

## **Best Practices: Online PSM Programs for Working Adults**

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### **Q: Who do you want to reach with distance learning master's education?**

A: First steps to take are identifying the appropriate target student audience for online delivery and determining the scope of your program's enrollment – regional, national, or international. Decide if your focus is on recent graduates, or mid-career professionals? These two groups of students have different needs.

### **Q: What methods of delivery are currently being used to deliver online education?**

A: There are several Course Management Systems available, such as ANGEL, Blackboard and Moodle. Increasingly, minimal cost (or free) online platforms are being used for online delivery. Social-media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn are also being used to connect to the distance learning students to their professors and to each other.

### **Q: What costs are involved in starting an online program?**

A: Development work of online courses is very time consuming and resource expensive. Simply taking a traditional course and putting it online will not result in the best learning environment. Faculty require training and/or support services for developing and managing online courses. Cost assessments depend upon resources available at the institution.

### **Q: What infrastructure/technology is required to deliver streamed courses?**

A: A course management system, video recording and editing equipment (hardware and software), voice recording capabilities, web cameras, basic word processing and presentation software. In addition, if you are streaming your courses you will need sufficient bandwidth.

### **Q: What is the learning curve for adapting to online teaching?**

A: With assistance, faculty can readily adapt to the online environment. Large institutions often have central resources. If these are not available they need to be included in the cost of start-up and management. Other opportunities include partnering with consulting firms that develop online learning programs (Compass Knowledge and Bisk for example).

**Q: What methods are used to engage the distance learning students?**

A: Best practices for online learning engagement can be identified from SLOAN-C and Blackboard. Engagement in the online environment is important for student learning and retention.

**Q: How are final projects handled with online programs?**

A: The final project can be done with the current employer or with the current employer's supervision. The project is generally outside the student's current job responsibilities, stretches the student's capabilities, and allows the student to demonstrate their new skills and knowledge. Final projects can be submitted in written form, and/or given in oral formats via online video technologies. Some programs require the student to present their final project in person on campus.

**Q: How can we ensure oral communication skills with distance learning students?**

A: Online video offers the capability of incorporating oral communication skills into class assignments, including final presentations.

**Q: How do we deal with students who do not have industry or lab experience?**

A: Some programs do not admit students without sufficient lab experience. Other programs develop hands-on courses which students must attend, usually one or two weeks long. Residential students of a hybrid online program may be required to take a semester-long lab course designed specifically for the PSM program.