

Inside SFCC

Distance Learning Breaks Through Educational Barriers

While distance learning may seem like a hot and new phenomenon at colleges and universities nationwide, Santa Fe Community College offered its first distance-learning class 20 years ago.

It started in 1986 when SFCC aired pre-recorded telecourses on the local cable station. Live telecourses began in 1990 and online courses were added in 1998. Today SFCC offers more than 60 courses online with thousands of class credits awarded to students each year.

Any student who has access to a computer and the Internet can enroll in an instructor-led online class on a wide variety of topics in many academic departments. These courses cover the same material as their on-campus equivalents and meet the same educational standards.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, distance education succeeds in providing increased student access by overcoming constraints that keep students from attending college. These constraints include geography, student resources, time, academic program structures and institutional policies.

The number of institutions nationwide that provide online offerings has been growing rapidly in recent years with a 700 percent increase in enrollment in distance education classes between 1998 and 2004.

Flexibility via the Internet At SFCC, online courses are interactive in that students meet in a virtual, Web-based classroom over the Internet. Courses generally follow a schedule with specific due dates for course work, but when and where students do their work is up to them.

Students taking classes online log onto the SFCC Web site for course instruction from experienced faculty members. Courses include class discussion times when students can post messages on a board, video streaming and other technically advanced instructional tools. Twenty-eight percent of SFCC's full-time faculty members are now teaching at least one online course.

Many courses are delivered as 100 percent online courses with no face-to-face classroom instruction and no campus visits required. This fall, SFCC will offer online classes in anthropology, art, business, computers, education, English, history, health, media arts, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Other classes at SFCC offer an online component blended with some on-campus meetings. The blended classes offered this fall will include architectural drafting, business, economics, math, environmental science and wastewater treatment.

Nationwide the most popular online offerings are in business, computers, psychology, nursing, criminal justice and education.

Expanding Access to Education In 2004, SFCC received a five-year \$3,221,062 federal education grant to develop a cooperative, state-of-the-art distance education network with TVI, now called Central New Mexico Community College, to improve higher education opportunities for Hispanic and low-income students and for professionals who want to make career changes or enhance their skills.

The network, called El Colegio: A Virtual College for New Mexico, has been able to offer online courses in high-demand programs such as health and education. It has provided students with support anytime and anywhere, strengthened faculty and staff development in distance learning, and is continually improving the technological infrastructure necessary to support distance learning.

SFCC Online Enrollment Statistics in Credit Hours

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Summer	138	387	535	500	751	N/A
Fall	258	1,070	972	2,060	2,040	N/A
Spring	N/A	802	1,348	1,599	1,958	2,481
Totals	N/A	2,259	2,855	4,159	4,749	N/A

While SFCC does not yet offer full degrees online, many general education courses are available in online format. And students interested in a flexible degree general studies associate degree program at SFCC can take many core classes online.

To learn more, visit www.sfccnm.edu/sfcconline.

STUDENT FOCUS: Ana June



Ana June balances her home life, which includes four children including her son Graysen (above), with completing online classes at SFCC.

Ana June struggles to find time to attend traditional college classes. As the mother of four young children and a free-lance writer and photographer, June turns to SFCC's online class offerings to fit into her busy schedule.

June, who has taken SFCC's philosophy and composition and literature classes online, is steadily accumulating credits so that by the time she enrolls in the distance-learning bachelor's program through Prescott College in Arizona, she will be close to graduating.

The busy mom plans to pursue a degree in creative writing or humanities – or both – with a minor in photography. She still takes some SFCC classes on campus, such as intermediate fiction writing and the novel, because she appreciates the face-to-face interaction.

"I love being able to connect to my classes wherever and whenever I can log on."

– Ana June, SFCC student and full-time mother of four

But June prefers online classes because they offer the freedom to complete her work even when the children keep her running around town or awake all night.

"Have laptop and wi-fi – will travel," she said. "I love being able to connect to my classes wherever and whenever I can log on." She also appreciates the opportunity to take the time to formulate replies to classmates, put them in writing and edit them before anyone ever sees what she has to say.

"In class and faced with verbal communication there's less of an opportunity to formulate a cogent reply. And I personally tend to feel more clear in writing," she said, adding that online classes are just as challenging and rewarding as the ones on campus.

"I suppose the most common misconception would be that the online format is less effective for learning. To me, that's an old school frame of reference," she said.

FACULTY FOCUS: Margaret Peters

Although writing and literature instructor Margaret Peters has been teaching in SFCC classrooms for 10 years, she hesitated when asked to teach composition and literature classes online.

"I thought, oh no — you don't want me to do this?" she said.

Peters always thought the face-to-face model was best and enjoyed meeting with students in the classroom.

"There is something about being in the room with them and struggling through the material together and the sense of satisfaction that goes along with that moment of revelation that, it seemed to me, could never be captured online," she said.

Peters was in for a surprise.

"I was astounded at the number of options — the kinds of activities — available to someone creating a course online," she said.

One of the upsides she found is that attendance doesn't have to be a problem for students because they can come to class whenever it is convenient for them as long as they check in regularly.

"I feel that learning happens on the same level, but not necessarily at the same rate," she said. "However, in the end, students online as well as those in the classroom reach the same goal; the journey to get there is just slightly different."



Writing and literature instructor Margaret Peters teaches classes both on campus and online.