With over a dozen master’s programs, two doctoral offerings and two certifications, the graduate studies programs at Salisbury University provide students with a diverse and robust range of options for professional advancement and personal enrichment.

A move into the digital world was the next logical step for SU, and the Geographic Information Systems Management (GISM) graduate program did just that in 2014, moving toward a fully online offering, a first for the school and a major bellwether of things to come.

That number triples this fall as the Master of Business Administration and Master of Social Work programs come online, meaning the campus at SU is truly becoming a global endeavor.

“It’s so interesting in an online world,” Dr. Clifton Griffin, dean of graduate studies and research, said. “Now that these programs are going online you could say your target audience is the whole world.”

Griffin said the new programs would start out small, with roughly 15-20 students each, although the potential for growth is nearly unlimited.

“As far as where they go from there and how big it gets, it’s really up to us as far as the capacity,” Griffin said. “There are M.B.A. programs online you could say your target audience is the whole world.”

Griffin said the new programs would start out small, with roughly 15-20 students each, although the potential for growth is nearly unlimited.

“Military people move,” Griffin said. “These folks are going to start this degree program in Germany, all this money is being invested and within a year they’re probably going to move – they’re not going to finish it. If we don’t have an online version, what we’re doing is we’re pretty much guaranteeing we’re going to offer a bunch of courses to folks in the military and affiliated folks and they’re never going to complete their degree – they might complete their degree with someone else, but they’re not going to complete it with us.

“Once we get them affiliated with Salisbury University, we want to be able to graduate them,” Griffin continued. “Social work had been talked about for years, but that was the final, ‘okay, we’ve got to do this now’ for a variety of reasons.”

Griffin said the school also is expanding its recruiting base and adjusting its tuition model in anticipation of the online expansion.

“What do people want? Access and speed,” Griffin said. “For me it’s all about providing a higher level of access and kind of broadening our perspective. By not having any online degrees at all this time last year, you’re just limiting yourself as far as what your potential could be. Really the goal is to increase access, provide a high-quality graduate experience online and continue to broaden the SU reach.”

Ultimately the expansion, Griffin said, was driven by the quality and demand of the existing residential programs.

“It’s really not any kind of rocket science,” Griffin said. “It was kind of amazing to me that I got here in 2010 and we weren’t offering any of this yet. It’s certainly amazing by the time you get to 2014 and 2015 if there’s not a single degree program online for a university of our size. It’s part of the normal maturation and growth of our university in 2015.

“Aside from the great programs that already have been approved for online delivery, there are discussions to consider offering the Master of Education and the Doctor of Education in an online format in the future,” Griffin continued.
GRADUATE GOES ONLINE

Dr. Michael Scott on the M.S. GISM Program

Scott, in his 17th year at SU, specializes in geographic information systems (GIS) and environmental hazards.

Responding to a major workforce initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor, the GIS Management (GISM) Program is the only program in the country focused on GIS management.

Scott said the Department of Labor “identified the GIS industry as one of the fastest growing job needs over the next 20 years.”

“Our program is essentially 50 percent technical education and 50 percent management education, blending the best of both,” he said.

Although convenience and accessibility are two of the major benefits of the new online programs, Scott said SU’s offerings would go much deeper than that.

“The ability to complete a graduate program while working, or one that is not near your home, is very attractive,” he said. “But I think that potential students don’t immediately recognize other benefits as well.”

“The majority of communication in our online graduate program is written,” Scott continued. “Communicating well in written form, particularly electronic, is a critical component of a successful professional career in 2015. Similarly, working in teams that are distributed across time and space is becoming the norm at many large businesses. Online graduate programs teach that implicitly.”

According to Scott, the typical residential graduate seminar can often be dominated by a few students. He shared: “Online there is nowhere to hide (and) everyone is responsible for contributing to discussions. On top of that, you usually have a bit more time to read and consider the opinions presented. This enables all students to get the most out of any discussion.”

Scott said the program targets “mid-career professionals who either want to retrain into the very dynamic technical field of GIS or are already working as GIS technicians and want to make the move to a management role.”

“We do have some freshly minted college graduates who are picking up their advanced education first before transitioning to their career,” Scott added.

Scott foresees the school adding more technical components to the program in the future, although he cautioned against offering what he called a “full-on technical master’s degree.”

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Classes begin in June 2015
An SU professor since 2001, Hyman served as the social work director of the undergraduate program for three years and is currently in her first year as the graduate program director.

Although her specific areas of research interest are focused on the mental health consequences of trauma, the cultural humility of social work students, and the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as they age, Hyman said the faculty in the Social Work Department have varied interests representing all aspects of the field.

“The Social Work Department is committed to reaching out to people who might not ordinarily be able to participate in one of our programs,” Hyman said. “With this in mind, we began the satellite program in 2007 and currently offer our bachelor’s and master’s programs at five sites in Maryland and to military personnel and their dependents in Europe.”

The Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) Program was engineered to prepare graduates to work successfully in community-based settings, including schools, hospitals, health departments, mental health clinics and child welfare organizations.

The expanded online program, according to Hyman, allows students with “complicated lives” to work toward those goals and participate in high-quality graduate social work education.

“Of course students also will need a high level of competence in technology and self-discipline in order to participate,” Hyman said, adding that students also must be prepared to engage in field internships in social work settings near their home two-to-three days a week for two academic years.

Although the program is currently only approved for the State of Maryland, Hyman said SU is applying for approval to offer the M.S.W. to residents of contiguous states including Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

“We are hoping to attract motivated students who have completed any undergraduate major and who have a passion for helping others and working hard,” she said. “For the next few years, we will focus on our existing programs and the new online M.S.W., but we hope to offer more opportunities to study abroad as well.”
Yvonne Downie on the M.B.A. Program

Downie, who has previous experience in sales and marketing in the telecommunications and manufacturing industries, left the corporate world and came to SU in October, 2009.

“I was heavily involved in the export/import side of the business, then became more involved in the sales/marketing area,” she said. “My role in sales/marketing led me to my interest in enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, more specifically, customer relationship management (CRM) systems.

“I really loved the business processes behind the scenes,” Downie continued. “I loved the idea of breaking down the processes, making improvements, and being able to measure those improvements and initiate change and take on the change agent role.”

Downie said the Franklin P. Perdue School of Business’ membership in the SAP University Alliance allows SU access to the latest ERP software, giving it a clear technical edge.

“One of the distinctions of our program is that we incorporate SAP – systems applications and products, an ERP system – used by organizations worldwide,” Downie said. “We can use the functionality of SAP to simulate business processes across accounting, production, materials planning, sales, etc.

“The student is able to become familiar with SAP and also the integrated nature of business,” Downie continued. “We also use different analytic and data visualization tools in our Analytical CRM class.”

With the residential Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) Program at SU already thriving, Downie believes the kind of flexibility offered by the online alternative will appeal to the “working professionals” targeted by Griffin.

“For many working professionals, attending class for three hours in the evening is not a viable option,” she said.

“The online M.B.A. is designed for anyone who wants or needs to be able to control when to ‘go’ to class,” she said. “The individual who works nights, days and flexible shifts would certainly benefit from the online M.B.A. program’s convenience and flexibility.”

Parents, Downie said, also stand to benefit from the program.

“If you are a parent and have active kids, going to class at a certain time may also not be viable,” she said. “The idea of being able to log in and complete assignments on your own time – be it 5 a.m. or 11 p.m. – is not only practical but empowering. You can control your class time, your pace and your success.”

While the program looks to have a broad appeal, Downie also recognizes one size does not necessarily fit all, and she hopes to expand SU’s offerings of the M.B.A. in the future, adding additional specializations and certifications.

“I speak to many individuals who are anxious about jumping into a graduate degree program,” she said. “Those individuals could certainly start slowly, complete a certificate program and ease into the M.B.A.”

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