

# Online learning offers flexibility, more options to students

by Gabby Christensen

In today's digital world, online learning has become more widespread than most might imagine, area educators said.

According to Sherry Douglas, associate vice president of student services at Chadron State College, there are various advantages to online learning.

"The benefits of online courses include flexibility for students to balance a full schedule of responsibilities such as work, family and school," Douglas said. "Online courses allow students to work toward a degree while not having to uproot their lives. Courses begin several times



Preuss

a year and students can interact with their classmates and faculty members in a virtual classroom at their convenience."

At Chadron State College, there are undergraduate online bachelor's degree programs for applied science in technical occupations, business, education, family and consumer science, geoscience, interdisciplinary studies, mathematics and psychological studies.

Some of these programs are fully online, while others are partially online. The college also offers various options for master's degrees programs, Douglas said.

Dr. Deb Carlson, president and CEO of Nebraska Methodist College, said a key trend among institutions of higher learning is to



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make online learning more personalized and adaptive to the individual learning styles and backgrounds of students.

"At NMC, we integrate high-tech apps and interactive software into online learning," Carlson said. "One example is Shadow Health's 'Tina,' a virtual patient our students interact with for clinical practice and assessment. Another is Digiication, an ePortfolio

system we have piloted and are now implementing to increase opportunities for active learning as well as faculty feedback and assessment of student work — in this case, for both online and on-campus students."

As far as online programs are concerned, Carlson said the selection of nursing and allied health online courses, certificate and degree

**Continued on page 8.**

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Continued from page 6.

programs available at Nebraska Methodist College have exploded in recent years, particularly at the graduate level.

"One of our newest and most popular online programs is the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree focusing on education and leadership in health care," Carlson said. "Another popular program is NMC's MBA in Healthcare."

Starting this fall, Carlson said NMC's Master of Science in Wellness and Health Promotion Management will offer four levels of wellness certification built into the program.

"Online learning has broadened the opportunities for students to choose the program

that best fits their educational needs," Carlson said. "Students are no longer limited to programs within their geographic location."

Dr. Tim Preuss, university provost at Concordia University, said the single overriding trend is that online learning is becoming ubiquitous.

"Students who are in grades K-12 have never experienced life without 'connectivity,'" Preuss said. "As the learning management systems that support the delivery of educational programs online have improved, so have the applications for online learning."

Preuss said Concordia offers online coursework to traditional undergraduates during the regular terms and during summer

school.

He said Concordia also offers fully online master's degree programs including a Master of Business Administration, Master of Public Health and Master of Health Care Administration.

In the education field, Preuss said the University offers master's degrees in curriculum and instruction, administration, early childhood and literacy to name a few.

Beginning in August 2019, Concordia will offer a fully online Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology for adult learners.

"With online learning, some programs are delivered in an asynchronous manner while others require students to meet to

gether virtually on a regular basis,” Preuss said. “So, from a learner standpoint, access and flexibility are huge benefits. From an instructional standpoint, a faculty member can use the online modality to deliver meaningful content to students to interact with in a variety of ways while using face to face time to engage the learners regarding the content and its applications. This can allow for richer and fuller inquiry.”