(male announcer) Welcome to *Pima Community College Perspectives*, a look on how education enriches our community. And now, here’s your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Nina Trasoff) Hello and thank you so much for joining us for another edition of *Pima Community Perspectives*. I am Nina Trasoff, and with me is Rachelle Howell, who is Assistant Vice Chancellor of Pima Community College. Today’s topic is "Learning Without Limits:" And though you can take that quite generally, or generically, that we are constantly learning in life, we *hope*, you’re really talking about something quite specific with what’s called “Distance Learning”.

(Rachelle Howell) Right, Distance Learning or Distance Education, which is something that’s just exploded. It’s um, mo—you can’t watch TV without seeing a commercial of some sort for someone offering Distance Education. And Pima Community College certainly is participating in this explosion. And what we’re talking about, really, is, is online education, and/or hybrid types of classes. Some, some are 100% online, and others are hybrid, which is about 50/50 in classroom and online, uh, instruction. And we’ve seen, over the past five years, um, our enrollment in online or hybrid courses, um, more than double. So it’s, it’s a large, growing segment. In fact, in 2009, one in five PCC students were enrolled in some sort of online or hybrid class.

(Trasoff) What are some of the reasons that students will choose this, this kind of learning?

(Howell) Well, of course, the first thing that comes to mind is, is flexibility. Um, but, you know, Pi—Pima, and other community colleges, well, colleges in general, but especially community colleges that— that serve the type of population that—that we do, really focus on flexibility, and online Distance Education is really all about flexibility and making it much easier for students to access higher education opportunities. And we’re talking about busy people, people who have full-time jobs, people who have kids, um, people for whom it’s just really difficult to get to a class and put their, put their rear in a seat and participate in a class. But they can do the same, they can get the same quality of education, um, and get the same credits through an online course.

(Trasoff) I find it interesting though, and we, we should define “Distance Education,” distance for whom? Because it sounds as if, if you’re learning at home, you’ve cut down the distance. You don’t have to get in your car and go to a campus or classroom. It’s really shortening the distance for you, to education.

(Howell) Right. That, absolutely. It—that’s, on the flip side, that’s another way to look at it. You’re—you’re farther distance away, uh, mile-wise, miles-wise, from, from the traditional type of school, but the, the distance is shorter, so it’s an interesting perspective.
(Trasoff) That, and not having to dress and put on makeup and... [laughs] Learning in your pajamas,

(Howell) Yes, yes. You can actually take courses in your pajamas; there ya go.

(Trasoff) Well, with us today is Kimlisa Duchicela, who is a History professor at Pima, and she’s also Director of the Title V program. Thank you so much for joining us, Kimlisa.

(Kimlisa Duchicela) You’re welcome. I’m glad to be here.

(Trasoff) Tell me about Title V. Because, you know, we know Title IX, but Title V’s a new one to me.

(Duchicela) It’s very different. Uh, Title V is a federal grant, and, from the Department of Education. And we, what we’re doing with Title V; every Title V grant is different, it depends on how you write the grant. But our grant is all about turning our campus into a center for integrated learning. And it’s about helping faculty to become student-developers, giving them the tools that they need to reach the students that we’re seeing today, which is, it’s very different from any generation we’ve had before; a generation that’s plugged in, and always on the go, and they have their iPods and their cell phones and their Facebook, and to reach them and to engage them. And so what Title V does is it supports our faculty, gives them the technology and the tools that they need to reach out to these students and engage them and to move into modalities that they didn’t have before, like support for online, support for hybrid.

(Trasoff) Well, for some of the faculty, that may be a bit challenging if—if they are of a generation that didn’t grow up with the Web and computers and all of these things that you’re mentioning. You—you have a program to help get them into that and get comfortable with it.

(Duchicela) FITT. Yes, it’s called “FITT,” and we—we, we title it “Get FITT in the Summer.” Um, FITT is the Faculty Institute for Technology in Teaching. And what FITT does is it brings faculty in in cohorts depending on disciplines; uh, so the writing faculty and, and the math faculty come in together. And we give them an intense week of training on different things that they can use to engage their students. Um, we pay them to be there, and it’s totally voluntary. Some people come in, they’re not quite happy about it, but at the end, they’re very, very happy about it. Um, and it is about redesigning our courses. It’s about, um, showing them the latest and the greatest, um, giving them tools with regard to, uh, ADA, uh, and with regard to, uh, technology that they can bring into their classroom or that they can take into an online course and, uh, really change the way they engage their students.

(Trasoff) I would imagine this changes their perspective on their own discipline, in a way, when you’re opening all of these other possibilities and doors.

(Duchicela) Um, you know, I think what it does, as far as, you know, the discipline is still there. I think it just changes the way they present the discipline to different students. And it also allows them to really think about the different learning styles that students have, uh, you know, whether they are oral learners, or visual, or tactile, and to bring those types of tools into the classroom.
(Trasoff) So the classroom then becomes, in essence, the Internet. All of those resources are now available in a way that it wouldn’t be in a traditional butts-in-the-chair classroom.

(Duchicela) An—and we have, we have levels of butts-in-the-chairs. Um, we have the—the traditional; you show up and you sit in the chair classes. But we also now have, uh, Distance Learning that’s called “hybrid learning.” And that come, it—it varies, but normally it’s 50/50. Fifty percent of the time you’re in the classroom, and then fifty percent of the time you’re online. And then we also have the fully online classes. So there’s a lot of, you know, if a student’s not really into online yet, or kind of worried about it, they can take a hybrid first, check it out, and then transition. Same thing for the faculty; they can start moving onto the online, putting resources online, go to a hybrid, and then go online completely.

(Trasoff) It just seems the direction that education has to take when you have that vast a resource available.

(Howell) Mmm-hm.

(Duchicela) It—it is.

(Trasoff) It, what’s lost? Or are there enough gains to offset-- can a student learn as effectively without the interaction that comes from a classroom?

(Duchicela) Yes. And, but I say that with a caveat. It, when you are online, um, you don’t have that, you don’t have the visual that you have with face-to-face. We get a lot of our input from watching body, you know, body language and things like that. Uh, so when you go to an online class, there’s an incredible amount of work that has to go in up front. You have to really think about what you’re going to put into that class and how you’re going to present it. And I think, I think that’s what Pima does really, really well. Um, we have the Center for Learning Technology, which has instructional designers that help faculty put together a course that’s meaningful, that’s engaging, that develops community within the classroom and will allow for very meaningful discussions and, and learning. So that when you put that type of resource into the online class, like Pima does, it—it can make it very good. Now, if you were to just throw together an online class and not have that kind of work up front, then it can, it can be very difficult.

(Trasoff) I really respect the fact that you’re taking the time to teach the faculty how to teach that kind of course instead of just throwing. But, um, as somebody, I—I’ve never taken an online course; I’ve—I’ve been a traditional student, in classrooms. How do you get a discussion growing, going amongst the students if it’s online?

(Duchicela) You know, interestingly, now, that’s not as hard, because students are used to communicating online. That’s, you know, they communicate on Facebook, they do the Twitter, they do, um, you know, text messaging, and so they’re—they’re used to that. The, the thing about online is, to—to start the conversation in a meaningful way that, that keeps them on task. The, the keeping on task is the harder part, quite frankly. Um, because they’re, they’re off on a tangent. Um, so what we do is, we
develop modules, and within that module are resources that they can look at online. And then we give them the discussion questions, and they, they do their discussion questions, and then they have to do their responses to other people's discussions. And what you find is they're doing more responses than are required, because now they've got a conversation going. And, and I've had, I can say, quite honestly, I've had great conversations in classrooms, but I've had really, really great conversations online. Because people take the time to edit and think about what they're goanna say before they just blurt it out there.

(Trasoff) Interesting, interesting.

(Duchicela) So, it can be very, very meaningful. And students that may not have spoken in the classroom, because they didn't have time to think about it, will speak in an online class, because the conversation takes place over a week. I—I had a, a student in my, uh, History 142 class, that's the second half of U.S., who was a Vietnam Vet, and we were talking about, we were talking about Vietnam. And they were, they were going online to the Oral History Project at the Library of Congress and hearing about Vietnam, and these younger students were talking about it. And all of a sudden this person chimes in and says, “Well, maybe you're not thinking about it correctly. I was there.” And then students went out and talked to their grandparents or their fathers or uncles that were there and came back with this information. And—and so you had, you had an ongoing conversation, but it was a very thoughtful conversation, which is very meaningful.

(Trasoff) And that’s—that’s, that’s fascinating to me, because that builds also on the diversity of the student body. So even within an online class, that diversity engenders greater conversation.

(Duchicela) Absolutely. And not only that, not only the diversity, but the geographic diversity. In any given class, I will have a student that's serving overseas in Afghanistan or Iraq or stationed in Germany. I will have people that are on the other side of the nation; I will have people, um, that are scattered all over the country. And so, they bring in, well, you know, “This is what's going on in my state.” You know, “This is what's--” We’re talking about Vietnam, and then somebody who is in Afghanistan says, “Well, you know, there are certain things that are happening here that I think I can parallel.” You know, so you, you get a lot of, of diversity but also just a lot of experience.

(Trasoff) Wow. It seems one of the other benefits of this is that if there is a lecture or research that needs to be done, and you don't get it the first time, you can easily go back and repeat it until you're comfortable with the material.

(Duchicela) Right. And we have had a lot of success with that. Um, uh, there has been, uh, two math faculty I can think of that have put together what we call “mini-lectures.” Um, math is a challenging topic for some, uh, certainly for me [chuckles]. And what they did was they put together mini-lectures where they would go through how to solve, you know, the quadratic equation or something. And then what—what happened is they found that the students were watching it over and over and over again. And those students that watched it over and over again did better. And then, ah—over time, they started noticing that certain students were watching it over and over and over again. And it turned out that they were students that were not, you know, native English speakers. And so, that gave
them the resource, not only to master the idea of it, to master the language that went with it. And, and they did better.

(Trasoff) It’s—it’s, it’s, the live classroom as much as people say the exchange and the “live-ness” of it creates an energy, what you’re suggesting is that you can get into a depth with the Distance Education that you might not be able to achieve in the classroom, and that it also accounts, or, um, accommodates people of different levels of expression in a way a live classroom might not.

(Duchicela) Right. And—and, and that is, that is my belief with online learning if that learning, if the class is designed in a meaningful way with the kind of work and thought process that needs to go behind it. The thing about, you know, I like, I like teaching face-to-face. I teach in all modalities, um, face-to-face, hybrid, you know, web-enhanced, online. Um, each, the preparation that goes into these classes are different for every modality. And what I know about online is that you must do the largest amount of work up front, uh, because once the students start working, it’s very hard to go in there and change and modify and, and do all those types of things. You want to put all that thought process up front so that it’s a seamless, flowing experience for the students.

(Trasoff) So you really do have to completely change how you think about your interactions with students.

(Duchicela) Yes, absolutely. And it’s very difficult. We, you know, especially the, I think hybrid is the hardest, you know, where you’re half in and half out, because then you have to think about, “Okay, what am I going to leave in the face-to-face, and what am I going to take out and put online, and how can I make that meaningful?” So you’re, you’re, that, I think that that is the hardest of the modalities.

(Trasoff) When you’re talking about the advantages to students, we were, I mean, jokingly talking about being able to just sort of wander down the hallway to your computer in your pajamas and not have to worry about anything, but you’ve also had students, um, who have had babies born during a class.

(Duchicela) Yes. Not, not during the class hour, maybe, but well actually some, we have the classes 7/24, so absolutely. Um, I have probably had over a dozen babies born in my online classes. [Trasoff and Howell laugh] Um, I have two that were born, uh, this semester. Uh, and what happens is at the, I always know it’s coming, because when they introduce themselves at the beginning, they say, “I am taking this class because I’m due,” or “I’m taking this class because my wife is due during this semester, but we don’t want to take a break; we want to keep going with our education, and, and so this is, allows me to do it.”

(Trasoff) That’s just amazing. So what does it take for a student to be successful online?

(Duchicela) Not everyone can be successful online, first of all. Um, it takes, you have to have the self-discipline. Um, for some students, eventually they can get there, but you have to, you have to say, “I am willing to log in, and I am willing to get going.” And so you—they have to have a lot of, of that get-up-and-go, uh, and a lot of the ability to, to, to kind of make that commitment to the class. Because
nobody is going to, you know, nobody’s going to call roll, and nobody’s going to say, you know, “You have to do this right now,” as you would in a face-to-face class.

(Trasoff) And yet, the professor can check whether or not people have been viewing the videos or whatever the materials are online.

(Duchicela) Yeah, that’s the wonderful—the one, one of the really great things about online is the, are the analytics. We can go in and we can check how they’re doing. We can see what they’ve done; we can, we can, we can look at, over time, what a student has done in an online class. Everything is captured. And so that way, when we know that it’s captured, we can tweak and, and adjust and, and make it even better every single time.

(Trasoff) And this really seems to help Pima fulfill its mission.

(Duchicela) Yes. We have a mission to, basically, um, improve our community through learning, and we have a, a vision of delivering education without regard to time and distance, and that is exactly what online does, because for faculty and students, we can deliver or receive education in a meaningful way from anywhere in the world. I have taught my classes from Ecuador. I have taught my classes from, you know, all over, you know, as I travel. My students go with me.

(Trasoff) Wow. What a great experience. [laughs] Well Kimlisa, thank you so much for joining us, I, you just think about online or distance learning as just sitting in front of a computer, and it’s ever so much more than that.

(Duchicela) Oh, absolutely. A lot, it takes a lot of people to put together a good class.

(Trasoff) Well, I appreciate your time. Um, we’re going to take a break now, and when we return, we’ll be talking with a student who’s completing her Post-Baccalaureate Teaching Certificate at Pima, and all of her classes have been online. We’ll be right back.

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(Trasoff) Welcome back, I’m Nina Trasoff and this is Pima Community College Perspectives. I’m joined by Rachelle Howell, who is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima. And our guest in this part of the program is Pamela Vandivort. Pam is completing her Post-Baccalaureate Teaching Certificate at Pima, and all of her classes have been online. And with children 16 and 11, I can understand that that’s an important thing for your life. Pam, welcome. Thank you for being here.

(Pamela Vandivort) Thank you. Thank you for having me.

(Trasoff) Tell me about your background. I find it fascinating that somebody who has a biochemistry degree from USC is now going to Pima in order to learn how to teach, or become certified.

(Vandivort) Well, um, like you said, I got my degree, uh, in, in biochemistry from USC several years ago, and I enjoyed a long career in biomedical engineering and science, uh, through Ventana Medical Systems and a little bit at the U of A. And I really enjoyed that career, but when we had children, um, I decided to stay home with them. And while staying home with them, um, we decided to home-school our children for several reasons, and I really enjoyed that as well. We home-schooled for about six years, and during that time, I did a lot of, uh, academic team coaching and mentoring and, uh, proctoring of exams and things like that, and, and I found that I really enjoy teaching. So when it was time for me to go back to work, I decided that it was time for a career change, and I would really enjoy working with middle-school kids.

(Trasoff) Wow, middle-school kids. [laughs] That is a particularly challenging...

(Howell) That’s brave.

[all laughing]

(Vandivort) That’s what everybody says, but I really enjoy that group.

(Trasoff) But how wonderful and lucky for those kids, because the experience you’re going to bring into that classroom as a teacher is unparalleled. I think that’s so exciting for you and for them.

(Vandivort) It is a lot of fun. It’s fun to share real-world experience and, and stories; uh, I’ve got, I’ve got a lot of them. And, and so far the kids, uh, that I sub with and, and, uh, work with, I enjoy hearing them and, and looking at me as a “real” scientist not just a teacher. So it’s been a lot of fun.

(Trasoff) Well, I have the unique, um, experience of, with all the guests that we’ve had on here, actually, I’ve watched you at work.

(Vandivort) [laughing] Yes, you have.
(Trasoff) Because there’s a Legos Club that I was sort of an adjunct part of, uh, for a while, and what you did with those kids through fun; you were teaching math, and physics, and all kinds of disciplines. They didn’t know they were in, they were learning; they were just doing something.

(Vandivort) That’s an exciting program to be part of. The kids are not told, “You can’t,” and so the, it’s, the possibilities are just unlimited, and the things they learn and the confidence that they come away with is just amazing. And it’s, it’s a great program to be a part of, and it’s exciting for me to see the light bulbs go on and just see, every year, what they can come up with, because they, they just absolutely blow my mind every year. Every year, without exception.

(Trasoff) You’re going to be a great teacher. So let’s talk about your learning how to be a teacher. You had to take 30 to 33 units. And you’ve done it all online, and you have one class to go?

(Vandivort) I’ve done it all online, and my next class starts, my last class starts next week, yes.

(Trasoff) Tell me about what it’s like to learn online.

(Vandivort) Well, it’s really convenient. Um, I don’t think I could have gone back for a certificate had I had to go to a traditional classroom, uh, so it’s very convenient because I can do it on my schedule at my leisure. And, um, it’s, it’s, it’s not without interaction because of the message boards and the communication with other students. And the professors are usually very, uh, prompt about answering questions and, um, clarifying things for us online. So it’s really not as difficult as one might perceive it to be, because the helpline is there, and, um, it—the instructions are very clear. And it’s so convenient to just do everything online from the computer.

(Howell) You know, I know, I know some students, or prospective students for online, think that because it’s an online class, and you don’t have to go into class, that it, they think it’s easier. It might be easier than a traditional class. Is that the case? Is that what you’ve found?

(Vandivort) I think, in a lot of ways, it is easier. Uh, it’s certainly easier in that, um, you can go to school in your pajamas, you can go to school at 5 o’clock in the morning, um, and you can do a little bit, 15 minutes here or there. Um, you don’t have to sit for any block of time if you don’t have it. And so, in that way, it is easier. And in some ways, it’s not as easy, because, um, just having to wait for clarifications on questions. Even if it’s only a few hours, just having to wait; you can’t just raise your hand and ask, “What do you—what do mean by that in this assignment,” or, “How do I—how exactly do I proceed with this?” So it’s, sometimes there’s a, a little bit of question there.

(Trasoff) Let me modify that question a little bit. It may be easier, but I think what you mean is it’s simpler. But the class work is still as challenging and as rigorous.

(Vandivort) Oh, the class work is extremely challenging and rigorous, yes, and in fact, more so than I thought it would be. I didn’t expect it to be as involved and rigorous, but I’m glad it was, because I learned more.
So you—you, you use the Internet; you use, you have a classroom— you have the sense of being part of a class.

Absolutely, yes.

And I think that’s what people don’t understand, that with distance learning, Distance Education, you’re still part of a classroom and exchanging ideas with other students.

Yes. Yes. And you recognize students from class to class, “Oh, I had you in Psychology, and now we’re in Classroom Management together,” and that sort of thing. And personality does come across, uh, a little bit online in some of the discussion boards, and, and, uh, so in, in a lot of ways, there is interaction and, and it is very much a classroom feel.

Wonderful. I—I, I think this has been a fascinating subject, because people in general, myself included, had kind of a narrow image of what this is. But it’s a hope for the future. Pam, thank you for joining us. Rachelle, always a pleasure.

Thank you.

Thank you.

I’m Nina Trasoff, thank you so much for joining us for Pima Community College Perspectives.

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