

impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Society-Ready Graduates

Distributed Learning in Nutritional Sciences

Issue

Completing a college degree in a reasonable time span is a challenge for both traditional and nontraditional students. Many students must work, raise families, or complete internships while working on their degree. Distance education facilitates timely degree completion for students so they can pursue their profession.

What has been done?

The UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Nutritional Science Department and Distributed Learning Lab created a distributed and interactive, student-centered introductory nutrition course that uses a website and CD-ROMs. A campus server hosts course-management software for course communication, interactive exercises and testing. The CD-ROMs contain an extensive textbook outline, a full semester's-

worth of short video clips of course lectures given during the classroom-delivered course, animations, a glossary, and links to the Internet. The course is offered as an elective course or can fulfill a Tier I Biological Science General Education requirement. Students can enroll through traditional methods as a University of Arizona student, through Extended University, or through Central Arizona College. An orientation meeting is held at the beginning of each term or students can obtain start-up instructions electronically.

Impact

The total number of students completing the nutrition course between 1998 and 2001 from the convenience of their own computers was 1173. The course was first offered during fall 1998 with 30 students. That

number jumped to 100 in 1999, to 400 in 2000, and to 640 in 2001. Spring 2002 currently has 140 students enrolled, and there are plans to offer the course during summer pre-session, summer, fall and winter. The department has evaluated the effectiveness of offering these distributed courses by comparing performance of the online students to those taking the course in a traditional classroom. No difference was found in exam scores, final grades, or between pre-test and post-test scores for the two learning environments. The program fulfills one of the Arizona Board of Regents priorities: to expand access to the university.

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