

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN AGRONOMY ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2008



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As we bring the spring to a close, we want to share with you the exciting developments in the Master of Science in Agronomy Program. Our goal with this newsletter is to keep past, present, and future students connected; and we invite you to keep in touch with us as well.

MASTERS STUDENT USES CREATIVE COMPONENT TO DEVELOP AGRONOMY TOOL FOR WEST AFRICA



MS in Agronomy student Chris Frederick brings a unique perspective to the program. Chris, who spent two years volunteering his agricultural skills in West Africa, not only contributed his preexisting knowledge to his work with the Peace Corps, but also gained new experience and background which he now shares with other MS students. The fruits of his travels include an extensive compilation of resources for development workers and local farmers in West Africa. He is currently working to adapt information learned from personal experience and research into his creative component. Chris writes about the broader implications of his trip below.

I completed my undergraduate degree from Lake Superior State University in 1996. I graduated with a B.S. in Environmental Science. As the program was rather broad in scope, I wasn't completely sure at that time how I wanted to incorporate what I had learned into a career. Toward the end of my final year, I was walking down the hall of the science building and noticed a flyer for the Peace Corps. After sending in for more information, I decided that this was a road that I needed to go down. A year later, I was serving as a forestry volunteer in a remote village of Ghana, West Africa. As with most Peace Corps assignments, my duties were many, varied, and evolved throughout the course of my two-year assignment; however, my primary duty was to manage a fledgling tree nursery. Being located on the fringes of the Sahara, desertification was a constant threat and there was a large need for people to begin replanting the trees that were being affected. With the nursery being in existence prior to my arrival, the workers already had the fundamental skills related to nursery practices. This allowed me to focus more on outreach and doing extension in the surrounding villages. The focus of this extension was on agro-forestry (combining trees and crops on the same piece of land). In working with farmers that had been in place for generations, I soon found that I had as much to learn as I had to teach. Having both language and cultural obstacles to overcome, the learning process was slow and I'm sure that much was lost in translation. Being in a remote part of the world meant that the written resources that I had available were limited and that most of what was available was out-dated.

Below left: The baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) has many local uses throughout West Africa and is revered as a link to the ancestral spirits.

Below right: These local women of the Sahel go through a recently harvested millet field to ensure that no grain is left behind. (Photos courtesy, Chris Frederick)



After coming home (and going through the usual period of re-adjustment), I enrolled in the Americorps and served as Crew Leader with the Michigan Civilian Conservation Corps. While not exactly lucrative, this opportunity offered me an educational stipend. When my service was completed, I was offered a position with the U.S. Forest Service as an Interdisciplinary Planner. This position offered me the opportunity to learn about the importance of integrating the different components that are involved in natural resource management. Recognizing that agriculture serves as the largest global land-use, I then sought out a Masters program that would allow me to tie it all together. The Masters in Agronomy program at Iowa State University allowed me to do just that.

This program caters to those who are in the field and is rigid enough to provide a thorough understanding of the subject matter, yet flexible enough to allow individuals to expand their knowledge-base in a way that applies to their life/career circumstances. Throughout the four years that it took me to complete the coursework, I gave serious thought as to the type of Creative Component that I felt would have usefulness beyond the halls of academia. I thought about my Peace Corps experience, my career, and the goals of this program as I developed A Farmer's Friend: A Growing Guide to West Africa. The concept of the guide was not to provide new information, rather to incorporate up-to-date agronomic information, from a wide variety of sources, in a way that was comprehensive and concise. The process of putting this together was meant to teach me about the common crops grown in this part of the world (a subject area I felt was a weakness). The end-product is meant to serve as an easy-to-use reference for host-country nationals and those that may find themselves in this part of the world doing development-related work.

Having the freedom to develop such a guide for a Creative Component is the beauty of the Masters of Agronomy distance-learning program. This program encourages individuals to incorporate their passions into their coursework. It breaks the mold of the pre-existing academic paradigm and, I believe, will someday be seen as a catalyst for the long-overdue revolution of higher-learning.

Chris is currently an Interdisciplinary Planner with the Baldwin-White Cloud Ranger Districts in Huron-Manistee National Forests.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Agronomy 594/

Program Orientation: July 24-25

Any current or past students in the area are welcome to attend the annual MS in Agronomy picnic, held from 5:30 - 8:00 at Emma McCarthy Lee Park on Thursday, July 24. See the program website for more details and directions to the park.

Creative Component Defenses:

If you are in the area and would like to listen to fellow students present their Creative Components, defenses are open to the public. For specific room locations, stop by the main office in the Agronomy building or contact the program.

Mark Hitz - July 9

Chris Frederick - July 14

Eric Bumann - July 14



As is sometimes rare for a distance degree, four students came to campus to receive their degrees in person. Patrick Reeg (left), Chris Rees (center), Doug Doty (right) and Mark Dostal (not pictured) participated in the May 9 graduation ceremonies at C.Y. Stephens Auditorium.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES

We wish to congratulate nine students who earned their masters degree this spring. Your hard work, determination, and commitment to lifelong learning are inspiring! The program now boasts 47 total graduates and around 102 active students, with new applicants being accepted every day.

- **Angela Begosh**, Program Coordinator for Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board in Yakima, Washington
- **Doug Doty**, Extension Education Director for Fremont County Extension living in Sidney, Iowa
- **Ken O'Brien**, Account Manager for Pioneer Hi-Bred living in Carroll, Iowa
- **Michael Hunter**, Field Crops Extension Coordinator for Cornell Cooperative Extension, living in Redwood, New York
- **Jason Chandler**, Farm Manager for Black Gold Farms living in Mayo, Florida
- **Patrick Reeg**, Technology Manager for the Iowa Soybean Association living in Johnston, Iowa
- **Christopher Rees**, Research Associate for Pioneer Hi-Bred living in York, Nebraska
- **Michelle Vigna**, Operations Supervisor for Monsanto Company living in Bondurant, Iowa
- **Mark Dostal**, Agronomist with Monsanto living in Coralville, Iowa