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## Revitalizing OCE

Mardi Mileham  
*Linfield College*

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# Revitalizing OCE



Rachelle Rehberg '16

As a young girl, Rachelle Rehberg '16 dreamed of attending college and becoming a buyer for a clothing retailer.

She graduated from high school early and at 17, wasn't ready for college, so she got a job in retail. Fast forward a few years and she had climbed the ranks to become general manager at the Gap Outlet in Lincoln City. Her lack of degree had not held her back. Then came an opportunity to work short term in China where a first-ever Gap store was opening. That chance was sidelined when the Chinese government refused to grant a visa because she didn't have a college degree.

Within a week, Rehberg enrolled in Linfield's Online and Continuing Education program. And even though she's never set foot on campus or met her classmates, she's on track to fulfill that dream of getting her college degree.

## Strengthening the online program

Linfield has long been a leader in adult education in Oregon, launching a program in 1975 with faculty teaching night or weekend classes at locations around the state. Since then, with advances in technology and student demand, courses went from a combination of face-to-face and online classes to exclusively online. And with the advent of digital education, the number of colleges offering courses online has exploded.

"OCE continues to be a strategic advantage for Linfield," said President Thomas L. Hellie. "At a time when some of the nation's most elite colleges are beginning to create online programs, we already have them. But if we don't strengthen and expand our offerings, we will be surpassed by colleges more willing to seize the opportunities."

Over the past two years, Linfield's OCE (formerly known as the Division of Continuing Education/Adult Degree program) has undergone a transformation to revitalize programs to appeal to a broader and changing population. OCE continues to offer six bachelor's degrees and four minors, including a new creative writing minor launched this fall. In addition, certificate programs designed to enhance skills and knowledge in specific subjects have expanded into five new areas (see sidebar on page 9).

"The reorganization will reflect and complement our strengths as a liberal arts college," Hellie said.

Among the new offerings are certificate programs in wine marketing and management, coaching, creative writing, global health and software engineering.

Online programs don't just serve adult learners, according to Laura Brener, director of OCE. Today's 18-year-old is comfortable with online learning and eager to enroll in classes. In addition, there's an untapped market of retiring baby boomers who are interested in attending classes but do not desire to earn a degree or certificate. They want the opportunity to address

## OCE facts

Average age: 37

Age range: 18-65+

Gender: 81% female, 19% male

Students of color: 19%

Part time: 79%

Full time: 8%

Certificate/non-degree: 13%

Transfer students: 97%

45 faculty, including adjuncts, taught OCE classes last spring

For more information:  
[linfield.edu/oce](http://linfield.edu/oce)

*Rachelle Rehberg, at right in Tecal, Guatemala, fulfilled her study abroad requirements for her international business degree in Guatemala, where she continued to study the Spanish language and immersed herself in the culture. She studied Guatemalan appearance and how traditional attire is tailored to meet business and cultural norms. She also spent time learning about business customs and interactions through a variety of observations and interviews.*

*"I have had some of the smartest, most caring and passionate professors that I could have ever asked for. Having this degree will open countless doors to potential career paths. And if an opportunity comes up again where a degree is required for a job, I won't be turned down again for not having one."*

*– Rachelle Rehberg '16*





*“The flexibility has been a real key to my success in school. With my 50-plus hour work weeks and evening commitments, if I didn’t have that flexibility to squeeze in homework, it wouldn’t happen.” – Dan Ripplinger ’16*

universal issues, read great texts or take a writing class without worrying about exams or grades. To respond to this, OCE will be offering personal enrichment courses and workshops this spring.

Those are all ideas that will be explored, but it is not just a matter of offering more, Brener said. “It is also differentiating ourselves and making sure our standards for completing a bachelor’s degree, certificate program or online course represent the same quality as any other program at Linfield.”

## Academic excellence

Each student has his or her own reason for pursuing a degree or certificate. While each experience is different, the academic quality and the flexibility of the program are critical.

Dan Ripplinger ’16 of Albany is earning an accounting degree while also working as full-time director of business services at the Oregon State Credit Union in Corvallis. He selected Linfield because it had a storied history and was one of the more revered adult degree programs available.

“Online learning at Linfield is not very different from being in the classroom,” he said. “We may not be physically around each other, but the program is no less rigorous.”

The strength of the program, coupled with its flexibility, is essential for Ripplinger, who oversees a \$100 million portfolio in commercial loans, and is married with four children. He maintains a tight schedule, even finding time for homework in his daily calendar. He always looks for little windows of time in which he can study.

“The flexibility has been a real key to my success in school,” he said. “With my 50-plus hour work weeks and evening commitments, if I didn’t have

that flexibility to squeeze in homework, it wouldn’t happen.”

Rehberg, an international business major, said the quality of the professors she’s had has been outstanding and the diversity of courses was surprising, including classes on the Holocaust, shoreline ecology, nutrition, entrepreneurship and cultural anthropology.

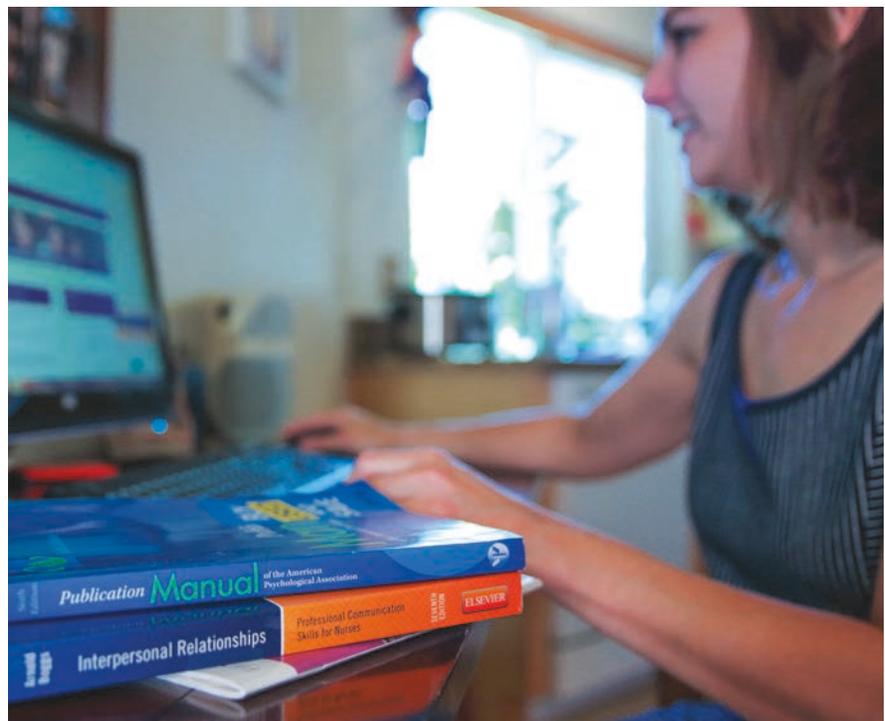
“I have had some of the smartest, most caring and passionate professors that I could have ever asked for,” she said. “Having this degree will open countless doors to potential career paths. And if an opportunity comes up again where a degree is required for a job, I won’t be turned down again for

not having one.”

As an international business major, Rehberg learned Spanish and completed her study abroad requirement in Guatemala, where she continued her language studies, learned about the culture and the history of the Mayan textiles of Guatemala, and how that industry sustains the economy.

## Expanding certificate offerings

Not everyone has the time, finances or desire to complete a bachelor’s degree. Certificates offer a great alternative for working adults to



*Chantel Gardner, a nurse and single mother of three boys, began her RN to BSN program in 2014 and tackles coursework in her dining room in between work and family commitments. She enrolled in the Online and Continuing Education program as a step toward fulfilling a lifelong dream of becoming a nurse practitioner. Her advice for others, “Don’t let your fears, whatever they may be, stop you from going to college.”*

learn additional skills that may help them advance professionally.

OCE has expanded its certificate offerings ranging from coaching, creative writing and global health to cyber security, software engineering, and wine management and marketing.

Tracy Thatcher, who completed a human resource management certificate, is a prime example of the value of the program. She said it was instrumental in her promotion to claims and customer service supervisor at Tuality Health Alliance and has also been helpful in her leadership roles.

"I am so thankful because it was so very useful and important for my job and career path," she said.

As a single working parent, Thatcher said Linfield's program was a good fit because the flexibility allowed her to study and work on classes whenever time allowed.

And the most surprising thing? "That I was able to complete so much and learn so much without actually ever meeting anyone in person," she said.

## Online classroom

Virlena Crosley '89, assistant professor of business, understands what it is like to be an adult learner. She completed her bachelor's degree through the face-to-face adult degree program at Linfield. However, she is aware of the challenges and benefits of learning – and teaching – online after completing her master's and Doctor of Business Administration through hybrid programs offering both face-to-face and online interactions with faculty.

"I know what it's like to be an online student," she said. "Even when professors work hard to make something clear, there are often questions. Unlike students in an on-campus class, online students don't have the opportunity to ask their questions when their instructor is in the room. Having taken classes in this medium gives me insights that influence my teaching style and also

helps me understand the importance of timely responses to student questions."

The critical aspect to online communication is providing feedback and responding to questions quickly, so Crosley is available to students on weekends and evenings when most adult students are studying.

Crosley teaches on the McMinnville Campus as well as online courses that include a mix of working adults and 18 to 22-year-olds. One of the challenges of teaching online is missing non-verbal cues that you would see in the classroom. But one of the benefits is the interactions and learning that occurs among the mix of online students. Working adult students bring real life work experiences that complement and add depth to the coursework as they share their examples or challenges in the workplace through assignments or online group discussions or projects.

Developing communication and student engagement strategies are important in online education, said Scott Vandehey '00, visiting assistant professor of anthropology.

Student engagement can present challenges, Vandehey said, but there's also a lot of opportunity. He mixes things up in his courses, using different kinds of media, such as links to videos or websites, along with various readings. To encourage engagement, he maintains an active presence in discussion boards and activities. He introduces himself using photos or videos and asks the same of his students. Students are required to participate and respond to two or three discussion questions posted each week, drawing from both course material and personal experience.

Vandehey's online course work is just as rigorous as in a traditional classroom. "I don't change the content, and even though the setting is different, what I expect students to deliver to me is the same," he said.

One of the benefits of teaching online is the diversity of students, he said. Students may include the adult learner with a job, career and family, or a traditional student on campus

taking an online course or perhaps an international student.

"That adds richness to the class, because that variety of students would rarely come together for an on-site course," Vandehey said. "The adult student raises issues related to family or work experience, bringing up ideas a traditional age student might never have considered."

– Mardi Mileham

## OCE majors

- Accounting
- Business Information Systems
- International Business
- Management
- Marketing
- RN to BSN

## Minors

- Creative Writing
- Environmental Studies
- Health Administration
- Global Health

## Certificates

- Post Baccalaureate Accounting
- Coaching
- Creative Writing
- Cyber Security
- Database Administration
- Global Health
- Health Administration
- Human Resource Management
- Marketing
- Software Engineering
- Web Application Development
- Wine Management
- Wine Marketing
- Yoga Instructor