

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN AGRONOMY ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2009



As we prepare for an exciting and busy summer, we are taking a moment to look back over the spring semester and note some of the accomplishments of our students and faculty. 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. Thank you for being a part of the Master of Science in Agronomy distance community!

RECENT GRAD LOOKS BACK AT THE PATH TOWARDS HIS MASTERS



We asked recent graduate Jason Steffl to reflect on the program. Jason, who says he knew right after the orientation that he made the right decision about pursuing a master's degree, balanced work and family with the demands of his coursework in order to earn his masters this spring. Jason works for Mycogen Seed Co. as a Product Development Agronomist and lives in Oliva, MN.

“ . . . I have made valuable connections with subject matter experts from various universities across the U.S. If one needs assistance in acquiring information, it can be only a phone call or email away. ”

How did you learn about the M.S. in Agronomy program and how did you decide to apply?

I learned about the M.S. program from a friend who was attending the University of Minnesota to obtain his M.S. in Agronomy. After completing my undergraduate B.S. degree from NDSU, it was my desire to go back to school and get my M.S. degree. Due to my location of employment after college, I was not located near a university to further my education. Once I inquired about the distance education program from ISU, I was convinced that this was my opportunity to achieve my goals.

Was there anything about the program that surprised you or was different than you expected?

The orientation provided a pretty good understanding of the expectations of the course. Therefore, I really didn't experience any surprises. I will mention that the courses were more challenging than I expected.

What was your biggest challenge in the program and how did you deal with it?

The occasional lack of motivation after a long work day. My young kids didn't make life any easier. To balance work, home and school, I found myself working from 9-midnight some evenings to avoid getting behind.

What did you find most satisfying or helpful about the program?

The program forced me to work at learning how to access research related material required for some assignments. I have now identified various search engines that provide relatively easy access to multiple sources of research material.

What specific advice do you have for students just beginning the program?

Depending upon the demands from your employment, the program may take more time than you are willing to give up. On average, I would spend about 7-8 hours a week for each course. I would highly recommend that you don't wait until the weekend to start a lesson.

In what ways did your involvement with the program affect your life, and did you see your knowledge or interpersonal connections relating to your work?

I am confident in saying that I have learned a great deal throughout the program. Because I work in a agronomic related field, I was able to apply many of the concepts learned throughout the course to my professional roles. During the time it took to complete the program, I have made valuable connections with subject matter experts from various universities across the US. If one needs assistance in acquiring information, it can be only a phone call or email away. I may not have all the answers . . . but I know where to find them now.

Did you know?



You can listen to a new podcast every week from the Agronomy Department?

Visit <http://www.agron.iastate.edu> and look for the Agronomist Podcast to stay up-to-date on current research topics of interest.

Did you have doubts about completing the program, and how did you overcome them?

For me, I knew it was going to take time. I don't believe I ever had any doubts. With constant discussion with other classmates, I really didn't feel I was alone in the program.

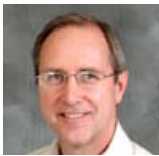
Have you noticed any changes in your work or professional confidence since you earned your degree?

Absolutely. I feel I have put forth the effort to achieve the skills and confidence to reach the next level in my professional development.



M.S. FACULTY MEMBER WINS TEACHING AWARD

Dr. Allen Knapp, who teaches Agronomy 501, was honored at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Convocation this spring with the Distance Education Teaching Award. This award is given to one faculty member in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences who demonstrates outstanding performance in distance education teaching, evidenced through both peer and student evaluations.



THANK YOU TO DR. WESTGATE

We would like to thank Dr. Mark Westgate for his dedicated service as an instructor with the program. Dr. Westgate has taught Agronomy 594, but will no longer be teaching in order to concentrate on his other commitments.

In addition to his recent appointment as editor of the Crop Science Society of America journal "Crop Science," Dr. Westgate has been named the Director of the Center for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL). The CSRL works to address the underlying causes of food security issues and poverty through relationships with rural community leaders and farmers. Last year, Dr. Westgate worked in Uganda with a team focusing on bean production and marketing for a project funded by USAID. While his involvement with these activities consumes a considerable amount of his energies, Dr. Westgate is still interested in working with graduate students. If your area of research interests relates to crop improvement, drought stress, or sustainable issues please contact Dr. Westgate as a possible member of your committee.

Agronomy 594 will now be taught by Dr. Steve Fales. For more information about CSRL, visit <http://www.srl.ag.iastate.edu>.



AGRONOMY WORKSHOP, ORIENTATION, AND PICNIC SCHEDULED

This year's Agron 594 Workshop course and program orientation are scheduled for July 23-24.

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 23. Come visit with your former professors and offer your advice and insights to incoming students. It's a great opportunity to make and strengthen connections within your field while enjoying a great meal. See the program website for more details and directions to the park.

Did you know?

You can watch Creative Component defenses online!

Creative Component defenses are video-recorded and made available at the program website so you can see your peers present their research.



CONGRATULATIONS

60 graduates - and counting!

Congratulations to all the students who have earned their master's degree this spring, and congratulations to the program for reaching the 60th graduate milestone!

- **Aaron Abrahamson**, Soybean Research Associate, Pioneer Hi-Bred, living in Moorhead, Minnesota
- **Jason Steffl**, Product Development Agronomist, Mycogen Seed Co., living in Olivia, Minnesota
- **Bradley Dixon**, Seed Quality Supervisor, Monsanto, living in St. Peters, Missouri
- **Nicholas Larsen**, Biological Scientist, University of Florida EREC, living in Pahoek, Florida
- **Ryan Kay**, Corn Research Associate, Pioneer Hi-Bred, living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- **Melissa Hastings**, Seed Lab Technician, Pioneer Hi-Bred, living in Madrid, Iowa