

# Higher education institutions moving from hybrid to entirely online learning options

by Sara Janak

Many of today's tech-adept students have come to expect online and hybrid courses as the norm at higher education institutions. Area colleges are meeting the demand by expanding online learning opportunities and adopting new technology for seamless course delivery.

"Our experience is even if someone lives just down the street from campus, if they have a choice of doing online versus face-to-face, many — not all, but many — will choose the online option," said William Man-



**Mancuso**

gan, vice president for academic affairs at College of Saint Mary.

The school recently re-launched its Doctor of Education program, transforming it from hybrid format to entirely online.

The school is also redeveloping two other degrees into fully online programs, Mangan said.

"The Master of Science in nursing program will re-launch in spring of 2019 and the Master of Science in organizational leadership will re-launch in fall 2018," he said.

Nebraska Methodist College also expanded its roster of online programs. Students now can complete online a Doctor of Education degree focusing on education and leadership in health care, said Nebraska Methodist College President and CEO Deb Carlson.

The two-year program launched last fall and before the school could market

it, "we had 37 students apply for the 15 spots," she said.

With technology constantly evolving, online courses are more interactive than ever.

"As far as new technology that's out there, I think one of the most innovative is Yuga," Carlson said. "That's a cloud-based integrated platform for virtual classrooms.



**McDonnell**

It's like you're right in the class, so you can do breakout sessions, you can do surveys, you can do testing. It's really one of the latest and greatest that our IT folks have found and it's going over really well."

Nebraska Methodist College is also piloting a tech tool called Nureva Span, allowing multiple people to collaborate on a digital canvas.

"We're really excited about that idea and using that in our in-class and our online classes," Carlson said.

Iowa Western Community College has a large selection of online and hybrid courses, and students will soon be able to complete fully online programs.

The school is in the midst of packaging together online courses into online programs placing students in cohorts, said Matt Mancuso, dean of distance education, mathematics, and technology. "We will probably have our online programming starting in the fall of 2019."

While many students might prefer online learning to in-person classes, they're better served in some areas of study with a blend of online and face-to-face instruction.

The school's welding and electrical technology programs, for example, are offered in hybrid format because they have lab components with hands-on learning experiences that can't be replicated online, Mancuso said.

Metropolitan Community College also

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offers a wide range of online and hybrid courses.

"Although we haven't promoted it, there's actually a handful of degrees you can earn completely online if you just take the right courses," said Tom McDonnell, vice president of academic affairs.

The school uses Blackboard, a learning management system with video and chat functions as well as value-added digital materials from textbook publishers.

"The most important thing for us is just making sure that the online student experience is as rigorous" and high quality as the on-campus experience, McDonnell said.

There's high demand for online courses from students at four-year institutions looking to fulfill general education requirements by transferring course credit.

"We have a lot of students from UNO or UNL," McDonnell said. "Oftentimes in our winter quarter, we'll get Creighton students taking online courses just to knock out a general education requirement."



**Deb Carlson, president and CEO at Nebraska Methodist College.**