

"Our programs are designed around the student's needs," says Doug Lynch, vice dean of the Graduate School of Education. "If you want to be full-time here, we create an environment in which you can do that and get the most out of the university. If you are working full-time and coming here, we don't give you a watered-down version of the same thing. We actually design the program to leverage the fact that you are working."

With so many programs to choose from, decide which one is right for you by starting your research and studying now. Two local students share their stories on their return back to school. They describe what works for them, why they chose the school they did, and how they're succeeding.

Drexel University's e-Learning Program

Student: Mary Jane Gray



For 59 year-old Mary Jane Gray, it was the convenience of Drexel's online Master's in Nursing that drew her to the renowned West Philadelphia university. A senior case manager for Keystone Mercy Health Plan in

Philadelphia, Gray decided to pursue a graduate degree to expand her knowledge base in nursing after a promotion to a more senior position. "I feel there's a need for leaders in the nursing profession," she says. She started the program, which is 100 percent online, in September 2007. She currently takes two classes at a time and has been thrilled with her experience.

Online programs run the gamut from professional education certificates to full and part-time master's programs—all from the comfort of your home computer. With online courses, classes can be taught strictly over the Internet or online activities can be combined with classroom work. They can also cost less than traditional on-campus programs.

The Master's in Nursing is just one of the many accredited master's programs offered through Drexel University's e-Learning program. Other graduate areas of study that can be completed online include clinical research, business, information sciences/systems, engineering, education, sports management and the arts. Students can also pursue post-graduate certificates online in education, retail leadership, computer security technology, engineering management, healthcare informatics, nursing, clinical research, public health, toxicology and industrial hygiene.

But just because the programs are online, doesn't mean they are any less rigorous or rewarding. Classes are taught by the same faculty as on-campus programs, and they apply the same academic standards and curriculum. Drexel's MBA Anywhere, for example, integrates leadership and ethics, and offers specializations in marketing, finance, entrepreneurship, information systems strategy and engineering management. When they graduate, e-Learning students receive the same Drexel degree as traditional students.

While the motivation to "attend" class falls on the student, Gray says it's easy to lose track of time and spend more time in her online classes than she would at a traditional on-campus class. "Teachers post lessons, you do the readings, and then they post questions that you will answer,"

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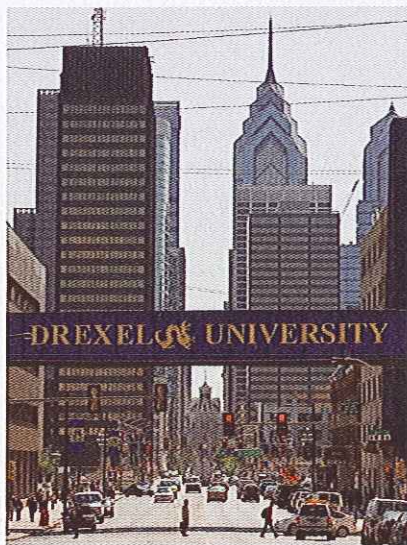
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“Statisticians estimate that the average person has three careers in their lifetime, some say even more.”

she explains. “There is a discussion board where you answer, and people can respond to your answers. You have to keep checking back to see how people respond. You can spend as much time as you want, or as little.”

While flexibility for professionals is a key advantage of an online program, Gray says that a challenge can be the lack of immediate teacher-student feedback if you have questions about the material. However, this usually pushes the student to solve the question or problem on their own, ultimately helping them glean more knowledge. “I don’t feel disadvantaged at all,” she says. “Sometimes I’d like to ask questions on the spot if I’m reading something. It puts more of the onus on me to do the research.”

Still, to offer students more interaction and instant feedback, Drexel e-Learning courses include virtual classrooms at specific times and days when the entire class can log on. Students are set up with a headset and microphone, so they can ask questions, have discussions and hear one another participating. Students and professors can also communicate via e-mail, and group projects can be completed through “live classrooms,” which are similar to virtual classrooms and parallel chat rooms or blogs.

In addition to the flexibility, the cost of the program was another incentive for Gray to pick Drexel over other programs in the area. The university works with more than 200 corporations, health systems, schools and associations to provide continuing education to employees at a discounted tuition rate. Keystone Mercy is included in that program. “I checked with other schools that I was interested in,” Gray says, “but the tuition was astronomical for me.”

While skeptical at first, Gray says she is very pleased with her experience as an online student thus far and that Drexel has made everything convenient and user-friendly. “I don’t think it’s for everyone,” she acknowledges, “but for me, it works. I find it convenient, working full-time. I can be online any time I want. Everything is at my fingertips.”

Gray is expected to receive her graduate degree in August 2009. She is confident that it will help her in her new leadership role, so that she can be the best nurse she can be.

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