

Welcome to

CLARK COUNTY

and Southwest Washington

OUR SCHOOLS

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builds
community
through
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ONLINE *and* ON TRACK

*Clark College goes the distance with e-learning,
partnering with other online leaders*

By JODIE GILMORE
SPECIAL TO WELCOME TO CLARK COUNTY

Clark College is taking the next step into the future by significantly expanding its offering of online courses.

"We're seeing a huge demand (for online learning) from the community," said Glen Jenewein, Clark College's Director of Distance Learning.

This demand isn't limited to just one sector of students – it is consistent between younger and adult students, people trying to fill gaps in their education, people interested in earning a college degree, even people who want to earn their GED. In fact, that demand has been growing for the last ten years. According to studies performed by the National Center for Education Statistics, for the 2000-2001 school year, 56 percent of all two-year and four-year degree-granting institutions offered distance education courses, whereas only 33 percent offered such courses in the fall of 1995. Although current statistics are not available, Jenewein stated that growth in distance learning has grown close to 200 percent annually over the last five years.

Clark College began experimenting with distance learning during the 2006 winter term, with an enrollment of about 900 students in 20 courses – about 8.7 percent of the student body. Of the 150 of these students taking only distance learning courses, 55 percent were adult students.

Jenewein said that in the beginning it was kind of grassroots effort, with each professor creating his or her own website, and the systems were not particularly secure. The system has quickly matured, however, and Jenewein expects burgeoning interest in distance learning during the spring and summer quarters. During the spring term, more than 60 distance learning courses will be available, and 866 students had already registered by March 1 (and registration wasn't

really even open for spring term yet). In addition to strictly online courses, Clark's distance learning opportunities include telecourses over Comcast Cable and teleweb courses, which combine video courses with online instruction.

Clark's online system is now state-of-the-art, including their own course management system (they use a program called Blackboard), and is quickly gaining a reputation for excellence.

"Other colleges are calling us up do see how we did things," said Jenewein.

In fact, according to Jenewein, Clark is fast becoming the largest online college in Washington. Jenewein, who has guided the development of distance learning at Clark, has plenty of experience in this sort of thing – he teaches online for the UCLA Extension, has taught IT, business information services and computer science management for various colleges and universities. His doctorate dissertation was also on distance learning.

Jenewein isn't the only faculty expert on online education. Dr. Adnan Hamideh, a member of Clark College's Business Department, recently completed his dissertation, titled

"Cultural Transformation of Curriculum to an Online Environment: Guidelines for Faculty in Higher Education." His research, spanning five years, provides important context and guidance for Clark College's own online initiatives.

Hamideh wanted to answer the question of how to implement online education so that no matter who or where the student is, they obtain effective results from online education. His 24 tips will enable instructors to design online curricula so it applies to all cultural and learning styles.

"My goal is to have every faculty member in the U.S. read it," said Hamideh. He is currently looking for a foundation or institution that will sponsor the publishing of his guidelines.

Another Clark College instructor setting the standard for

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Distance learning close to home

While the distance learning opportunities at Clark College abound, there are also other higher education institutions within Clark County that offer distance learning.

University of Phoenix. The University of Phoenix – Vancouver campus offers courses through their FlexNet program, which combines online learning with “on-ground” learning – that is, traditional classroom time. The University of Phoenix is a leader in distance learning, offering its first online courses in the early 1990s. At the Vancouver campus, the FlexNet program includes bachelor’s degrees in Business Management, Criminal Justice and Information Technology and MBA, and a master’s in Management. As the nation’s largest online university, the University of Phoenix had 120,000 online registered students last semester.

The University has signed an articulation agreement with Clark College, facilitating the transfer of credits from the two-year program to the four-year program.

City University. City University offers several online degree and certificate programs, including a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration, Computer Systems, Accounting and Applied Psychology, as well as a master’s degree in Computer Systems, Project Management, Public Administration and the traditional MBA. City University also offers mixed-mode learning, which blends in-class learning with online activities and discussions.

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online education at Clark and elsewhere is Scott Morris, who may be teaching the only purely online GED course in the state. Accessed through the GED–Illinois website, www.gedillinois.org, Morris’ class lets the students progress at their own pace, and get feedback from him on their assignments. Typically, the more traditional classroom GED course has lesson due-dates, and instructor feedback is limited to occasional assignments.

“I have a number of students I have never met, but I see everything they do,” said Morris.

This is the second year Morris has offered his online GED course, and enrollment has tripled to about 15 students during the current quarter. Morris admits that it is challenging to encourage his students using only writing (e-mail, for example), but it “seems to work.” In fact, due to the “always on” nature of being online, he finds

himself participating in his online students’ lives more than he does with his traditional students. For example, he was e-mailing with a student who just had twins, and she was writing him from her laptop in the hospital.

“If she’d been a student in a classroom setting,” said Morris, he wouldn’t have heard about the twins – she would have simply stopped coming to class.

Online courses at Clark include art, computer technology, mathematics, music, English, business administration, economics and chemistry. Jenewein said that the eventual goal is to offer a complete Associate of Arts transfer degree online. Another goal is to extend the online benefits from the classroom to other aspects of the campus, such as online registration, financial aid, academic advising and clubs.

“The program touches the entire campus,” stated Jenewein. [WCC](http://www.wcc.edu)

Benefits of Online Learning

According to Glen Jenewein, director of distance learning at Clark College, and Mary Bradbury Jones, University of Phoenix’s Vancouver Campus college chair, online learning poses many benefits, both for the learning institution and for students.

For the institution, online courses have a lower overhead, serving to reduce per-student costs. Additionally, there is the potential to increase enrollments of nontraditional students and students who otherwise might not be able to enroll due to constraints of geography, time, job and family. The convenience of online instruction provides access to educational opportunities for schedule- or place-bound students. An example of this is University of Phoenix MBA student Cedrick Redula.

“It works well for my schedule,” said Redula of the FlexNet program at University of Phoenix. Since Redula works Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., as well as runs a personal business on the side, he would not be able to attend classes in the traditional classroom-only setting.

But beyond these benefits, the advantages of online learning to the students are numerous:

“Virtual” skills. Success in the real world demands competence at project management, team-building and communication in a “virtual environment,” where team members may never meet face-to-face.

Dynamic relationship with instructor. Without the strict time-component of “office hours” and “class time,” instructors can be more of an accessible coach than merely an “expert.”

Increased opportunity for peer learning. Online interaction extends the time available for peer feedback, so people who would feel uncomfortable responding “off the cuff” in a classroom can critique and learn from other students’ work. For example, Redula said that with online learning, students can give better answers to discussion questions, because they do not have to answer on the spot in the classroom, and have access to more resources than just the textbook.