

OMNIBUS

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work, home and school responsibilities. Those knowingly unable to do so need to re-think whether the program suits them or not.

"It's not an easy way of learning for every person," Jeffress said. "It takes an awful lot of dedication to get through an on-line course. If any student thinks an on-line course is quick, dirty and easy, they've made an

instant mistake. But it will be (suitable) for an increasing number of students in the future. They'll either want to or have to."

OMNIBUS grad Bosnjakowski agreed that the program is time-consuming and difficult. But the rewards are clearly spelled out when someone signs up before the first year, and people know

what is expected of them in return.

"I don't think everyone is cut out for a program like this," Bosnjakowski said. "But for those who do need to join OMNIBUS, the best advice to give them is not to give up."

This is one of the most rewarding programs (they will have ever signed up for).

According to Gregorich, instructors also need to put in the time in order for OMNIBUS to be effective. They need to get to know the makeup of students in order to create e-mails that connect on a

personal basis. They need to monitor the Blackboard system to find out when students are logging on to do coursework or interact with others in their cohort.

"With statistics available in software like Blackboard, you can see if a student is only in a chat room the morning of a class," noted Prof. Dave. "So instructors can be clever with that information, such as (to) ask a particular question or change an approach."

There's the opportunity to be a better master of your topic, a better communicator because

you're looking at transcripts."

Being ultra-perceptive without having the benefit of much in-person interaction can be tough, however.

Finding more ways to foster personal interaction is a goal being looked at by Schoolcraft and Madonna officials.

"Opportunities for social interaction, face-to-face, are more important than we first thought," Jeffress acknowledged. "We need to make some adjustments" such as hosting social gatherings during the semester.

But Bosnjakowski gives the

program high marks in the social interaction category.

"What made this experience a bit easier was the group of friends that stuck together throughout the program," he said. "Everyone sticking together, helping each other, and taking care of each other was something I wouldn't have expected when I first joined the program. I feel I was part of something special."

Tweaking aside, there is every reason to believe current and future OMNIBUS cohorts will get to experience that feeling.

Success

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might be working in tandem on a project in business finance or accounting.

But those concerns easily are outweighed by the pluses: a flexible program where dedicated "non-traditional" students who also have jobs and households to juggle are able to earn the degree they might sorely need to get that next job or promotion.

Ride and learn

When Bednark found out about the online program, it meant a chance to do something she wanted to do immediately after high school, but had to wait on while getting married and raising a family. Kaye Lynnette and Ken Bednark were married in 1984, and their children now are age 12 and 16.

"I always wanted to go to college. I just did it in a different order," said Kaye Lynnette Bednark with a smile.

She told her mom about the learning opportunity and Buchanan quickly got on the OMNIBUS, so to speak.

"I was getting older and I knew I needed a degree, in case I needed to support myself in the future," Buchanan said.

Bednark said the program just made sense for her particular lifestyle. "I was looking into traditional courses at different colleges. But when I stumbled upon OMNIBUS I thought, 'Great, I can do this on-line.' The convenience of it is what got me."

"I also realized I could spend more time studying and doing my homework because there'd be less time traveling and sitting in a classroom. I figured I'd be able to do it at home, that's my classroom."

But being devoted without being distracted is a challenge for all OMNIBUS students to deal with. Doing assignments daily, even if it means burning the midnight oil, is crucial to stay on track, the women said.

"You really have to stay focused on your goal. You can't think, 'I'm going to quit or give up.' You just keep chugging. And when you look back, the time goes by so quickly."

Whenever things did get difficult, the mom and daughter had each other to consult with. "We would boost each other up when we were feeling low about a project or assignment," Bednark said.

They discussed assignments already under way, ones in the hopper and how to organize themselves to complete those tasks. And now, they have massive portfolios and multiple degrees to show for their efforts.

And for the middle-aged Buchanan, completing the OMNIBUS program is leading to an exciting opportunity she never could have foreseen. She begins teaching a Schoolcraft on-

line business course in January. "Now, I'm going to be a professor."

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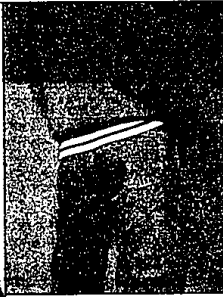
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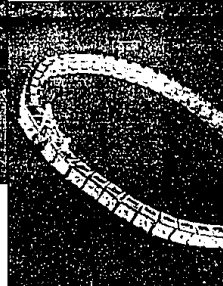
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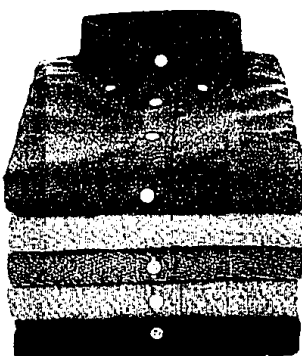


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