

## **Online non-credit coursework for early childhood and afterschool professionals in Vermont**

1-21-12

### **HISTORY**

STARS, Northern Lights and child care licensing seek to be in accord in defining acceptable training hours. A small committee with representation from STARS, Northern Lights, and the Child Development Division (CDD) has been tackling these and other issues for a number of years. The Committee already agreed on the criteria needed to verify face to face professional development activities. Once verified, Northern Lights staff can enter them into BFIS course calendar and individual credential accounts. We already agreed that *online coursework for college credit* would be treated the same as any college course. It is verified by a transcript and then approved if it is (a) from an accredited institution, (b) the topic aligns with one or more of the core knowledge areas, and (c) the student earns a grade of C- or better. We agreed that these online college courses could count for annual training hours, and STARS (staff qualifications and annual professional development arena). We agreed that after Northern Light staff verifies completion of the course it can be entered into a person's BFIS Credential account.

In fall 2011 Reeva Murphy, Deputy Commissioner of the Child Development Division charged that Northern Light Career Development Center would verify and approve *online* professional development training. These could be entered into a person's BFIS Quality and Credential account, and potentially meet requirements for child care licensing annual training hours, and STARS staff qualifications area training hours. As noted above, there is already a process for approving *college credit* that is offered through online classes. Therefore, Northern Lights needed to determine what documentation was needed to verify and approve *online not for credit* training.

### **What criteria should be used to verify and approve online, not for credit training?**

***There are millions of non-credit professional development opportunities available online, and more are developed each day. Northern Lights charge is to enable professionals to find and use effective and meaningful training that is aligned with the professional development system in Vermont.***

### **THE PROCESS:**

1- Northern Lights staff reviewed research about how to define quality on-line training. They also learned from Vermont funders of professional development, models in other states, national experts on non-credit online training, and Vermont organizations that provide professional development training and courses (sponsors). These discussions determined that organizations that offer online, non-credit professional development for early childhood or afterschool professionals (the sponsors) would need to meet specific criteria for approval of their classes in Vermont. The criteria include what is expected of face to face quality training in

Vermont now and other criteria specific to on-line, non-credit training. Criteria were drafted and reviewed several times by sponsors, funders and participants of training in Vermont. Based on this feedback, Northern Lights staff finalized the criteria elements.

2- Professional development sponsors that provide on-line non-credit training are sent an offer from Northern Lights to submit a *Request for Approval* demonstrating how they meet the criteria. Requests are reviewed for approval by Northern Lights staff or those they designate. If individuals want to add a sponsor to the list of those that offer approved online, non-credit classes in Vermont, they ask the sponsor to submit a Request for Approval to Northern Lights.

3- Northern Lights website posts an approved list of sponsors of professional development that offer non-credit, online training. This list includes their websites and some useful information for students. Participants who complete these trainings and want their attendance entered into their BFIS Credential account, send a copy of their documentation of completion, to Northern Lights to verify and enter into their account. (This procedure is also followed for other training that is not listed in the BFIS course calendar. The Documentation Cover Sheet on the Northern Lights website, outlines what to include when you submit documentation.)

4- When the new child care licensing regulations are drafted during 2012, CDD may seek more feedback on how non-credit online training can meet annual licensing hours.

### ***DRAFT CRITERIA for Approval of sponsors of Online, non-credit training***

In order for Northern Lights to consider including a sponsor in an annotated list of approved on-line, non-credit training, the sponsor must provide a module free of charge for Northern Lights to test, and meet the following criteria:

1. Training content is relevant for early childhood and/or afterschool professionals and addresses one or more of the five core knowledge areas: Child/Youth Development, Curriculum and Teaching, Health and Safety, Families and Communities, and Professionalism and Program Organization.
2. Training content is research based and follows developmentally appropriate practices.
3. The course has clear, measurable learning objectives that define the content and evaluation of the student's learning experience.
4. The course provides documentation to each student that includes the five criteria needed to verify all non-credit professional development: logo/letterhead and name of sponsoring organization; title and description of training; total hours and date(s) of training; name of participant; signature of instructor or sponsor.
5. The course incorporates adult learning principles: the learning engages<sup>1</sup> the student, is individualized, requires reflection by the learner and is interactive. This may or may not include a live person teaching and responding to the student.
6. The student's learning is evaluated and the sponsor provides clear and specific evidence of successful completion.

7. If there is an instructor directly teaching the student(s), that instructor either has at least a Bachelor degree in a field related to the content being taught, and extensive on-line teaching experience or is in the Vermont Instructor Registry.
8. Online training that provides Continuing Education Units (CEU's) approved by IACET or an accredited higher education institution<sup>2</sup> are automatically approved by Vermont Northern Lights, if they meet the other criteria above.

And for the student, the sponsor also provides information concerning:

- CEUs or other results issued upon completion
- Cost
- Format: written words, movies, graphics, etc.
- Education and credentials of the course designer
- Reading level of the course or module
- Content level of training: introductory level, intermediate level, advanced level
- Computer operating system requirements and time (range) required to complete course
- Work setting of the targeted student (i.e. family childcare, home visitor, school based program, center based program, director, caring for infants, preschool, school age, etc.)

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<sup>1</sup>By engaged learning, we mean that all student activities involve active cognitive processes such as creating, problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making, and evaluation. In addition, students are intrinsically motivated to learn due to the meaningful nature of the learning environment and activities.

- Engagement Theory: A framework for technology-based teaching and learning; Greg Kearsley & Ben Shneiderman 1999

<sup>2</sup>Higher education institution must be currently accredited by both DOE and CHEA accrediting bodies