



IN-DEPTH //
DISTANCE LEARNING



Education *Your Way*



Busy schedule? Full-time job? No problem. **Distance learning** helps adults earn advanced degrees on their own terms.

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STUDENT STORIES

Five adults change their lives through online learning

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THE BENEFITS

The top five reasons to pursue distance learning

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TECH TRENDS

A sample of high-tech learning tools and applications

Did You Know?//

Distance learning is a formal education process in which the student and the instructor are not in the same place.

Online enrollment increased by **17 percent** from 2007 to 2008.

More than **25 percent** of all higher education students take at least one online course.

74 percent of public institutions say that online education is a part of their long-term strategy.

To read this special section online, go to deltaskymag.com.



Going the *Distance*

Five distance learning grads share how they juggled work, family, school and travel to achieve academic and professional success online.

By Sarah Asp Olson



Lyndy Worsham

Age: 39

Current City: Chiang Mai, Thailand

School Attended: Penn State University

Degree Earned: Postbaccalaureate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Current Job: Research & GIS Officer, Thailand Burma Border Consortium

WHY DISTANCE LEARNING? // Distance learning gave me access to a high-quality GIS program that I knew would boost my professional development without putting my career on hold or physically relocating my family.

BENEFITS // My program had students from around the world with varying backgrounds and cultures. In today's world, knowing how to effectively communicate and collaborate on projects in digital space with people from different cultures and across multiple time zones is an invaluable skill. In addition, my GIS Certificate program provided me with an opportunity for an expanded role in my current organization. I also recently received a job offer

from another company. There is absolutely no way I would have been able to make it through the interview process without the kind of detailed technical knowledge that I gained from my certificate program.

SURPRISES // My program's online environment offered highly rewarding student interaction and frequent personalized feedback from my instructors. This kind of dynamic learning environment challenged me to take my knowledge and skills to a higher level.

ADVICE // It is not easy to balance family life, work and studies, but remember that it is a privilege to be able to study at all.

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Sean Wohlgemuth

Age: 36
Current City: Duvall, Washington
School Attended: Colorado State University
Degree Earned: Master of Computer Science
Current Job: Software Design Engineer in Test Lead, Microsoft Corp.

WHY DISTANCE LEARNING? // I needed flexibility in a graduate program that would allow me to balance my studies, family and work life. CSU provided that flexibility by allowing me to asynchronously interact with other professionals.

BENEFITS // Not only did my graduate work have practical applications to my day-to-day work, but it also helped increase my confidence on the job. The decisions I am making are backed by the learning I acquired through the graduate program.

SURPRISES // I had not considered actually going to the campus to walk for graduation when I started the program. However, as graduation neared, I felt drawn to fly out to

Colorado to walk for my degree. We combined my graduation and the family vacation.

BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION // One popular misconception is that online or distance programs are easier than brick and mortar programs. In many cases, online students need to do more work than their on-campus counterparts. On-campus students can have discussions right in class, whereas online students need to schedule times to meet or write up ideas more formally to share with other classmates.

ADVICE // Research the program you are thinking about pursuing. Consider work and family commitments, and make sure the program fits into your lifestyle.

Top Schools Go Online //

Well-known universities—such as Stanford, Notre Dame and Harvard—have embraced distance learning. They offer a variety of online courses that count toward graduate degrees and professional certificates. Here's a sample:

Stanford Center for Professional Development

Course: Computer and Network Security
This master's-level course teaches students how to build reliable code to protect against network attacks. Other online courses count toward master's degrees in areas such as computer science, statistics and engineering. scpd.stanford.edu

The University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business

Course: Applied Business Strategies
Learn how to develop and implement a successful business plan. This eight-week online course is part of

the Executive Certificate in Business Administration program. The university also offers executive online certificates in negotiation, and leadership and management. notredameonline.com

Harvard University Extension School

Course: Managerial Accounting
Students in this graduate-level course study budgeting, cost estimating and performance evaluation. Other graduate programs with online courses include journalism, information technology, and sustainability and environmental management. extension.harvard.edu //

—Amanda Hoffstrom



Lane Fabby

Age: 39
Current City: Lakeland, Tennessee
School Attended: University of San Diego
Degree Earned: Master of Science in Global Leadership, School of Business Administration
Current Job: Director of Operations, Frew & Associates

WHY DISTANCE LEARNING? // I was working full time and raising three kids while my husband was serving a tour in Baghdad. I knew the only way I was ever going to get a master's degree was online.

BENEFITS // Being a distance learner gave me the opportunity to learn and collaborate in virtual environments. It also forced me to stay up to date with technology. I am confident that I provide more value to my company now. Since graduating from USD, I have become a published writer, part-time professor and facilitator.

SURPRISES // I was pleasantly surprised by the technologies that were available, including information sharing and WebCT/Blackboard

technology. I could watch videos of my professors lecturing and interact with classmates using e-mail and Voice over Internet Protocol. I also worked with teammates on papers using collaboration applications. It was so cool.

BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION // The biggest misconception is that online schools do not provide as good of an education as traditional schools. Distance learning programs not only allow students to learn from traditional classroom materials—books, journals, case studies, etc.—but also teach students to interact using multimedia software and other technologies. This helps students develop additional skills and advance their careers.

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Micah Stewart

Age: 28
Current City: Duncan, Oklahoma
School Attended: Oklahoma State University Spears School of Business
Degree Earned: MBA
Current Job: Technical Professional-Mechanical, Halliburton Energy Services

WHY DISTANCE LEARNING? // I work a 40-hour week, and I have two kids, so distance learning really was the only choice.

GOALS // To learn as much as I could about the business side of business and to pass every course with a B or better. I accomplished those goals by dedicating a set time each day to study and learn the material. My final GPA was a 3.7.

BENEFITS // For starters, it's definitely padded my resume and given me a broader range of knowledge and skills in business. It let my managers know that I am serious about being involved in the management of the company.

BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION // That a distance learning program will isolate you. In actuality, you are a part of a community of learners, and you work together.

ADVICE // Do it. There is no better time than now. Even with a hectic schedule, getting an online degree is possible and definitely worth it.



Kimberly Miller

Age: 49
Current City: Victoria, Minnesota
School Attended: Indiana University's Kelley School of Business
Degree Earned: MBA
Current Job: Regional Vice President of Claims, Group Benefits Division, The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc.

WHY DISTANCE LEARNING? // My role at The Hartford involved a great deal of travel. The Kelley Direct online program provided the level of flexibility that I needed.

BENEFITS // I valued the quality and comprehensive educational experience. I was challenged by the instruction and the coursework during the tenure of the program. I have acquired the skills to perform at a higher level. Within two years of receiving my MBA, I was promoted to my current role as regional vice president of The Hartford's Minneapolis disability claims office. Earning my MBA helped me land this role.

BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION // That it's a scaled-back version of the traditional academic program. For Kelley Direct, the online program is exactly the same as the in-person MBA program. They have the same academic requirements, curriculum, books, simulations, faculty, group projects, access to the professors and diploma—just the delivery method is different.

ADVICE // Don't underestimate the time commitment. An MBA program takes a great deal of time and requires re-shuffling of priorities. Balancing class assignments is critical to success.

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Reasons to **Learn Online**

Distance learning is exploding in popularity, growing faster than higher education as a whole. Here are five reasons why. By Jenny Sherman

1 Flexibility // Family, job, frequent travel, military service—there are many impediments to signing up for a traditional degree program. Even night school or weekend programs can be tricky to juggle with a busy schedule. But distance learning courses can be completed anytime, anywhere. Many programs deliver coursework via the Internet, though many institutions, such as Colorado State University, also mail DVDs of lectures to students in remote locations. Students have flexibility in the variety of distance programs available, too. MBAs are popular, as are undergraduate and other master's degrees, professional certifications, executive programs and even some doctoral degrees.

2 Credible Programs // “The first thing prospective students think of [a distance learning MBA]?” says Jay Bryant, director of admissions for Thunderbird School of Global Management in Glendale, Arizona. “Employers know and respect our school. It’s not considered an MBA lite.” Well-known schools offer online learning. Harvard University offers more than 100 online courses that count toward undergraduate and graduate degrees at its Extension School. The University of Notre Dame offers online non-degree executive certificate programs in business administration, negotiation, and leadership and management. Notre Dame also uses real-time, interactive video technology to deliver its Executive MBA program to working professionals in its Cincinnati offsite classroom.

3 Global Reach // When the classroom goes global, so does the student body. Distance learning students from the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University have hailed from countries including Germany, India, The Netherlands, Romania, Italy, Mali, Spain and Thailand—as well as across the United States. Distance

learners tend to be a range of ages, too. For example, the average age of students in the Thunderbird School of Global Management’s distance learning MBA is 31. They’re required to participate in intensive on-site seminars at the school’s Arizona campus as well as at locations in Europe, Latin America and Asia. This ensures a diverse, immersive educational experience.

4 A Technological Edge // In an increasingly global marketplace, employees need to have expertise in the latest tools for doing business. Distance coursework can use Web-based conferencing applications, document sharing and other collaborative applications that allow students to interact and complete group projects—without the need for face-to-face meetings. This gives students in online programs a technological edge.



5 Working Independently // As technology allows more of the work force to be located remotely, workers must become more comfortable with the requisite work habits to stay competitive. Distance learning environments replicate this scenario perfectly. Students in online courses have to be independent, self-starters and proactive about managing workloads and deadlines—all while juggling the needs of work, home and family. “There are lots of students who cannot learn online because they do not have the discipline,” says Hunt Lambert, associate provost in the division of continuing education and founder and former CEO of the Colorado State University-Global Campus. An online course is not necessarily easier than a campus-based course, he says. //

Three Steps to Success //

The Executive MBA program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Center for Executive Education has primary components that make the program a success. Here’s a breakdown:

• **Flexible Schedule**—The 12-month UT curriculum consists of four two-week residence periods and 15 periodic distance learning sessions. “Executives living or working anywhere in the world can earn a degree with minimal disruption to their lives and careers,” says Kate Atchley, director of the Executive MBA program.



Kate Atchley

• **Leadership Development**—Students participate in leadership assessment exercises and work one-on-one with a leadership development coach to hone their skills.

• **Return on Investment**—Students apply what they learn in the classroom directly to their careers. This offers a great return on investment, because students are able to design and execute strategic initiatives for their organizations. “Students not only submit assignments to UT, but also report end-of-year insights, analyses and achievements to their managers and companies,” Atchley says. As a result, “both the executive and their organization enjoy an immediate return on investment.”

To learn more, visit emba.utk.edu. //
—Majja Saulitis



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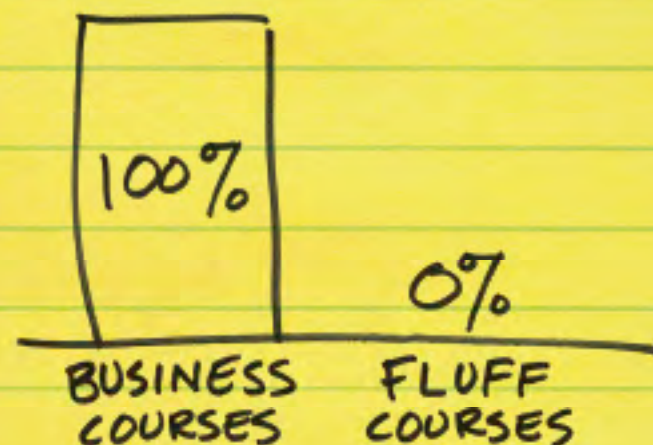
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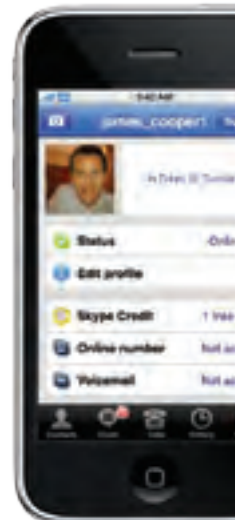


High-Tech Learning

Thanks to ongoing **technological advances**, there are more ways to learn online than ever. Here's a sample of the tools and applications used by distance learners. By Jenny Sherman

Go Digital // Audio and video of lectures, as well as associated images and materials, can be saved as podcasts. These digital files can be downloaded to a computer or handheld device. Students at the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University can access audio podcasts of class presentations. “We do know that [students] are using [them],” says Shona Gambrell, program manager for the school’s Center for Executive and Professional Development. “They’re in an airplane, flying to Boston for the weekend, and they plug in their earphones and listen to a lecture.”

Real Conversation // Nothing beats a face-to-face conversation, but the next best thing is available online. Skype is a simple online tool for real-time Voice over Internet Protocol phone services. Another online tool is VoiceThread, which allows students to comment on media such as videos



or images through a telephone, Webcam, text, microphone or other uploaded file. In lieu of real-time conversations, this method allows discussions to take place at users’ convenience—especially if they’re in different locations or time zones.

Total Access // These online environments incorporate a medley of specialized software tools to help students access course materials, assignments, grades, discussion groups, shared files and other services. They are “a gateway into the online learning experience,” says Rick Shearer, director of Penn State World Campus Learning Design. Penn State uses a platform called ANGEL Learning. Others include Blackboard, which just merged with ANGEL Learning in 2009; open-source software such as Sakai, which institutions can customize to suit their needs; and Desire2Learn, used by the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University.

Listen In // Thunderbird School of Global Management uses the Tegrity video-based lecture-capture system. Classes recorded through Tegrity automatically have enhanced podcasts generated, which include audio recordings and an index of thumbnails for topic browsing. Students log in through an internal portal called My Thunderbird. Once they are logged in, students can review class sessions, search for key phrases or even submit assignments such as electronic portfolios and multimedia presentations.

Real-Time Presentations // Web seminars—also called Webinars—allow classes, lectures and presentations to be held in real time through the Internet. Users can access online applications such as Dimdim to sign in to sessions that feature audio, video, PowerPoint presentations, screenshots, Web pages, a shared whiteboard and more. Elluminate Live! is a tool used by students and faculty at Penn State World Campus for group work and office hours conferencing.

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High-Tech Tests // In the past, distance learners had to arrange for a special test proctor to oversee exams in person. Now they can take proctored tests online. “We’ve been working with Kryterion; they have a fully secure online testing experience,” says Shearer of Penn State World Campus. The hosted environment includes a special camera, an exam delivered online and a proctor observing remotely. //

Online Resources //

Interested in distance learning? Check out these websites:

The United States Distance Learning Association usdla.org

The national organization for distance learning is focused on leadership, advocacy and information about trends in distance learning in all its forms, including pre K-12 and other training purposes.

Executive MBA Council emba.org

Flexible MBA programs for high-level working executives are often called Executive MBAs. This organization provides information on trends and offers a directory of programs.

Get Educated geteducated.com

This website ranks and compares online schools and degrees, providing extensive consumer-related information to help you shop wisely.

Graduate Management Admission Council gmac.com

The leading advocate and resource for quality graduate schools of business worldwide, the GMAC examines distance learning trends among MBAs and what appeals to working adults.

Distance-Education.org

This site offers program descriptions, online college reviews written by students and articles on distance learning. There’s also a tool that allows you to ask questions from the site’s experts. //



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