

More colleges and students embrace online classes

By [Dana Bartholomew](#), Staff Writer

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Alissa Dimock studies from her home in Eagle Rock. Dimock is studying law at Mission College online. She has never seen her teacher or fellow classmates. (Photo by David Crane/Staff)

Alissa Dimock gazes into her laptop and studies a litigation lesson from Los Angeles Mission College – all in the comfort of her South Pasadena bedroom. ... her studies rely on a virtual pedagogic exchange, tapped out every day on a keyboard 25 miles from the Sylmar campus. "It's terrific," said Dimock, 44, seated next to a stack of law books.

Her class, Law 11-Civil Litigation, is among the steadily growing number of online courses being taught at community colleges throughout Los Angeles and California. At Mission College, an online leader among San Fernando Valley schools, law, business and sociology classes are available online, in addition to library, counseling and support programs. (Dimock) A college graduate with a masters in fine arts who has studied in New York and London, she has produced film and TV shows and owned her own pub. She's also a single mom of a teenage son. She chose Mission for its highly regarded online paralegal program and plans to attend law school to become an entertainment industry lawyer. ... Taking these classes, you know every area of the law. If and when I go to law school, I can fast track."

The online drill

Students can complete assignments, take tests, upload papers and engage in class text discussions ... students have access to online textbooks, research papers, videos and other educational aids that give them more control over their learning. For David Jordan, Dimock's law professor who spearheaded the Mission College online program, the rapid growth of technology in recent years and the popularity of laptops and handheld gadgets has accelerated the acceptance of online learning. "It used to be, I had to train students to use their own email," Jordan said. "Now I train them on how to use the course management systems."

Mission College in Sylmar is a distance-learning leader among San Fernando Valley schools. More importantly, online students of the working-class northeast Valley school last year mustered the highest test scores among distance learners in the district, with 66.4 percent earning a passing grade.

Credit for the surge goes to a former attorney and law professor - and pressure from students. It was Professor David Jordan who, as the World Wide Web was gathering pixels in the late 1990s, responded to a request from students to bring the Internet to class. Mission College had just installed 250 computers at its new learning resource center. So Jordan founded a Web page to post quizzes and assignments for on-campus students. Then students asked if they could take their tests and submit papers online. Before long, he'd developed curricula to put all paralegal courses online, including complex evidence and family law classes with their myriad of legal forms. "It was totally student-centered, and student driven," said Jordan, the college's online coordinator and director of its paralegal studies program, whose enrollment has tripled in five years. Credit for the surge goes to a former attorney and law professor - and pressure from students.