

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

METEOROLOGY DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES OFFERED BY MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

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In the December 2006 issue of *NWA Digest*, Wilson (2006) addressed the sparsely-studied topic of broadcast meteorologists and their perceptions of the seals of approval awarded by the National Weather Association and American Meteorological Society. In this paper, Wilson (2006) provides useful insight into the opinions of weathercasters, which also establishes a standard for comparison of future research. Wilson (2006) uses Mississippi State University (MSU) as an example of a program that trains students in both the science of meteorology as well as communication skills. However, the brief explanations provided by Wilson (2006) leave some ambiguity regarding the MSU programs, and readers may be led to believe that one can earn an online degree in meteorology at MSU. This misconception and others should be clarified below.

Meteorology Degree and Certificate Programs Offered by MSU

Since the inception of the MSU Broadcast Meteorology Programs, there has been a great deal of confusion both within and outside of the broadcast meteorology industry regarding the program's offerings. Whether in professional publications or public conversations, the debate over the value of a broadcast meteorology education from MSU can be a contentious subject. This

debate, while not likely to subside, deserves an entry of perspective and understanding into the formation and purpose of the MSU programs.

a. Distance Learning Broadcast Meteorology Program

The Distance Learning Broadcast Meteorology Program (DL BMP), developed in 1986, is a non-degree program designed to provide working broadcasters with training in meteorology. In fact, broadcasting courses are absent from the curriculum as it is assumed the student has gained, or is gaining, this knowledge from practical experience and/or previous education. Originally, the DL BMP consisted of ten courses. As a result of technological advances in both meteorology and DL delivery methods, and student requests, the curriculum has grown to 17 courses (Doug Gillham 2007, personal communication). Two courses are taken per semester (including summer term) for the period of three years (Table 1.).

Each course includes twelve one-hour lectures supplied on DVD, a web-based and instructor-driven, interactive learning center, weekly quizzes, and quarterly examinations. Upon satisfactory completion of the coursework (students must earn a grade of "C" or higher in each course) the graduating class attends a mandatory workshop where professionals

(both broadcast and non-broadcast meteorologists) present current research and advances in the science of meteorology. Finally, each student must pass a proctored comprehensive exam with a score of 80% or higher. Once all steps have been satisfied, the student receives a certificate in Broadcast Meteorology from Mississippi State University. Upon completion of the DL BMP, the student has been given the educational background sufficient for passing the NWA seal of approval examination. However, a considerable amount of additional coursework is needed for the student to meet the AMS Certified Broadcast Meteorologist educational requirements. *The DL BMP is designed to equip a broadcaster with a principal knowledge of meteorological processes and a set of well-developed forecasting skills.*

b. On-Campus Broadcast Meteorology Program

The on-campus Broadcast Meteorology Program (OC BMP) is a 124-credit hour Bachelor of Science degree program. The OC BMP is housed within the Department of Geosciences at Mississippi State University. Unlike the DL BMP, it is not assumed that the student possesses prior knowledge of broadcasting. Therefore, *Practicum in Broadcasting Meteorology* courses have been developed to allow students the opportunity to work with weather graphics computers and perform “weather shows” with chroma-key. The OC BMP curriculum meets or surpasses the civil service and AMS Certified Broadcast Meteorologist educational requirements. *The OC BMP is designed to produce a meteorologist with broadcasting expertise.*

Conclusion

The authors appreciate the opportunity to clarify these few, yet important, items in this forum. MSU was among the pioneers in distance learning, and this might have led some to incorrectly associate MSU solely with distance learning. MSU has never offered a distance-learning degree in meteorology, despite this common misconception. Nevertheless, most educational institutions are developing more distance-learning programs each year, including those with emphases on meteorology and climatology. Such programs are becoming more rigorous, and it is certainly only a matter of time before numerous universities are offering their meteorology degrees online.

We hope that future studies and discussions take these points into account, especially with respect to broadcast meteorology. Perhaps more than any other science-related field, broadcast meteorologists have a wide range of educational backgrounds, including those with no formal science education. Therefore, future research in this area will likely gain more insightful results by further qualifying broadcast meteorologists according to their educational background.

References

Wilson, K., 2006: Seals of (Dis)Approval: Television Weathercasters Debate the Value of Voluntary Credentials. *National Weather Digest*, 30, 100-107.

Semester	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Fall	Phys.Geography Introduction to Met.	Synoptic Meteorology Statistical Climatology	Physical Met. Thermodynamic Met.
Spring	World Geography Climatology	Water Resources Satellite Met.	Weather Prediction I Severe Weather
Summer	Natural Hazards	Applied Climatology Radar Met.	Weather Prediction II Oceanography

Table 1. Course curriculum sequence of DL BMP