

'95-'05: a decade of distance-learning success

by Liz Karlson Baker

MTSU's focus isn't only on academics, but also the convenience by which students obtain degrees. With the 10-year anniversary of correspondence and telecourses, MTSU's pride in providing courses for students living hundreds of miles away is a decade-long tradition.

Political science major Misty Herndon has taken these types of classes for years as part of MTSU's Academic Outreach and Distance Learning, or AODL, program.

"Without correspondence courses, I would have picked between school and other priorities in my life," Herndon said of the positive impact the program has had on her life. "Through the program, I was able to accomplish both."

Greyson Billingham, coordinator of correspondence courses at AODL, agrees that the program has changed lives and eases the everyday stresses for the nontraditional enrollees.

"Distance Learning has taken the university to the student," said Billingham. "For some students, it is difficult or impossible to sacrifice enough time to make the commute here and take time away from family while sitting in a lecture class. These courses allow students to spend the same amount of time working on their classes each week, but there's no commute."

Last spring semester, there were 5,196 students enrolled in the AODL program with an average class size of 13 and an average enrollee age of almost 28. Although some may question the educational quality of an online course ver-

sus a traditional lecture class, both students and teachers agree that online and correspondence courses are just as effective as traditional classes.

"We all learn in a different way," said Dr. Janet Colson, professor of human sciences and the first to teach a correspondence course at MTSU. "There are some students that, just because of the way their brains work, can do extremely well in an online environment."

Herndon also agrees with the results of AODL courses.

"I think these courses tend to stick with the textbook more and don't keep you wondering all semester, 'What do I need this book for?' I personally would prefer to take all my courses through correspondence if it were possible."

With more than 30 correspondence courses ranging from "Exploring the Universe" to business communication, the AODL program allows thousands of students to complete degree requirements who may not have otherwise.

Colson speaks from experience: "I think the changing in our society is making the few online

courses that we do offer a blessing to students."

For registration information, contact AODL at 615-898-5611 or visit www.mtsu.edu/learn.

AODL is part of MTSU's College of Continuing Education and Distance Learning. As the community service arm of the university, the College provides academic outreach, continuing education opportunities and workforce training and evaluation for Middle Tennessee residents and their employers.

'We all learn in a different way.'

Dr. Janet Colson, professor, Human Sciences, and early adopter of correspondence teaching

Library's READ posters stir interest far from campus

by Jennifer Jackson

When Richard Gelardin saw a poster featuring MTSU student and virtuoso fiddle player Tyler Andal in the magazine for the International Bluegrass Music Association, he decided he needed a copy or two.

After all, the poster also featured the work of his close friend, John Silakowski, the violinmaker whose violin is featured along with Andal.

Gelardin, who lives in Anchorage, Alaska, is also a fiddle player, though his musical focus is mainly traditional Irish music.

"I met Tyler through the IBMA and videotaped him playing his fiddle," Gelardin said. "He's a great player, and so nice."

Gelardin said he saw the poster featuring Andal in the IBMA's magazine and called MTSU's James E. Walker Library to obtain a copy.

"They were really nice," he said of his conversation with library employees. "I bought two copies, one for myself and one for John."

The effort even saved Andal the trouble of sending a poster to the craftsman to thank him for his work, Gelardin said.

The poster is just one in a series created by the library with the university's Publications and Graphics and Photographic Services departments.

The American Library Association has been creating READ posters for a number of years and has featured celebrities from every genre of entertainment and characters from children's stories and popular movies. Previous posters included such stars as Bill Cosby, and, more recently, a series based on the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.

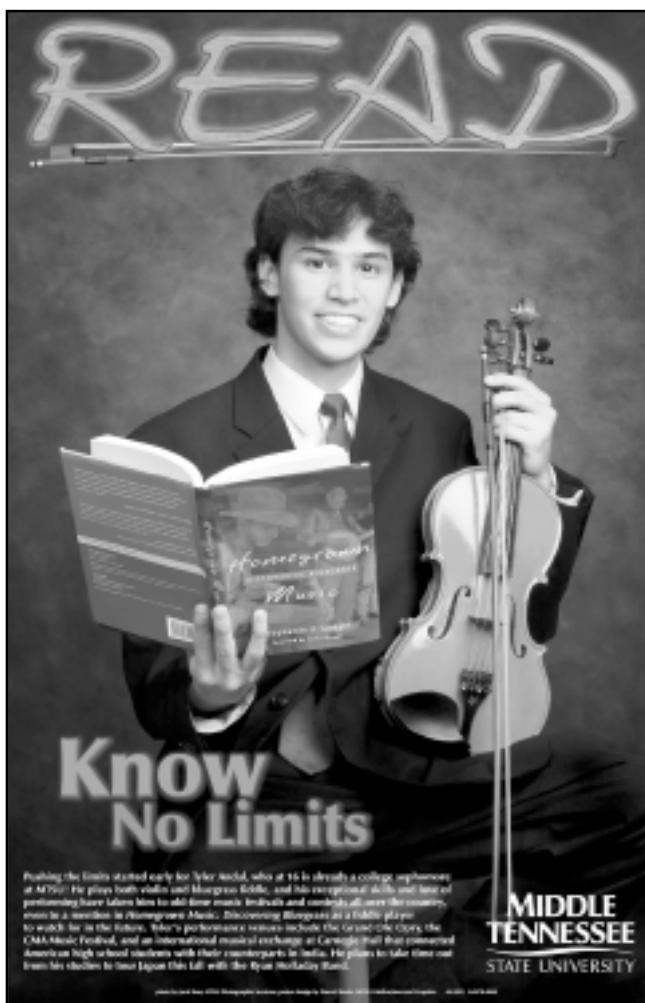
Last year, the ALA made the software available to individual libraries so they could begin creating their own READ posters with local celebrities. At MTSU, Bill Black, administrative services librarian, has looked for outstanding members of the university's community to highlight in the posters.

"We really try to focus on students," he said. "We thought they would be the best connection with younger students in school, so they could see these as role models and possibilities for things they might be interested in doing. And we're linking these successes to reading."

To date, the library has created five posters, which run the gamut of subjects and success stories.

The first poster focused on a group of robotics engineering students who built a moon rover and won a national contest. The poster also was submitted to a contest and won first place. Next, Black decided to highlight Dr. Aaron Todd, a retired professor who garnered support for MTSU athletics by campaigning to fill Murphy Center and Floyd Stadium.

The third centered on two members of the wheelchair tennis team, and the fourth featured Krystle Horton, a member of the women's basketball team who had many achievements, both athletic and academic.



MTSU CELEBRITY—This poster of sophomore Tyler Andal, created by Jack Ross of Photographic Services and Darrell Burks of Publications and Graphics, is one of a series of Walker Library posters encouraging reading for success.

The fifth poster highlights Andal, who, at 17, is already making a name for himself as a bluegrass fiddler.

Andal already has been named to MTSU's list of "Tennessee's Best." He began his violin career at 12 with classical music—and said it wasn't long before he was ready to quit.

"Then my mom heard about a Celtic music festival up in Kentucky," he continued. "It was the first time I heard a fiddle player. It was so different from anything I'd ever heard, and it was really interesting."

Andal told his parents that if they could find him a fiddle teacher, he would like to try playing in that style for a while. His mother found a weeklong music camp in North Carolina, which he attended.

"I didn't really start back into any classical stuff until I started coming here," Andal said, "so it's mainly fiddle, but I am trying to do classical, too."

Right now, Andal plays in a bluegrass band with another young musician, a 13-year-old prodigy who plays banjo and mandolin. Last December, the two performed at Carnegie Hall, and the event was covered in *Sidelines*. Black decided Andal would be a good candidate for a poster subject and contacted Andal through Tim Musselman in the music department to suggest the idea.

The READ poster has spread the word about Andal as well. Currently, the library is distributing the posters to Murfreesboro City and Rutherford County schools—65 schools in all. In addition, all of the existing posters are available for viewing on the Internet at <http://ulibnet.mtsu.edu/misc/posters.html>. There's been some response from people in the local community, but the effect has been more far-reaching.

"My mom's done a lot of research on the posters, but I didn't know it was so wide that you could look up something and find it already," said Andal. "But it's really cool that someone found it, and definitely in Alaska."

Andal seems to be enjoying the exposure.

"It's not about me, but the posters!" he joked. "But I like seeing it. All my friends say, 'I saw your poster in the library.' I want to go out one day and just stare at the poster, until someone realizes, 'Oh, that's that kid.'"

Andal, along with his band, is now beginning to get his name out to the rest of the world. In October, they traveled to Japan with a country music tour, along with stars such as Trick Pony and Stonewall Jackson.

"Right after Carnegie, someone from around Nashville had seen an article," Andal said. "They hired us to go on tour back in January. It will be a really good, fun thing. It's my first time out of the country, so I'm excited."

Andal is not yet sure what his plans will be after college, but he knows music will always be a big part of his life.

"I've been really lucky, that what I'm doing, what I have fun doing, is turning out so well for me," he said. "You can do the stuff you like and still make a living."



Black