

WHAT TO EXPECT AS A DEL-MEM STUDENT

You are about to join a community of environmental professionals, from across the world, from diverse backgrounds, ready to reinvigorate their environmental, management, and leadership skills by participating in a masters degree program. The pillars for fulfilling the Nicholas School of the Environment's mission is based on creating knowledge, creating global leaders, and forging a sustainable future.

As a student in the Duke Environmental Leadership Master of Environmental Management (DEL-MEM) program, you will contribute to the fulfillment of this mission and, upon successfully completing the program, be better prepared to lead and manage our world towards a more sustainable path. This on its own is a tall order. Accomplishing this mid-career, while still employed, adds its own hurdles. Stepping back into a "classroom" years later can be intimidating. Add a family and personal life to the mix and things get complicated. Incorporate a distance-learning format, and your head may begin to spin! Getting an advanced degree from Duke University is certainly not easy. But, the experiences you gain, the new friends and colleagues you will make, and the outcomes you take with you will be incredibly rewarding and well worth your effort and time.

The following is a compilation of advice, tips, and expectations from DEL students, alumni, faculty and staff on the expectations and realities of going back to school, how to embrace distance-learning, and being part of the DEL-MEM family (an experience that endures long after you graduate).

Course Work

- Don't get caught-up in the notion of grades or being an "academic superstar." As mid-career professionals, grades are no longer important. What IS important is getting the most out of the academic experience. Be vocal (not over-bearing) and participate (not monopolize) in web conferences, discussion boards, etc. What you put into it, is what you'll get out of it!
- Take the time to do the course readings--it is worth it! The courses are typically set-up in modules, giving you time to catch-up if one week is busier than the other.
- Utilize your teaching assistants. They are there to help in all aspects of the course and can provide great feedback and support.
- Keep discussion board posts short and to the point. Everyone is in the same boat; writing a book on the discussion when you can get your point across in a few sentences doesn't help anyone. Follow the posting guidelines provided in each syllabus and be sure to understand the expectations.
- Take advantage of opportunities to submit assignments early for a pre-graded review, when offered. Be sure to meet deadlines – and don't expect to be accommodated if you miss a pre-graded review of your work.

- Start early on group projects. Scheduling a team of students from across the world with different work schedules and commitments can be challenging and may require more time. The Project Group Suggestions document (provided in leadership materials) may be helpful.
- Be cognizant that your peers live in various parts of the country/world and that everyone needs to be accommodating and mindful when scheduling meetings and/or project tasks.
- Be cognizant of your professor's, TA's, and DEL's schedules. Do not expect answers to questions in the middle of the night or over the weekend (unless those are established office hours). Do not wait until the last minute to ask important assignment/project/test questions or to ask for an extension – it's possible that he/she will not see the question until it's too late.
- Embrace the culture of "group effort" to get to the finish line TOGETHER! You are all in this program TOGETHER and peer support can go a long way. Be accountable to yourself and your peers.
- Pull your weight during group projects. You will have multiple opportunities to play different roles within each group. Make sure you take your turn to step-up (and be sure to allow others to participate, too). Do not leave your group hanging; 360 peer reviews on group participation are common.

Master's Project

- The summer between your 1st and 2nd year is not a time to disconnect from the DEL program. You are expected to meet various deadlines for your MP after the summer and in order to meet these deadlines, you will need to be working on your MP and keeping in touch with your advisor.
- Don't let MP deadlines slip. Staying on track will make your life far easier; if you fall behind on deadlines you will make your life far more stressful.
- If you are conducting interviews or surveys, be sure to complete the IRB process EARLY. You cannot conduct interviews without receiving a formal exemption.
- Be mindful of MP requirements and stresses during the final semester for 2nd year students when working on course group projects. Planning ahead can help eliminate stressful situations.
- Review the deadlines, samples, and guidelines provided to you. Know where they are and use them!

The Realities

- Orientation week is exhausting! You will be overloaded with information and it will all seem very overwhelming. Remember, all of the information provided to you is also provided via other resources (i.e., Student Manual, website) for future reference. Do not get frustrated. Take in as much as you can.

- Accept that your first semester may be the hardest. You are incorporating a very intensive, time-consuming aspect into your already busy life and it will take time to balance everything. It will certainly be a “shock” to your system. Be ready for it. After your first semester you will be a “pro” at managing everything!
- Distance learning does not mean easier. In fact, it may take more time and effort to stay on top of your schedule and stay connected within the program. The strains and stresses of pursuing your academic endeavors are compounded by your existing personal life, family, and career.
- Pursuing an advanced degree from Duke University is very rigorous. You are held to the same level of academic quality and expectations as on-campus students. You are held to the same honor code and code of conduct.
- The DEL-MEM is a distance-based program. Your campus interactions are minimal. Access to academic resources, including faculty, administrative support, and the library is not the same as those attending a brick-and-mortar program. All of these resources are readily available to you and are integrated into the program, but you must be open to accessing these resources in an online environment.
- The DEL-MEM program is a different paradigm than your undergraduate experience. It is similar to taking on a second job. The DEL-MEM is a professional degree and is pursued by students wanting to update their skills, become better leaders and managers, and make a difference in the environment and in their careers.
- You will feel overloaded at times; you may have moments of panic. You are not alone. Take a step back to put things in perspective. Talk with your peers and faculty to work through those moments.
- The DEL-MEM program is designed to be much more than just the knowledge you gain. It’s about the connections and relationships you establish with your peers and professors. Take advantage of the place-based sessions to develop these relationships.
- The DEL-MEM program provides a wealth of information and opportunities. It is not and cannot be, however, everything to everyone. Access to experiences outside of the DEL-MEM program is dependent upon availability, accessibility, and interest on the part of the other programs and/or faculty.
- It is a rigorous program with *incredible* rewards at the end!

Program Expectations

- Respond to emails and inquiries in a timely manner from your faculty and the DEL program staff. All communication from the DEL Office is via email. The amount of email will be minimized as much as possible. Requests requiring your immediate attention or response will include “URGENT” in the subject line. It is your responsibility to respond as requested; if you miss deadlines, you will not be

hounded and you may not be accommodated. In some instances, missing deadlines related to graduation and your master's project may result in you not being able to graduate on time!

- Communicate, communicate, and communicate!
- We are all adults – take responsibility for yourself and your learning. Use the resources provided by the professors and the DEL program to find answers to your questions and enhance your learning. Be proactive. Do not rely on faculty, staff, or your peers to provide you with reminders – you must be organized and on top of academic and program requirements.
- Take advantage of the tremendous intellectual capital that exists at the Nicholas School and Duke University. Take the time to seek out resources and connections. Network. Note, however, not all of the resources available at Duke are easily available to distance learning students. This is a reality and must be considered when seeking resources outside of the DEL program.

Essential Keys to Success

- Learn how to manage your time quickly. Set a schedule that includes your weekly course meeting commitments and group project meetings. Block off time each week in your calendar to complete your asynchronous learning activities (reading, viewing recorded presentations, assignments).
- Get comfortable with a computer, the Internet, checking email frequently, discussion boards, MS Office applications, web conferencing, and Skype. It will make communicating and keeping up with coursework easier.
- COMMUNICATE! Communication cannot be stressed enough in all aspects of this program. Don't leave your faculty and DEL staff wondering what is going on with you or why you appear to be "off the grid." Talk to your professors and DEL staff. They are very reasonable, compassionate people. They know that you have to balance a full-time job, family, and DEL-MEM. Keep them up-to-date with time constraints if you have to travel or are having personal issues that are affecting your academics. You need to communicate before an issue arises; do not wait until you have missed an assignment or have fallen behind. Communication is paramount to your success in this program.
- Talk to your classmates. If you're struggling to understand something, it's likely that others are as well or they may be able to help you through it. Your peers are in your boat and whether it's course-related or personal, they can be a great resource to help you get through it.
- Enjoy the experience!