

Online classes now the norm for students

Despite negatives, most courses feature online component

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While UNC Asheville professors shift from paper to online instruction, students said they are not concerned with the potential drawbacks of Internet-based class work.

"Every class uses some form of online instruction," said UNCA junior health and wellness promotion student Martha Turpin. "Generally, things are becoming more computer based. It's more convenient."

UNCA's Information Technology Services department is gradually making the shift into technology-integrated learning. Faculty are not only utilizing online classrooms, such as Moodle, but the campus is now equipped with roughly 110 "smart classrooms."

Over the last few years, more professors receive and grade assignments online, cutting back on paperwork and enforcing deadlines for assignments.

The physics department was among the first UNCA offices to hit the Web.

"Dr. Ruiz and myself developed the program in 1991. The homework assignments came

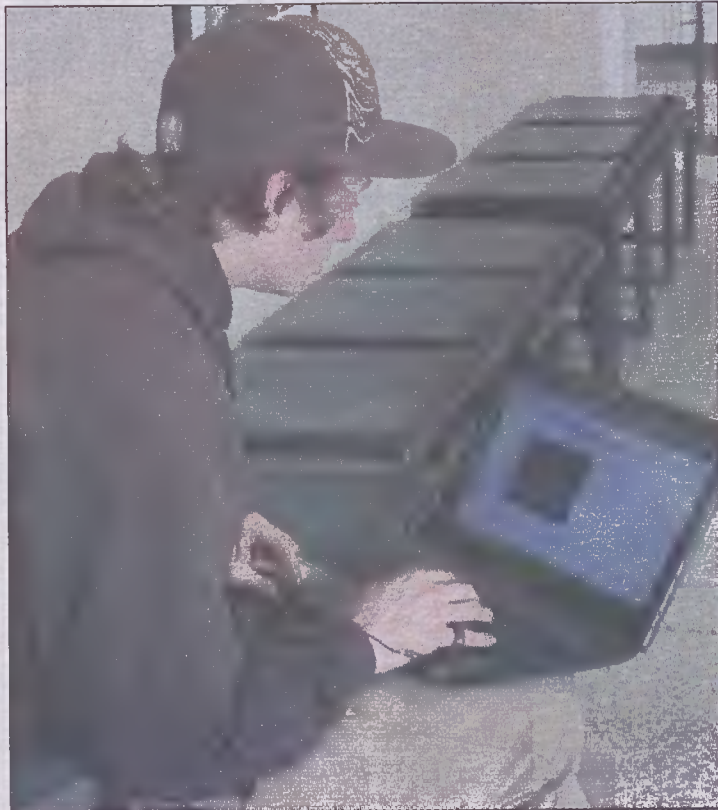


Photo by Beth Ellen - Staff Photographer

Freshman art student Dan Trigg checks Moodle, UNC Asheville's online learning platform before his class Feb. 14.

first," said Randy Booker, professor in the UNCA physics department.

The astronomy online course

expanded and now includes not only online examinations, but the course textbook as well.

Booker said the shift into the

online course, which was completed in 1998, allows astronomy to be offered more widely to the student body and allows the professors to completely cut textbook costs.

"It is certainly less paper grading, balanced by more programming and updating the website," Booker said.

Both Booker and Ruiz continually update the online database with new homework and test questions, as well as revamping the text.

"At first, it was intensive time-wise," Booker said. "But we wanted to do something more innovative. We wanted to eliminate the drudgery work of paper grading."

While Booker said the website hit snags over the last year as it switched to a different server, the program received mainly positive feedback.

Turpin, who takes examinations for organic chemistry online, agrees that the programs are beneficial and conducive to student learning.

"I have adapted to online testing really well," Turpin said. "With organic, I'm getting more than my money's worth with extra study materials. If it was on paper, I would never be

able to find that stuff."

Turpin, who transferred from Montreat College, said the ability to have excess materials at her fingertips made online examinations a simple compromise.

Science is not the only program going online. More introductory math courses across the university rely on MyMath-Lab, a web-based program that allows interactive homework, tests and quizzes mitigated by the professor.

Rachel Siegel, a freshman who took introductory statistics with an online component, said the program had its drawbacks.

"It was beneficial cause the convenience of the program let me understand what I was doing wrong immediately," Siegel said. "The drawbacks were that I had to be in front of a computer with an Internet connection to do the homework, which sometimes limited when I could do the assignments."

While students become accustomed to technology integrated courses, the dependency on the computer screen could give rise to other problems,

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Obama plan would connect community colleges with businesses

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President Obama proposed an \$8 billion fund for community college to career programs, accelerating partnerships between community colleges and businesses, on Feb. 13. The fund has not yet been passed by Congress.

In the 2012 State of the Union address, Obama said, "My administration has already lined up more companies that want to help. Model partnerships between businesses like Siemens and community colleges in places like Charlotte and Orlando and Louisville are up and

running."

Colleges like Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College as well as other community colleges across the United States would be able to help train 2,000,000 workers with the skills that will immediately lead to job opportunities in high-demand industries.

"Now you need to give more community colleges the resources they need to become community career centers — places that teach people skills that businesses are looking for right now, from data management to high-tech manufacturing," Obama said.

A-B Tech's Small Business

Center already recognizes the role of small business entrepreneurs in our economy and has set up programs to give them aid. One of these programs, the Business Incubator, is designed to provide companies maximum flexibility while working closely with them to identify areas of improvement and to assist in locating resources.

"The Small Business Center and Business Incubator have been created to provide our vital small business community a focal point for education, counseling, advising and referral," said Martha Ball, communications specialist at A-B Tech. "The Small Business

Center will address the continuing need for updating of information, refining of entrepreneurial skills and enhancement of techniques to improve the profit advantage in risk taking."

The Business Incubator program provides companies two years to grow in the incubator and then relocate into the surrounding community. Special emphasis will be given to the critical areas of capital formation and prevention of business failures.

"Two-year colleges are good for two years, but today, everyone is stressing the importance of not having only a bachelor's

but a master's degree," said UNC Asheville sophomore Haley Martin.

Community colleges may be cheaper, quicker and offer students opportunities to begin their careers sooner, but four-year colleges offer a much more extensive education that students cannot find elsewhere, Martin said.

"I think bigger universities have a broader range of courses to study and more opportunities to supplement your education, like major-specific clubs and that sort of thing," Martin said.

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