

Online classes open doors for Centre students

By Ben Kleine, *Marion County Record*

Students who are frustrated by the choices available in their curriculum — the lack of classes that interest and challenge them — have a new option available to them this year.

About 10 Centre High School students are using the virtual school program at Centre, provided by Lincoln Interactive, to enhance their learning experience.

Senior Jacob Jirak chose to take Latin online because he had already taken three years of Spanish at CHS. Latin provided an opportunity to learn the base of many languages, and a challenging class that would be a boon to college applications.

“It’s awkward; it uses less words. You can have a five-word Latin sentence that is like 12 words in English,” Jirak said. “It has more of a relationship to English than I thought.”

Through the first semester of the class, Jirak said the class has been like piecing together a word puzzle.

“When you look at language, you have to see how one word, with its forms, works in another form,” Jirak said. “It’s like a math equation, only math with words.”

Jirak also took a creative writing class online last semester; students are allowed to take two online classes in addition to their current curriculum.

As a senior, he had already taken four English classes. Writing, poetry, and literature being some of his interests, creative writing provided an outlet to explore those subjects. By emailing assignments to the online teacher, it was an outlet free from peer criticism that also provided a constructive feedback.

“I was glad to have the opportunity to take these classes,” Jirak said. “I think I would have slacked off senior year.”

While Jirak is unique because he has been accepted into an ivy league school — Columbia — he is not the only Centre student exploring educational interests through online education.

Senior Adam Matz is currently taking a computer programming class.

Fellow senior Charles Stuchlik completed a rocket cars class this past semester. The class is designed to teach applications for mechanical engineering.

However, there are more traditional applications for virtual school classes. Senior Trevor Hageberg is taking a U.S. government class online because the same class taught at Centre conflicted with another class. He is also going to take a personal fitness class in the fourth quarter.

Freshman Brett Muhlig transferred from Herington at the beginning of the winter semester. Muhlig struggled with Algebra 1 at Herington and was tracked to take Algebra 1.5. CHS does not have an Algebra 1.5 class. Instead of being vaulted into Algebra 2, Muhlig is taking an Algebra 1.5 equivalent

through Lincoln Interactive. Muhlig has thrived with the online class that allows him to learn the material at his own pace.

“I like it a lot better,” Muhlig said. “You’re not pressured to get it done at the end of the hour.”

Virtual classes offered at Centre and taught by Lincoln International teachers located all over the U.S. are online lessons, tests, and assignments available on Blackboard sites. Unlike Interactive Distance Learning broadcast over video screens, there is no face-to-face teacher student instruction.

Instead, students work on lessons using instructional videos and audio clips. For Latin, Jirak uses audio phrases that he can repeat and mimic.

Instructors are available through e-mail or by phone.

Although Centre Learning Advocates, led by Virtual School Coordinator Vickie Jirak, oversee student progress and meet with students at Centre daily, students can work on virtual classes beyond school hours. This can be advantageous to some students, but they must be self-motivated to finish classes.

“In a way, teaching yourself is the best way to learn anything,” Jacob Jirak said. “You have to be your own regulator.”

Students at Centre are just a small fragment of CHS’ virtual school operation. Currently, 23 students are enrolled from around the state — from Kansas City to western Kansas. The students range from elementary school, to home school, to even one girl who was a homeless dropout. USD 397 Superintendent Jerri Kemble and Vickie Jirak went to various fairs to advertise the virtual school program to prospective students.

Centre implemented the virtual school program in two weeks at the beginning of this past fall semester. The USD 397 Board of Education approved the program this past summer.

“It opens up so many more doorways,” Kemble said, “opportunities that weren’t available at a 1A school.”

Online:

http://marionrecord.com/direct/online_classes_open_doors_for_centre_students+1122virtual+4f6e6c696e6520636c6173736573206f70656e20646f6f727320666f722043656e7472652073747564656e7473