school shows potential" April 1, 2008 -- and hope that I may have an opportunity to meet with you and your staff to learn about the work you are doing in online/virtual training and education.

During my stay in the United States I will be based in Washington D.C. and plan to visit Baltimore on May 15 and was wondering whether it would be convenient to arrange a meeting with you or an appropriate member of your staff. I would anticipate that our meeting would be no longer than an hour. Background information on EducationUSA, and the project on which I am working is included.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Reidy
EducationUSA Advising Center
US Consulate General
Sydney, Australia.

2.

Martha Hochstrasser
UCLA

Via Email: MHochstra@unex.ucla.edu

CC: ldagradi@collegeboard.org

Dear Ms. Hochstra:

I am writing from the EducationUSA Advising Center at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney, Australia. I will be traveling to the U.S. in May to participate in the Department of State's Professional Advising Leadership program (PAL) during which I will be undertaking an independent study program examining best practice in online training and learning. I am developing this project with the assistance of Janine Farhat at The College Board.

I am aware of the UCLA Extension Online College Counseling Program and hope that I may have an opportunity to meet with you to learn more about this program.

During my stay in the United States I will be based in Washington D.C. and plan to visit Los Angeles May 19-21 and wonder whether it would be convenient to arrange a meeting with you on one of these days. I would anticipate that our meeting would be no longer than an hour. Background information on EducationUSA, and the project on which I am working is included.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Reidy
EducationUSA Advising Center
US Consulate General
Sydney, Australia.

3.

Dr. Esther Hugo
Santa Monica College

Via Email: hugo_esther@smc.edu

Dear Ms. Hugo:

I am writing from the EducationUSA Advising Center at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney, Australia. I will be traveling to the U.S. in May to participate in the Department of State's Professional Advising Leadership program (PAL) during which I will be undertaking

an independent study program examining best practice in online training and learning. I am developing this project with the assistance of Janine Farhat at The College Board.

I am aware of the UCLA Extension Online College Counseling Program and hope that I may have an opportunity to meet with you to learn more about this program.

During my stay in the United States I will be based in Washington D.C. and plan to visit Los Angeles May 19-21 and wonder whether it would be convenient to arrange a meeting with you on one of these days. Background information on EducationUSA, and the project on which I am working is included. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Reidy
EducationUSA Advising Center
US Consulate General
Sydney, Australia.

4.
Mr. Angel Perez
Director of Admissions
Pitzer College

Via Email: angel_perez@pitzer.edu

Dear Mr. Perez:

I am writing from the EducationUSA Advising Center at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney, Australia. I will be traveling to the U.S. in May to participate in the Department of State's Professional Advising Leadership program (PAL) during which I will be undertaking an independent study program examining best practice in online training and learning. I am developing this project with the assistance of Janine Farhat at The College Board.

I am aware of the UCLA Extension Online College Counseling Program and hope that I may have an opportunity to meet with you to learn more about this program. I would anticipate that our meeting would be no longer than an hour.

During my stay in the United States I will be based in Washington D.C. and plan to visit Los Angeles May 19-21 and wonder whether it would be convenient to arrange a meeting with you on one of these days. Background information on EducationUSA, and the project on which I am working is included. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Reidy
EducationUSA Advising Center
US Consulate General
Sydney, Australia.

5.
Susan Patrick
President and Chief Executive Officer
North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL)
Via Email: <http://www.nacol.org/contact/email.php?to=susan>

Dear Ms. Patrick:

I am writing from the EducationUSA Advising Center at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney, Australia. I will be traveling to the U.S. in May to participate in the Department of State's Professional Advising Leadership program (PAL) during which I will be undertaking an independent study program examining best practice in online training and learning.

I am aware that in February NACOL released a set of voluntary standards regarding online education. I hope that I may have an opportunity to meet with you or the appropriate staff to learn more about this work.

During my stay in the United States I will be based in Washington D.C. Would it be convenient to arrange a meeting with you or an appropriate member of your staff on May 16? Background information on EducationUSA, and the project on which I am working is included.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Reidy
EducationUSA Advising Center
US Consulate General
Sydney, Australia.

Sample appointment letter background attachment

EducationUSA

EducationUSA is a global network of more than 450 advising centers which actively promotes United States higher education around the world. The centers are supported by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Centers are located in Fulbright Commissions; U.S. Embassies and Consulates; universities and international exchange organizations. The EducationUSA mission is to provide accurate, comprehensive, objective and timely information about educational opportunities in the United States.

Information on EducationUSA can be found at: <http://www.educationusa.state.gov/>

Online training project

The U.S. Department of State is developing an online training program for entry-level EducationUSA advisers. While the Department provides U.S.-based training programs for mid-level advisers (3-5 years experience) and senior advisers (5+ years), a program for entry level advisers that provides a grounding in core advising principles and topics does not exist. The online training course seeks to address this need.

The online course will be based on a printed manual, *Advising for Study in the United States: A manual for Educational Advising Professionals* (The College Board and U.S. Information Agency, 1998). This course will aim to ensure that the information provided by EducationUSA advisers, no matter where they are located, is consistent and professionally informed. To assist the Department of State in this endeavor my project is to look at online training programs to identify “best practice” in the field.

Helen Reidy - Biography

I am the Cultural Affairs Specialist and Manager of the EducationUSA Advising Centre at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney and am the Consulate General's U.S. education specialist. I have been involved in international educational exchange for over 15 years; am a member of the Fulbright State Selection Committee (Queensland); the Eisenhower Education Fellowship Selection Committee; and NAFSA: Association of International Educators. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree from The University of Sydney; a Graduate Diploma in Library Science from Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, Sydney; a Master of Management degree and a Master of Arts in Communication Management degree both from the University of Technology, Sydney.