



# Beginning an Online Graduate Program: Tips for Success

Dr. Denise A. Crawford  
Center for Technology in Learning and Teaching  
School of Education  
College of Human Sciences  
Iowa State University





- ✓ Program Background
- ✓ Online Learning & Tips for Success
- ✓ Program Evaluation & Feedback

# WELCOME

YOUR ONLINE DEGREE STARTS HERE...



- Reputation, more 'valuable' degree
- Grows from a strong graduate program (*nationally ranked!*)
- Classes taught by ISU faculty and subject matter experts
- Focuses on working adults
- Embraces the need to develop high quality program;  
Uses learner-centered pedagogy
- Emphasizes interaction and quality



# Program's Fast Facts...

- 205 Students have graduated (2001-2018)
- 207 Active students in the Program
- 24 students graduated in 2018
- 78.7% live in Midwest
- 30% Female, 70% Male
- 58.4% < 30 years old
- Completion timeline: 3-7 years



# Areas of Focus for the ISU Program



- 1) Course experiences
- 2) Engagement & Interaction
- 3) Learning outcomes
- 4) Program Support
- 5) Technology

# WELCOME

YOUR ONLINE DEGREE STARTS HERE. . .



*Now your journey begins as an  
**online learner!***



“The students of the future will demand the learning support that is appropriate for their situation or context. Nothing more, nothing less. And they want it at the moment the need arises. Not sooner, not later. Mobile devices will be a key technology to providing that learning support.”

*Dr. Marcus Specht*

*Professor of Advanced Learning Technologies  
Open University of Netherlands*



# Why is online learning more effective?

1. Students learn more than they do in traditional courses
2. Retention rates are higher with online learning
3. Online learning requires less of a time investment
4. More frequent assessments can reduce distractions
5. e-Learning is the greener option

- CAE Computer Aided USA



**Why will you be a successful  
online learner?**



# Successful online learners are:

- ... self-motivated
- ... self-directed
- ... disciplined
- ... goal oriented
- ... independent
- ... reflective
- ... life-long learners



**What challenges are you personally anticipating as online learner?**



# 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
- Schedule weekly lesson times
- Use the interactive features
- Stay on schedule
- Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise
- When in doubt, ask!
- Keep in touch with instructor and other students



# What do our students say about the program?



# 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. *Feedback is used for improvement!*



# Master of Science in Agronomy

## Students' Expectations of Program

1. Weekly access to f2f time
2. Timely feedback and communication from instructors
3. Instructors' participation in discussions
4. Increase communication with others
  - *Don't isolate yourself!*
5. Community of learners
6. Accessible support staff



# Master of Science in Agronomy

## Learning Outcomes

*This program increased my ability to apply agronomic knowledge to real-world problems and issues.*

7. The program increased my ability to apply agronomic knowledge to real-world problems and issues.



"Great course to broaden my knowledge. Being in an agronomist role it will be highly valuable now and in future opportunities."

"Course materials in the program are current and relevant."

"On-line assignments and discussion provided an opportunity to learn from other professionals in different geographies, but also about different cropping systems."



# Master of Science in Agronomy

## Students' Strategies for Success

1. Time management ("Know your job schedule. Don't overbook yourself.")
2. Work ahead
3. Do the readings, all of them. Not just the module.
4. Study in quiet setting ("...get out of the house when working on class work.")
5. Take more classes in the beginning
6. Take advantage of office hours ("...I would jump in on office hours...it would take me five seconds, otherwise it would take me 5 days.")
7. Don't isolate yourself ("...Reach out to the professor or someone else in class.")
8. Start the creative component early ("...Plan out ahead.")



# In Sum...

## Our Students/Graduates Tell Us

- They appreciate the opportunity to take the program at a distance
- They learn as much or more as they would on campus
- In general, lessons and expectations are clear
- Interactivity features are very useful for learning
- 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



# In Review, 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/instructors, 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

Denise A. Crawford  
[dschmidt@iastate.edu](mailto:dschmidt@iastate.edu)

Center for Technology in Learning and Teaching  
School of Education  
College of Human Sciences  
Iowa State University

