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Ag Programs Offer Education Without Moving to Campus

MANHATTAN, Kan. - Andy Holzwarth's typical day is pretty much like the rest of working America's. He heads off to his job as a crop systems specialist at John Deere in Wichita. Once finished, he heads home for supper and some family time, but that's where things turn atypical.

Rather than turning on the television or heading out to the lake, Holzwarth is likely to hit the books - sort of. He's actually firing up his computer to work on a lesson for a course in the Master of Agribusiness (MAB) program at Kansas State University.

And, he's earning the master's degree almost completely from home.

K-State's MAB program is an award-winning, internet-based degree designed for food and agribusiness professionals. That means farmers and ranchers, bankers, retailers and processors who specialize in agricultural products, and numerous others who can benefit from this education, said Lynnette Brummett, MAB program coordinator.

A minimum of two years of professional work experience is required for admittance.

"Like any campus-based course, the first task is to read the text and go to class," said Allen Featherstone, K-State professor of agricultural economics and MAB program director.

Course lectures are delivered via a CD-ROM provided for each course, but can also be accessed through the Internet at any time. Lectures are 40-60 minutes long, but unlike a campus-based course, the student chooses when and where he or she 'goes to class' each day.

"The program breaks down barriers associated with earning a master's degree, such as access to a university campus, job changes, relocations, and job-related travel," Featherstone said.

The MAB program was awarded the University Continuing Education Association Peterson's Award for most innovative distance education program in 2001. Other honors include the American Distance Education Consortium's National Excellence in College & University Distance Education Honorable Mention, spring 2001; University Continuing Education Association Credit Program of Excellence, spring 2000; and the University Continuing Education Association Region V Credit Program Award, fall 1999.

Like any college course, there are homework assignments and exams. But the homework is done via email and chatrooms so students do not have to make a trip to campus.

Although based at Kansas State University, the program has had participants from more than 30 states and 12 other countries.

Before starting the master's program, Holzwarth participated in a different K-State continuing education program - the Management, Analysis and Strategic Thinking (MAST) program.

MAST is a four-month program that combines face-to-face workshops with distance education, beginning with a two-day workshop on the Manhattan campus and proceeding through a series of computer-based modules at home. Students come back to the campus the last two days for a program on campus that applies the tools and concepts they've learned to their individual farm situations. The two MAST group classes start this year on Nov. 1-2 or Nov. 8-9.

MAST modules cover such topics as Land Ownership and Leasing; Machinery Ownership and Leasing; Financial Management; Human Resource Management; Tax Planning and Management; Risk Management; and Marketing.

"I enrolled in the MAST program out of interest in improving my awareness and skills involving the ag business industry," Holzwarth said, adding that it was helpful to try a distance education program such as MAST first before committing to the more intensive and expensive master's program.

"It's been a pleasant surprise to experience the feasibility and flexibility of distance education while working a full time job and having family responsibilities," he said. "Networking with people throughout the world has been as rewarding as the class work."

Holzwarth, who is starting year two of the MAB program, said he was able to handle the work load during busy harvest and planting months while working with a large Kansas farm and retail spraying business in a position he held before starting at John Deere.

The first two years in the MAB program also begin with an on-campus session, followed by coursework via the computer. They wrap up with on-campus visits in March, Brummett said.

Year three in the MAB program is spent researching and writing a thesis on a company-related issue. This phase takes about six months, with graduation anticipated in August.

For more information about the Master of Agribusiness program, interested persons can call 785-532-4495; email mab@agecon.ksu.edu or visit <http://www.mab.ksu.edu> .

Information about the university's MAST program can be obtained by calling 785-532-2743; email csimons@agecon.ksu.edu or visit the Web site: www.agmanager.info and click on "Programs."

At a Glance - MAB and MAST Ag Programs at Kansas State University

MANHATTAN, Kan. - The Management, Analysis and Strategic Thinking (MAST) and the Master of Agribusiness (MAB) distance learning programs offered by the Department of Agricultural Economics at Kansas State University are two ways men and women can continue their education without living in a college town. Following are some facts about each program.

The MAST program:

- * is a four-month distance education course that requires two 2-day campus visits, one in November and one in March. The rest of the learning is done through computer modules.
- * is designed to increase participants' farm management skills.
- * requires no prerequisite coursework. Students do not need a college degree.
- * provides for training on Excel spreadsheets during first on-campus orientation session.
- * allows participants to work any time - day or night - as they have time around their schedules.
- * offers 24-hour help in accessing course modules or chat rooms to discuss coursework.

For more information, interested persons can visit <http://www.agmanager.info/> and click on "programs" or type in "MAST" in the search function. Inquiries can also be made to MAST program director Clay Simons at csimons@agecon.ksu.edu or 785-532-2743.

The Master of Agribusiness (MAB) program:

- * is a two-and-a-half year distance education degree program focused on the food and agribusiness industry that is delivered executive-style to working professionals.
- * requires one week on the Manhattan campus during January and March of each of the first two years, and a week cumulatively during the program's third year. The rest of the learning occurs from home via customized CD-ROM provided for each course.
- * is designed to teach students: problem solving using analytical and quantitative tools, how to use computer and information technologies, and to refine verbal and written skills. It is also designed to help identify opportunities for competitive advantage in participants' businesses.
- * requires bachelor's degree and two years of professional work prior to starting the MAB.
- * Like the MAST program, features nationally-recognized faculty.
- * has had enrollees from such countries as China, Canada, Morocco, Argentina and Brazil, in addition to students from the United States. Employees of companies including Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, Frito-Lay, Land O'Lakes, Safeway, Syngenta and Farm Credit Services have participated.
- * has a cost of \$7,500, \$6,000, and \$5,000 due in January of each respective year. Scholarships and financial aid are available.

For more information, interested persons can visit <http://www.mab.ksu.edu> . Inquiries can also be made to MAB program coordinator Lynnette Brummett at lynnett@ksu.edu or 785-532-4495.

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K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county Extension offices, experiment fields, area Extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus, Manhattan.

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