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Occupational Safety and Health offers online courses

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

During the academic year, Monica Frechen lives on campus, but during the summer, she would have to commute an hour and 40 minutes from her home north of Lansing to Oakland University for classes. This summer, thanks to online classes, the Occupational Safety and Health graduate student has been able to get ahead in her studies without spending any money on gas.

This summer was the first time Frechen participated in an online course, but she already plans to do it again. She will take two online and two on-campus classes this fall.

"The online classes are a really good learning experience," said Frechen, who participated in the OSH 520 Advanced Safety and Health Administration course. "Our group had a conference call every Sunday night. We were actually talking to each other, assigning duties and asking questions. Throughout the week we could post questions to the message boards and e-mail each other."

Frechen graduated at the end of the winter semester. She has less hands-on experience than some of her classmates but Frechen said they were able to teach her a lot.

"Everyone in my group was working in the field. I haven't had a whole lot of work experience. What I didn't understand from the book, other people could answer my questions based on their real-world experience," Frechen said. "There is a lot of interaction even though it is an online class. You can't sit back and watch others do the work. You have to participate."

Neal Saiz, HC '94, took OSH 520 online and was in Frechen's group and said he has taken online classes before but OU uses of Moodle, a good, comprehensive tool for online course delivery.

"We were all learning from each other," said Saiz, who has been working in safety since 1992. "Within the course, there are always a couple of natural leaders. We rotated roles so that everyone was in the leadership role."

Saiz has started master's programs at a few different institutions a few times, but he moved a few times and didn't have the flexibility in his job or the graduate program to finish. He learned about OU's OSH online program and decided to start the program, but knows he can stick with it even if he has to relocate again. It also works out for him because he has a family at home.

"In the evening, after everyone goes to bed, I work on my coursework," Saiz said. "I am still able to spend time with my family and work on the coursework at a more convenient time."

Saiz said with the online course, the group has to make a connection, even if that means meeting on campus once or twice a semester. For his group, the weekly conference calls helped them get to know each other on a more personal level.

"The online class was more work than an on-campus class. Everyone got a lot of out of the class. It's a lot more flexible than the traditional classroom course, but it's not easier. It's noticeable to the entire class if you get behind. You have to post a lot and you have to do your work," Saiz said.

Charles McGlothlin, professor and director of the OSH program, said that the master's classes were offered online first and the undergraduate classes will be offered online as well.

"It was a great class with great participation and from the student feedback, it was a great learning experience as well," McGlothlin said. McGlothlin said the online courses will continue to be evaluated for continuous improvement.

Frechen, who wants to work as a safety director in a hospital or in construction, said the OU professors were the main reason she participated in OU's master's program.

"Oakland has one of the top programs for occupational safety and health in the nation. Oakland University professors are great and the learning experience is amazing," Frechen said.

For more on OU's OSH program, visit the **Occupational Safety and Health** Web site.

SUMMARY

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