

Adult Degree Program

Virtual classes build real community



Meet a portion of the cyber Class of 2009. These 10 students will spend roughly the next 18 months together in a tightly-knit virtual community as they earn their bachelor's degrees through Corban's online Adult Degree Program.

- *Melissa Kurtcuoglu, 29, is a stay-at-home mom in Switzerland.*
- *Arlene McDonald, 37, is a preschool teacher in Texas.*
- *Nancy "Kitty" Sickler, 49, is an Oregonian who wants to earn a master's degree in art therapy.*
- *Barbara Ellich, is a 25-year-old wife and new mom.*
- *Mary Horton, 44, of Georgia, works at a homeless shelter for battered women.*
- *Nicole Hinckley, is a 23-year-old newlywed who wants to finish what she started at Seattle Pacific University.*
- *Janet Kush, 60, is a successful paralegal who promised her father that she'd go back to school.*
- *Dorothea Lander, 54, has traveled the world as a Wycliffe translator but now wants to teach on the college level.*
- *Charles Bickel, 45, is married with kids, and he's finally managed to pare his accountant's job to part-time so he can finish earning his bachelor's degree.*
- *Tom McGowan, 30, is a firefighter/*

paramedic in Grants Pass, Ore., who says that returning to school is a "pre-midlife crisis."

These students first met each other at a 2 ½-day orientation on campus in April. Now, they're back home, and classes have begun. They won't see each other again until graduation, but they "talk" online a least three times a week, bouncing ideas off each other as they read and research. After work, on lunch breaks, between baby's naps, and, sometimes, in the morning's wee hours, they post answers to their instructors' questions and responses to their fellow students' thoughts.

"We have found that the online students often get to know each other better than the on-campus degree completion students because they talk to each other three to four times a week," says Adult Degree Program Dean Nancy Martyn. "In this online format, everyone's voice gets heard, which doesn't always happen in a classroom setting."

Each of Corban's Adult Degree online classes—or "cohorts"—begins and ends the journey together. Each cohort starts with the required 2 ½-day training on campus, a feature that builds friendships and contributes to the program's unusually high 94-percent retention rate.

"If online students can meet each other, the retention rate is higher because there's

that personal connection," Martyn says. "That's what brings them back for graduation. They're excited to see their friends."

After the initial training, courses begin right away, but instead of taking several at once, the cohort moves through them one-by-one, with each course "module" lasting no longer than six weeks.

Almost immediately, every student also begins working on a dissertation-style project due upon completion of the program. Those in the Family Studies track, with its social psychology focus, will complete an internship with a social service organization. Those in the business-oriented Management and Communication track will devise a research project that ties into their job or career goals.

"The students get excited about this research because they can put it to use right away," says Bruce Merritt, Management and Communication program chair.

So far, Corban's online students have hailed from 34 states and seven countries. On average, 56 percent are women. When the college awarded 34 degrees to online students at the May 5 graduation, 25 of those had maintained at least a 3.8 GPA.

"This program works for the typically busy adult, whether he or she works in the home or out of it," Martyn says. "It can be taken anywhere at anytime while working full-time and maintaining family and church responsibilities."

Adult Degree Program "Finish What You Started."

On-Campus or Online

BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMS:

Family Studies

Management & Communication

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