

# CASNR goes the distance in Ag Ed

If you're thinking of a master's degree, why not earn it from a distance? Oklahoma State University's recently approved agricultural education online graduate program just may be right for you.

The OSU Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and 4-H Youth Development has added a complete online distance master's program. The OSU Board of Regents approved the program to begin in fall 2000.

"This program is great for students who want to pursue higher education while still staying in the work force," said Jim Leising, head of the department.

The 30- to 36-hour master's program is designed to be completed in nine semesters or approximately three years. Nine semester credit hours can be transferred from another school. While students work on their degrees, they are not required to come on campus. Students can even work with their graduate advisory committee online.

Just like on-campus students who are required to have an advisory committee of three faculty members to provide guidance and mentoring, distance education students are no different. They are given the option to come to campus to put their committee together but are not required to do so.

Bob Heinemann, a station supervisor at the OSU Kiamichi Forestry Research Station in Idabel, Okla., has taken distance education courses for the past two years. He said one of the best parts about distance education classes is they allow you to customize your plan of study. A student's plan of study consists of the courses he or she will take to complete a graduate degree.

"The only drawback to online classes is the lack of interaction with other students," said Heinemann.

Todd and Denise House of Kiowa, Okla., are both working on their agricultural education master's degrees.

"With both of us having full-time jobs, taking distance classes gives us a good opportunity to spend more time together," said Todd House.

Agricultural education is one of the first programs in the university to effectively

use the art of video streaming. Other OSU colleges such as business, education and arts and sciences are looking to CASNR for ideas and advice.

To prepare courses for online delivery, professors digitally record their lectures. The video-streamed lectures, as well as PowerPoint presentations, homework and syllabi are posted on the course Web page. Students can login any time and listen to lectures or review course material.

"I have found that even my in-class students go back and listen to the lectures again on the course site," said James Key, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources distance education director.

Even though students are taking courses from a distance, they still have the opportunity to interact with other students in their classes.

Distance students participate in interactive activities such as work reviews. Heinemann said work reviews did not sound

good at first but, in the end they became beneficial.

Reviews consist of being paired with another classmate for the semester. E-mail addresses are exchanged, and students are encouraged to share thoughts throughout the semester. This allows the dis-

*"Our classes can be anywhere you have Web access."*

*James Key  
CASNR distance education director*



*If you can access the Internet, then you can participate in higher education programs from OSU. New distance education classes are allowing agricultural education graduate students the opportunity to hold full-time jobs while furthering their education. (Photo by Lea Ann Castleberry)*

cussion of assignments, along with the exchange of homework ideas and critiques of each other's work.

OSU has offered online distance education for the past eight years. However, the first distance courses were taught in the 1960s on talkback television systems operated through a microwave tower system. This system was a two-way audio, one-way video. This meant students could see and talk to the professor, while the professor could only talk to the distance students.

The problem was distance students had to find a school or site that had the proper equipment, said Todd House. Then OSU changed to the compressed two-way audio/video system. This was a great way to interact and teach distance students, said Key.

"OSU began online classes because distance students needed more courses to be available," said Key.

Key and Heinemann both said distance courses are for independent people who are self-motivated. One of the benefits of this program is being able to move at your own pace, said Heinemann.

Key said, from a professor's standpoint, not only do you

have to be concerned about your students, but also about technology. Using the technology allows students to further their education — whether they are in Oklahoma or anywhere around the world.

"Our classes can be anywhere you have Web access," said Key.

Potential students interested in the program can download admission applications from the OSU Graduate College Web site (<http://www.osu-ours.okstate.edu/gradcoll>).

In-state and out-of-state fees are \$151 per credit hour for distance courses. Other costs such as thesis, internship and other special problems courses that do not require distance delivery are \$116 per credit hour (fall 2001). There are two different degrees to choose from: the master of science in agricultural education and the master of agriculture.

For more information about the online master of science in agricultural education or master of agriculture degree programs, view the departmental Web site (<http://agweb.okstate.edu/agedcm4h/>).

◆ *By Lea Ann Castleberry, Ninnekah, Okla.*