

Lifelong learning

Students shop for courses at these extension centers

By Tim Smith
staff writer

It already had been a long day for Janice Rushlow, but instead of going straight home after work, she bolted for Wayne State University's Birmingham extension center and an evening class.

Sifting through her notes while consuming a quick fix meal of potato chips and pop in the center lounge, the professional-by-day, student-by-night prepared for her 5.5-hour course in computer programming.

Rushlow, a middle-aged divorced woman with a 21-year-old daughter living at home, wants to get a bachelor's degree in business administration, despite having a secure profession as a buyer and purchaser for American Motors Company.

"When I was hired at American Motors (in April 1985), it was because of my experience in advertising and the fact I've made it in business," Rushlow said. "Wow, everybody they hire has a degree. So I'm here as kind of a self-satisfying thing. Maybe a degree will help me move up."

NEARBY, BRIEFCASE-TOTING aspiring executives mingle in the lounge with other students, waiting for classes.

Judging by the growth of extension centers in Oakland County, these university arms must be meeting the needs of adult students.

Accessible and convenient centers give working adults, like Rushlow, the opportunity to complete a degree that may be nearly impossible for them to finish on a main campus, which is distant from where they live and work.

Taking classes at their own pace, some study not to earn a degree, but to enrich their educational and personal lives. For other "professional students," extension centers — such as the one housed at Birmingham Groves High School — are shopping centers for learning.

GROVES, LOCATED at 20500 West 13 Mile Road, is unique among the region's extension centers, according to Chip Gorman, facilities coordinator.



Kara Kuchnic of Farmington Hills makes a quick telephone call during a break from her music class at the Birmingham Groves extension center.

for its University Consortium.

At Groves alone, courses are offered by four major universities — Wayne State, Michigan State, Oakland and Eastern Michigan universities — which rent space from the Birmingham school district for their evening programs.

"Having so much under one roof I think is very good for the community. It gives those who aren't working on a specific program, a chance to try something different," Gorman said.

A panorama of the college scene shows part-time students signing up for extension courses throughout the county.

For example, the Oakland University student can sign up for classes in Bloomfield Hills, Southfield, West Bloomfield, Pontiac, Warren, Rochester and Royal Oak.

BESIDES BIRMINGHAM Groves, a Wayne State student can travel to Southfield for a course, in addition to Sterling Heights, East Detroit and Southgate.

Michigan State has a management center entrenched in Troy, while some courses are offered at the Mercy Conference Center on 11 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

And Central Michigan University in April will open its fifth Detroit-area center in Southfield, with another already operating in Troy.

Not only are the campuses different, but so are the students who attend them.

"Basically, the students who attend here range in age from their mid-20s to their mid-30s, and work in business or teaching endeavors," said Gorman. "Many are here to earn master's degrees while not having to give up time to their jobs, which would be the case if they had to take classes four or five days a week on campus."

"DEGREE I see from semester to semester are working slowly on the program," Gorman continued. "For them, it's the only way to do it because of work or family responsibilities. Many are dedicated students who have every intent on finishing their degrees."

"Others want to take a couple classes here or there, to help them keep up with changes within their jobs."

Gorman said there are countless others not on a clearly defined career path who use the facility. For example:

- The blue-collar working man, who takes a course in estimating and blueprinting to prepare for advancement or a class in financial investment to learn more about budgeting.

- Middle-aged or senior citizens who engage in what Gorman terms an "enrichment" program, tapping into classes about film history and literature appreciation.

- The wandering career student, who has taken a course per semester for 10 years while several times changing his major.

LIKE OTHERS hoping for advancement, Rushlow is a veteran student pushing hard to finish her bachelor's degree.

A seven-year college student with more than 10 years of advertising experience, Rushlow said she attends courses both as a "self-satisfying" exercise and in the hope she will win a director's position at AMC.

But satisfaction has its price.

Rushlow said she works about 50 hours weekly at AMC. After a full day there, she drives to Birmingham two nights a week for her classes. If she's lucky, she can grab a bag of chips or sandwich for dinner.

Rarely during the week does she see her daughter, who works afternoons.

"I'D PROBABLY be going to college anyway, but I prefer coming here because of the convenience factor. It's much closer to work and school," said Rushlow. "And, I really like getting all of an assignment at once, instead of over four or five days."



It's 8 p.m. and all's well at Birmingham Groves High School, where universities offer nighttime courses for adult students who work.

That trait of purposefully going full-steam-ahead regardless of the cost, typifies the extension center student, according to Ed Andrews, a Michigan State associate professor who specializes in teacher education. He is an instructor at Groves' University Consortium.

Andrews said there are drawbacks for students and teachers in the extension center setting.

There is an adjustment for both because of a lack of resources available off campus, but Andrews said that extension center students have an "inmate" drive and determination which pulls them through a course.

And instructors know ahead of time what the evening assignment entails and that limitations exist.

"A TEACHER has to tailor his offerings and methods of instruction in order to teach a course most efficiently, and to make up for fewer available resources," Andrews explained.

"It's simply a fact that on campus entire library resources are at your fingertips. There are books here, but it's not nearly the same." Having taught courses both on and off campus, Andrews said he uses all available resources, including school district and public libraries and prepared course materials, for his extension center class.

Also, there are physical limitations which hinder night-time teachers, he added.

"There are certain time restraints. If you finish a class at 10 p.m., you can't stay until midnight talking to a student," Andrews noted. "And there may be problems with weather, which make it very awkward to make it to a class on time."

"(Extension center) teachers teach all day, and then from 7-10 p.m. There is the potential that energy levels can be drained. On campus you can make certain provisions."

"BUT THE students at off-campus classes are there because they want to be, and that keeps you going," Andrews added.

"It really doesn't matter where you teach, if that's what you want to do. If you're enthusiastic, you can teach in a tent!"

Though actual course work is the same on and off campus, according to the teacher, the make-up of students is different in both settings.

"The average age of the off-campus student is higher (than his on-campus counterpart), and that

alone is an immeasurable difference. Also, I've found that off-campus students intrinsically have a high motivational level," he said, noting they punch out for the night at work and then sit behind a desk rather than in front of a television.

The biggest problem for on-campus students is the opportunity for and variety of interests that make demands on their time.

"BUT DON'T forget students living at home also have distractions," Andrews said, emphatically.

So there's really a tradeoff between the two. I can't detect a marked difference in intensity. They're just in different situations."

And, according to Gorman, off campus it's tougher to complete a degree.

"It would be very hard to get a complete degree off campus because of the course offerings," Gorman said. "For example, here aren't any labs set up here for courses like biology, so students have to take a lecture here and a lab on campus."

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS like Wayne State and Oakland University offer different programs from extension center to center. For students, going to school off campus is much like trying to complete a puzzle.

At Oakland University's Pontiac center for the winter 1988 term, courses are available only in photography and independent studies. At its Rochester site, only advanced photo journalism is available.

"You can see what kinds of problems can crop up," Gorman said.

So students who attend regional extension centers give up having more educational choices for convenience and accessibility.

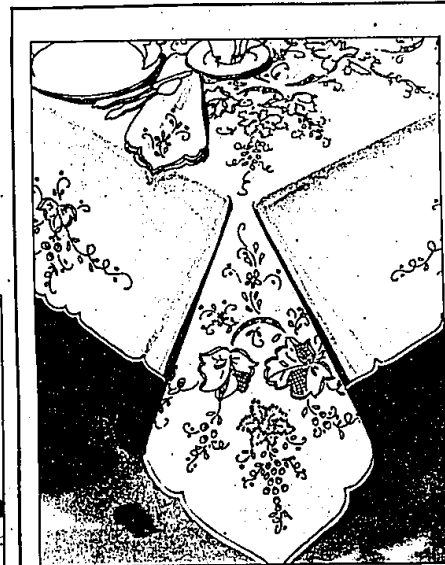
In today's fast paced job market, continued advancement requires consistently updated skills. And the continued growth in extension centers is offering the chance.



'Having so much under one roof is good for the community.'

— Chip Gorman,
facilities
coordinator,
University
Consortium

Staff photos
by Dan Dean



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Regional college extension centers are readily available throughout Oakland County. They include offerings for everybody from the casual student to the veteran business executive pursuing his MBA.

Following is a capsule look at what's out there.

FARMINGTON HILLS

- Mercy Conference Center, 28600 11 Mile Road, 476-8010, or contact Dr. Phil Cusick at (517) 355-4338. Michigan State University offers courses for administratively-minded people.

Cusick, who teaches Externship in Educational Administration and Multi-disciplinary Seminar in Educational Administration, said the classes are for "people who are practicing school administrators and teachers or who want to be administrators."

"We deal with issues which effect administration" including policies, private schools," Cusick said.

NOVI

- Novi High School, 24082 Taft Road, 249-5155 or contact registration office at Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge, 471-7500. Courses are available in variety of subjects, which vary from semester to semester.

SOUTHFIELD

- Central Michigan University is slated to open a Southfield regional center in April at 29840 Telegraph near 12 Mile Road.

Graduate and undergraduate courses will be offered at the Southfield center, geared for career-oriented professionals.

The Southfield center will join CMU extensions already operating in Troy, Dearborn, Highland Park and Mt. Clemens. Persons who want more information should contact regional program director Chuck Carlson at CMU's Troy center, 643-8997.

Though Carlson said the "vast bulk" of CMU extension center students are



Taking a break before their driver education certification class offered by Wayne State University are Daryl Shoonover (left) of Rochester, a teacher at Birmingham Brother Rice High School, and Bob Furca of Livonia, a special education teacher in Oak Park.

associated with the automobile industry, auto supplier groups or the healthcare profession, undercenter manager Kris Krzyzanski at 358-2104 from 8:30-10 a.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

The center, part of WSU's College of Lifelong Learning, offers a high concentration of business courses. But Krzyzanski said a wide range of graduate and undergraduate offerings in other areas, such as liberal arts, are also available.

ROYAL OAK

- Shrine High School, 3500 West 13 Mile Road. Of the several Oakland Uni-

versity extension centers, besides the one at Birmingham Groves' Shrine offers the most for students.

This semester, for instance, courses are available in everything from accounting to technical writing to drawing. Contact the university extension program office at 370-4010.

- Oakland University extension courses are also offered at Dondore and Kimball high schools, located at 709 North Washington and 1500 Lexington respectively. Again, interested individuals should contact the university's extension program at 370-4010.

The courses offered at the Royal Oak centers this semester primarily are communications-oriented.