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Online classes offer flexibility

Beaufort County Community College's service area is the largest of any community college in the state, geographically, covering more than 2,000 square miles. For students in Hyde, Tyrrell or Washington counties, or even the other side of the river in Beaufort County, BCCC's main campus is more than an hour away.

As part of its effort to serve all of the residents in those four counties, the college now offers many classes in online format. In fact, there are now eight associate degrees, two diplomas and fifteen certificates that can be completed entirely through online classes.

"It gives us a way to reach people that are an hour away even though they're within our service area," says Ben Morris, Dean of Business and Industrial Technology. "It provides flexibility for students with family or a full-time job, and it's also beneficial for the long-distance student."

Programs offering all or some of their classes online include College Transfer, Computer Information Technology, Computer Programming, Criminal Justice, Medical Office Administration, Office Administration, Business Administration, and Early Childhood Education.

Online classes are not without their own challenges, Morris adds. Just like normal classes, there have to be enough students registered for a class to be offered. Some activities, such as lab exercises, are difficult to set up and oversee when students aren't on campus in person, and taking classes online requires students to be self-motivated. The idea that online classes are easier is a common misperception, he says.

Just like an on-campus class, there is an assigned text. Instead of coming to class, students may participate in an online discussion board. There is homework to show that they have done the reading, and sometimes there may be assigned videos to watch, as well. There are quizzes and usually a research project or paper that's due at the end of the semester. Some classes have proctored exams that need to be arranged for the students to take near where they live.

"The ideal student for an online class is self-motivated and has a strong desire to learn," Morris says. "They have to be willing to read, to watch videos, and to complete all assignments and participation activities when they're due. The challenge with online classes is to maintain the students' interest, as well as academic rigor and accountability."

For many students, though, taking some classes online provides an additional means of balancing studies with work, family, and the challenge of a long commute. BCCC is committed to serving as many students as possible within the service area, and online classes have become a bigger and bigger part of that equation.

For more information about online classes and programs at BCCC, call the Admissions Office at 252-940-6233 or visit