

UW-Stout: Master's graduates enjoy challenges of career, work balance and improving themselves

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James Gunderson loved the challenge of his classes while earning his [Master of Science in operations and supply management](#) from University of Wisconsin-Stout.

But it wasn't just that — he knows those studies help employers too.

“Every class I took challenged me to not only learn the methodologies of the coursework but apply them in my current role,” said Gunderson, of Eau Claire. “I learned a lot in discussion feeds on what worked well for my classmates and the coaching from professors at UW-Stout.

“The master's in operations and supply chain program at UW-Stout has a niche for creating immediate value for the organizations that have employees in the program. It is truly a win-win situation where UW-Stout supports innovation and growth for organizations across the globe.”

The program is offered online or on campus.

Gunderson, who works in the Chippewa Valley as a senior production supervisor, is graduating Saturday, Dec. 19. UW-Stout will have 637 graduates, including 133 from the Graduate School. Learn more about the virtual ceremony [here](#).

In his master's project, Gunderson's client in one month saw a 70% improvement for work-in-process inventory dollars on the production floor of the department by using Lean Six Sigma, a method that relies on a collaborative team effort to improve performance by systematically removing waste and reducing variation.

“My thesis focused on the impact of implementing lean culture in a low performing climate of an organization and the rapid value-add it can create,” Gunderson said. “I truly believe any organization in any industry who wants to continuously improve, meet/exceed customer expectations and remain profitable in today’s competitive global marketplace should consider implementing Lean Six Sigma methodologies.

“Not only did it create large dollar inventory cost savings, but it also increased employee morale and engagement at the front-line to continuously improve,” Gunderson added. “The creation of a systematic approach engaging the front-line to discover contributing factors for a problem statement and addressing those top factors with timely corrective action have created real value.”

Scott Gunnufson, the Colfax village president, who works at Andersen Windows Corp. based in Bayport, Minn., is graduating with the same degree. He is a senior supply chain analyst at the company.

He decided to attend UW-Stout for his master’s to help advance to a manager-level position. Gunnufson also earned his undergraduate degree at UW-Stout in business management in 2012.

“I tend to take on anything I can fit into my schedule where work and school are not my only obligations,” Gunnufson said.

He has been village president for seven years, owns a residential design business, sells real estate for Northwest Wisconsin Realty of Stone Lake, serves on the Dunn County Economic Development Corp. and is on the Chippewa Valley Technical College Building Steering Committee, he said.

Flexible and convenient courses

Gunnufson credited the flexibility and convenience of course schedules to be able to earn his master’s while working and fulfilling his other obligations. He encourages other students to make sure they set a schedule and stick to it.

Professor David Ding, director of the operations and supply management program, said both Gunderson and Gunnufson are great students. “They both work hard, are focused and can relate working experiences to the course content. I believe both of them, as well as other MS OSM students, will have bright careers in the future.”

“The MS OSM program focuses on the goal of three wins — the students receive high-quality, graduate education to advance their careers; the industry benefits from the course projects that students do to improve operations performance; and the university completes its mission by supporting our community,” Ding said.

“It is very important for the MS OSM students to apply what they’ve learned in the program to improve the operation performances for their organization. The program strongly focuses on business impact. All of our faculty have professional industry backgrounds, some of them have multiple professional certifications and are still working with industry in some types of consulting capacity. This allows the program to stay on top and deliver content that meets industry needs,” he said.

Since 2015 program projects have generated more than \$4.5 million in savings for the students’ organizations. “That’s the value our program provides to industry” Ding said.

Sustainable operations lead to strong industries

Operations and supply chain management play an important role in American industry, Ding said. Business with well-managed operation and supply chains will have a faster response time to their customers, highly efficient operation, superior product/service quality, low inventory cost and low employee turnover rate, as well as a sustainable operation.

“Organizations are in the process of modifying/changing their operations and supply management strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic; managers need to have vision, skill, leadership and project management ability to lead this change,” Ding said. “I am confident to say that the students graduating from this program are trained with the above credentials to help their organizations.”

Gunderson learns by applying course materials in the real world. The MS OSM includes high-level accounting and finance, human resources operations, quality, data analysis courses and is a difficult program but worth the work, he said.

“The way the faculty push you to do a project and implement it in your workplace while studying not only drives accountability for yourself to learn the material, but it makes it easier for you to see the value those methodologies create for high-performing organizations. Every single class that required me to apply the coursework added value to my organization.”

UW-Stout offers a Dual Level option. It allows students the opportunity to apply for a UW-Stout online master's degree when they are within 30 credits of graduating with their bachelor's. Then, some undergraduate coursework can be applied toward the master's program. The three Dual Level master's programs are operations and supply management, [risk control and safety management](#), and [training and human resource development](#).

UW-Stout also offers undergraduate degrees in [supply chain management](#) and [management with a supply chain management concentration](#).