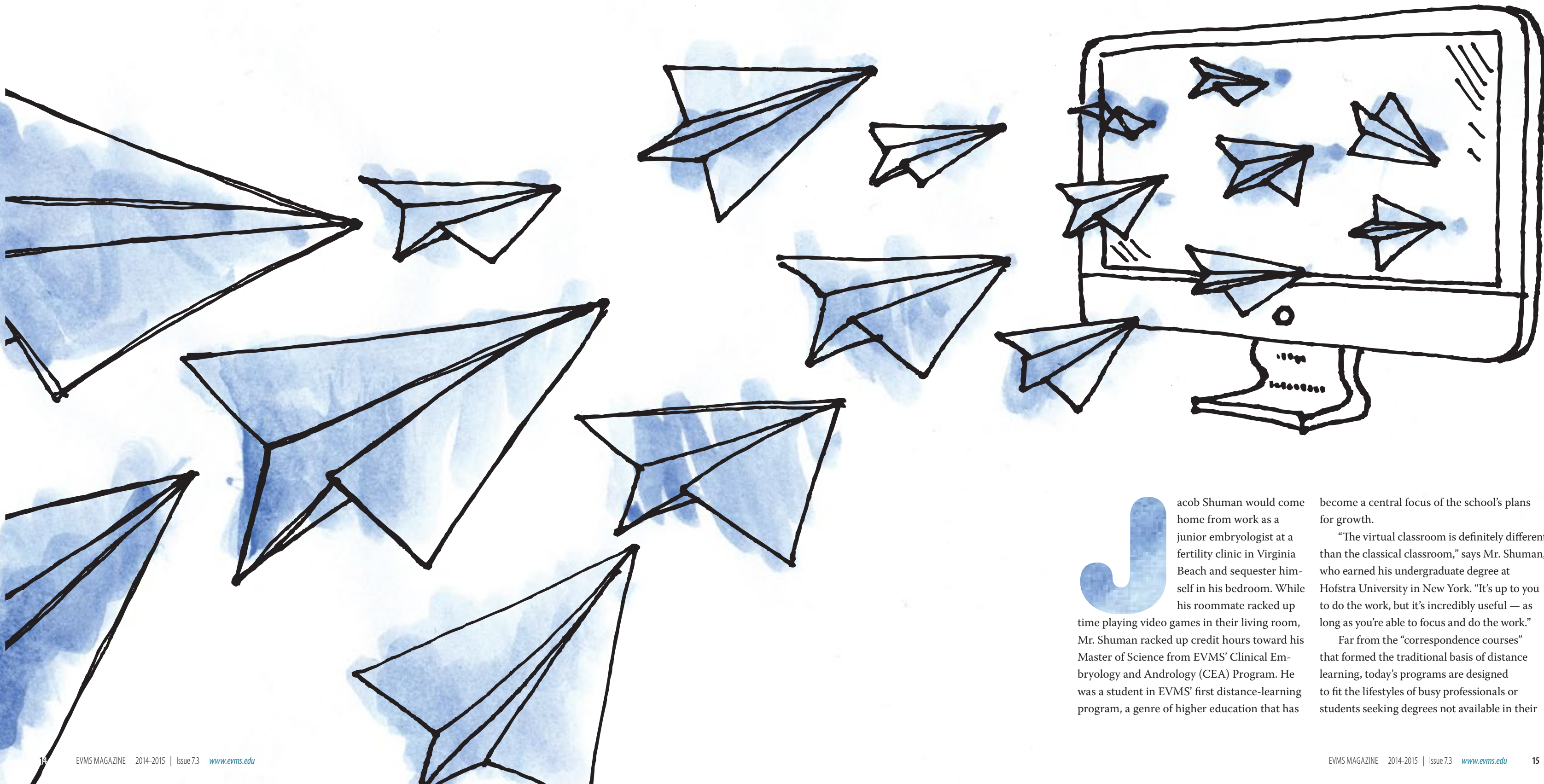


Going the Distance



Jacob Shuman would come home from work as a junior embryologist at a fertility clinic in Virginia Beach and sequester himself in his bedroom. While his roommate racked up time playing video games in their living room, Mr. Shuman racked up credit hours toward his Master of Science from EVMS' Clinical Embryology and Andrology (CEA) Program. He was a student in EVMS' first distance-learning program, a genre of higher education that has

become a central focus of the school's plans for growth.

"The virtual classroom is definitely different than the classical classroom," says Mr. Shuman, who earned his undergraduate degree at Hofstra University in New York. "It's up to you to do the work, but it's incredibly useful — as long as you're able to focus and do the work."

Far from the "correspondence courses" that formed the traditional basis of distance learning, today's programs are designed to fit the lifestyles of busy professionals or students seeking degrees not available in their

EVMS' Distance-Learning Programs



Clinical Embryology & Andrology

Degree: Master of Science
Duration: Two years



Graduate Program in Public Health*

Degree: Master of Public Health
Duration: Two years



Laboratory Animal Science

Degree: Master of Science
Duration: Two years



Medical & Health Professions Education

Degree: Master of Science
Duration: Two years



Surgical Assisting Bridge Program**

Degree: Master of Surgical Assistant
Duration: One year

**Classes live-streamed for the benefit of students participating in international programs or serving in the military.*

***Open to Surgical Assisting graduates who completed the program prior to its conversion to a master's degree.*

geographic area. EVMS, for instance, is one of just three schools in the world to offer a CEA master's degree.

"Over the last 25 years, the culture of education has changed to realize that distance education can be effective," says C. Donald Combs, PhD, Vice President and Dean of the School of Health Professions, which houses all the distance-learning programs. "The old mindset used to be that physical was better, but that's not what the evidence shows. And we have increasingly focused faculty development on delivering effective online classes."

EVMS launched the CEA program, which trains people to work in fertility clinic laboratories, in early 2003. At first, the program's structure looked a lot like the old correspondence courses, but it wasn't long before it began evolving toward modern online-teaching paradigms, a process that gained momentum when Helena Russell, MS, joined EVMS later that year to run the program.

Now the School of Health Professions' Director of Distance Learning, Ms. Russell

assembled a studio for recording lectures and started developing more interactive media after seeing what some other distance programs were doing with online presentation and meeting software.

"We need to have these kinds of connections in the modern age," she says. "It's affordable education, and these kinds of technologies make it possible for us to reach out to new communities of students nationally and internationally."

Today, five programs at EVMS deliver at least part of their curriculum online. Three — the CEA, Laboratory Animal Science and Medical and Health Professions Education (MHPE) master's programs — are held completely online. To meet the demands of that growth, Ms. Russell's staff now comprises four people who help instructors and learners work seamlessly in a digital environment. EVMS' Distance Learning and Instructional Technology office also is seeking to become "Quality Matters" certified, a peer-review process developed at the University of

Maryland that ensures online programs meet rigorous quality standards.

The programs EVMS offers online were developed based on a two-step process: looking at the marketplace to see where there are needs and identifying areas where EVMS has expertise to share.

The CEA program, for instance, served as a logical starting point for distance learning given EVMS' standing as the birthplace of in vitro fertilization in the U.S. and the paucity of opportunities for advanced training in the field of embryology and andrology. More recently, the MHPE came to fruition based on the need — driven by growth in undergraduate medical education across the nation — for more clinicians who can be effective in academic settings, too.

Future online offerings, Dr. Combs says, will be similar to the ones already launched in that they are geared toward students already in the workplace. To accommodate busy professionals looking to grow specific skills, new curricula may include certificate

programs that focus on a "cluster of expertise" rather than a full master's degree.

"The marketplace is becoming more diverse and more sophisticated," he says. "We need to diversify the way we reach out to that market, because we know there are substantial needs in the health-care market that we want to meet. We will look at needs in the workforce and where those dovetail with competencies we have. We're not going to build programs just to build programs — or build programs where we don't have strengths."

That approach makes sense to students like Mr. Shuman, who is now a senior embryologist at a clinic in Raleigh, N.C., and consults for another clinic in Missouri. He says studying material directly related to his day-to-day work made the classes more gratifying and engaging than his undergraduate course work.

"Being interested in the subject matter made me more focused," he says. "Overall, it was a great experience and has been great for my career." □