

Distance Learning Today

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Highlights

Keeping your kids sharp over the summer

Learning shouldn't stop when the school year does

Distant languages come home

Learning "strategic" foreign languages online

Making the grade online

Tips from a teacher

The Digital Divide

Can 19th century classrooms prepare us for 21st century careers?

Are digital textbooks in a bind?

The forces delaying acceptance

Middle schools and high schools log on

Distance learning broadens its base

An online teacher tells it like it is

A first-person account of the online teaching experience

Major Employers Embrace Online Degrees



by Dr. Kenneth E. Hartman

Vernon Ross, deputy director of learning and development at Lockheed Martin Corporation (LCM), knows all too well the importance of distance learning. With over 140,000 employees, located in over 50 countries, ensuring that his colleagues have access to university-level courses is a monumental task. He said, "With employees dispersed around the globe, LMC believes that online learning offers a world of possibilities and promises to aid in the delivery of critical, strategic training to ensure that as an organization, we are well positioned to compete in a global marketplace with highly skilled employees."

Ross is not alone. According to a 2005 survey of 151 learning executives by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), employers increasingly cite distance learning as a key to increased employee satisfaction and retention. According to the ASTD survey, 29 percent of corporate tuition reimbursements now go to online or blended programs, and nearly 60 percent of survey respondents expected the role of online higher

education to increase in their organizations in the next two or three years.

The reasons are simple. Distance or online learning provides both the employee and the employer with the best of all worlds. Employees enjoy the convenience and flexibility of completing assignments in the evenings and/or on weekends, so their after-work commitments to family and friends aren't disrupted. Moreover,

"Our research found that a majority of employers – more than 62 percent – have a favorable attitude toward online instruction."

distance learners needn't race out of the office at 5:00 pm in order to find a parking spot on-campus for an evening course.

"Had it not been for the online degree option, I would have never considered going back to college to earn my Master's degree," says Kimberly Lovecchio, a production material planner at L-3 Communications Systems in Camden, NJ. Lovecchio, who graduated in 2006 with her Master's in Engineering Management from Drexel University Online, credits her online degree with opening new opportunities within her company.

Many employers, like Subaru of America, leave little doubt where they stand on distance learning. "We encourage our employees inter-

Continued on page 13

Distance Learning Today

MAJOR EMPLOYERS EMBRACE ONLINE DEGREES 1

As online employee training takes hold, executive attitudes shift

HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS AVOID SUMMER LEARNING LOSS 3

Why "summer school" makes sense for every student

A GUIDE TO MAKING THE GRADE ONLINE 4

Useful advice from an online teacher

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE 6

A university provost explores the digital discrepancy between the schoolhouse and the workplace

NO LIMITS ON LEARNING FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS 7

Distance learning takes hold in local school systems

TEACHING ONLINE: ONE TEACHER'S STORY 8

A 12-year veteran of online teaching has learned a thing or two

DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS: AN UNREALIZED REVOLUTION 9

The journey from paper to pixels is certain but slow

MAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGES LESS FOREIGN 11

Training linguists is suddenly a national imperative. Online learning leads the way

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To our valued readers:

Welcome to the second edition of Distance Learning Today, a quarterly supplement to USA TODAY in partnership with the United States Distance Learning Association.

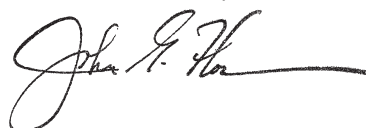


Response to our first issue in January has been enormously gratifying. Consumers and academics agreed that it was an informative, useful and much-needed guide to education's fastest growing segment. Our advertisers - all of them providers of quality distance learning programs - reported robust response to their offerings and our editor fielded many requests for article reprints. It was, as we hoped, a lively meeting place of the ideas and individuals that are driving this revolution in education.

If you're one of the millions of students worldwide who are pursuing, or about to pursue, courses, degrees or certificates through distance learning technologies, spend some time with this second issue of Distance Learning Today. I'm confident it will be helpful as you fulfill your own personal and educational ambitions.

Finally, feel free to visit www.usdla.org where you will find additional information about Distance Learning programs along with USDLA membership information and opportunities.

John G. Flores, Ph.D.



Chief Executive Officer
United States Distance
Learning Association



If you would like to propose or submit an article for future issues of Distance Learning Today, please send all materials (including any illustrations) to dltoday@bkoadv.com

How to Help Your Kids Avoid Summer Learning Loss

by Liz Pape

The dog days of summer are just around the corner. Your teenagers may envision days spent lounging by the pool, but they may pay a high price for their fun in the sun. Despite working hard during the previous school year, research shows that unless they are actively learning over the summer, they will regress academically.

Numerous studies prove that all students experience significant learning losses during the summer months. According to research performed by Johns Hopkins University's Center for Summer Learning, all students lose approximately 2.6 months of grade-level equivalency in mathematics and one to three months in reading, depending upon their household income level.

Other research shows that teachers typically spend between four to six weeks re-teaching material that students have forgotten over the summer.

If we want our kids to succeed in an increasingly competitive college environment and thrive in today's highly competitive job market, they'll need summer learning opportunities beyond what schools typically offer. Scarce funding for broad-based summer school programs has made it difficult for most schools to offer them. Unless your student needs to take a remedial course or recover credits, classroom opportunities for summer enrichment are few. In fact, only about 10 percent of students nationwide participate in summer school of any kind or attend schools with non-traditional calendars. Distance learning during the



summer is rapidly changing that.

Traditionally intended for "problem" kids or those that failed classes during the school year, summer school today has undergone a makeover. Thanks to a host of quality online summer school courses that focus on enrichment rather than credit recovery, parents and kids can combat summer learning loss in an easily accessible way. In addition, motivated students can take classes that would not fit into their schedules during the regular

Continued on page 10

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A Guide to Making the Grade Online



by Errol Craig Sull

Well, there you sit, the computer in front of you beckons. Next to the computer is all the registration info for taking your first distance learning class and you feel like you're at a border crossing, fumbling with passport and papers. You have a steaming cup of coffee nearby, the door is closed for maximum quiet and focus and you've adjusted your desk lamp so it's just right. You take a deep breath and sign on to your new school and course. With a click of your mouse, you've just joined the millions of others in this country, and around the world, known as distance learners!

For many, taking a distance learning (DL) course has become second nature; they know what to expect and have embraced this form of learning. But if you're new to it, distance learning can be somewhat intimidating and a bit scary at first.

It doesn't have to be.

What follows is a mini-guide to all the basics you need to make DL work for you. This won't give you a secret tip to acing a course, tell you how to "read" your instructor, or offer you a magic approach to learning – but what it does present is the information that's crucial to making DL an enjoyable, productive and fun experience.

• **Self-Discipline, Time Management, and Organization are your best friends.** Approach your DL course like courses you've taken in the classroom, requiring X amount of effort, time, and commitment.

Jot down all course "cannot miss" dates and times on a pad designated for the course; keep it next to your computer. Make use of online "reminder" websites to keep you on top of all deadlines, "stuff to do" for the course, etc. Block out X time each day to do your schoolwork (it's important you establish a routine). Organize all classwork into online folders. Check class email and announcements daily.

• **Explore the online platform your school uses.** An online course platform is what your

school uses to present and manage your course (WebCT, eCollege, Blackboard, WebTycho, Angel, etc.). As it becomes available to you, explore and experiment with it; take the platform tutorial (each has one); and don't hesitate to call or email the platform Help Desk with any questions.

• **Communicate with your instructor and class on a regular basis.** Let the instructor know why you can't meet a deadline; can't make a scheduled online meeting; or that you'll be away for awhile. If something comes up at the last minute, be sure to inform your instructor as soon as possible. Don't overwhelm your instructor with emails and IM's – only contact him or her with legitimate questions and concerns.

Follow all directions. Your instructor will add to the class syllabus emails and postings that clarify and expand upon information in the syllabus and other items. Read all thoroughly and make hard copies, keeping them in one folder so you always have them at the ready. Be sure to follow their directives.

• **Take advantage of the resources offered by the Internet and your school.** All school platforms have a variety of resources available. Additionally, the Internet has a wide variety of sites that can serve as wonderful aides in assisting with assignments. Create a Favorites folder for those that are okay to use so they're readily available.

• **Don't even think about plagiarizing! Your work must be your own.** Don't diminish the satisfaction of earning a grade or degree by using someone else's work. And remember this: if you fail a course because you plagiarized, that failing grade – and the reason for it – stays on your class record forever. It will be available to anyone who needs to see a copy of your transcript, such as prospective employers.

• **Save all returned assignments and class emails from your instructor.** This assures you can check previous errors, and your

instructor's comments and suggestions, keep all important info from your instructor, and have websites/related material that might be helpful in the class.

• **Invest in a good computer and the proper software, and keep them healthy.** You don't want your computer to be outdated or slow to the point where it can't handle the course's technical requirements. You do want the best software to fit the course's needs; and you should give your computer an internal checkup to be sure all is in good working order.

• **Always expect the "unexpecteds."** Something you hadn't planned on will always pop up – get used to it. Always try to have a backup plan "just in case"... and when your unexpected does happen, don't let it unnerve you; rather, work around and with it as best you can.

• **Interact with your classmates.** Take advantage of opportunities to talk online with your classmates. You'll feel more a part of the class, gain new insight on varied subjects, get input on assignment problems you may be having, and improve your grade (in many online courses this participation is graded by your instructor).

• **Always dress your writing in a tuxedo, never a pair of jeans. Online learning is writing-intensive.** When you "discuss" a course topic online, you're typing, not talking. The better your writing, the clearer the information, ideas, and comments you contribute will be.

Distance learning is a wonderful way to improve your knowledge on any number of subjects and earn a degree or certification, all from the comfort of your home. But the key to doing this smoothly, efficiently, and productively is to do it smartly!

Errol Craig Sull has been teaching online for 12 years. He frequently conducts workshops on and writes about distance learning and currently teaches for Excelsior College.

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The Digital Divide: 19th Century Classrooms, 21st Century Careers

by Craig Swenson

In the space of one brief decade the Internet has changed our world – and most of us with it. Almost everything we do is different now. We don't shop like we used to. We don't read like we used to. We don't make dates, find mates, or communicate like we used to.

The digital revolution is dramatically changing the way we learn. Some scientists go so far as to suggest that immersion in the digital world will affect how our brains wire themselves. This will be especially true for those who make up the first generations to have grown up as, what Marc Prensky called, “digital natives.”

We often don't think of the kinds of the things we do each day at work as learning – but they are. When we boot up our computers at work and get into email we invariably come across questions or problems for which we don't have answers. What we do to get those answers is learning in the very same sense as when we went to school. Imagine walking into your doctor's office 10 years ago with a set of complicated and bewildering symptoms. Where would your doctor have learned what she needed to know in order to diagnose your illness? Where would your lawyer have found the case law for an overdue legal brief? Where would your accountant have researched the changes in the tax law for your return? In all three cases the answer is pretty simple – textbooks and journals.

If I asked the same question today the answer would be equally simple but very different. Today's professionals are digital. I've interviewed doctors, lawyers, accountants, managers, and engineers. It is clear to me that these, and most other professions, now demand, and their employers expect, just-in-time learning. There is just too much knowledge already out there, and being created every day, to do it any other way.

To keep up, professionals search the Internet or access technical databases. They search via laptop, PDA, or Smartphone. They seldom read anything cover-to-cover, at least for work-related learning. Digital tools guide them to an ever-widening variety of sources and synthesize the newest and latest knowledge the moment it becomes available. They're also as likely to take a self-paced tutorial



or a flash-video presentation as they are to read an article.

Professionals also learn through collaboration. They instant message, email, participate in online discussion groups and conduct business via teleconferences and web meetings. They share and manipulate data on their computer screens in real time. They communicate and work in teams across time zones and continents. Those who will succeed in our global marketplace have learned to learn from each other and, importantly, to teach each other.

Those who will succeed in our global marketplace have learned to learn from each other and, importantly, to teach each other.

Ask CEOs about the competencies MBAs, engineers, and other professionals lack coming out of college and they'll point to these collaborative and technological skills. They seldom talk about subjects like accounting, economics, or strategic planning. Those are assumed. They talk instead about leadership, teamwork, communication, and the ability to manage and adapt to change. Knowing how to learn and using that skill throughout a career are top priorities for them.

This is the world that today's college graduates enter. This is what they should know and be able to do. This is why professionals have been forced to adapt so quickly to the digital world. It is a career imperative.

Yet consider how much time and talent is wasted when these skills have to be learned on the job. Shouldn't they be highly developed before graduation?

Where and how will they learn them when most college and university classrooms simply aren't designed to promote these skills?

How will students learn to collaborate when the predominant method of teaching is the lecture? Students must be active participants in the learning process if they are to become independent lifelong learners. If they engage with students and faculty members through a variety of methods, they are more likely to carry those essential leadership and communication skills into their work lives.

How will students learn to master digital resources when educational content is still organized and delivered primarily through textbooks? Moving from the often dated, two-dimensional textbook to digital content will foster research and problem solving skills professional work requires.

We see progress being made in traditional settings and there are innovative teachers and administrators working for change. Regrettably, that change is slower and less widespread than required to keep our educational system competitive. Responsibility for change rests with students, teachers, and institutions. Higher education students should seek out institutions that offer the kinds of experiences that will help them develop these essential professional skills. College and university teachers need to challenge themselves to develop these skills and then pass them on. Institutions need comprehensive plans to create new and innovative learning environments.

Craig Swenson is Provost and Academic Vice-President of Western Governors University.

No Limits on Learning for Middle and High School Students

by Kay Johnson and Julie Young

Billy Mayhood was born without developed nerves and muscles on the right side of his face. By the time he was in fourth grade, he had endured numerous transplant operations. His medical condition generated teasing in elementary school and outright bullying in middle school. The bullying became so unbearable that he began to skip classes. "No matter how many times my parents and I met with administrators to ask them to do something, we just never got anywhere," notes Billy.

Enter Florida Virtual School (FLVS). After a demo to see how it worked, Billy was hooked. "I was happy to be able to move at my own pace. The flexibility is a real plus for me. Every course has a pace chart, and every week there are a certain number of requirements to complete. If I wanted to—and I usually did—I could continue on ahead with my course work."

Believe it or not, home-educated students like Billy



comprise only about 20 percent of Florida Virtual School's total population, which has grown from 77 enrollments in 1997 to almost 56,000 in 2006. The vast majority of students (75 percent) are enrolled full time in a public school, taking just one or two courses online to fill gaps, make up credits, take courses not otherwise unavailable, or fix scheduling conflicts.

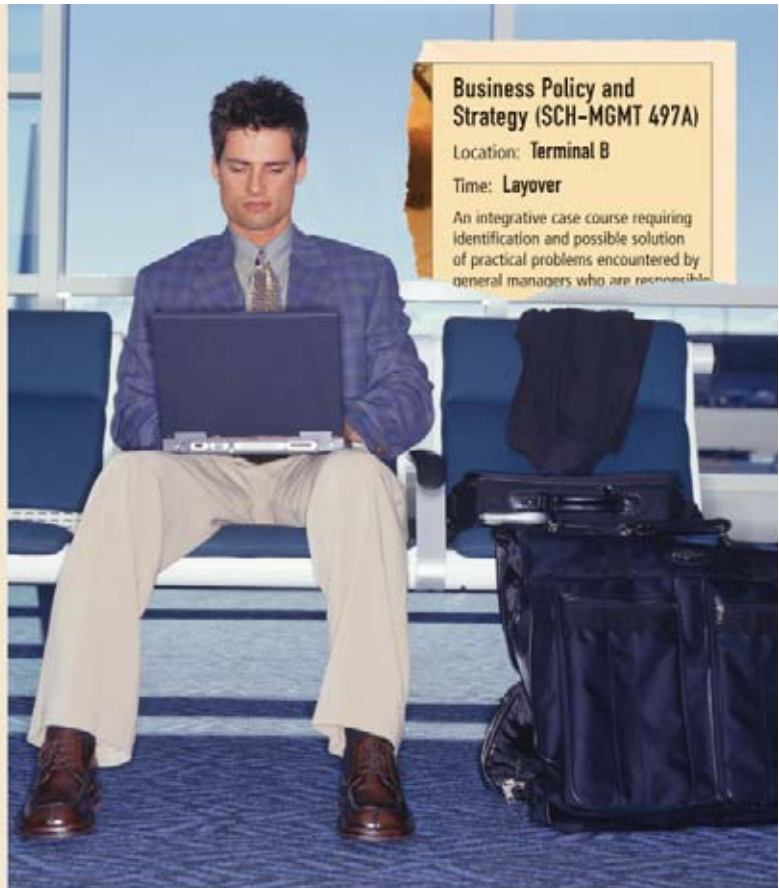
When FLVS first started, its founders believed that online courses would mostly attract advanced, highly motivated

Continued on page 12

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Teaching Online: One Teacher's Story

by Errol Craig Sull

Can a traditional, true-blue classroom teacher, who welcomes a sprinkle of chalk dust on his sportcoat, transition to teaching online? What do I do about student interaction? How am I going to engage my students with only bits and bytes at my disposal? Those questions loomed as I listened to my department chair tell me of the decision to launch the department's first distance learning (DL) course, and that I should teach it. Although I eagerly agreed – I knew this was the future of education and I wanted to be part of it – I wondered whether an old-school teacher could succeed in this brave, new world.

That was more than 12 years ago and I've been teaching online continuously ever since. My life as a DL instructor has been challenging, but I've learned that my earliest fears were unfounded. DL is a great way to teach and a wonderful way to reach students. Another early expectation I had – that I might teach a class while

lying on a beach in Maui – also proved groundless. The truth is that being a DL instructor can be even more demanding and time consuming than teaching a “class in a box.”

I worried about student interaction unnecessarily. DL classrooms are designed, primarily, to get and keep the student involved: online discussions, chats, virtual office hours, forums, and student teams, as well as email, allow and encourage constant student/instructor involvement. And rather than oversee this bountiful spread of teaching opportunities only X days per week, at set times, as one would in a traditional classroom, I have the freedom to plan my teaching around conferences I may want to attend, snowed-in winter days, or an afternoon appointment with the dentist.

By offering a more flexible teaching schedule, presenting me with many options to keep students motivated, and fostering my teaching creativity, I've found that DL has taken my passion for teaching to a higher level. I believe it allows my efforts in the “classroom” to reach deeper and last longer – the ultimate hope of every teacher.

But the advantages of DL don't end there. It also gives me an opportunity to reach students for whom attending a “regular” college is either impossible or extremely difficult due to geography, military (or other employment) location, physical disabilities, or a serious time crunch.

After all, what's more motivating for a teacher than to know that every student in the class has selected your course from among thousands that are offered online? They've actively chosen to invest their time, money and effort in what you're offering. They're not in your class merely because you're nearby. I remind myself of that every day and bring that understanding to every student interaction I have.

Are there any challenges to teaching online? Most definitely. First, there is the care and feeding of The Laptop. It is the DL instructor's umbilical cord to the class. Where the instructor goes, so goes The Laptop. A ballgame with a friend, a nice dinner with a date, a visit with Mom, a meeting with a colleague must always include it or so it seems. “Must check my email” ... “need to make sure my students aren't missing anything” ... “have a ton of papers to grade” ... “my attendance report has to be in by 8” –these “gottados” follow me wherever I venture. This translates into not finding me – or many other DL instructors –taking vacation near mountains, valleys, deserts, and similar remote spots without



I wondered whether an old-school teacher could succeed in this brave, new world.

reliable Internet access.

Then there are the “others.” Imagine trying to explain to friends and family that you really DO teach, just not in a traditional classroom setting. And my neighbors? More than a few think I'm unemployed, because I'm home all the time.

As for The Laptop itself, it must have only the best, the brightest, the most bodacious of software and hardware so it can stay happy. A happy laptop translates into a teaching experience with no crashes, malfunctions, error messages,



slowdowns, and glitches. This keeps the DL instructor pleased (not to mention employed), to be sure, but also makes for satisfied students and schools, always an important combination. Every Laptop “hiccough” results in sleepless nights for me but computer repair shops are on my speed dial.

We now come to the “must” of online reminders and folders. The distance learning instructor must manage an enormous variety of dates, times and information: start/stop dates of courses, dates/times of papers due;

Continued on page 14

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Digital Textbooks: An Unrealized Revolution

by Rhonda M. Epper, Ph.D.

It's 11:30 pm, and Bailey McGuinness is finishing up a reading assignment in her online U.S. History course. As she reads about the concept of Manifest Destiny in the American West, a photo of the fictional character Zorro comes to life. It explains to her how "social bandits" protected the interests of ordinary Mexicans during the 19th century. Bailey is not reading from a printed textbook, but rather from a digital text, which is embedded within her online course at Colorado Community Colleges Online. "I like the interaction," she noted, "it is just an extra tidbit that you don't have in the hard copy book."

The great promise of digital textbooks is that they will bring to life the one-dimensional reading experience of the printed book. While reading online, students will hyperlink to other sources, search for terms, view videos of famous speeches, and hear mini-lectures that reinforce concepts covered in the text. In difficult subject areas, such as college algebra, students will engage in problem solving as they read by launching simulations where they can manipulate variables. It's one thing to read about "motion on an inclined plane," but more compelling to experience it through a runaway truck simulation.

While pockets of textbook innovation exist in the higher education marketplace, the promise of digital textbooks is still largely unfulfilled. Publishers provide supplemental electronic materials as described above to accompany their printed



textbooks, but the book itself remains unchanged. Why? From the publishers' standpoint, there are concerns about the security of electronic books, and risk of illegal file sharing by students, who notoriously took advantage of such opportunities with the music industry. Also, lackluster student demand for digital textbooks has slowed publisher investment until very recently. Additional barriers are posed by lack of a standard technology platform and need for new business models. And, of course, the printed book is a proven technology for delivering long passages of written text to students.

What can students find today on the virtual bookstore shelves? In the current marketplace, digital books usually are presented to students as electronic representations of the printed book, via a static format, such as PDF. For most students, this format is not a marked improvement over the printed book. Many students, in fact, end up printing the PDF files because they are more comfortable reading from paper than from a computer screen. Even when factoring in cost savings – which can approach 50 percent off the list price – the student's total cost of digital book ownership may be only marginally less than a traditional book that he or she can sell back to a bookstore.

Cheaper and Better

To capture students' attention, digital textbooks must not only be cheaper, but better than their print counterparts. Much as the first generation of movies started as an electronic representation of the stage play, the next generation of digital textbooks must evolve into something more than a picture of a printed page. It's already happening, slowly but steadily.

The above-mentioned U.S. History and Algebra courses from Colorado Community Colleges Online are real pilot projects undertaken through a

partnership with leading publishers in the industry. Over the past 18 months, MBS Direct, a major online college bookstore, offered digital textbooks alongside selected print editions. According to Kevin McKiernan, director of Business Development, sales have steadily increased each semester – from 8 percent to 11 percent to 18 percent of total sales among books where a digital version was available.

Developments outside the commercial publishing industry also are driving textbook innovation. The Open Educational Resources movement, where experts from around the world collaborate in the production and distribution of digital educational materials, has grown exponentially over the past decade. Resources such as the MIT OpenCourseWare Initiative (<http://ocw.mit.edu>), the National Repository of Online Courses (www.montereyinstitute.org/nroc), MERLOT (www.merlot.org), and Wikibooks (www.wikibooks.org) – to name just a few – do not replace the textbook's role entirely, but place much more educational content directly in the public domain and outside of

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DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS: Continued from page 9

commercial publishers' control. The very definition of textbook and how it is used in higher education is evolving into something new.

Both commercial and open content developments will continue to grow, as will student and faculty comfort levels with using online resources. The advantages of digital textbooks are many: maintaining currency because re-versioning doesn't require printing a new book, lower cost, convenience of having all course materials online, and the ability to actively engage students' various learning styles through text, audio, video, and simulations. The major drawbacks are temporary, and relate to the need for better technology and business models. And it's only a matter of time before students who are native to the digital culture will outnumber those of us who are not.

Rhonda M. Epper, Ph.D. is Co-Executive Director at Colorado Community Colleges Online (www.cconline.org).

SUMMER: Continued from page 3

school year. For Alexis Kleinman, a Junior at Wilmington Friends School in Wilmington, Delaware, an online American History course allowed her to fulfill a requirement in order to graduate after switching schools her freshman year. Despite working five days a week and attending the Governor's School for Excellence in Theatre while taking her class, it was an experience she enjoyed. "It was great being able to share ideas with people from all over the world and to have the ability to take what would normally have been a full semester or full-year course, in just four weeks."

Additionally, online courses allow students to get their feet wet in an intended major. While majors are usually associated with college, many high schools now require or offer optional majors. Starting with the 2007 - 2008 school year, high school students in Florida must declare a major, choosing from hundreds such as Finance, Biotechnology and Marketing. But, for the majority of students who have never had exposure to such a subject area, it can be a daunting task. Online summer school enrichment courses can give kids a chance to explore curriculum on a "no-penalty" basis, while keeping them actively learning.

However, not all online courses are created equal and parents should carefully weigh their options. Areas of examination should include the course curriculum and design, the student's role in the course and technological considerations.



"It was great being able to share ideas with people from all over the world and to have the ability to take what would normally have been a full semester or full year course, in just four weeks."

Does the course align to national curriculum standards? For example, if the course in question is in the math discipline, it is important that the course meet standards from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Most state standards are developed from national standards so following national standards is a good choice.

Some online courses are correspondence-based, with minimal teacher involvement, and simply require students to read a certain chapter followed by a test. Others are delivered synchronously, meaning that they occur at a specific day and time. These can be difficult for families with vacation plans to manage. The best and most effective online courses take a student-centered learning approach to foster inquiry and the subsequent acquisition of knowledge. These are delivered asynchronously over the Internet, available around the clock. Students take to Internet-based social interactions easily, so courses which enable students to interact socially with other students who share their interests, whether locally, nationally or on a global scale, are of tremendous value.

What will your student do in the online course? Is the course designed so that your student will be taking the course with other students or working one-on-one with only the course teacher?

Working in an online course as part of a group enables your student to take part in valuable social interactions with other kids of approximately the same age, interactions that might not otherwise occur over the summer. Will the student be actively engaged in the learning process, with daily, weekly and longer assignments, projects and team activities? High levels of engagement in the online course activities generally lead to successful outcomes.

Given that the student will be participating in the course at home or while traveling, parents need to ensure their own technology infrastructure will support what is required for the course. Confirm those requirements with the course provider.

Over the summer, parents need to keep their kids connected, learning and exploring. With the right online course and online classroom experiences, your student can avoid summer learning loss and take a positive step into the next grade level or future educational experience.

Liz Pape is President & CEO of Virtual High School (www.govhs.org), a non-profit consortium of over 361 member schools in 28 states and 34 countries, serving over 10,000 enrolled students and the winner of the United States Distance Learning Association's 21st Century Award for Best Practices in Online Technology and K-12 Education.

Making Foreign Languages Less Foreign



by Carol Woolbright

“Ni hao, Yi Laoshi. Zao shang hao,” rings out across Kansas each morning as students greet their teacher. Kansas students are learning Chinese in specially designed interactive distance learning classrooms that provide high quality video and audio. Distance learning has proven an excellent delivery method for teaching strategic languages like Chinese. Using video technologies, one teacher can teach students in four locations simultaneously. The teacher and students see, hear and respond to each other in real time.

equal educational opportunities. In geographically rural states like Kansas, small schools simply cannot offer a rich language curriculum, partly due to the shortage of teachers and partly due to the fact that critical language classes typically attract low enrollments that do not justify hiring a teacher.

Expanding accessibility to critical languages via interactive video technology is a passion for the Greenbush Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) Network at the Southeast Kansas Education Service Center in Girard, Kansas. The IDL network is a consortium of 48 school

at Kansas University from which Mr. Yi teaches daily classes. Suddenly, more students wanted to learn Chinese than one teacher could handle. Critical language classes filled up quickly for
Continued on page 15

The National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) is changing the paradigm of foreign language training in K-12 schools in Kansas and across the United States.

Is this the language classroom of the future? Possibly, for two reasons: 1) interactive video technology works very well for language instruction, and 2) qualified and licensed teachers of critical languages like Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Arabic can be shared by several schools in a learning-friendly environment. Seeing and hearing the teacher allows students and teacher to bond as in a traditional classroom. By receiving critical language classes over a video network, schools reap powerful benefits. Their curriculum is enhanced by providing instruction that truly prepare students for working and living in today's global community. In addition, several schools can share the best language teachers, enriching the educational experiences of students and ensuring

districts, including 111 interactive video classrooms located in the eastern half of the state. The Greenbush Strategic Language Project, established in late 2005, supports and promotes the teaching of critical languages. Kansas is a state with an entrenched European language curriculum, and initially, only a few school administrators understood the necessity to teach lesser-taught languages in Kansas schools. Most administrators felt comfortable maintaining traditional language classes. However, everything changed when the Bush Administration announced the National Security Language Initiative in February 2006. The Strategic Language Project gained momentum. Key educational collaborations were established, most notably with the Confucius Institute

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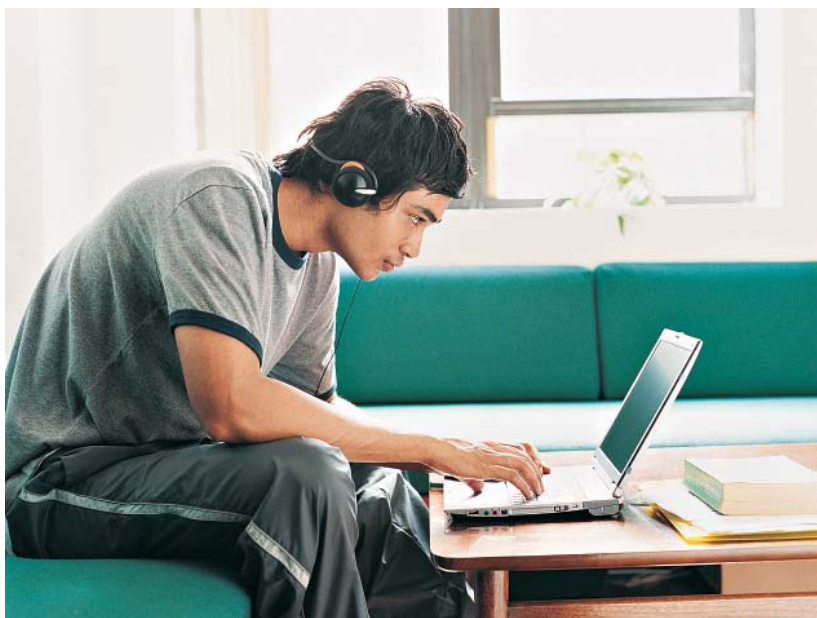
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NO LIMITS: Continued from page 7

students. As program popularity grew, this theory was proven false. Almost half of FLVS students come from Florida's "high priority" populations, including high minority, low performing, or rural schools. Of course, advanced students also fare well, scoring at or above the national average in Advanced Placement tests. Overall, the success rate at FLVS averages around 85 percent.

Nationally, some 500,000 students will take online courses this year, with around 100,000 added annually. As the nation's first state-wide public online program, Florida Virtual School has taken the lead in groundbreaking educational and legislative reform for online programs. For instance, the school's funding is tied strictly to performance versus seat time. Put simply, if students don't succeed, FLVS is not paid.

Across the nation, online learning takes many shapes and forms. Cyber charter schools or consortiums often lead the way in states where no statewide online offering is in place. "In states such as Ohio, Connecticut, and Wisconsin, districts are teaming together to realize the economy of scale evident in our model," notes Young. Appleton eSchool in Appleton, Wisconsin began with just



Lori Gully, Director of Florida Services at FLVS, agrees. "We've structured multiple levels of feedback to reveal on a daily basis what works and what doesn't. It has become part of our ethic to challenge sacred cows."

As online courseware evolves, it is clear that coupling good curricular design with best teaching practices is critical. "Online

their wardrobe, looks, wealth, or social circles.

Julie Young is President and CEO of Florida Virtual School. Kay Johnson is Marketing Manager of the FVS Global Services division.

As more students log on to online courses, the challenge shifts to creating solutions for all students vs. only advanced students.

a handful of courses in the 03-04 school year—with just 77 enrollments. They now serve more than 1,000. The district partners with Kenosha and Kimberly districts, sharing teachers and pooling funds.

In Carson City, Nevada, Silver State High School, a charter program originally targeted to at-risk students, now plans to expand offerings to all students. According to program leaders, the online option fills significant gaps. Keith Martin, Social Studies Instructor, notes that some of their students work 60+ hour jobs and carry responsibilities for younger siblings. "They will often go online at midnight and work until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning because they really want the education. It's remarkable," Martin said.

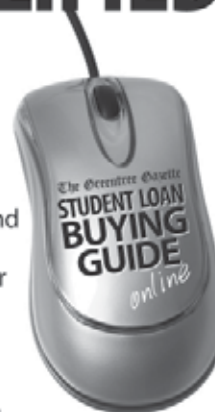
As more students log on to online courses, the challenge shifts to creating solutions for all students versus only advanced students. "When we started out, we didn't realize that the reinvention process never ends. As long as there is one student out there who needs a new way to learn, our challenge is to reshape ourselves to meet that need."

learning is far beyond the old notion of posting a syllabus online and expecting students to comprehend it on their own," notes Jennifer Whiting, Chief Curriculum Officer at Florida Virtual School. "In fact, elearning is becoming more tailored to each individual learner. Instructors will be challenged to maintain a high level of personalization for every student within collaborative learning environments.

In fact, online student interaction is an element that Billy Mayhood found he surprisingly enjoyed. "Last year, I worked with other students by e-mail on a biology project and another one for English. I still talk to them all the time." Mayhood particularly enjoys Elluminate, a web conferencing tool. "This year, we started a book club and there are about 200 of us in it. I can go on to Elluminate, select two or three people who are online and have real-time discussions with them," Mayhood explains. The interaction has provided students who may struggle to make friends in the physical school environment, an opportunity to be judged by their ideas and character versus

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MAJOR EMPLOYERS: Continued from cover

ested in furthering their education to consider enrolling in an online course or degree program,” states Dan Dalton, vice president for human resources at SOA. “We’ve found that the online option affords them the convenience and flexibility needed to manage both their work and family responsibilities,” claims Dalton.

Employers increasingly cite distance learning as a key to increased employee satisfaction and retention... and expect the role of online higher education to increase in their organizations in the next two or three years.

Employers’ changing attitudes and practices toward distance learning is best represented by Lockheed-Martin Corporation. For nearly a decade high-potential employees have been selected annually to participate in LMC’s Operations Leadership Development Program (OLDP), a two-year program involving four job rotations and participation in a Technical Development Curriculum (TDC) program. The OLDP is intended to develop a pipeline of successful future leaders.

For many years, LMC staff planned and administered the TDC in a face-to-face classroom, relying on a host of external consultants and trainers. Consequently, OLDP courses varied in length, location, cost, format, and quality. Additionally, the on-site OLDP-TDC required significant staff resources before, during, and after each exercise.

LMC’s solution: deliver the OLDP-TDC completely online saving administrative time and money, while enhancing quality and accountability. Drexel University was selected to deliver the OLDP-TDC completely online.

United Health Service, a comprehensive health care system offering care services to 600,000 residents, is piloting a Performance Practice Model PPM for bedside nurses designed to provide quality patient care. The PPM offers progressive promotions through a career ladder that requires clinical and certification competencies, demonstrated critical thinking skills, and BSN and MSN preparedness. “Online degree programs offer our nurses the tools they need to help them reach their career goals at their own pace while developing skills that benefit our patients and the quality of care we provide to them,” says Penny Helsel, Manager for Organizational Development at Universal Health Services.

Richard Garrett, Senior Analyst at Eduventures, Inc., believes this form of distance learning will undoubtedly grow. His firm conducted a survey in 2005 of Chief Learning Officers and Directors of Human Resources and found that respondents gave distance

learning high marks when compared to face-to-face courses.

Garrett reported, “Our research found that a majority of employers – more than 62 percent – have a favorable attitude toward online instruction, viewing the value of online learning as being equal to or greater than that of face-to-face instruction. We know that many online students are employer-supported, funding their online studies either in-part or in-full through tuition assistance programs.” He described distance learning’s move to the mainstream: “Online delivery is still relatively new, and many students and faculty, as well as employers, are only now becoming familiar with it. Online delivery is not appropriate in every circumstance, but just as online services are becoming mainstream in other sectors (e.g. banking, retail), so a role for online delivery in education is increasingly accepted as “normal”, states Garrett.

Dr. Kenneth E. Hartman is Director of Academic Affairs at Drexel University Online.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE: Continued from page 11

2006-07, and waiting lists became the norm.

The National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) is changing the paradigm of foreign language training in K-12 schools in Kansas and across the United States. School administrators are beginning to understand the importance of K-12 students learning languages that have not typically been taught in public

There will be a 25 percent increase in jobs for linguists over the next 8 years.

schools, and they are clambering to provide classes in Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic, and other languages. The Jan 22, 2007, edition of "Time Magazine" addresses the need for linguists and translators. According to the article, there will be a 25 percent increase in jobs for linguists over the next eight years.

It is obvious that the post-9/11 climate will provide careers for students who are fluent in critical languages. But, perplexing questions remain: how do educators provide and sustain language programs when qualified and licensed teachers of the languages are rare? How quickly can university teacher preparation programs provide the large number of teachers needed for the NSLI project? Will state departments of education allow alternative licensure and certification procedures for heritage speakers and exchange teachers so no child is left behind in

TEACHING ONLINE: Continued from page 8

online chat times and virtual office hours; student info that relates to why a student may be late with this or that info or assignment; conference calls with a departmental supervisor and colleagues teaching the same course; days and times attendance reports are due; dates that grades must be entered; dates that various student reminders and emails and postings must be sent; a Favorites folder for info on plagiarism and another on course-related websites that are helpful; a date and time website to know where my students are and the time difference for my calls to them. All of these can "easily" be seen in the two reminder pads next to my computer, umpteen reminder email notes that I receive daily, and Favorites and My Documents folders that I'm always visiting.

Finally, there is the email — tons and tons of the stuff — from that which I expect ("Professor Sull, attached is my assignment for the week") to the many "unexpecteds" (such as, "How do I send an attachment?" ... "My unit is being deployed for six weeks so I'll be somewhat behind" ... "Sorry I've been inactive of late but my wife had a baby!" ... "The storm — you probably read about it — shut down all connectivity and I'm just now back on; hi!"). These all have to be answered, of course, and in a timely manner.

So, yes, teaching online has its challenges, they can't be denied. But when I stop this typing for a minute and look to the student from Germany IMing me with a question about an assignment, read an email from another student thanking me for "really caring about the class," and notice that all students have been very involved in this week's discussion thread, I think — this is why I became a teacher.

Errol Craig Sull has been teaching online for 12 years. He frequently conducts workshops on and writes about distance learning and currently teaches for Excelsior College.

language study?

Even if an abundance of qualified teachers were available and all the issues were resolved, the geography of Kansas would impact the decision to deliver critical languages via distance learning. Using distance learning is, quite simply, a highly cost effective method of delivering high quality language study. In 2006-07, Japanese I, II, III, and Chinese I are taught over the video network to small and large high schools across the state of Kansas. Plans are underway to add Chinese II and to provide other critical languages that are listed in the National Security Language Initiative beginning in 2007. Kansas is a perfect state to implement new interactive video programs. While interactive distance learning technologies were first used to deliver high school classes in 1989, it was not until 2002 that the statewide technology backbone was established by Kan-Ed. Kan-Ed is responsible for creating and supporting the technologies that allow Japanese, Chinese, and many other classes to transverse the state in real time and connect schools located anywhere in the state. Thousands of Kansas students receive high-quality academic instruction via IDL each year, and the need to expand critical language instruction simply reinforces the need for other states to invest in the future of their children, by installing backbones capable of high-quality interactive video networks.

Carol Woolbright is Director of the Greenbush Interactive DL Network, SE Kansas Education Center, Girard, Kansas.

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academic: *adj., of, relating to, or associated with an academy or school, especially of higher learning.*

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