DISCUSSION SESSION
2000 World Food and Agribusiness Forum
International Food and Agribusiness Management Association

Title:

Distance Delivered Executive MBA Program: Lessons Learned from the Purdue University EMBA in Food and Agribusiness

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Abstract

Rapid developments in distance learning technologies have greatly expanded the ability to serve food and agribusiness managers who cannot participate in more traditional, campus-based learning experiences. However, the technology is still relatively new, experience is limited, and individuals and institutions interested in employing distance learning have few models to benchmark. This discussion session shared insights gained during the first module of the Executive MBA in Food and Agribusiness at Purdue University. This innovative model uses a combination of distance learning tools and campus-based residencies to enable professionals working full-time to obtain a fully accredited MBA degree. The three courses in the first module encompassed a wide range of material and employed an equally wide range of teaching techniques. The session focused on lessons learned from the experience of the three instructors of these courses, along with the distance technology expert who led the course development team.

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Introduction: Jay Akridge

Rapid developments in distance learning technologies have greatly expanded the ability to serve the educational needs of food and agribusiness managers who cannot participate in more traditional, campus-based learning experiences. However, the technology is still relatively new, experience is limited, and individuals and institutions interested in employing distance learning have few models to benchmark.

This discussion session shared insights gained during the first module of the Executive MBA in Food and Agribusiness at Purdue University. This innovative model uses a combination of distance learning tools and campus based residencies to enable professionals working full-time to obtain a fully accredited MBA degree. The first class included individuals from 11 states and Mexico. The three courses in the first module addressed three very different subjects, and employed an equally wide range of teaching techniques. The session focused on lessons learned from the experience of the three course instructors along with the distance technology expert who led the course development team.

Specific issues addressed include the distance learning environment, preparing students to learn at a distance, and matching distance delivery tools with course objectives and characteristics of the learners. In addition, comments were offered on a wide range of distance learning tools with respect to where they have application, and where success may be limited. Finally, insights as to key success factors in course development and design were offered, based on both successes and challenges of delivering the first module of the program.

Program Overview: Jay Akridge

In August 1999, Purdue University launched a unique distance educational activity, the Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) degree in Food and Agribusiness. Combining the resources of the nationally ranked Schools of Management and Agriculture, this program is aimed at experienced managers in the food and agricultural markets who want to obtain a top-tier graduate degree in management without disrupting their careers. The program is launched with a one-week, on-campus orientation and consists of four, 22-week modules. Each of the four modules involves 10 weeks of distance delivered coursework, followed by a two week, on campus residency, and then 10 more weeks of distance delivered coursework. Students take three courses each module. The first three residency sessions are held on the West Lafayette campus, and the fourth and final residency will be conducted on the campus of Wagengien Agricultural University in the Netherlands.

The overall objective of this complex program is to enlarge participant understanding of the basic functional areas of management and organizations in their competitive international environment and to prepare participants to assume greater general management and leadership responsibility in their respective organizations. Development of the program began in 1996 with a visit to benchmark Athabasca University's (Edmonton, Canada) innovative distance delivered MBA program. Extensive market research was conducted involving telephone interviews with and site visits to more than 30 food and agribusiness companies. Key elements of the final program design were heavily influenced by this market research, including off campus time commitments and the balance of residence and distance delivered coursework. To meet the needs of a clientele that is increasingly mobile, distance delivered coursework accounts for about 70% of the total content, with the traditional residency component accounting for about 30%.

The inaugural class consisted of 21 individuals from 11 states and Mexico. The average age of the group was 32 years, and they averaged 9 years of business experience. During the first module (which ended January 14, 2000), three courses were taught: quantitative methods, managerial economics, and organizational behavior and human resource management. A wide variety of instructional strategies and technologies were used to accommodate this highly diverse subject matter. The instructional strategies and technologies which involved Internet delivery included analysis and discussion of case studies, discussion forums, self-quizzes, digitized video lectures, animated spreadsheets, voice-over PowerPoint presentations, and audio feedback on homework assignments. Perhaps the highlight of the first module was a virtual team project that integrated the material from the managerial economics and quantitative methods courses. Teams with members scattered across the US and Mexico 'presented' their final reports to instructors via Net Meeting and a conference call.

The primary objective throughout the program is to use the Internet not just as a vehicle to deliver content, but to use it as a means to allow individuals separated by time and space to collaborate effectively. A hallmark of the program has been an extensive quality control initiative. This has impacted virtually every dimension of the program and has included activities ranging from assessing the computing environment of the individual students, to regularly seeking feedback from the students, to extensive pre-testing of on-line modules before release to students. Given the highly dynamic state of technology in this area, and relatively recent history of web-based teaching, such a focus on continuous process improvement has been critical to the very positive evaluations of students to date.

This session summarized key lessons learned from the first module of the EMBA in Food and Agribusiness. Specifically, the on-line learning environment, the use of on-line discussion forums, teaching quantitative material, and on-line experiential projects will be addressed.

The On-Line Learning Environment: Ramiro Guzman

A major component of Purdue's Executive MBA in Food and Agribusiness is the student's use of a distributed on-line learning environment. While the students are not on campus they access course materials, interact with classmates and communicate with faculty and support staff using a set of tools that provide both efficiency and flexibility to the students, recognizing their hectic schedules.

In the development of the EMBA's on-line learning environment some conscious decisions had to be made as to the infrastructure and tools to be implemented. The availability of technical expertise and network infrastructure in both the Department of Agricultural Economics and the School of Management's Krannert Computing Center led to the decision of housing the course delivery servers in-house as opposed to using a remote hosting solution. This allowed for greater flexibility, quicker response to requested changes and considerable convenience in developing course materials. The tools chosen were web-based tools that allowed for easier access by students and relied on 'cutting edge' technologies that were proven. 'Bleeding edge' technologies that might not be usable by all students in all computing environments were avoided. Although some development was done in-house, the staff focus was more on course design and curriculum development. Hence, an on-line software package called WebCT was licensed and integrated into the course environment to provide the authentication, messaging, collaboration and some of the course delivery features.

A conscious effort was made to use the medium to its potential. Some course subject matter was consciously moved to the on-campus residencies for delivery and other subject matter was chosen for asynchronous distributed delivery through the on-line learning environment. The on-line learning environment is accessed through a class home page. On this page (that many students now have as their browser home page) students are asked to log in. This log-in feature allows for tracking of student participation as well as tailoring of the learning environment to individual students. The goal of the home page is to make the technology transparent and make all course materials and communications accessible in the most efficient and intuitive manner possible. This sometimes meant consciously excluding some of the latest technical 'bells and whistles' and only implementing enhancements that met the above criterion.

The course material is accessed in a variety of ways not excluding the generous use of textbooks. The on-line materials make reference to textbook material or enhance certain sections of the readings. Non-textbook readings are made available both for download and in printed format. Web based lectures are developed to be delivered on-line but also allow the option to download and work off-line or print materials and work through some of the materials when computer access is not as practical. Efforts were made to provide several options for students with varied learning styles while maintaining consistency in the material that was delivered. The use of HTML based lectures provided an environment where supplemental material could readily be made available to students that wanted to review materials or see it presented in another format that might be more suited to that particular student. The use of streamed audio commentary was extremely well received by students. This not only helped reduce feelings of isolation but also presented materials in the format that auditory learners found much more appealing.

The web based e-mail and threaded discussion forums allow for a consistent and accessible communication and collaboration tool set. Using a consistent browser based messaging system allows students to communicate within teams or with faculty and staff. It also allows for the exchange of documents for submitting assignments and receiving commented papers. The threaded discussion forums allow for a variety of communications ranging from general announcements to quick requests for assistance to very in-depth discussions. Finally, the web-based tools allow interactive content like streamed audio or pictures to be easily integrated into communications.

On-line Discussion: Holly Brower

Organizational Behavior and Human Resources (OBHR) is a management course that typically focuses on topics such as leadership, teams, decision making, organizational structure and design, diversity, motivation, and employee selection and benefits. Especially when teaching executives, covering these topics is greatly enhanced through classroom discussion and the sharing of real life situations.

The case study approach to management education has been broadly touted as the most effective methodology of teaching, especially at the Master's level. Executive students each bring with her/him their own "case" in that each is working in an organization that currently is implementing the topics that are relevant to OBHR. The learning of the subject matter is greatly enhanced as executives share their own frustrations about how their HR departments share information about raises or benefits, or the trials involved in going through a restructuring process. The instructor guides them as they network with each other on topics such as how to motivate problematic employees, how to manage difficult bosses, and what processes are most appropriate for teams. Certainly, theory is presented through text and other readings, but the learning environment is most effective when discussion is promoted.

Because this type of a class benefits so strongly from the interaction of students in a classroom, teaching OBHR in a distance setting where students work independently from their own homes and offices presented some unique challenges. These challenges included emulating a classroom discussion, capitalizing on the “case study” approach, utilizing experiences of students as a teaching tool, and making the reading come alive with real-time examples.

Many of these challenges were met through the use of an electronic "discussion forum" for the class. Each week, students participated in the forum. In fact, 15% of their final grade was based upon their participation in the forum. The instructor posted an initial open-ended question on the forum that probed students to apply the readings to their work environment. Students, then, could either reply to the question or pose a different question about the topic. All the students in the class could see the postings of the professor and their colleagues, much like a bulletin board. Students could respond to the question posed by the instructor or to comments and questions posted by fellow students.

Exhibit A below shows some excerpts from the discussion forum during the week where the topic was "diversity in organizations." This excerpt is typical of how a discussion developed during each week, only the names of the students have been changed. The professor posted the initial question asking students to react to the readings. Four types of responses were made by students: 1) responding directly to the question asked by the professor; 2) asking a completely different question of a more technical nature; 3) answering a question posed by a student; and 4) responding to a comment made by a different student and building on that comment to continue the topic initiated by the professor.

Using the discussion forum, the challenges posed by teaching OBHR at a distance were addressed. The discussion forum did a fair job of emulating a classroom discussion. In fact, more students were able to become involved in the discussion because time and "air time" was not limited in the way it is in a classroom setting. The case study approach was effectively utilized because students shared how the topics were being applied in their own companies or shared problems or issues facing them at work that were pertinent to the discussion of OBHR. Students took advantage of the experiences of their colleagues when they shared solutions to each other's problems. Finally, the discussion forum brought life to the readings on each topic as students shared how they applied to their work setting. The forum made the class far more interactive and enhanced the learning environment tremendously.

Exhibit A. Example Discussion Forum

Instructor Posting:

Q1. The article you read this week talks about 3 paradigms of dealing with diversity in organizations. Which of these are most prevalent, in your experience? The authors advocate a new learning-and-effectiveness paradigm. What is your reaction to their proposal? How could it be implemented in your organization? What type of a reception would you anticipate such a proposal receiving?

Article No. 524: [Branch from no. 521] posted by Pat Deming on Wed, Nov. 10, 1999, 18:34
Subject: re: Week 13 (All Groups) Q1: 3 paradigms of dealing with diversity in organizations
The most common is the discrimination-and-fairness due to the fact that diversity has grown out of mandates, and has changed little. The use of the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm should be related to the same as when doing a reorganization of the company. The activities are to be performed not for the sake of head count, but for the productive ideas, practices, and teaming that results. The most effective implementation would result from getting all members in the organization to express their ideas and viewpoint not only from experience, but also their heritage. The reception in my organization would be quite mixed. The most interesting observations would be due to the fact that those who talk big of generating ideas from the mass may unearth some latent adversity to an idea if it came from a person of different cultural background or expression. The danger is also that some good ideas may face a difficult reception by the masses if indifference arose to the idea change due to the generators cultural affiliations.

Article No. 527: [Branch from no. 524] posted by Dan Cook on Thu, Nov. 11, 1999, 19:50
Subject: re: Week 13 (All Groups) Q1: 3 paradigms of dealing with diversity in organizations

Can someone help me with where we find the reading: Diversity in the Workplace? Thnx
Article No. 528: [Branch from no. 527] posted by Emit Plat on Thu, Nov. 11, 1999, 20:15
Subject: re: Week 13 (All Groups) Q1: 3 paradigms of dealing with diversity in organizations
Dan, it is "attached" to the first, and only, slide found in the All Course Slides for week 13 (bottom right hand corner of the slide).

Article No. 533: [Branch from no. 521] posted by Ralph Morris on Thu, Nov. 11, 1999, 21:50
Subject: re: Week 13 (All Groups) Q1: 3 paradigms of dealing with diversity in organizations
I have a limited scope in this area being from a white male dominated profession (agribusiness) and the fact that I have worked out of my home for many years. The most prevalent paradigm in my experience would be probably #2 (access & legitimacy) -- a celebration of difference for the most part. A selfish realization that something has to be done to access markets that you currently do not enjoy and effectiveness that existing people are not getting accomplished. I do believe that our company, and for the most part our industry, has a mixture of the three paradigms. My reaction to their proposal is that it makes sense and why do we have to be told that. It is like duh, no kidding! It is quite obvious to me and would like to think that is the trend for our company. We partially accomplish this but have a long way to go. I enjoyed this reading and realize this and other tools we managers have available to us should make slow but sure strides in getting there all the way. I called and talked to two women in our office and spoke with them quite openly about how they perceive our company is on diversity issues. I wished we had other cultures and races from which I could also gain feedback from. I wasn't too terribly surprised by much of what they said. I truly think that if our managers were more aware and appreciative of these issues, they would make an honest effort to change. It may take some time and it will take persistent efforts.

Article No. 535: [Branch from no. 533] posted by Philip Vance on Thu, Nov. 11, 1999, 22:43
Subject: re: Week 13 (All Groups) Q1: 3 paradigms of dealing with diversity in organizations
I don't have much to add here because Ralph pretty much summed it up from what we see in our company. I would agree that we are in the second paradigm. This is testament to the fact that the last couple hires have been for the purpose to attack new markets we haven't been able to get. I like the paradigm of learning-and-effectiveness. I think this is where most companies will have to go to stay competitive in the future. I think the case about the woman not responding at work like she has in a community setting is more real life than we realize. In my opinion, this is one of the biggest challenges a manager has to face today. We have to create an environment where any employee, regardless of race, sex, age, or position, will feel open to give opinion and create new ideas without feeling that "preset traditional formula to behave".

Teaching Quantitative Material: Allan Gray

The quantitative analysis course is a 4-credit course taught in the first module of the program. The course was designed to cover a number of topics in statistical analysis and quantitative modeling of economic problems including: descriptive statistics, probability theory, hypothesis testing, regression analysis, time series analysis, and Monte Carlo simulation.

The students in the course came from a wide variety of quantitative backgrounds ranging from almost no background to one person whose primary job was quantitative analysis. The students' professional experience and desire to have immediate applicability created added pressure to illustrate the relevance of quantitative analysis in managerial decision making early on in the course. The need to create relevance meant that abstract concepts must be made concrete through relevant and current examples in the agribusiness industry. While creating a quantitative course that was highly relevant and immediately applicable the time commitment for both the students and the instructor had to be considered.

The fundamental goal of the quantitative analysis course is to develop a working proficiency of the quantitative tools used in managerial decision-making and become proficient in interpreting results, identifying problems with analyses, and making decisions using results. More specifically the course objectives are:

1. To create an awareness of the importance of quantitative analysis in the decision making process.
2. To develop proficiency in the use of spreadsheets to facilitate quantitative analyses.
3. To become comfortable with interpreting results of quantitative analyses and using them in decision-making.

The strategy for delivering the course consists of three interrelated components. First, traditional lectures were designed using PowerPoint, voice recordings and HTML and delivered via the Internet. These lectures were designed to summarize and reinforce key concepts from the textbook by creating an interactive environment that allowed for additional learning tools to be easily accessed by the students. The second component for delivery of the course was a series of assignments. Assignments were designed to solve a particular problem (a mini-case study) using the methods being discussed in the lecture. The assignment was broken into weekly tasks that related specifically to the topic of the lecture for that week. Completion of a particular assignment coincided with completion of the particular lecture topic (usually three to four weeks in length). Finally, the use of various means of communication was an integral part of the learning process in this course. The communication between the instructor and the students was conducted over the telephone, through e-mail, and through the discussion forum. Specific office hours were set-aside to guarantee access to the instructor and to the TA. E-mail and discussion forum questions were answered within a 24-hour period.

Adjustments were made throughout the semester as the issue of workload was revisited and revised. However, in the end, the combination of the lectures, assignments, and communications access were viewed very favorably by the students and proved very effective for delivering the course. The student evaluation of the lecture delivery was 4.5 on 5 point Likert scale where 1 reflected strong disagreement and 5 reflected strong agreement. The assignments were rated at an average of 4.2. In addition students indicated strong disagreement with the statement that their quantitative skills were strong coming into the course (2.6 on a scale of 5) and showed strong agreement with the statement that their quantitative skills were improved after the course (4.2 on a scale of 5).

The lecture material was delivered in several formats including a movie style traditional PowerPoint lecture with voice over and an HTML version of the lecture with additional learning tools embedded. The additional learning tools consisted of animated and interactive spreadsheets as well as immediate feed back self-tests. Each of these delivery methods will be discussed in detail below.

Traditional classroom style lecture material was developed using PowerPoint. A voice recording of the traditional lecture "as if it were given in a classroom" was made that lasted approximately 45 minutes. This slide presentation/voice lecture was delivered to the students by creating a link to a downloadable file containing a "movie of the lecture." The intent of this delivery mechanism was to give the students an overview of the chapter in the textbook. By delivering the lecture material in a "movie" type format the students were forced to view the material from start to finish, take notes, compile questions on the parts they didn't understand, and see the "big picture" of the topic for the week.

The PowerPoint lecture was also converted to an HTML version and embedded in the WebCT environment. The purpose of the HTML version of the lecture is to allow student to review parts of the lecture that were unclear from the "movie" and provide access to additional learning tools to help facilitate the learning process. The reason both versions of the lecture are needed is so that the time spent on lecture material can be managed properly. Using only the HTML version, where students have complete control of the pace, students tend to spend too much time trying to understand concepts that may be made more clear in later parts of the lecture. By having the students view the lecture in its entirety before engaging in other tasks, much of the time lost trying to understand a particular slide can be avoided. However, delivering the lecture only in a "movie" format does not take advantage of the learning tools available to help the students understand the concepts.

The primary learning tools used in this course to supplement the more traditional lectures were animated and interactive spreadsheets and self quizzes. The example spreadsheets were used to show applications of the textbook material to "real" problems in the food and agricultural industry. In addition, some spreadsheets were delivered using streaming video to illustrate the mechanics of building a spreadsheet to address the issue or problem being discussed. The interactive spreadsheets allowed students to use spreadsheets designed to address specific problems, change the numbers in the spreadsheets, and see how the particular statistics or decision variables were affected by those changes. Each of these learning tools was made available via a hyperlink provided in the margins of the particular lecture slide in the WebCT environment.

The self-quiz was also used as a supplemental learning tool to the traditional lectures. Self-quizzes were available to the students in the WebCT environment and were placed periodically through the lecture slides to help reinforce student understanding of the material. The self-quizzes were designed to give immediate feedback to the students when they answered the questions. The self-quizzes proved to be quite beneficial in areas where the subject material tends to be a bit more abstract. For example, several students commented that the self-quizzes really helped them better understand the use of Z-tables and areas of the normal probability curve.

In closing, for a young faculty member with very little experience with executive audience teaching the quantitative analysis course in the EMBA program was both a challenging and rewarding experience. Teaching to such a motivated set of students places the instructor under constant pressure to deliver relevant material in a concise and interesting fashion. While these same pressures exist in the traditional classroom they are magnified in a distance education environment. However, the opportunity to interact with a highly motivated and extremely talented group of leaders from the food and agribusiness industry and to try new and interesting ways of delivering education is a truly rewarding experience.

On-line Experiential Projects: Mike Boehlje

The fundamental goal of the food and agribusiness environment and managerial economics course is to inform students of the dramatic changes occurring throughout the food and agribusiness industries from genetic material and input suppliers to food consumers; the fundamental forces behind those changes; and the economic and managerial concepts that can be useful in analyzing these changes and managing the agribusiness firm to successfully shape and respond to these changes. More specifically, the course objectives are:

1. To familiarize students with the current and expected future characteristics of the various segments and industries of the food production, processing and distribution sector.
2. To introduce the basic elements, concepts and structure of managerial economics, strategic positioning and value chain analysis in agricultural industries.
3. To identify critical issues that will be the focal point of strategic decisions by participants in the food supply chain.

The strategy for content delivery for the course is very traditional and is based on a set of assigned readings. Two books provide the core reading material:

1. *Food System 21: Gearing Up for the New Millennium.* EC-710, Department of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University, pp. 1-432, 1997.
2. Besanko, David, *et. al. Economics of Strategy*, Wiley, New York, 1996.

Success in teaching content and engaging students through assigned readings has always been difficult. In traditional educational systems the lectures, class discussions and case studies can be used as effective reinforcement mechanisms to engage the students in the material and encourage as well as facilitate and evaluate the understanding and application of that material. The challenge with distance delivery is to accomplish these same goals using different didactic tools. The tools used in this specific course are: 1) content quizzes; 2) discussion dialogue questions; 3) current events briefs; and 4) cases/projects. The first two of these tools are standard fare for educational programs; here the current events briefs and a major team project assignment will be discussed to illustrate their use in the course.

The prime educational objective of the current events briefs and project activities was to apply the concepts and ideas presented in the written materials to the solution of real world problems. The fundamental premise of this approach from an educational design perspective is that effective application of concepts and ideas suggests or implies an understanding of those ideas. A critical and very important further benefit of using these tools in an executive education program is the opportunity to illustrate and reinforce the practical application and usefulness of what might appear to be relatively abstract concepts and ideas.

<u>The Current Events Briefs</u> The purpose of the current events briefs was to apply the concepts, principles and ideas discussed in the reading and reference materials to current real world problems and issues. The student's task was to identify an important current event reported in the press or elsewhere that relates to the topical material of the assigned module and, write a brief that follows the format identified below. This brief was to be written with the perspective that the student's superior and/or colleagues are the audience, and the task was to convey to them the importance of this newsworthy event to their business/agency/organization. The brief was required to use the following structure:

1. Topic Heading
2. Background/Setting (including citation of source)
3. The Problem/Issue
4. Assumptions and Analysis
5. Implication/Solutions/Decision/Recommendation

Current events briefs were posted by each student for each content module in the course. These briefs were evaluated by the instructor with the prime focal point being the effectiveness in applying concepts to understand, analyze, and solve real world problems. Feedback on the briefs was initially provided in written form, but audio file feedback was used in the last half of the course to expand the personal dimension of the student-instructor relationship and facilitate further student engagement. The audio file feedback was very well received by the students. Even more valuable feedback was obtained in the form of peer review and commentary. The current events briefs were posted in a forum for review and comment by all participants in the class. A number of the briefs stimulated extensive dialogue and discussion in this forum, further reinforcing the education experience of the students.

<u>The Risk Project</u> The fundamental goal of the risk project was to reinforce the application of the economic and risk management concepts taught in the food and agribusiness environment course, and the quantitative tools taught in the quantitative assessment course to an actual decision problem. The students were asked to identify and conceptualize a problem that had important and significant risk

and uncertainty dimensions, to collect appropriate date relevant to that problem, to analyze that problem with the appropriate risk analysis tools and techniques, and to draw conclusions and implications and/or make recommendations based on that analysis. This project was done in teams and the work activity extended over a period of approximately four weeks. Each team was asked to submit a complete written report that included an executive summary, background information, a description of the problem to be analyzed, the data used, justification for the tools used, analysis of the quantitative results, and set of recommendations.

The students also made a presentation to the instructors who role-played senior management. A professional quality presentation was required with integrated phone conferencing and student controlled Internet delivered PowerPoint visual support. Each student was required to present a segment of the report and the 'senior management team' (instructors) asked questions to assess understanding of concepts as well as their application to the problem and the practical interpretation of the results. The Internet/telephone conferences lasted for approximately 1-1/2 hours per team. Questions were structured so that each team member was expected and required to have a full and complete understanding of both the economic/management concepts and the quantitative tools and their pragmatic application.

The projects chosen for analysis by the students were substantive and real. Many of them have led to further subsequent analyses with reports to managers within the respective companies. The presentations were very professional with no technological problems -- presenting teams and the instructors were impressed with the effectiveness of the technology to simulate in-person presentations and conference/workshop dialogue. Peer supported learning along with facilitation and coaching by the instructors (particularly the quantitative analysis instructor) created an exceptional experiential learning experience for the students.

Summary: Jay Akridge

This session provided a set of ideas related to the on-line learning environment and to specific teaching tools that were found to be effective in bringing managerial content to experienced food and agribusiness managers. Questions in the discussion session at the conclusion of the formal remarks addressed areas such as time requirements for course development. The time investment is dependent totally on the tools used in the course. A course like quantitative methods with extensive lecture material, animated spreadsheets, etc. takes a far greater investment than a course based primarily on readings. Other questions addressed faculty support for course development. In the response, the important of both adequate faculty support for taking a course on-line and the importance of adequate lead-time was emphasized. Finally, the issue of grading executives in these types of programs was discussed. For the Purdue program, executives are held to the same standards as on-campus students. In the end, the session provided an excellent exchange of ideas for enhancing the use of distance learning tools to teach agribusiness management to working professionals.