

NMSU expands online, distance education programs  
By Garrey Carruthers, Ph.D.  
NMSU President

I'm fond of telling people everything that ever needed to be said can be found in the lyrics of an old country and western song. That's certainly the case when I think of all the different ways college students are able to take classes today and an old country song by Tommy Duncan called "Time Changes Everything."

When I first arrived at New Mexico State University as a student more than 50 years ago, it was a different place. Our enrollment was only about 2,000 students and to earn credit for their courses, each of those students was expected to show up, in person, to class.

Today, it's a different story. Our enrollment across the NMSU system is now more than 24,000 and thanks to technological advancements, our students who choose to take online or distance education courses no longer need to be physically present in a classroom. They don't even need to be in the country; all they really need is an Internet connection.

We want to take our product to where our customers, the students, would like us to be. And, it falls inline with NMSU's land-grant mission to deliver education, research and outreach programs to people across the state. That's why NMSU offers entire degree programs – delivered online or through distance education – for students who want to pursue their college degree, but may not be able to join us in Las Cruces for an entire semester's worth of classes.

Among our new programs is a distance Master of Business Administration program offered by the NMSU College of Business and designed specifically for working professionals. It's taught one evening per week and students can earn their degree in 24 months. The first cohort of students begins this fall.

Our online MBA program includes 36 hours of graduate course work, plus some additional background courses for those students without an undergraduate degree in business. Classes meet online and can be viewed in real-time from work, home or live in the classroom, wherever is most convenient. Students can ask questions, interact with other students and professors, and participate in class discussions, all without being in a classroom. The majority of class meetings are digitally recorded and available to students anytime to review important elements of the course.

Another program, offered by NMSU's College of Education, will allow students to earn an online master's degree in curriculum and instruction – and it will be delivered completely in Spanish. We believe we're the first university in the country to offer this.

We're fortunate faculty members in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction have the academic and language proficiencies that make this program possible. Because of the growing diversity in our country, and strong collaboration NMSU has with several South

and Central American countries, we believe there is a strong interest in this kind of program. The plan is to admit the first cohort of students this summer and expand the opportunities in the future.

Another program, started last semester by NMSU's College of Health and Social Services, offers students at NMSU Alamogordo an opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. It's modeled after a similar program we've offered to students at NMSU Grants for several years.

Through this program, it's possible for nursing students in Alamogordo to earn a bachelor's degree without leaving their community. This is important in addressing the state's health care needs as research shows most nursing students practice within 40 miles of where they graduate. Students who graduate from this program are more likely to stay in Alamogordo and will now be able to provide an increased level of care.

These are just a few examples of online and distance education programs NMSU has recently started, and we don't intend to stop there. We will continue to expand these kinds of programs, particularly in our graduate school.

New Mexico State University is a caring community and we want to make it easier for students to earn degrees while they address the other demands of work and life. While no one can be certain what the future will hold, one thing is for sure: time changes everything.