



GULF DEFENDER



Going the distance - without the commute

REBEKAH YEAGER
Grantham University

Twenty years ago, a college education almost always meant dorm rooms and football games. The average freshman was eighteen years old, fresh from high school and away from home for the first time.

Now, the face of education is changing, and for many Airmen, the change is good.

From the high-tech systems aboard a fighter jet to the self check-out line at the local grocery store, technology has altered the way Americans live. It should not surprise most that education has been impacted by technology as well. More Americans are turning away from traditional universities and choosing distance education instead everyday.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, enrollment in distance education courses has more than doubled since 2000. In the past, distance learning meant taking courses through audio or video feeds. Today's technology has allowed schools to offer more and more courses using the Internet. This new distance learning model is ideal for military personnel who are deployed, move frequently because of temporary duty assignments, or whose duty schedules make it difficult to attend traditional evening classes.

Master Sgt. Jim Anslow and Staff Sgt. Jacqueline Doherty are two of the many students at Tyndall who are finding that distance education works for them in a way that traditional universities didn't. Both are students at Grantham University, located in Slidell La., and neither Sergeant Anslow nor Sergeant Doherty has ever set foot on

the school's campus. They've never needed to. All of their educational needs—from taking tests to communicating with professors—can be met online.

The reasons people choose this type of distance education vary.

Sergeant Anslow has found this solution since his life has revolved around his family and his job and forced him to put his college plans on hold. Now, with distance education, he has found time to spend with his family, excel in his career, and earn his degree.

"The concept of distance learning is ideal for military personnel," Sergeant Anslow said. Due to the variety of work schedules, deployments, and other obligations, most personnel find it very difficult to attend the necessary classes in a traditional education.

Sergeant Doherty agrees. She left college years ago to join the Air Force to travel, and for the tuition assistance the military provides to students. Though she has been thrilled to see the

world while traveling to locations, such as Honduras and Saudi Arabia, deployments and a busy schedule didn't leave her much time to sit in a classroom.

"I like distance learning because it gives me the flexibility to get an education while working a full-time job," she says. "I'm able to study and do homework whenever I can fit it in."



Airman 1st Class Sarah McDowell

Kristen Johnson, 325th Comptroller Squadron financial services technician, looks at online classes. People are able to study, communicate with teachers and take quizzes and tests online through various distance education programs.

Considering distance education

When researching distance education programs, experts suggest that military servicemen and women should look for the following in a university:

- An accreditation that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education
- Established record of working with the military
- Help that is available from real people in real time: make sure that the faculty and staff is readily available to answer questions and provide guidance.
- Portable, self-paced, and flexible

- Financially manageable To learn more about distance education and the many programs available to military personnel, prospective students should contact the base education office.

More information about Grantham's programs is available at www.grantham.edu or by calling (800) 955-2527.