
Online courses burgeoning

By: Alyssa Cashman - The Daily Iowan

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More students are turning to the Internet for their educational needs.

The number of students taking online courses jumped by more than 10 percent from 2002 to 2006, according to statistics from the National Association for College Admission Counseling. About 19.8 percent of students were enrolled in online courses in 2006.

At the UI, there are a "couple hundred" online courses available and approximately 4,000 students participate, said Chet Rzonca, an associate provost and the dean of the continuing-education program. The number of courses available saw a 3 to 5 percent increase over last year.

Although a relatively small percentage of UI students take online courses, that number is increasing, he said.

"More and more people's lives are packed, and with an online course, you can access it whenever," Rzonca said.

UI officials have approached the idea of web education cautiously, he said. Tenure track and adjunct professors are chosen in terms of interest and who will best represent the department to teach the Internet courses. Recent initiatives have increased the number of online courses available.

"Our No. 1 priority is quality," Rzonca said.

The cautious approach, however, has not put the UI behind the curve compared with other public research universities, Rzonca said.

UI sophomore Karen Leidall, who is taking medical terminology online from the university, plans to take another online course in the summer from Kirkwood Community College.

"If I could take all online courses, I would," she said.

Although Leidall sang the praises of online courses, she admitted they're not for everyone.

Rzonca agreed, saying that self-discipline is vital to success in an online class.

Newly hired Provost Wallace Loh has been an advocate of online education in the past.

"I see online education as an excellent way to complement learning in the classroom," he said during his visit to the UI prior to being hired.

The university has taken advantage of the growing web trend by adding courses such as Online@Iowa. The class is designed to help incoming freshmen acclimate to the school. Officials at the Entrepreneurial Certificate program has also made many of its courses available online. E-mail DI reporter Alyssa Cashman at: alyssa-cashman@uiowa.edu © Copyright 2008 Daily Iowan