

## Distance Learning Offers Freedom, Convenience for College Students

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Classes started up at the Kodiak College yesterday, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the campus was flooded with students. In recent years the college has provided many more opportunities for distance learning, meaning students can complete courses online whenever it is convenient for them.

Jared Griffin is an assistant professor of English at KOC and spoke on KMXT's Talk of the Rock last week, along with fellow professors, about the college's shift toward distance learning.

"Over the past three or four years we have exponentially grown our distance offerings through video conferencing, through the internet and I think virtually every department has some element, some classes that are offered that way."

He said the number of classes offered online definitely differs within each department, and often times many of the students taking online classes are actually people living in Kodiak or surrounding villages.

"At least in the English department I think maybe about anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of the students are in my distance classes are local or here on the island. I did teach a literature class last spring that half of the class was located in Chevak, Alaska, which is near Bethel, nearish Bethel. And then with some students here. So I think it kind of varies, but for me it's anywhere between 10 and 50 percent I think."

April Laktonen Counciller is an assistant professor of Alutiiq studies and said classes within the Alutiiq studies program are primarily offered online.

"We have students right now all over Alaska. Last semester we had a student in Oregon. We also had a local student who was traveling, so she called in when she was spending a month in Thailand from an internet café. And actually the reception was really good, she had no problems calling in, even though we had some people locally who had trouble with their internet speed."

The shift helps students, who often work full time or have families, take classes at their convenience. But for some programs, like the new online medical coding program the college offers, it actually mirrors certain jobs that are also being done from home. Suzanne Buie is the department chair for health sciences at the college and said about a quarter of medical billers work at home.

“But it’s estimated that in about three or four years, two thirds will actually work from home or a remote area, not the physician’s office itself.”

Other classes offered online include the new intro to sustainable energy course and different art classes, among many others.

While distance learning does offer a certain freedom for the modern college student, Counciller did say that there are still regular deadlines for assignments, and no matter where students are in the world, those assignments will need to be turned in on time, Alaska Time.