



TV411: An Online Community for Adult Learners

Over a decade ago, the Adult Literacy Media Alliance (ALMA), at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), undertook a visionary project: to use popular media to teach the 70 million adults nationwide whose reading and math skills fall roughly between the 5th to 8th grade (pre-GED) level. Today ALMA is a nationally recognized producer of multimedia learning materials for English-speaking adults who strive to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalency, to qualify for college, a job, or promotion, or to better manage their family's finances, health, and education.

ALMA began by creating a public television series, *TV411*, that in combination with a national distribution system and outreach network, has reached millions of adults. First broadcast in 1998, this Emmy Award-winning program continues to air on many stations while correlated *TV411* learning materials are used by thousands of adult education programs nationwide. In 2002, ALMA created **tv411.org**, an extension of the television series and one of the first websites designed specifically for low-literate adults.

But times—and media—are changing dramatically. Audiences are increasingly immersed in the online environment with its rich interactive media, social networking capabilities, and ease of access. These features are especially appealing to young people who make up a rapidly growing percentage of those we serve. In October, 2010, ALMA began a full-scale development project funded by the National Science Foundation. This project includes development of a new *TV411* website incorporating video and social media features, distribution of content to other online partners, and an evaluation of how our visitors find, use, and learn from the site. The centerpiece of the project is a new web series, *TV411 What's Cooking?*, a cooking show that puts on the front burner the science and math at play in our kitchens, in the news, and in our lives. Building on *TV411*'s practical and contextualized approach to learning, the cooking show format is designed to put low-literate adult learners at ease as they tackle reading, math, and science concepts.

TV411 What's Cooking? will launch in fall, 2011, with a series of six episodes, each focused on embedding one or more basic science and math concepts in the preparation of a healthful meal. For example, a recipe for a green salad leads to an exploration of the role photosynthesis plays in providing the food we eat; preparation of a yogurt dip illustrates the effect of time and temperature on bacterial growth. Learners will be guided to web activities that help them gain a deeper understanding of the STEM concepts presented in the videos. Learners can also engage in online discussions linking STEM concepts in the videos to what's happening in the news. The project also includes a pilot program that folds the STEM content of *TV411 What's Cooking?* into Head Start family nutrition workshops. Finally, project evaluation and research will shed new light on how our target audience learns from and uses web-based instructional materials.

With more than 100 free, interactive, high content/low reading level lessons, games and articles on reading, writing, math, vocabulary, learning strategies, financial literacy, health literacy, GED prep, entrepreneurship—and soon with *TV411 What's Cooking?*, *TV411* aims to be the “go-to” online community for the tens of millions of adult learners who are eager to improve their education in pursuit of their life goals.

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