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Classes Observed On Web

By Erica Plouffe Lazure

A partnership with ECU's College of Education and area school systems provides a fly-on-the-wall seat inside its classrooms for ECU students and faculty.

A pilot project launched with Wayne, Greene and Lenoir county schools enables education professors at ECU to conduct teacher intern evaluations via the Internet. The technology also provides ECU students an opportunity to observe real-time teaching practices.

Vivian Covington, director of ECU's Latham Clinical Schools Network, said the video conferencing initiative provides an opportunity for faculty and students to observe educators in the classroom without having to travel to the school and disrupt the natural flow of the class.

"With the price of gas and increases in the number of student interns in public schools, it's difficult for a faculty mentor to do more than one evaluation a day," she said. "And the students can benefit from real-time, real teaching experience and

have the opportunity to debrief right after."

Routine observation of how a student teacher performs in the classroom is an important aspect of ECU's teacher training program, Covington said. Digital video equipment and a live Internet feed enables viewers to manipulate a camera inside a classroom to zoom in, for example, on a teacher working with individual students or in small groups. The students and teacher are aware of the evaluator's virtual presence.

Because of the importance of making personal contacts with faculty mentors, educators don't expect that televised supervision will replace in-person observations. Covington noted that this project can supplement their ability to reach the most students in the shortest amount of time, particularly those who teach in remote areas.

Covington said she hopes the program, which offers the same technology as the College of Education's Partnership East, will soon be available at all of the Latham Clinical Schools Network's 18 school system members.