

the fact that researchers do not easily find instruments with which to evaluate web sites (Fitzelle & Trochim, 1996). Therefore, evaluation of ROPER Online Learning began with the beta test in the four weeks prior to its public launch,

relying on survey of undergraduate and graduate students in Family Sciences. Continuing evaluation will be made by the CPE, relying on the results of users' test scores as well as on the comments of users.

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ROPER Online Learning:
Continuing Education for Family and Parenting
Professionals and Paraprofessionals

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Collaborating with the Texas Registry of Parent Educator Resources (Texas ROPER), the University of North Texas Center for Parent Education (CPE) has published an online curriculum available free of charge to anyone working in the family and parenting field.

Phase I of the project centered on the planning, development, and beta testing of a curriculum called *Module #1: Developmental Stages of Parenting and Family Life*. The module was introduced in the February 15, 2001, launch of ROPER Online Learning at the Ninth Annual Conference on Parent Education at the University of North Texas.

To view the curriculum	For more information
The curriculum is availabe online: www.unt.edu/cpe/module1.htm	Dr. Mary Bold, Texas Woman’s Univ. MBold@twu.edu
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Description of Module #1

Designed to provide ten contact hours of continuing education accessible through the Internet, Module #1 is an illustrated text with hyperlinks to research and theory notes that expand on the basic curriculum. Information on developmental stages of parenting and family life is organized in seven Building Blocks, each of which links the user to an interactive Forum. Users read a case study and then post their comments about it to a Forum, where they can also read others' comments. Five of the Building Blocks feature short video lectures by "faculty" (Module authors), with written transcripts provided.

Content of Module #1 addresses typical transitions for parents and families as well as strategies for the family and parenting professionals who work with them. The text summarizes selected classic and recent research related to the topics. Applications of theoretical models serve to explain uses of ecological theory, stage theories, and a life course perspective.

At the completion of the Module and Forum participation, users may elect to test their knowledge in the Module's Self-Assessment section. The test of 50 items is e-mailed to the CPE (via a "Submit" button on the webpage) and answers are checked by CPE staff. The Center issues a Certificate of Completion to users who score 70% or higher and who also post comments to each of the seven forums.

History and Rationale

ROPER Online Learning was conceived as a method to offer low-cost training to professionals and paraprofessionals who work with parents and families. These professionals are often the key interventionists in reducing risks for abuse and neglect of children and in promoting the quality of parent-child interactions. Their success in these endeavors depends on their skill level, their knowledge of child and adult development, their familiarity with theoretical foundations that inform the family field, and their understanding of cultural variations in parenting and family life. Training in these matters can be accomplished through continuing education. ROPER Online Learning, an Internet-delivery system, is one method of continuing education.

The movement to online education has grown dramatically in the past decade. As of mid-1999, about half of U.S. adults were counted as Internet users ("US Net Users," 1999). Far from the historical profile of Internet users as being highly educated and overwhelmingly male, today's users are considerably more diverse (Parks & Walther, 1996; Robinson, Levin, & Hak, 1998). Internet-based learning programs have become popular with adult learners, especially professionals who see the Internet as a convenient source for education (DiPaolo, 1998). Thus, the plan for ROPER Online Learning was based on the assumption that increasing numbers of family and parenting professionals and paraprofessionals

have both access to the Internet and an interest in using online learning as a convenient and efficient way to access continuing education in their fields.

Research has demonstrated that instructional technology can enhance learning (Fitzelle & Trochim, 1996). Paulsen (1995) identified numerous pedagogical techniques that have been used successfully in computer-based learning between educators and adult students. While the list of technology options is long, Internet-based learning has emerged as a leading delivery method.

The typical platform of HTML-coded webpages provides access that is not dependent on brand of computer or type of operating system. Learning-enhancing elements of color, sound, video, and hyperlinks can be produced inexpensively. Interactive discussion forums can be provided for asynchronous use by learners. Dubbed "any-time, anyplace" education, online curricula offer learners the opportunity to learn at their own pace and in the location of their choice. ROPER Online Learning takes advantage of these technologies to offer 24/7-accessible webpages of continuing education.

Topics for ROPER Online Learning curricula were drawn from results of a statewide survey of parent educators and other family and parenting professionals in the Texas ROPER database. Priority topics were those that emerged as respondents' "highest need" skill and knowledge areas.

Lessons of Module #1 Creation

As predicted in the literature, large amounts of time are required to develop computer-based curricula (Hughes, 1996; Kearsley, Lunch, & Wizer, 1995; Lacina-Gifford & Kher-Durlabhji, 1996). Module #1 creation exceeded 400 hours of work by the lead editor and developer, 120 hours of research by a graduate student researcher, and scores of unrecorded hours by support staff in tasks such as proofreading, correspondence with authors, screening of photographs, website preparation, and file management.

Design of the curriculum required close attention to detail that might frustrate users unaccustomed to online learning methods or users new to Internet browsers. The developer thus incorporated user-friendly page elements in following the exhortation of Rohfeld and Hiemstra (1995, p. 3): "The amount of support novice users are likely to need cannot be overestimated." Visual elements, including white space, were incorporated according to electronic publishing standards to enhance reading, encourage interaction, and relieve fatigue associated with computer use. Basic standards for accessibility by screen readers were also followed.

Evaluation was incorporated in the ROPER Online Learning plan as a necessary component. Problems were identified, such as the potential validity issues of self-reports (Hiltz, 1997) and

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