

Education from the Cab of the Truck

BY MICHAEL HOWE

How does one who is rarely home and rarely in one location pursue additional educational opportunities? This is the question over-the-road truck drivers often ask, especially as they consider ways to either improve skills that can help them be a more successful driver or earn the degree that may help eventually move into management positions. Fortunately, there is a solution – online education. The Internet affords anyone anywhere the opportunity to pursue their educational goals, and with Internet access available at many points along the road (rest areas, truck stops, etc...) truck drivers too can take advantage of this convenience.

While it is difficult to ascertain just how many over-the-road truck drivers are currently enrolled in online education programs, it's fairly reasonable to suspect there are many. Most schools, like Selkirk College in Castlegar, British Columbia, don't ask students to disclose their current occupation, so it is a challenge to really know. But, as

Shirley Pasioka, Dean for the School of Health, Wellness and Career Studies at Grand Prairie Regional College (GRPC) in Alberta says, "There are students enrolled in online education from all walks of life, which could very well include truck drivers."

It is even possible for Canadian citizens and drivers to enroll in US colleges. Rasmussen College, for example, has a robust online education program. Lynne Croteau, Online Dean for Rasmussen, says, "Students can enroll as an international student and would need to have a student visa if they are to locate in the US to go to school." But, for online classes, "If they were to stay in Canada and not reside in the US then they could attend online."

Perhaps one of the most important benefits of online education, especially for an over-the-road truck driver, is convenience. "The biggest benefit is the flexibility of online education," says Croteau. "Students can be anywhere and remain engaged." Courses can generally be accessed 24 hours per day, allowing for great flexibility. Cathy Mercer,

Director of Student and Enrollment Services at Selkirk College, adds that students "study on their own schedule, meet other online students through course discussion forums, and can even access the BC transfer system where by courses taken at one institution are transferable to others."

"Whether students are working full-time, or raising a family, most busy adults do not have time to take 2-4 years on-site at a post-secondary institution," says Pasioka. "On-line education allows students to gain the skills, confidence, and practical experience to pursue a rewarding professional career without the time, high-cost and restrictive schedules of traditional college and university programs."

It's really all about taking advantage of current technology – whether at home on the couch with kids running around, or in the cab of the truck using Wi-Fi access points. "By utilizing technology students can advance their skills and career prospects on their own schedule. On-line education saves time commuting, saves

money on parking or transit costs, parents save money on costly child care, plus students (like truck drivers) can keep working while studying," says Pasioka.

And, if anyone thinks online education isn't as meaningful or challenging as a traditional college setting, they are in for a surprise. Each of the individuals interviewed for this article agree; the same rigor and expectations exist for online classes, so these are not an easy way out. Croteau adds, "Some of the online courses have even more supplemental material that students have access to than in the residential setting, such as videos and links to articles."

One frequently asked question is related to how quickly a student must finish a degree plan. Traditional students just out of high school going to college will take 4-5 courses a term, with a goal of finishing in 4-5 years. This plan simply is not possible for most working adults. "Students can take one or two classes at a time. They are not obligated to carry a full load," says Pasioka. "The experienced instructors will take personal interest in each student's progress in each class and students will have unlimited on-line support to help with their success."

There may be certain requirements, however, that demand a minimum

number of courses to be taken. Croteau explains, "Depending on if they are planning on receiving financial aid, they certainly can take one course at a time. But, if they are getting financial aid, students need to take at least 6 credit hours per quarter to qualify." There may also be specific degree program requirements. "Depending on the program, students can study full time or part time," says Mercer.

Online education does require a certain level of commitment and understanding that everyone should know before enrolling. Pasioka suggests that students consider the following aspects of online education before beginning a course or program: time management skills, program accreditation, comfort level with technology, academic and career goals, finances, and adequate and varied learning resources available.

Mercer agrees, and also suggests that it is important to work with a school advisor or counselor to "map out your educational pathway and get started." Having the right tools though is of the utmost importance, and this is where the challenge can lie for over the road truck drivers – where will the WiFi be and will you have frequent access? "Make sure you have a reliable computer with wireless

capabilities," says Croteau. "Your computer needs to have the most updated Microsoft Office suite as well as the most current Java Script in order to log in with little interruption."

So, why would an over-the-road truck driver who is interested in advancing their education take online courses? "At Selkirk, the majority of our online students prefer the online learning format because it provides students with the ability to study around work and family responsibilities and, for many of them, moving to attend school is just not an option," says Mercer.

"On-line education is an excellent opportunity for some students to advance their academic and career goals in today's busy world! On-line education is another avenue for making the transition from student to working professional and beyond," says Pasioka.

If you have always wanted to get a degree or take a course to learn a new skill, you can do it from the cab of your truck!

For more information visit the following websites: Selkirk College: www.selkirk.ca, GRPC: www.gprc.ab.ca, Rasmussen College: www.rasmussen.edu.

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ECONO PRO

Econo Pro Responds to the Calgary State of Emergency

Econo Pro enterprises, part of the Shadow Group of companies, deployed its THRS 24hour emergency shelter from the Langley Head Office location, arriving in Calgary on June 27th. This unit has been donated to the Salvation Army in Calgary for use by their volunteers who are tirelessly working to help clean up the city. Econo Pro is grateful that the Sal-

vation Army has chosen to use this unit as it is perfectly set up to house 16 volunteers at a time in a safe and clean environment.

Econo Pro has worked with homeless relief societies in the Vancouver area over the past 3 years. Econo pro delivers and sets up the THRS 24 Hour Emergency Shelter, allowing the relief society to manage the shelter as best

fits their needs. With the shelter deployed, Econo Pro is continuing to work with relief agencies in Calgary to best maximize benefits for our neighbours in Calgary.

Please direct any questions about the 24hr Emergency Shelter and how it is helping Calgarians to Cameron Hull at 604.309.4779, or email cameron@econopro.com. ■

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