

PSI offers faith enrichment, college credit at fraction of cost

Stories, photos and graphics
By AMANDA WILLIAMS

Most major academic programs at a typical four-year university generally require, at minimum, 12-18 elective credit hours. Electives are courses students choose themselves based on their individual interests or long-term career goals.

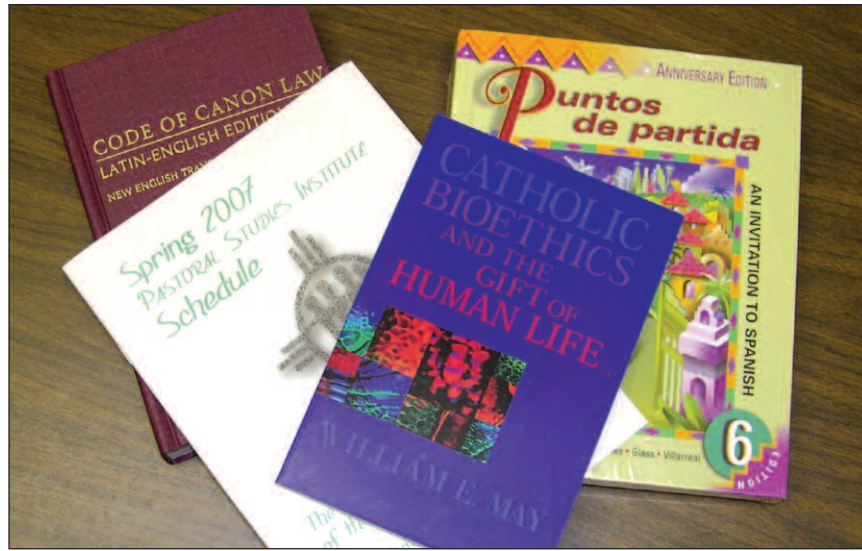
The catch is that tuition for electives is the same as the cost for major coursework required for a specific degree. The Diocese of Tulsa's Pastoral Studies Institute offers degree-seeking programs at a fraction of the cost.

Tuition at the University of Tulsa is \$741 per credit hour for students enrolled in fewer than 12 hours, with standard courses ranging from three to four credit hours. Oklahoma State University in Tulsa charges \$152.21 per credit hour.

This means students often pay thousands of dollars for electives that are not specifically mandated for their degree focus – they are only taking them to fulfill hourly requirements and suit personal interests.

"Some students coordinate their elective coursework to earn a minor degree supplementing their major program with a specialized focus or area of expertise," said Natalie Sanders, assistant director of admissions for Oral Roberts University.

The cost for three hours of credit through the PSI ranges from \$135-\$150. That equates to approximately \$47.50 per credit hour – substantially less than



other post-secondary institutions.

In light of the dramatic difference in tuition rates, some students in the Diocese of Tulsa have opted to complete their elective coursework through the PSI.

PSI offers college-credit courses in theology, church ministry, social issues and Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults as well as an opportunity to complete a practicum in Church ministry. Students can earn an associate or bachelor degree, and plans are in the works for a master-level program.

For degree-seeking students enrolled through PSI, their undergraduate degree is awarded by Newman University, a private Catholic liberal arts college in Wichita. The college's average annual enrollment exceeds 2,000 students seeking degrees in more than 40 different undergraduate and four

graduate programs.

PSI also serves as an outreach site for St. Gregory's University which is based out of Shawnee with a College for Working Adults in Tulsa.

The diverse offerings of the Institute are not limited to students seeking a degree. There are also a variety of courses, seminars and workshops available throughout the year for individuals interested in adult studies and faith enrichment. Part of the faith enrichment prong of the curriculum includes the Women's Daytime Scripture study, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this month.

More information about the PSI, including the just-released spring 2007 catalog, is available online at www.dioceseoftulsa.org/education/PSI. Online registration is available, and the PSI phone number is 294-1904.

PSI registration options

Early admission option for high school seniors

High school students who wish to enroll in university courses prior to completing their secondary school program may receive credit through Newman University. Students must meet the following requirements:

- A 3.0 cumulative average at the end of their junior year
- Recommendation from their high school principal or guidance counselor
- Completed application for admission including \$15 application fee and official high school transcripts. Similar requirements apply to students who enroll in credit courses with St. Gregory's University.

Transfer credit for current degree programs

College students currently in degree programs may wish to take courses in the PSI degree programs and transfer that credit to their program at another university. Theology classes offered through the PSI may be used as elective credit or a humanities credit in most degree programs.

Degree-seeking students

Degree programs are available for students interested in taking classes leading toward an associate degree of youth ministry; an associate degree of religious studies; bachelor degree in theology; bachelor degree in pastoral ministry, master degree of pastoral ministry.

Non-degree-seeking students:

Students are welcome to audit credit courses of interest to them in the degree programs without intending to pursue a degree.

Personal faith enrichment students:

Adults interested in taking non-credit courses for personal faith enrichment are welcome to enroll in any of the courses listed.



Joanne Beach

RE director earned degrees through PSI

An article in the Eastern Oklahoma Catholic newspaper alerted Joanne Beach to the Pastoral Studies Institute. She is now St. Anne Church's director for religious education and youth ministry.

"I was happy that I could go to classes about the Catholic faith without having to move to a Catholic university," she said.

Ms. Beach enrolled in PSI's first class in 1996 and continued her studies until she received her bachelor's degree in pastoral ministry from Newman University two years later. She said she was coined "the poster child" of the PSI program because she attended every class.

She also had a bachelor's degree of accounting and finance from Northeastern State University and, after earning a second degree from PSI, went on to complete a master's program in theological studies from the University of Dallas – also through PSI.

"I use my education every day, at home, at work, in everything that I do."

Ms. Beach believes the tuition is really inexpensive compared to what students receive in return. "You gain more than knowledge –

you gain an increased devotion to God."

Though she has never taken an online course through PSI, Ms. Beach has taught one.

From the teacher's perspective, she said, online courses are much simpler. The computer-mediated communication lacks gestures and emotions but is a great way for motivated students to earn college credit.

"I'm the catalyst or facilitator for the students," she said. "I get satisfaction from helping students who can't travel to Tulsa for the class." She said many of her online students were from Bartlesville.

"Online students have to be dedicated to their studies because they don't see me face to face every week."

In addition to the online course, Ms. Beach has taught Old Testament, Theology, and Methods of Ministry for the Pastoral Studies Institute.

It's not the degree, it's the knowledge

Christopher Cooley is a husband, father of four, manager of the restaurant Brookside by Day, musician and self-described cradle Catholic. When he began researching Catholic higher education he said it was because he wanted to better "walk-the-walk and talk-the-talk."

He had completed about 60 credit hours at the University of Oklahoma as a history major and began researching Catholic education on the Internet. He was wary of the many programs he found professing online courses from Christian universities and contacted the Diocese of Tulsa to ask about the legitimacy of such programs.

He was referred to Monica Skrzypczak, director of religious formation, who helped him sort through what he was looking for, what credits from his work at OU would transfer and what program would suit him best.

"I only intended to audit the courses," Mr. Cooley said of his goal for faith enrichment. "I was pleasantly surprised to learn I could complete a degree program at Madalene (his home parish)."

He attends PSI classes at Church of the Madalene but has taken online courses through St. Gregory's University for Working Adults in Tulsa. He said the online system called Blackboard was uncomfortable at first but quickly became easy to use. "It's a great way to knock out some required courses."

His primary purpose in taking theology courses was to help him

and his family participate more deeply in their faith. "I think the Bishop set this program up to allow us all to learn more about Catholicism."

Mr. Cooley said the Church is so complex and deep that "few people know what it's all about and don't even ask the questions." He believes PSI is there for that reason.

"Once you start taking courses it's like opening Pandora's Box," he said. "You can't go back to being naive – even though sometimes ignorance is easier." He said he takes the knowledge gained from theology back to the "real world" as a totally changed person.

Regarding the economy of the PSI program, Mr. Cooley said it was another testament to the program's service to the Diocese. "From a corporate standpoint, they should have folded by now." He said he can't believe more people aren't taking the classes.

When asked about his long-term goals, he said he has no plans to do anything with his degree. He still sees PSI as a way to learn more about the Church – "I could care less about the piece of paper."

Mr. Cooley plays the guitar, mandolin, whistles, harmonica and percussion. He also sings and writes his own music "portraying images of God and man's struggle here on earth." He plans to continue his faith enrichment through the many offerings of PSI and pass what he learns to his children. "I'm gaining the tools to have a deep knowledge of the richness of Catholicism."



Christopher Cooley

What is distance learning?

Distance learning is the term applied to any satellite medium of course instruction. Pastoral Studies Institute faculty either can teach courses via television broadcast or the Internet.

ITV is a live video conferencing system based out of Church of the Madalene in Tulsa, broadcasting classes to participating remote parishes located in Bartlesville, Bixby, McAlester, Stillwater and Vinita. This enables students in surrounding areas to actively participate in PSI courses via video and audio technology without traveling to Tulsa.

Blackboard is an online academic environment used by PSI as well as many major institutions of higher education. Nearly 75 percent of the 129 universities listed by U.S. News & World Report as "America's Best Colleges 2005's Top National

Universities," use Blackboard Solutions, according to the product's website, www.blackboard.com. Other universities in Tulsa using Blackboard to conduct online courses include Tulsa Community College, Oklahoma State University and Northeastern State University.

PSI's Blackboard course management system allows adults to take college-level theology courses online - from their living rooms if they wish.

Newman University, which offers a bachelor's degree in theology through Tulsa's PSI, has fully accredited these online courses.

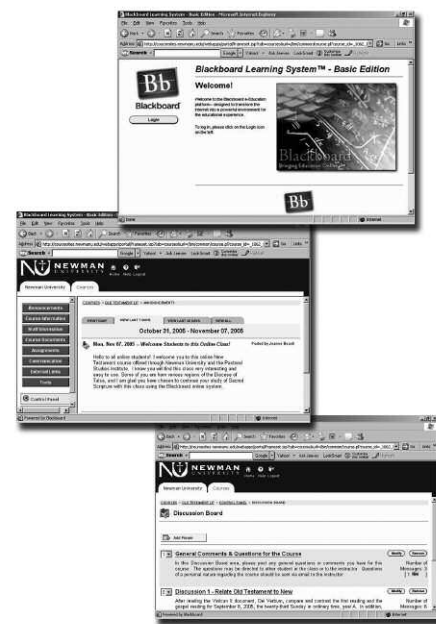
In the spring semester that begins Jan. 16, PSI will offer three lower-division online theology courses for three hours of college credit using the Blackboard system: Old Testament Literature, New Testament Literature and Church History; as well as

upper-level elective classes.

Blackboard allows students and faculty to interact via the system – with course information, syllabus and discussion boards for interacting with other students, accessing course grades, submitting assignments and more.

The program is especially helpful for students who cannot come to classes at Church of the Madalene because of family obligations, work or distance. Students across the Diocese can take these classes with modern computer software and an Internet connection.

"It's easy to use and a great way to complete required courses," said PSI student Christopher Cooley. "But you still have to keep up with the work."



Convert completes degree with theology electives



Kathryn Klammer

As a newly converted Catholic, Kathryn Klammer was excited to supplement her Southern Nazarene University degree program with theology classes from the Pastoral Studies Institute.

"I was working on my bachelor degree in family studies and had all but two classes completed. The choices to fulfill those classes were limited, but religion was one of them."

She thought the opportunity to fulfill the elective requirements through PSI was "phenomenal"

"The classes were wonderful, and being Catholic, I was thrilled to learn more about my faith," Ms. Klammer said. She also noted the cost-efficiency of PSI courses compared to other major universities and said it is a great idea to take theology classes through the Institute and then transfer them into another degree program. "All my classes transferred easily into my bachelor program."

She also praised the "excellent instruction" she received. "Deacon (John) Donnelly is a genius. The way he can discuss history without ever looking at a book is amazing." She also felt

fortunate to have had Father Bryan Brooks as an instructor for one of the last courses he taught for PSI. "He is a good man and a good priest."

Ms. Klammer has worked for the past 10 years for the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services as a specialized case manager helping individuals with mental retardation and/or illness seek gainful employment and turn their lives around. She attributes her knowledge and incorporation of the Catholic faith, which was enhanced through PSI, to her ability to understand and love others – no matter what their situation in life may be.

"I'm not allowed to speak about religious beliefs with clients, but my faith defines my principles and core values. Catholicism is a way of life and people can see it – even if they don't realize what it is."

She is currently working toward a master's degree in human relations through the University of Oklahoma. She also enjoys spending time with her son and two grandchildren.