Background:
- Distance Learning & ISU Program

Online Learning:
- “Tips” for Success

Program Evaluation:
- What do we know?
“Online learning has now shifted to be a mainstream form of delivery for the majority of higher education institutions. We are now seeing colleges and universities take a much more strategic approach to creating program offerings that are scalable, sustainable and personalized to improve academic and employment outcomes for learners.”

- Todd Hitchcock, SVP, Pearson Online Learning Services
  2014 Survey of Online Learning
Why did you choose an online degree program?
Why is Online Learning Popular?

- **Availability of learning experiences** for learners who cannot or choose not to attend traditional face-to-face offerings
- Assembling and disseminating instructional content more **cost-effective**
- **Learning outcome quality** that is equivalent to that of comparable face-to-face instruction
Online education has become an integral part of many colleges and universities; In 2014, 70.8 percent of all chief academic officers reported that:

“...Online education is critical to the long-term strategy of an institution.”

Public universities, like Iowa State, need to play on their strengths as they develop distance learning programs.
• Reputation, more ‘valuable’ degree
• Grows from a strong graduate program (*nationally ranked!*)
• Uses full-time professors
• Focuses on working students
• Embraces the need to develop high quality program; Uses learner-centered pedagogy
• Emphasizes interaction and quality
Areas of Focus for the ISU Program

1) Course experiences
2) Engagement & Interaction
3) Learning outcomes
4) Program Support
5) Technology
Now your journey begins as an online learner!
What challenges are you personally anticipating as an online learner?
Successful online learners are:

- self-motivated
- self-directed
- disciplined
- goal oriented
- independent
- reflective
- life-long learners
Challenges of Learning Online

- Need for a new set of learning strategies
- Face-to-Face contact can be a motivator
- Different type of personal contact
- Need to self-schedule
- Technical challenges
- Questions must be addressed
Tips for Maximizing this Experience

• Be self-motivated and self-disciplined
• Reflect on learning content
• Accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process
• Use the interactive features
• Stay on schedule
• Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise
• When in doubt, ask!
• Schedule weekly lesson times
• Keep in touch with instructor and other students
Who are “our” Successful Students?
- Adults between the ages of 25-50
- Work full-time
- Have various family & social commitments
- Have college degree
- Tuition for one-third of the students is paid by employer
Program Evaluation

1) Pre-Survey*
2) “New Student” Focus Group
3) End-of Semester/Class Evaluations
4) Focus Group Interview (on campus – about Year 2)
5) Post-Interview (on campus)
6) Post-Survey*

Student feedback is essential to sustaining and improving the program. *Suggestions are used!*
Master of Science in Agronomy
Self-Perceptions

With my enrollment in the M.S. Agronomy program:

I possess greater confidence in my ability to perform my work

- 86.95% of current students chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”
- 100% of graduates chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

I am better able to problem-solve when presented with obstacles

- 82.6% of current students chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”
- 90.9% of all responding graduates chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”
Master of Science in Agronomy

Income / Promotion Perceptions

As a result of pursuing a degree in the M.S. Agronomy program:

*My skills and knowledge will be worth more income in the marketplace*

- 95.6% of current students chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”.
- 100% of graduates chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”.

*I will have more potential for promotion within my current company*

- 52.1% of current students chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”.
- 100% of graduates chose either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”.
Enabled me to apply and receive a better job. More money, better hours, closer to home."

"The program has given me a more in-depth agronomic knowledge than I previously had. The degree is also allowing me to currently apply for a promotion that I would not have been able to if I had not completed this program."

"It helped me ‘get’ a job as head of a crop consulting department."

"I have not changed jobs since I started the program. The potential is very real that I can improve on my current position. However, the potential would be diminished had I not started and completed the M.S. program."

"My efforts in this program have resulted in a promotion."
Our Students/Graduates Tell Us....

- Online allows for any time, any place learning
- Interactivity features are very useful for learning
- They learn as much or more as they would on campus
- In general, lessons and expectations are clear
- They appreciate the opportunity to take the program at a distance
- They appreciate the many sources of expertise and knowledge in each lesson
- They interact with professors more than in a traditional setting
- They appreciate the opportunity to connect to their professional experiences
More Students’ Comments….

• It’s reflective of what I do in the real world. I have a problem, and I am going to go to all those resources.

• I have a master’s degree from a conventional program in [name of state]. Hands down, I have put more into this, and I get more out of it. I feel like there is a better collection of resources and authorities on topics. I think it has been put together better.

• I see the great effort being made to take this beyond the undergraduate memorize and regurgitate things to an implied understanding level…problem solving. Yeah, problem solving and it’s not just state the facts.
Avoid these Pitfalls!

- Getting behind schedule
- Not allocating enough time
- Failing to ask questions
- Failing to interact with instructor, students
- Failing to develop learning strategies
- Not immediately solving technical difficulties
Summary

• Program courseware can be accessed anytime and from anywhere
• Creates a rich & interactive learning environment
• Enhances learning through interactive media
• An asynchronous learning environment can provide as good or better learning outcomes as traditional classroom teaching.
• You need to stay “connected”… to faculty, to students!
“Excellent program for expanding upon the base agronomic knowledge, and from experience gained in the working world. This program helped to take the learning to a new, higher level, and enhances professional analytical skills to agronomists.”

- 2014 Graduate, Exit Survey
Learning at a Distance: Tips for Success

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