

On-line courses now a popular alternative

■ Students who don't want to spend their time in lectures can opt to take classes on-line

By Edward Yuen
Oregon Daily Emerald

Usually, taking a class means attending lectures and lab sessions for most students. But journalism major Erin Marshall will take a political science class by sitting in front of a computer and learning the material on her own.

Distance Education courses on-line are quickly becoming a popular alternative to normal classes at universities across the country. The number of Distance Education programs nationwide has grown 72 percent from 1995 to 1998, according to the Jan. 7 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Web classes at the University started three years ago and are currently offered in architecture, astronomy, economics, geology, linguistics, political science and physics.

Distance Education program coordinator Sandra Gladney said 510 and 342 students registered in the Distance Education program in spring and fall terms of 1999 respectively. According to the registration information from the DuckHunt Web site, 365 University students are enrolled in the program this term.

Gladney said Web classes allow students away from the University and continue their education without interruption. She also said some students in the MBA program who do not have a strong background in economics took Web classes before fall term began.

In addition to economics and politi-

cal science classes, the program offers a new physics class in winter term: physicists' view of nature.

Marshall said she hopes to get the same experience from the on-line class as in regular lecture class that includes a discussion session once a week.

Jason Kragt, a sophomore business major, took an economics class on-line fall term. He said it was easier for him to manage his time since he did not have to spend time at lectures.

However, students enrolled in these classes still have assignments and examinations for grade evaluation. Gladney said the assignments are usually handed in by e-mail.

Gladney also said the University has developed a proctoring process for tests and examinations. Students who are not in Eugene can take the examinations at the Portland Center in downtown Portland. Students can also take tests at the Social Science Instructional Lab in Prince Lucien Campbell Hall, on campus.

Scott Merryman, the graduate teaching fellow of the Web micro economics class fall term, said not having lectures in the course is the major difference between regular classes and Web classes. He said students have to be self-paced in learning and take the initiative to learn. In addition, students can contact the GTF by e-mail or go to office hours when they have questions regarding course materials.

Merryman also said students who are in Web classes may have difficulty understanding the course materials without a lecture, and is developing a set of lecture notes for his Web class.

Financial aid

continued from page 1A

both sides of the debate. Hake added that she understood how the government could be concerned with students using financial aid money for supporting a drug habit.

"Obviously, drugs are bad," she said. "But if they don't get financial aid, what other choices do they have except to do more drugs?"

Bryan Calza, a senior international studies major, said he thinks there are "dozens" of worse offenses than drug convictions.

Denying aid "perpetuates the cycle," he said. "I don't think drug convictions should have any bearing on how much financial aid they receive."

Under the new rule, students with convictions may be ineligible for financial aid for a certain length of time, based on when they were convicted.

For example, someone with one conviction for possession of illegal drugs before July 1, 1999, could still be eligible for aid, while someone who had a conviction for sale of illegal drugs after July 1, 1998 wouldn't be eligible until one year after the date of their conviction.

U.S. Department of Education officials have received feedback on the rule, particularly pertaining to the issue of double punishment, said David Bergeron, chief of policy and budget for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education.

"There have been lots of expressions of concern about the federal law," he said.

Though departmental workers may have personal objections to the law, "the department has no flexibility on this issue," he said. "It must implement the federal law."

Students who are convicted on charges of possessing or selling drugs can regain their eligibility for federal financial aid by participating in a government-recognized drug rehabilitation program. The program must include at least two unannounced drug tests.

Convictions affecting financial assistance

Students who have prior illegal drug convictions for the following offenses may find their financial aid for the 2000-2001 year in jeopardy:

One conviction after July 1, 1999, for possessing illegal drugs

One conviction after July 1, 1998, for sale of illegal drugs

Two convictions after July 1, 1998, for possessing illegal drugs

More than two convictions for possessing illegal drugs

More than one conviction for selling illegal drugs

Convictions for both possessing and selling illegal drugs

SOURCE: FAFSA worksheet

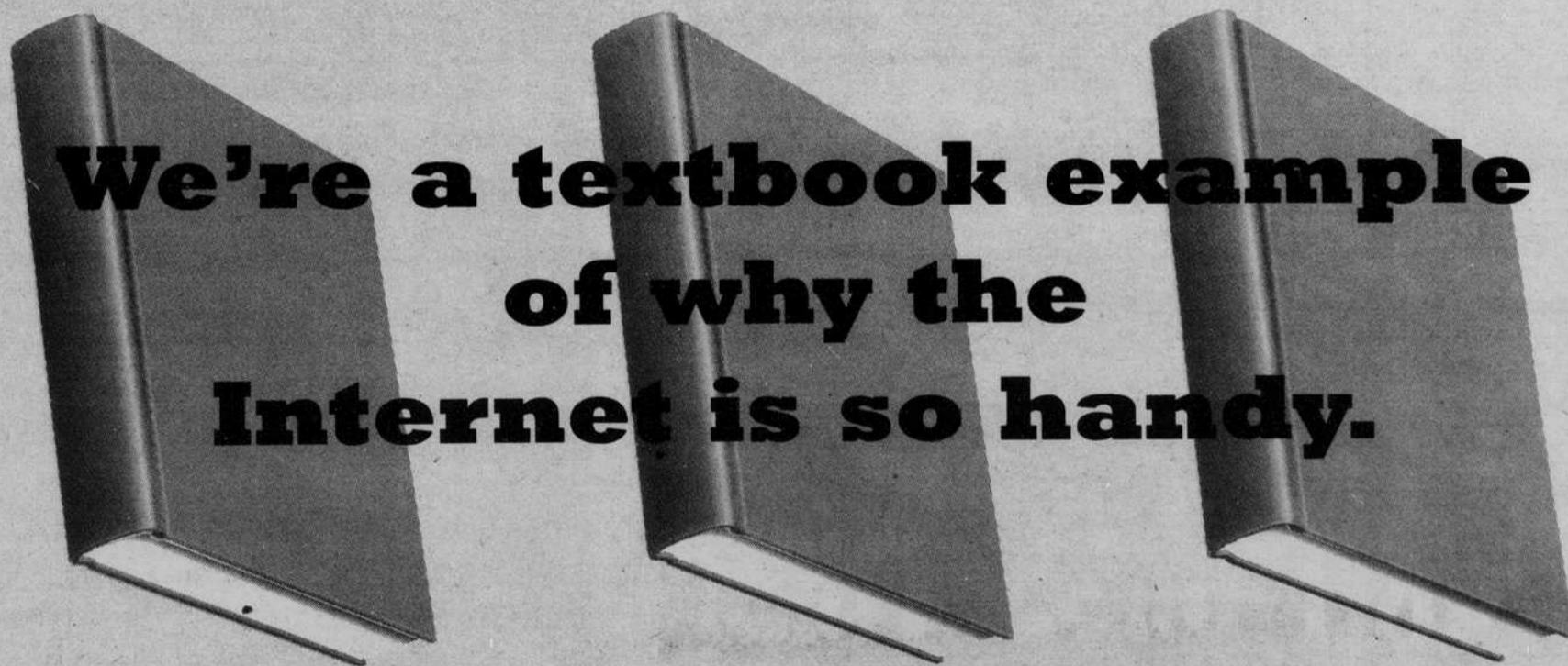
Jim Buch, associate vice president for student academic affairs and interim director for financial aid, said that for students who would be affected by the rule the best bet may be to participate in such a rehabilitation program, because students who are denied federal aid may disqualify themselves from state aid as well.

But students should apply whether they think they'll be eligible or not, he said.

"A drug conviction, in and of itself, will not disqualify a person," Buch said. "It's not a simple 'gee, I smoked pot once and I've gone to jail and now I'll never get financial aid.' That's not the case."

Buch cited several examples of students with drug convictions in their pasts who would still be eligible for financial aid. If a student was a minor when they were convicted, for example, their record would be expunged when they turned 18 years old.

Students with one conviction for selling illegal drugs before July 1, 1998, or one conviction for possessing illegal drugs before July 1, 1999, are off the hook — they will not be disqualified from receiving financial aid.



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