



Rural Development • Rural Utilities Service • Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program

Distance Learning Increases College Access for Rural Students

Until recently, residents of Oregon’s Lake County have not had the opportunity to attend college without driving long distances, moving to urban centers, or taking impersonal and often inadequate online classes. Today, however, advanced telecommunication technology installed with USDA financing is enabling residents in this remote, rural area to fully participate in a variety of classes at neighboring Klamath County’s Klamath Community College (KCC).

Using a high-speed, synchronous live video feed, instructors and students separated by more than one hundred miles of rugged forest highway interact face-to-face as though they were in the same room. The technology also allows the class to employ small group learning techniques with participants in both locations, incorporates interactive multimedia, web-based resources, and more.

As well as traditional college coursework, adult learning, and workforce training opportunities unavailable locally, the new technology also allows high school students to participate in KCC’s advanced diploma program remotely, easing their transition into college while completing one year of college for free. The technology was purchased and installed in seven classrooms across the region with the help of two Distance Learning grants from USDA Rural Development in 2014 and 2015.

In the first year, 34 Lake County students took advantage of the new distance learning opportunities, and that number climbed to 52 students just one year later. The college celebrated its first five distance learning graduates in 2015, with 12 more in 2016, including the first distance learner to graduate from the Rural Registered Nursing program—a Lake County resident who was promptly hired at her local hospital. Not only was she able to complete her education without moving away from her home and family, but the hospital also benefits from the greater opportunity to develop and hire local people to meet their workforce needs. With expanded educational opportunities, more remote rural residents are improving their career outlook while ensuring their communities continue to thrive.



Speaking at the KCC 2016 commencement ceremony, Rural Development State Director Vicki Walker said, “I firmly believe the long-term success and prosperity of our rural communities depends on people like you: motivated, knowledgeable, innovative, and hard-working.”

Obligation Amount: \$202,600 grant (2015) and \$194,053 grant (2014)

Date of Obligation: November 2015 and November 2014

Congressional District: Representative Walden, District 2; Senators Wyden and Merkley

Demographics: Lake County, Oregon; population 7,820

Impact: Expanded college access for remote residents of Lake County, Oregon; 34 students participated in distance learning opportunities in the first year, and 52 students participated in the second year; 17 distance learners obtained a college degree in the past two years.