

CONNECTING THE DOTS

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NEW ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS CONTINUE THE RIVIER TRADITION OF ADAPTING TO SERVE STUDENTS EFFECTIVELY

"Rivier is committed to providing the same quality and level of academic rigor in our online programs as we deliver in classes taught on campus. Though the methodology is different, the learning outcomes are the same."

—Sr. Therese Larochelle, p.m. '72/'75G, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Last fall, Rivier began offering an online RN to B.S. in nursing and in January, the College launched a bachelor's degree in psychology online. While the program format may be different, both online degrees draw on the strengths of the College's well-established brick-and-mortar programs for evening students.

Vice President for Enrollment Management David Boisvert says, "More and more programs are electing to use the modality of online instruction—the beauty of it is that it accommodates nontraditional students with busy schedules, allowing them to balance work and family." He emphasizes that this can be especially important when dealing with students in jobs that call for frequent travel or evening shifts.

Dr. Susan Murphy, Director of the RN-B.S. and M.S. nursing programs, points out nontraditional students typically do not have the same campus experience as the College's undergraduate day students. "They're busy balancing family and career," she says. "Professionals like these are highly self-motivated."

Through online discussions via Blackboard, faculty connect with students, continuing the Rivier tradition of providing personal attention—even over the Internet. Assistant Professor of Nursing Judi O'Hara says she is amazed at how much she enjoys teaching online. "I feel like I know everyone better because everyone responds to discussions—I may not know what they look like, but I know the students through their posts."

O'Hara makes sure the students get to know her, too. For the lab component of the Health Assessment course, O'Hara videotaped herself demonstrating some of the lab skills students need to learn. "In some ways, I'm doing the same things I would do teaching face-to-face," she says.

Online education does not mean students escape giving presentations. O'Hara has students prepare PowerPoint presentations, then add audio of themselves speaking. O'Hara points out that RNs working on the floor can use the same technology to prepare in-service workshops. "When you have all three shifts to cover, you can tape the presentation and everyone can access it," she says.

Ryan Kosowicz '10 earned his A.S. in nursing at Rivier, then earned his bachelor's online while working as an RN on a post-operative orthopedic surgical floor at Concord Hospital. "I could work and finish classes fairly quickly," he says. "The professors are great. They make the online courses very similar to being there—it's remarkable," he says.

The psychology department has been offering courses for undergraduate evening students online for the last five years, but recently launched a bachelor's degree program online in its entirety.

Rivier currently offers the only M.S. in psychology in the state of New Hampshire. Psychology Department Coordinator and Graduate Clinical Psychology Program Director Dr. H. Alan Goodman says, “Because we have both undergraduate and master’s level graduate psychology programs, we’re already among the leaders in the state in this field. It made sense for the College to connect with a broader audience and the best way to do that is through distance education.”

Dr. Goodman says undergraduate evening students are immersed in an online program that offers all the quality and support of an on-campus program. “The courses, whether on-campus or online, are taught by the same faculty members, and program experiences including the opportunity to participate in supervised internships are available to all students,” he says.

Dan Speidel, Director of Regina Library, says the library staff frequently works with online students. “The library is conscious of the needs of the students who take online classes when we think about how to best provide access to our online resources and services,” he says. For example, the library offers remote help from reference librarians via phone, chat, e-mail and texting. Students have 24/7 access to online tutorials that provide an orientation to the library and academic research. They can also request electronic delivery for interlibrary loan articles.

To ensure the College continues to anticipate—and effectively accommodate—online students’ needs, Rivier has created a new position: Director of Online Education. Reporting to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Director will work with faculty and staff to develop and assess innovative online courses and programs and create policies and procedures for distance education endeavors. The Director will collaborate with Enrollment Management and Marketing staff to establish a strategic direction for online programs.

Vice President for Academic Affairs Sr. Therese Larochelle, p.m. ’72/’75G says, “Rivier is committed to providing the same quality and level of academic rigor in our online programs as we deliver in classes taught on campus. Though the methodology is different, the learning outcomes are the same.”

As the College has done throughout its history, Rivier continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of its students while remaining true to its mission. ■