

# it's possible—a full-time job and a master's too!

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Ann Harrison

## Beginning of an Idea

Working towards a master's degree while I was fully employed started with an occasional off-campus class and the comment, "At least they'll know I'm interested in keeping up to date." Finishing a master's degree program on the job meant a few harried times, lots of support from co-workers, administrators, local councils, and family—and even writing by the river bank on Sunday afternoons.

In 1968, the first home economics graduate courses came to our area from Iowa State University. Periodically for five years, courses were offered in our Extension area, but I still had no particular plan for working on my master's. I wanted to be considered a quality staff member and I knew I needed to include graduate courses as a part of my professional updating.

## Needed a Plan

Course work taken in the field seemed an excellent way to keep current in subject matter. In most cases, these off-campus classes gave me the opportunity to adapt or apply the topic to the local situations in my counties. However, it soon became apparent I was accumulating too many hours and that I needed a plan or I'd lose these hours.

My area Extension director was ready to help me and other students in the off-campus classes explore if and how Iowa State University might respond to our needs for a graduate plan.

Forms, procedures, and a research plan all materialized over time. An advisor helped me get organized and we jointly decided on the plan for the rest of my master's degree program. Though not especially difficult for me, the mechanical procedures might be a barrier to some Extension professionals.

The local Extension Councils in each of my two counties were very supportive of my graduate study program. One six-week period on campus was all it took to complete statistics requirements, a research methods course using the library and an adult education course. I found I could gather the research data and do the initial writing on the job.

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## **Finishing Up**

Finishing the thesis and final procedures were the two parts of my graduate study program that seemed impossible while on the job. Again the county councils and administrators were very understanding and allowed me to take an additional five days of study time. Daily conferences with my advisor and productive library time eventually led to the finished product.

In retrospect, I can see that taking one course each quarter lacked some of the value of being on campus. On the other hand, courses I did take were useful to me in my two counties. My research study, which involved the attitudes of home economics program committee members toward roles of an Extension home economist, tied the whole effort into one complete package.

My job as a two-county home economist continued during the time I was taking classes. In addition, I assumed a new liaison position of area program team leader. While actually working on the degree, I found it difficult to recognize the stresses I'd been under. When the program was done and the diploma signed, I felt differently about myself and my job. Tension, pressure, and strain had really become daily companions. Having completed the degree was a great feeling of relief and satisfaction . . . I can admit it now. I've always disliked the idea of having a job opportunity pass by me because I didn't have the required master's degree. Now I can at least apply.