Pioneers in the Digital Age

Michigan Virtual University sets the bar for online and distance learning

Michigan Virtual University® (MVU®), located in Lansing, Mich., was founded in the late 1990s by the State of Michigan as a statewide option for online classes. With over 150 courses, this non-profit is striving to promote positive change by providing quality online programs and creating a well-rounded learning experience for K-12 students.

Brandon Bautista, Digital Media Manager, has been with MVU for over 13 years. "In the beginning we were very static," recalls Brandon. "Instead of a textbook in front of you, you have a textbook on your screen."

Today Michigan Virtual University has moved way beyond that image of a student reading a textbook on the computer or watching a teacher lecture over a webcam.

Classroom Challenges

MVU is on the forefront of creating a worthwhile, large-scale online classroom. They're working on providing equal, effective education for students across a whole state—students who may not have had the same opportunities in the classroom, students who have scheduling conflicts, or require extra help.

Brandon Bautista

William Springer, lead world language instructor and subject matter expert, understands the challenges. MVU, being one of the first institutions of its kind, runs into roadblocks from time to time as they innovate on the traditional classroom model. "There are things that can be discouraging," he admits, "but it's very much a pioneering work as well…That's one of the things I like most about the job: we're making it up as we go, and we get to set the tone for how online education is put into practice."
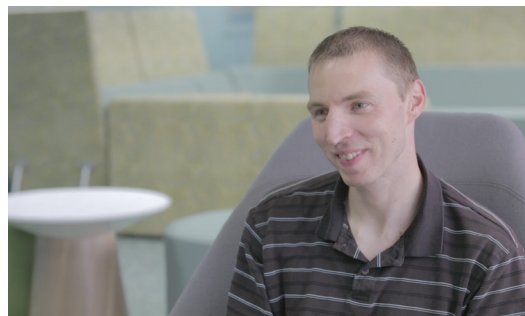
Going up against the perception that online learning is trying to replace teachers with computers can be tough. Justin Bruno, former teacher and research associate at MVU, agrees. "I do see people who view online education as a threat," he says, "but I don't ever see the two being mutually exclusive: online education and face-to-face education. I think it's a tool that needs to be used effectively and properly."

MVU is on the cutting edge of improving education with the use of online learning.

William Springer

Jamie DeWitt, lead math instructor and subject matter expert, believes that MVU is interested in giving students a new opportunity. She explains, "We really try to push that boundary. If we have you here, what can we do online that we couldn't have done face to face?"

Evolution of the Online Class

For these educators, online learning is not simply taking what you do in a class and shifting that to the

At A Glance

- MVU was founded by the State of Michigan as a statewide option for online classes.

- MVU courses are designed to use what's unique about the Internet to offer a learning experience that can't be replicated in the traditional classroom.

- Today, the school offers over 150 online courses for K-12 students.

Featured Product

Camtasia®

Jamie DeWitt

Internet. It's about using what's unique about the Internet to offer a learning experience that can't be replicated in person. But it took them years of research, trial and error to get to where they are now.

"As we've evolved, the courses have gotten more evolved," comments Brandon. "We have more multi-media assets, more interactivity. In general, we're not just telling [the students], we're showing them what we want them to learn and having them interact with the courses in a way that's going to facilitate their learning."

Jamie DeWitt agrees, commenting, "How things have changed has just been insane. The growth has been incredible, but it's not even the growth of technology that's accessible at my fingers, it's what's available at the students' fingertips as well."

As access to technology spreads, Jamie and her fellow educators are able to do more for their students. Beyond creating basic course materials, she's able to zero in on students' needs. Using TechSmith Camtasia, she can provide targeted help for students. "If students still need help, if they still don't understand what's going on, what can I say in a Camtasia video that's going to help them really close the loop?"

In a lot of ways, online learning is a much more personalized experience than what teachers can provide in a traditional classroom. William compares online learning to the traditional classroom. "In the face-to-face environment, students have you [the teacher] for that 50 minutes, and then it's basically over. Online, they're able to progress through the class as quickly or slowly as they need to. They can access it whenever they want, wherever they want…the individuality of the experience, tailored to what they need, is a huge difference."

Twenty-First Century Learning

The educational system is finally catching up to the twenty-first century. Today, "students thrive on almost this need for multiple technologies and multiple ways of seeing feedback," explains Jamie. "What's really changing is I'm not just understanding a learning style of a student anymore, it's actually a technology style of a student."

Justin Bruno

The impact technology is having on students is amazing. "I love the possibilities that tech provides," says Justin. "A student can create almost anything if they know the tools they're using to create it with. An educator can put a message out there so incredibly well and efficiently if they know the tools they're using to create it with. It provides so much opportunity for real learning to take place." But it's not a complete solution and shouldn't be considered one.

Online learning is not a replacement for face-to-face classrooms. Just as not all students thrived in the traditional classroom, online learning is not right for everyone. It is, however, a new option for those students looking to try something different. As Justin points out, "Education should ideally reflect society's movement. People are using the Internet to do anything and everything these days, so why should a student not be able to get that same opportunity online?"

Quoted

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—**Jamie DeWitt,**
Lead Math Instructor