

Educational Renaissance

California Southern University – a pioneer in distance learning – takes remote learning to a new level.

Commuting reduction. Flexible scheduling. Childcare savings. Improved air quality and less traffic for those who must be on the road.

After eight months, the benefits from shifting to remote work and learning because of COVID-19 are still revealing themselves. And despite frustrations for many, there is no argument that the options have been revolutionary in many unexpected ways.

None of this comes as a surprise to Glenn Roquemore, Ph.D., President of California Southern University. This regionally accredited institution of higher learning has been a trailblazer for remote education for 42 years – decades before the internet, video conferencing and smartphones.

The university was founded with the intention of making continuing education possible for working professionals. The strides in technology have only empowered the model and now students can set their own class hours, do lessons online, get one-on-one faculty assistance, and even have student group support. Additionally, learners can take courses from anywhere in the world and the faculty pool – not constrained by geographic area – are professionals from all over the United States.

Roquemore, who spent his career at more "traditional" colleges, was intrigued by the benefits remote education could offer when he was approached by Dr. Donald Hecht, the founder of California Southern University, to join the staff as chancellor. At the time, Roquemore was president of Irvine Valley College, which is a brick-and-mortar, regularly scheduled course format that has been common in public education for 18 years.

"I came to a point where I was ready to hand the administrative baton to the next generation," he says. "I wanted to return to the classroom and continue my teaching and research as a tenured professor."

Then he met Dr. Hecht, who drew upon his training from Columbia University to develop a truly unique educational platform. The meeting made such an impression on Roquemore that he gave up

his tenure to lead CalSouthern, joining the university as chancellor and then president shortly after.

"When Dr. Hecht and I first spoke about his vision, it brought up longstanding interest I had regarding online learning – especially since I was one of the first to begin to push that mode of delivery at Irvine Valley College as vice president of instruction," he says. "I learned that CalSouthern had been built as a university intended to reach those that wouldn't otherwise have access to an education and lacked the ability to advance their careers because of time and distance limitations."

Roquemore points out that this model doesn't just benefit working parents and professionals – who have experienced tremendous benefit in fully remote, flexible-learning options from CalSouthern – but veterans and active military, too.

Since courses can be taken from anywhere, service members can work on their degrees while deployed overseas. And those who have finished active tours have been able to use their GI Bills to complete associate's, bachelor's, master's, and even doctorate degrees at the university.

"We're going through a renaissance era," Roquemore says. "I read about it every day where the brick and mortar institutions are rethinking their entire dynamic to meet a broad range of student needs and we already have those options."

California Southern University has programs in behavioral sciences, business, nursing, education, and criminal justice.

"What impressed me so much with Dr. Hecht's model is that it is both flexible and outcomes-based," Roquemore says. "Students are self-paced and working directly with faculty – we have a one-to-one ratio of faculty to learner here – so each student has his or her own faculty member to help them pace through the course. We also recognize that online learning is not automatic for many people, so we also offer one-on-one counseling services – academic advising – to help the learner pace through as well."

When calculating the time expenditure involved with getting an advanced degree, particularly while working full time, flexibility can be an invaluable option. It's not uncommon for brick-and-mortar institutions to contend with overcrowding and students can be shut out of a required course, forcing them to wait a year or more to finish their degree.

"We focus on the professional who wants to move from a bachelor's or master's to a Ph.D. or doctorate, which is very difficult while you're working," Roquemore says. "And this challenge relates back to those who don't have access for other reasons, such as single parents, those with tight work schedules, or people who don't live near an institution of



higher learning. It's just not feasible or even possible for them to sit in a classroom every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 to 11 a.m."

The CalSouthern model has been of particular value to veterans and active military. Not just because they can take courses while deployed, but much of their specialized military training can be put towards college credit so it's an efficient way to finish their education. This means promotability for active military and career development and advancement for veterans. Since all commissioned officers must have college degrees, obtaining that education can substantially open a career path for enlisted or non-commissioned personnel. To recognize and celebrate veterans' contribution, CalSouthern offers tuition discounts for active military, veterans, and their immediate dependents.

"We're proud to offer these everyday heroes the additional education and undergraduate and graduate degrees they need to take the next step in their personal and professional journey," Roquemore says. "Those who put their lives on hold to serve our country deserve this added assistance, and it's the least we can do to honor them during Veterans Month and throughout the year."

The discount represents a value of up to $1,400 for undergraduate courses and $1,700 for graduate courses and the offer is an extension of CalSouthern's 365-day tuition discount of 15% for all veterans and active military, spouses and direct dependents. The university also offers its veteran and military students a dedicated support team led by a trained military advisor.

Editor's note: Go to calsouthern.edu/military-learners for more information. To take advantage of the school's offer, participants must present a valid U.S. Veterans ID Card (VIC) or U.S. Uniformed Services Privilege and Identification Card (USPIC) when registering and enrolling in any CalSouthern certificate or degree program between Nov. 1-30, 2020. The 15% tuition discount applies to the first and all successive CalSouthern courses in the program. ***— By Susan Belknapp, California Business Journal.***

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