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By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

Getting a college education used to mean moving far away to a new town and the new students then spending their days in classrooms and then at the library studying.

But modern technology has changed that notion. While the majority of students still take classes in person, they can now also take courses online for credit and teachers are also embracing how far it has come. Seward County Community College/Area Technical School offers the technology locally.

“The online allows me to reach more students that may not be able to come to campus,” said SCCC/ATS biology instructor Don Hayes, who has been teaching since 1988. “So it really is evolving as another avenue to be able to extend any kind of instruction to students.”



Kim Zant, the chair of the SCCC/ATS Ag, Business, and Personal Services Division, agreed with Hayes.

“We’re trying to accommodate the needs of our students and being so isolated, rurally isolated if you will, we have a lot that do drive in,” she explained. “But we just try to accommodate the need for the students and so the opportunity arose for me.”

There is also a general consensus that there is no real difference in performance between the students in online courses and those who are in traditional face to face courses. Zant said that she has even been able to integrate some of the tools from the online course with her face to face classes.

“We use the same book, we use the same lessons and actually I find that much of the online students are very motivated because they want to take that class and this is giving them an opportunity to go ahead and finish school,” Sherry Farrell, the SCCC/ATS Health Information Management coordinator and business instructor, added. “And so I’ve found them to be wonderful students actually, they’re very good students and I haven’t found any difference really as far as the ability or anything like that between the two.”

Farrell also said that much like the traditional face to face classes, the online courses are also individualized by the instructor.

While these teachers say they immensely enjoy working with their online classes, they admit that there are times when meeting face to face is an advantage.

“The con of online learning is that there is less contact hours face to face if they’re existent at all while online and that does sometimes leave a void for understanding for certain students.” said Hayes. “They may not quite understand a concept as it’s written in written prose or discussion they could get online so they have to be more proactive about generating their own questioning.”

“Face to face is wonderful because you get to meet them, you know them, you can work with

them, you can learn what their learning styles are pretty quickly but that was hard for me initially," added Zant. "I think is to identify those learning skills and styles and just getting to know them because I like getting to know the students so I can better teach them – I feel like I'm a better instructor when I know a little bit about why they're in the class and what their goals are."

Zant also said that with the increasing quality of the associated technology and online tools, she has been able to adjust and interact better with her students in the online environment.

Farrell said that one way she has had to adjust her teaching is the need to increase the creativity in assignments, stressing how important it is to students to interact with each other.

"It's really important to be creative in an online environment so that you're not just having students read, do questions at the back of the book, read, do questions at the back of the book," she explained. "You want to create assignments that will allow them to be interactive with each other so they'll still have that feeling that they're in a classroom with other students."

While Hayes says he prefers the contact with his students in his face to face class, Zant and Farrell admit they can't pick just one for a preference but say they appreciate the options for the students.

"I like providing opportunities for students who want to complete their education but maybe they live too far away from campus to come, either they can't come because of the distance or they have family obligations or they work during the day," Farrell said. "So I just like to provide them an opportunity to complete their education and degree."

There are also plenty of opportunities for students who have questions about online courses.

"I would just encourage people if they have any questions about either format," encouraged Zant. "Any questions or concerns about the two, we definitely encourage people to come give us a talk."

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