

MONTANA STATE ONLINE

# GUIDE FOR DISTANCE STUDENTS



Fall 2019



**MONTANA**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

Academic Technology  
& Outreach



# Draw your own map to Online Learning Success

## Welcome to online learning at Montana State University!

Montana State University is known for its world-class faculty, its hands-on, active learning environment and its welcoming “Mountains & Minds” attitude.

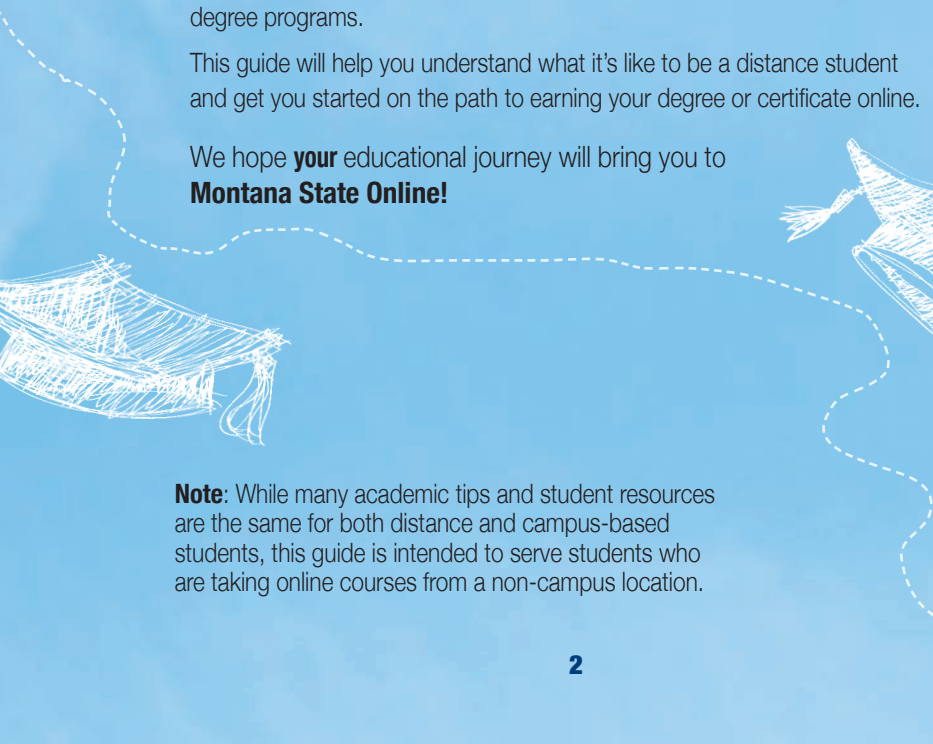
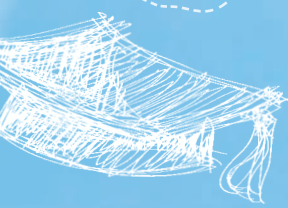
You’ll find that same quality and atmosphere in MSU’s distance programs, along with flexibility and support that allows you to succeed as an online student no matter where you are in your career path.

A pioneer in distance learning, MSU houses one of the oldest and most established networks of online graduate science courses, The National Teachers Enhancement Network (NTEN), which has been operating continuously since 1993.

Each year, MSU adds new and different online undergraduate and graduate courses, professional development opportunities, and graduate certificate and degree programs.

This guide will help you understand what it’s like to be a distance student and get you started on the path to earning your degree or certificate online.

We hope **your** educational journey will bring you to  
**Montana State Online!**



**Note:** While many academic tips and student resources are the same for both distance and campus-based students, this guide is intended to serve students who are taking online courses from a non-campus location.



## Is online learning right for you?

Online learning requires different strengths than classroom learning. Some of the benefits are the ability to access your course materials at your convenience (at any time, from any place) and to have time to think and reflect before participating in class discussions. However, online learning also requires self-discipline, a comfort level with technology and the capacity to communicate through writing without ever meeting your instructor or peers face to face. **Complete this quick quiz** to decide if online learning is right for you.

	YES	SOME-TIMES	NO
I've been seriously considering earning or completing my degree and am committed to reaching my goal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am self-disciplined, and I take initiative to start projects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I manage my time well, and I am able to prioritize tasks and deadlines.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have access to a computer with a reliable internet connection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable using a computer to email, manage files, and interact with online content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy working autonomously.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am good at comprehending instructions on my own but will ask for help if needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I communicate well in writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that meaningful learning can take place without face-to-face interaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My personal and professional schedule allow me to dedicate at least 5-10 hours or more per week or to my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am good at assessing my own progress and performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that a degree or certificate is beneficial and /or necessary for my career path.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**If you answered mainly YESs**, it sounds like online courses would be a great fit for you!

**If you answered four or more NOs**, online learning may work for you, but you will have to reflect on what you need to do to become a successful online learner.

Online learning requires commitment, self-discipline, some technical savvy, the ability to learn from lengthy reading materials, and the ability to engage in lively online discussions.

# Distance Student Profile:

## Rebecca Christian

### Online bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies

Through MSU's Degree Completion Program, Rebecca was able to complete her undergraduate degree in May 2019, and is now a first year law student in California.



When **REBECCA CHRISTIAN** decided she wanted to become a lawyer, she knew she first needed to complete her undergraduate degree. Although a resident of California, she was also an avid traveler and always on the go. "I knew I wanted to finish my undergraduate degree, but I didn't think I could stay in one place long enough to do it."

She was attracted to the Degree Completion Program at MSU because it allowed her to finish her undergraduate degree while still living in California and traveling the world. "I am so grateful to have found a program that let me finish my degree in a way that fit my lifestyle so I could start moving forward with my dream career."

Rebecca's journey was not without some extreme challenges, however. In November of 2018, the fall of her senior year, her home in California was destroyed by a massive wildfire. But despite this heartbreaking setback she stayed on track and received her degree in May 2019. "The staff and teachers at MSU were so supportive, and somehow, thanks no doubt to all of their patience and efforts, I

managed to finish on time and not let the fire destroy my GPA."

And thanks to some travel assistance offered by the program, Rebecca was able to travel to Bozeman in May 2019 to walk in her graduation ceremony and receive her diploma with her graduating class.

"Thank you so much to the MSU online degree completion program staff. I truly feel as if I wouldn't have graduated without this program and I am so grateful for everyone who is behind it."

Rebecca is currently a first-year law student at McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento and is hoping to work in the human rights sector. "I am very passionate about the rights of minorities and the rights of women."

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For more information, visit  
[montana.edu/liberalstudies/online/](https://montana.edu/liberalstudies/online/)

# What is it like to take an online class?



Online classes can be an exciting challenge for students. You and your instructor may never meet face-to-face but will communicate regularly through email, online discussions or video tools.

Plan to check your email regularly (daily, if possible). This is the primary means of communication between online instructors and distance students.

Some instructors set online office hours when they are “live” and available. Communicate

immediately with the instructor when you know you are having a problem.

You’ll spend a lot of time reading and writing, and quizzes will be given in an online format. Exams may require proctoring.

MSU online courses are self-scheduled, but not self-paced. You will be required to keep up with the class and meet deadlines.

You may take part in group assignments or discussions. Get to know other students, as they may be a useful resource for you.

**“The students come from different walks of life, educational backgrounds and professional experiences and offer different perspectives of Environmental Sciences. Whether my classmates’ backgrounds are in biology or agriculture or something in between, hearing their experiences has been just as beneficial as learning from the professors.”**

**Jerin Borrego**

**Online master’s degree student in Land Resources and Environmental Sciences**

**Anticipated graduation: May 2020**





# How many classes should I take?



How many classes you should take in a given semester depends on several different factors: Are you working full or part-time?

What are your family or community obligations? Do you have any travel plans this semester?

Montana State University uses the following formula for determining the number of hours of work needed for college level courses:

**1 credit\* = 45 hours** of work per semester.

\* (Undergraduate or Graduate)

Thus, a **3 credit course = 135 hours** of work per semester.

A typical fall or spring semester is about 15 weeks, so when you divide 135 hours by 15 weeks, it works out to approximately **nine hours of work per class, per week (for a 3-credit course)**. Keep in mind, some courses may require more work, and some may take less. Some graduate classes also run over a shorter time frame and require more hours per week.

Twelve (12) credits in a semester is considered full time for undergraduate students. For a traditional-aged, campus-based college student who does not work or have children, taking 12 or more credits in a semester is fairly common. This load of courses works out to roughly 36-45 hours a week, which, for someone who isn't working or doesn't have too many other obligations, isn't too much to handle. School is their full time job.

Graduate students' credit loads vary, and rarely exceed 9 credits per semester.

Please carefully consider how much time you will have to devote to your studies before signing up for classes. Montana State Online classes are not self-paced. You will be required to keep up with the class. Even though taking classes online adds additional flexibility for those who can't attend campus-based courses, the **amount** of work in an online class is the same as a campus-based class (and sometimes more).

# Distance Student Profile:

## Erin Walaszczyk

**Online master's degree  
in Land Resources  
and Environmental  
Sciences.**



**ERIN WALASZCZYK** earned a PhD from Michigan State in Fisheries and Wildlife. Her work there was geared toward laboratory research on fish brains. When she found herself in the small mining town of Elko, Nevada, for her husband's job, she quickly learned there were no opportunities for careers specific to her graduate research. Not one to sit idle, Erin looked around for online opportunities for a masters degree that would dovetail with her PhD work but more closely align with her interest in field work.

After careful searching, she discovered the Environmental Sciences program at MSU through the department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences (LRES).

"I've had other online courses at other universities and this program is the best I have ever seen in how it is set up, how much you learn in classes, discussion-based activities and professor engagement. I am very impressed by the caliber and diverse selection of courses, and the affordability of the program."

"I am so happy I found this program. I never thought I'd get so much out of an online platform. I have learned even more than in my standard undergrad or even PhD classes. By interacting with the other students who are

professionals from all over the country, even the world, I have been exposed to a diverse set of career opportunities I hadn't considered before, and I have made excellent professional connections."

Erin has had very positive interactions with the program's faculty "My interactions with faculty have been very engaging; I felt very comfortable asking questions. The faculty want all the students to get as much as possible out of the course. I have formed more personal relationships with the online faculty than I ever had with the faculty I saw in person."

The discussion-based nature of the LRES courses lead to richer learning interactions and deeper personal connections for Erin. Students freely share their backgrounds and professional perspectives and experiences. "Classes are focused and small so you get to know everyone and get comfortable engaging with classmates and professors. We are all working together in a very positive and helpful environment."

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For more information, visit  
[montana.edu/online/degrees/  
environmental-masters](https://montana.edu/online/degrees/environmental-masters)

# How much will it cost?

## Tuition, fees and costs



Costs depend on whether you are an undergraduate or graduate, whether you are a Montana resident or out of state resident, and how many credits you take. See [montana.edu/online/cost](https://montana.edu/online/cost) for the latest tuition and fees information.

Some of the fees you may encounter as an online student include

- Application fee
- Transfer student fee (one-time fee charged to new Transfer students)
- ID card fee (this can be waived if you are a distance student)
- Registration fee (one-time, non-refundable per semester fee)
- College fees
- Lab fees
- Textbooks and materials
- Distributed learning fee and other applicable fees

Student Health Insurance is automatically charged to students who register for 6 or more credits in a given semester. Rates depend on your age. However, the Student Health Insurance can be waived if you are covered by another insurance plan.

For more info see [montana.edu/health](https://montana.edu/health)

## Financial aid

Many students will use some form of financial aid to pay for their college education. This includes scholarships, grants, loans and other types of tuition waivers.

The best information on how to apply for and use financial aid to pay for your education can be found through the MSU Office of Financial Aid's website: [montana.edu/wwwfa](https://montana.edu/wwwfa) or by calling (406) 994-2845.

To be eligible for financial aid, students:

- Must be a US citizen or eligible non-citizen
- Must have a high school diploma or recognized equivalency
- Must be enrolled in an eligible degree or certificate program
- Must be enrolled at least half time (6 semester credits)
- Must be in good standing with any previous federal aid programs
- Must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress

**NOTE:** Requirements will vary with private loans and non-federal sources of aid.

## Tuition payment plan

The tuition payment plan is an installment loan available for qualified applicants. Contact MSU Student Accounts for more information:

[studentaccounts@montana.edu](mailto:studentaccounts@montana.edu)

(406) 994-1991

[montana.edu/ubs/studentaccounts/defpay.html](https://montana.edu/ubs/studentaccounts/defpay.html)



# Applying for admission

## GETTING STARTED:



The application process differs depending on whether you are:

- an undergraduate or graduate student, and,
- returning to MSU or are a new student.

## Undergraduate students

Undergraduates who are *new* to MSU (transferring from elsewhere and/or have not completed their bachelor's degree ) go through the MSU Office of Admissions.

You can apply online at [msuadmissions.org/transfer](https://msuadmissions.org/transfer)

Undergraduates who are *returning* to MSU fill out an “MSU-Bozeman Online Intent to Register” form. You can access this form online by logging into the **My Info** system and going to the “**Student Services**” tab. When you fill out this form, you will need to list any schools you have attended since leaving MSU and have your official transcripts sent to the Registrar's office.

[montana.edu/registrar](https://montana.edu/registrar)

*Continuing* undergraduate MSU students who are entering a new online program fill out a “Change of Curriculum” card available from the Registrar's office. [montana.edu/registrar](https://montana.edu/registrar)

## Graduate students

All graduate students use the online Graduate School application system.

[montana.edu/gradschool/admissions/apply.html](https://montana.edu/gradschool/admissions/apply.html)

You will be asked to provide application materials, including official transcripts, and provide the name and email of your recommenders.

## International students

International students contact the Office of International Programs for more information on how to apply.

[international@montana.edu](mailto:international@montana.edu)

(406) 994-4031

[montana.edu/international/](https://montana.edu/international/)

## TIPS FOR Online Student Success



Getting started in an online program can seem daunting at first. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your online program:

### Work environment



Set up a quiet place in your home where you can study undisturbed. Your computer, room lighting, broadband connection, even your chair—all are key to creating an environment optimized for studying and learning.

### Time and scheduling



Be aware that the flexibility of the online environment can be challenging for students who are prone to procrastination. Don't be fooled by its flexibility! Courses are not self-paced. You will be required to keep up with the class and meet deadlines. Be aware of your dates and deadlines when you start the class; most classes have weekly assignments and discussions.



Find a time management system that works for you. Choose a calendar or time management system that is reliable and easy to update. Make a note of all due dates and set reminders.



Print syllabi and course calendars and keep them in a highly visible place so you can refer to them often.



Set aside time each day to devote to your online class the same way you would for attending a class in person. Make sure you set aside sufficient time each day to study. Think of it as an appointment you can't miss!

### The online learning environment



Log into your online courses as often as you can—at least five times a week—and every day if you can. You don't want to miss out on important updates or discussions that happen in your classes.



Check your email often (daily, if possible) and make sure MSU has your correct, preferred email address.



Be clear in your communications. Whether it is an email or discussion posting, remember that in online courses, the non-verbal cues that are so important in face-to-face communication are nonexistent. Consider composing emails, discussion posts or responses in a word processing document (e.g., Microsoft Word) first, then copying and pasting into the email or course discussion

area. This can give you time to think about what you want to say and how best to say it, and allows you to check for grammar and spelling errors.



Consider that once you post something in an online class, you may not be able to remove it. Think carefully about what you want to say in your post before you submit it.



Ask questions if you are not sure about something. Use the interactive tools available to you (such as the Discussion Board, Pages and Email) to ask your instructors and fellow classmates questions. Keep in mind that what you ask on a Discussion Board can be seen by others in your class, so if you need to ask a question in private, use email.



Keep in mind “Netiquette.” Netiquette is pretty much as it sounds: social guidelines and rules that dictate interaction in online environments. For example, TYPING IN ALL CAPS IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING.

It’s pretty basic: Don’t say things that you wouldn’t normally say to someone in a face-to-face environment. It can be easy to say anything in an environment that feels anonymous, but keep in mind that you are interacting with real people in your online courses. Be careful with sarcasm and humor; it often doesn’t translate in an online environment. Remember, too, that even though you are not in a classroom, you are still expected to abide by the MSU Student Conduct Code (see p. 13).



Keep your class syllabus and read it! The class syllabus is the road map that typically lists all course readings, assignments and deadlines. You can refer to it throughout the course to make sure you are on track.



Online learning can sometimes feel isolating. Be involved and interactive. Taking part in class discussions and communicating with your instructors and your advisor can help you feel more connected.

## Technology



Technology can sometimes fail us. Connectivity fails. Computers crash.

Have a backup plan and keep copies of your work on a cloud or backup device. MSU’s Help Desk phone number is **(406) 994-1777**.

## Advising



Find out who your advisor is. Make an appointment and establish a positive relationship. Prepare for your advising appointment by having your transcripts close by and researching the classes offered as part of your program.

## Personal life



Minimize social distractions. Consider turning off your phone and logging off social networks during study time.



Turn to classmates, a friend or your family for support. If you’re stuck on an assignment or facing writer’s block on a research paper, email or use tools in the online Learning Management System software (Brightspace by D2L) to reach out to a fellow classmate. Talk to your family before you start your degree about the importance of pursuing your degree and how they can support you.



Reward yourself and have fun! Just the fact that you are taking online classes is a tremendous accomplishment. Reward yourself along the way.

# Student Services



## Services available to all MSU students

**MYINFO** - MSU's secure student information portal, allows access to personal information such as transcripts, class schedules, grades, financial aid packages, and pay stubs. You may access MyInfo from anywhere and at any time, even if you are no longer a student at MSU.

[montana.edu/myinfo](http://montana.edu/myinfo)

**BRIGHTSPACE BY D2L** - MSU online classes are delivered using this Online Learning Management System (many campus-based courses use it, as well). A brief, self-paced course introduces you to Brightspace and its tools. For help, contact the support team.

[ecat@montana.edu](mailto:ecat@montana.edu)

**(406) 994-3255 (994-D2LL)**

[ecat.montana.edu](http://ecat.montana.edu)

**DEGREEWORKS** - DegreeWorks provides a convenient way for students to know where they are academically and how they can plan the rest of their college careers. DegreeWorks is an excellent tool for distance students to monitor academic progress anytime, anyplace. However, note that DegreeWorks is not a substitute for consultation with an academic advisor, and students still need to discuss their program of study with their academic advisor.

[montana.edu/degreeworks](http://montana.edu/degreeworks)

**ACADEMIC ADVISING** - Academic advising is provided to students who are admitted to a degree program. Login to MyInfo, click on Student Services, and select Show Advisor.

**MSU WRITING CENTER** - The MSU Writing Center offers online tutoring on a limited basis for distance students. Online tutoring sessions involve document sharing, chat and phone, as needed. To make an appointment, visit [montana.edu/writingcenter](http://montana.edu/writingcenter) and click *Make an Appointment*.

**MSU LIBRARY** - Subject librarian research consultations, chat/phone/email research help, research database, tech help and interlibrary loan are some of the resources available to distance students.

**(406) 994-3139**

[lib.montana.edu](http://lib.montana.edu)

## OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS -

The Office of the Dean of Students advocates for students, works with individual students and student groups, and collaborates with other campus offices to ensure students are successful at MSU.

[deanofstudents@montana.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@montana.edu)

**(406) 994-2826**

[montana.edu/deanofstudents](http://montana.edu/deanofstudents)

## THE GRADUATE SCHOOL -

The Graduate School enriches the graduate student experience by providing excellent service, timely oversight, and relentless advocacy for student success. Graduate students can find graduate-specific resources at the Graduate School website.

[gradschool@montana.edu](mailto:gradschool@montana.edu)

**(406) 994-4145**

[montana.edu/gradschool](http://montana.edu/gradschool)

**DISABILITY SERVICES** - The Office of Disability Services provides access to all college programs, services, activities and facilities for students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation(s), you are encouraged to contact your instructor and the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible.

[drv@montana.edu](mailto:drv@montana.edu) • **(406) 994-2824**

[montana.edu/disabilityservices/](http://montana.edu/disabilityservices/)

**VETERAN SERVICES** - MSU believes in providing access to quality education for all veterans. Veterans Services provides many programs and resources, including the

Veterans Support Center, to help veterans navigate the system and succeed on campus. Contact Veterans Services for more information on services available.

**vets@montana.edu • (406) 994-3661**  
[montana.edu/veteran](http://montana.edu/veteran)

**DIVERSITY AWARENESS OFFICE** - The mission of the Diversity Awareness office is to increase understanding, promote inclusion, and inspire critical thinking about diversity.

**diversityawareness@montana.edu**  
**(406) 994-5801**

[montana.edu/studentdiversity](http://montana.edu/studentdiversity)

**OFFICE OF STUDENT SUCCESS** - The Return-to-Learn Program helps returning MSU students understand the reenrollment process and overcome any hurdles to completing a degree. Success advisors and learning strategists will meet with online students in person or over the phone to create an academic success plan and discuss time management, study skills and other learning strategies.

**success@montana.edu**  
**R2L@montana.edu**  
**(406) 994-ROAR (994-7627)**  
[montana.edu/success](http://montana.edu/success)

### **CAREER, INTERNSHIP AND STUDENT**

**EMPLOYMENT SERVICES** - Students can access all resources for employment and internships on [hireabobcat.com](http://hireabobcat.com) and meet in person or over the phone with career coaches to discuss career planning, résumé and cover letter review, and interview preparation.

**careers@montana.edu • (406) 994-7627**

### **OFFICE OF FINANCIAL EDUCATION** -

Financial Coaches can meet with online students in person or over the phone to discuss scholarships, loans and loan repayment, financial aid and budgeting.

**makechange@montana.edu**  
**(406) 994-4388**

**SMARTYCATS TUTORING** - SmartyCats offers tutoring services to help you reach your full potential or if you just need a bit of help. Contact Smarty Cats for information on current services.

**success@montana.edu • (406) 994-7627**  
[montana.edu/aycss/success/smartycats](http://montana.edu/aycss/success/smartycats)



## **Other helpful information**

### **STUDENT TECHNOLOGY**

**RESOURCES** - Services available to distance students include student email account, University Information Technology Center Help Desk, and free software, including Microsoft Office, Endnote, WebEx and antivirus software.

[montana.edu/uit/students](http://montana.edu/uit/students)

**MSU STUDENT CONDUCT CODE** - All MSU students must abide by the MSU Student Conduct Code, which includes responsibilities and expectations for students and instructors, plus information about academic decisions, records, confidentiality, and other policies and procedures. The Code is reviewed and updated regularly.

[montana.edu/policy/student\\_conduct](http://montana.edu/policy/student_conduct)

**TEXTBOOKS** - Textbooks are available at most online retailers. Some textbooks are available as electronic copies. Books can also be purchased and shipped to you through the MSU Bookstore.

[msubookstore.org](http://msubookstore.org)

**REGISTRATION HANDBOOK** - This online document is updated each semester and includes important dates for the semester, registration instructions and deadlines, and other important information.

[montana.edu/registrar/Handbooks.html](http://montana.edu/registrar/Handbooks.html)





# Becoming an Online Student Checklist

- ☐ Tell your family, friends, co-workers or anyone who is part of your support network that you are determined to further your education. Stating this commitment out loud is the first step toward your educational journey!
- ☐ Research the program or programs that interest you. Find out:
  - what degree or certificate will you earn?
  - how many credits is the program?
  - how much will it cost?
  - what are the prerequisites for the program and courses?
  - how many classes do you need to take?
  - will any existing coursework transfer in?
  - how do you apply?
  - what are the admission dates?
- ☐ Apply for admission or submit an Intent to Register form if you are a returning MSU student.
- ☐ Set up an advisor appointment.
- ☐ Prepare for your advising appointment by getting your transcripts together and researching what classes you need to take.
- ☐ Meet with your advisor and get your advisor PIN.
- ☐ Start organizing your time, physical space and life commitments.
- ☐ Submit immunization records. All students, whether online or on-campus, must submit these. For more information, call **(406) 994-2311** or visit **[montana.edu/health](http://montana.edu/health)**
- ☐ Find out when class registration opens: **[montana.edu/registrar](http://montana.edu/registrar)**
- ☐ Apply for financial aid: **[finaid@montana.edu](mailto:finaid@montana.edu)** or call **(406) 994-2845**
- ☐ Log into MyInfo: **[montana.edu/myinfo](http://montana.edu/myinfo)**
- ☐ Register for classes using your advisor (alternate) PIN.
- ☐ Confirm (pay) your bill.
- ☐ If you have a disability, contact Disability Services: **[drv@montana.edu](mailto:drv@montana.edu)** or **(406) 994-2824**
- ☐ If you are a veteran, contact Veteran Services: **[vets@montana.edu](mailto:vets@montana.edu)** or **(406) 994-3661**
- ☐ Find your textbook list at the MSU Bookstore or on your program website and order textbooks, if necessary.
- ☐ Log into Brightspace by D2L.
- ☐ Sign up for the Brightspace by D2L student overview class.



*"I think a lot of people who are not in traditional circumstances, or not living near a campus, or maybe caretaking someone, or working full time, will really appreciate this platform. I really got a sense of the people in the program and I really enjoyed that. I met some really amazing people."*

**Charles Byrne**  
Online master's degree degree in  
Land Resources and Environmental Sciences  
May 2019

## DID YOU KNOW?

Online students can participate in graduation ceremonies just like on-campus students.  
See you at graduation!

Every path in life is unique

# Reach your goal

with online learning at Montana State University



*67% of students in a survey of online undergraduate MSU students said completing their degree was their life goal.*



**You can do it!**



**MSU Online Student Support**  
(406) 994-6550 | [distance@montana.edu](mailto:distance@montana.edu)  
[montana.edu/online](http://montana.edu/online)