

Distance learning reaches out with technology

SUSAN COURTNEY
Contributing Writer

Using information technologies to cross-traditional boundaries of time, space, organization and culture might sound like the mission of the Star Trek Voyager, but in fact, it is the goal of distance learning at Clackamas.

Since 1978, when the first telecourses were developed, Clackamas has been reaching out to students through long distance learning. Correspondence, telecourses and online courses are offered in more than 30 classes. More recently, online classes have become global.

"We had a student from Pago Pago last year," Cyndi Andrews, director of distance learning at Clackamas, said in a recent interview.

Andrews' career at Clackamas began 23 years ago as a part-timer in the reading and tutoring department. She eventually became chair of that department when it merged with ABE/GED/ESL. In 1993, she became the director of learning services.

Andrews was asked to take on distance learning in 1996.

"I remember being a little balky. I didn't even know what distance learning was! I am not a very technology-oriented person; in fact, my children would say that I'm archaic even."

Andrews quickly realized the significance of online education and propelled herself to learn more. In 1997, Andrews and her staff attended a national conference on Internet-based courses in Phoenix, Arizona. They returned to Oregon with the technological information needed to make "virtual" classes a reality at Clackamas.

"Since then, development of online courses has been very rapid, given the tight budget circumstances of the last few years," Andrews said.

From the first offerings of five online classes in the fall of 1998, Clackamas now offers 35 online classes, six of which are hosted by other colleges but are available for Clackamas credit.

In her long career in education,

Andrews has witnessed many changes in how information is offered to students, and she anticipates even more technological expansion.

"More media, especially video, will be added to online instruction," Andrews predicts. "Telecourses and correspondence courses will increasingly have more web-based discussion groups, and interactivity will be possible to allow situations that seem face-to-face. We may get to a point where we don't label the class a telecourse, or online, or correspondence, just simply 'distance learning.'"

Although the demand for online classes is steadily increasing, expansion in class offerings is limited, in part, by the time an instructor must dedicate to create the course.

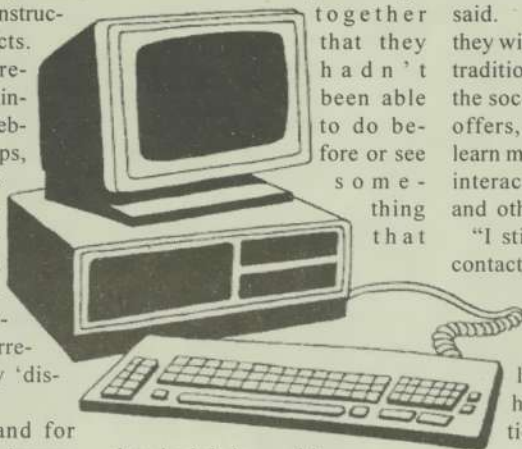
"It takes more than 100 hours, on average, to develop an online class," Andrews said.

Hal Bender and Dave Arter, chemistry instructors at Clackamas, worked together to put Chemistry 104 online.

"What I like most about the online format," Bender relates, "is that it is one more way of communicating and making our

offerings available to students." Bender has been teaching at Clackamas for 31 years, but he still gets a kick from seeing his students master chemistry.

"When students put things together that they hadn't been able to do before or see something that



they hadn't been able to see, that makes my day!" he said.

Online students typically are working towards a degree rather than taking classes for personal interests. Self-motivation is an important character trait for successful online students.

"It takes a very dedicated student to stick to the course in the online format," Bender said. "Dave (Arter) has made a point of trying to increase the frequency of contact with the online students and I plan to continue

doing that to help students keep progressing with the online lessons."

Online classes will continue to grow at Clackamas, as well as at the university level, Andrews said. But educators doubt they will ever completely replace traditional learning. Aside from the social experiences a campus offers, many students simply learn more easily in spontaneous interaction with the instructor and other students.

"I still prefer the eye-to-eye contact with students," Bender acknowledged. "To me, that's still the best way to work through problems that a student may have or to answer the questions that help the student progress toward understanding chemistry."

Andrews confirms that online courses can be demanding on an instructor's schedule, yet there are advantages.

"Teachers report that it takes two or three times the work of a regular class," she said. "However, they love the flexibility, the challenge of a new delivery mode and content, and the idea that they are helping students achieve their education goals by providing flexible course offerings."

"It takes a very dedicated student to stick to the course in the online format."

Hal Bender
Chemistry Instructor

Students prepare for Death Valley trip

CORINNE RUPP
Opinion Editor

A slide show and talk for students interested in participating in the annual spring break Death Valley biology trip will be presented tomorrow from noon to 1 p.m. in Pauling Center, room 101.

Death Valley is the largest National Park in the lower 48 states. It is one of the world's hottest regions and is considered to be one of the most beautiful parks in America, according to trip

leader Jennifer Porter.

The trip will be from March 22-31, leaving the Thursday morning of finals week. The science department gives three biology credits for students who participate in the field course, *Natural History of the Southwestern Deserts* (BI 165). The course covers the geology and ecology of the Death Valley ecosystems of Southern California.

Student Bill Lutz took the trip last year and described it as "life changing."

"Death Valley is far from a field

trip, it is an experience. It forces you to look at the world through new, educated, interested eyes. This trip is pure inspiration!"

Thursday's presentation is the first planning meeting for the trip. Those interested should attend, as space is limited to 20 students. Students need to attend planning meetings and have instructor approval before registering for the class.

For more information, contact Porter in her office in Pauling Center, room 124e or at extension 2926.



Last year's Death Valley trippers hold up a canyon wall in Titus Canyon.

FILE PHOTO / Clackamas Print

MIKE'S PROVERB OF THE WEEK

Even the nibbling rabbit can gorge itself to death.

Tibetan

Writers' Club Contest

Deadline: Friday, March 2

You may submit up to 3 poems, 1 essay, 1 piece of fiction, and 1 one-act play. Submit 4 copies of each entry. Include 1 cover page for each set of entries.

On each entry, include the title and your social security number. The cover page for each entry should include the title and category, your name, social security number, address, and phone number. Include an IBM-compatible 3.5" disk with your work on it.

All entries will be considered for the literary magazine *Synesthesia*. Return entries to Allen Widerburg, S124, ext. 2359.



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