

# Student Experience in the MSIDT Program

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In the evenings, Kellie Otis comes home from work, grabs a cup of coffee and goes to college—in her living room. A full-time web master at San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, she is participating in the on-line Masters degree program in instructional design and technology (MSIDT) at Cal State Fullerton.

Lorin Ifkovic, a resident of New Jersey and an Associate Learning and Development Specialist at Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceutical Company, found the Cal State Fullerton program while surfing the web.

“It offered the kinds of classes that I needed,” Ifkovic said. “I have been extremely impressed with the instructors and the challenging coursework.”

“We started this program in Fall 2002,” said JoAnn Carter-Wells, professor of reading and coordinator of this new program. “Our intent was to provide educational opportunities to professionals working in the field of technology—whether they are in teaching, the military, industry or business, we wanted to provide a superior university education that matched their needs and schedules.”

Some of the students in the program are currently instructional trainers for corporations and businesses and want to enhance their skills and teaching abilities. Others are designers of textbooks or work for “e-learning” companies. Still others are web developers, software consultants or teachers. What they have in common is a desire to achieve a university education in a field that seems poised to grow and develop.

“This on-line program works for me because it offers more flexibility,” said Otis. “In my field, my work schedule may change without much notice or I have to work late on special projects. As long as my class assignments get done, it doesn’t matter when I do them. You still need to respond to your class members every night but there’s more flexibility—and no commute. That flexibility and the quality of the program have enabled me to help the designers in my workplace do a better job.

“I do find, however, that I do much more work than I did in traditional classrooms,” Otis continued. “I think there is a misperception that on-line classes are easier. I find the on-line classes to be quite challenging and intense.”

“We find that on-line programs allow us to offer more options to our students,” said Carter-Wells. “And we are continually learning and developing new programs based on evaluations we receive from them. For instance, students were interested in learning from one another so we encouraged them to begin building an online community that fosters collaboration and networking. This, combined with an ‘electronic portfolio’ that students can show their employers or prospective employers makes them more marketable and professional.”

The first program began in fall 2002 with 22 students. Twenty-five students enrolled in the second session (the maximum). Upon acceptance to the program, each student is placed with a “cohort,” that is, a group of students that will proceed through the program together, taking classes at the same time and graduating in 18 months. Initially, they meet “in person” for what Carter-Wells refers to as “Boot-Up Camp.”

"It's helpful to have an initial face-to-face meeting to address any potential problem areas that may develop and get to know one another," she said. "We also look at the different areas of interest and the backgrounds of our students. We discuss goal setting and how to reach these goals. It also gives the students a level of comfort to meet with the MSIDT interdisciplinary faculty and technology support team." Mid-way through the program, the students meet again to see if they are on target for meeting their goals and to make plans for their final project/practicum experience for the end of the program.

Because most of the work is done on-line, students have resided in states as diverse as New Jersey, Colorado and Oregon—yet they receive their degrees from California State University, Fullerton.

"We are filling a niche in business and industry," Carter-Wells explained. "With more and more companies expanding their web presence and conducting business on-line, there is an increased need for training and education. Our students are not only attending classes on-line but are exposed to a wide range of the mediums that they will be using to develop their own programs."

While the ultimate goal is a Masters degree, Carter-Wells says that what her students truly prize is the knowledge.

"There is a huge need for these types of programs," she said. "Based on requests we've received, we're considering the development of an international cohort. This will entail more research as we come to grips with the ideas of what would technology look like in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia or Jamaica? They have issues with access or speed that most Americans don't have to consider."

Each student in the program must develop a culminating project. Some of those that have been proposed include a web-based tutorial program for parents who home school their children, an American Sign Language tutorial, an e-learning program for a loan consulting company, K-12 curriculum to accompany a North Pole solo expedition this spring, a spelling program that can be used by a local school district, a credit reporting system and a program to sell box office tickets.

"There is no limit to the range of options available," said Carter-Wells. "We encourage students to use all the multi-media modalities available to them: streaming video, training videos, tutorials. They may not end up using all of them in their final projects but at least they're familiar and comfortable with the technology."

"For someone like me, a working professional, this is really the way to go," said Otis. "It's so nice to be able to log on from home and not have to worry about traffic or parking. And the quality of instruction is terrific. This has direct applications to the skills I need for my job."

*The deadline for fall 2004 admission is March 1, 2004. For more information on this program and two new Instructional Design certificates to be implemented this fall, check the program website at [msidt.fullerton.edu](http://msidt.fullerton.edu) or contact JoAnn Carter-Wells at (714) 278-2842 or [msidt@fullerton.edu](mailto:msidt@fullerton.edu).*

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