Graduate Policies and Procedures

for

The Online Masters of Agricultural & Life Sciences

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Education Concentration
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Introduction

The Master’s of Agricultural and Life Sciences (MALS) was developed by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences as a completely online degree program for working professionals. Currently there are five concentration areas available from which students can choose. The Department of Agricultural and Extension Education administers the Education Concentration, which is designed for practitioners in formal education, agricultural business, extension education, and other related fields. Within the education concentration, there are two tracks from which students may choose: teaching & learning and leadership studies.

Successful candidates in the program should be able to:

• Locate, access, and evaluate research literature in the field;
• Describe the role that human interaction has on agriculture and the life sciences;
• Delineate how human learning, perceptions and behaviors impact agricultural and life sciences globally; and
• Develop and implement theoretically sound programs that promote the advancement of agricultural and life sciences amongst industry professionals and the general public.

The primary purpose of this handbook is to outline policies specific to the Education Concentration of the MALS degree program in accordance with the policies of the Graduate School. A more detailed version of the Graduate School’s policies is available in the Graduate Catalog (http://www.graduateschool.vt.edu).

Admission Requirements

It is expected that applicants should have completed or near completion of a B.S. degree in agricultural and life sciences or a field closely associated with a graduate degree in this discipline. Students should have an overall GPA of 3.0/4.0 or greater and strong scientific writing and communication skills. Applicants slightly under the requirement can be admitted on provisional status at the recommendation of the department. Provisional status is permitted for a maximum of 12 credit hours of graded course work; at this time a minimum GPA of 3.0 is required for the student to continue their graduate program.

The GRE exam is optional. The department strongly recommends that international students submit results for completed GRE examination. The results of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is also required for applicants who did not receive their bachelor's degrees from an Anglophone university and whose first language is not English. A minimum TOEFL score of 550 (paper based test) or 213 (computer based test) is required. More information on admissions can be found on the Graduate School website (https://www.applyweb.com/apply/vtechg/index.html).
Financial Assistance

Financial aid is available to degree-seeking students who qualify. Students who qualify must be enrolled at least halftime (6 credit hours) to maintain eligibility for financial aid. Financial aid is not available to non-degree seeking students, even if they are enrolled in a distance-learning course. More information on financial aid can be found on the Graduate School’s homepage (http://graduateschool.vt.edu/financial/financial_aid/index.html).

Payment of Tuition and Fees

Information concerning current tuition and fees for online students is available through VTOOnline (http://www.vto.vt.edu/costs.php) or the University Bursar website.

There are two payment options available for online students. Payment options include:

1. Check or money order in the exact amount due (or cash if you can pay in person). Make checks payable to Treasurer of Virginia Tech. Mail your payment to: Office of the University Bursar, 233 Burruss Hall, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061
2. Online by credit card. To pay by credit go to MyVT and follow the instructions under Student Accounts (http://www.my.vt.edu).

Receipts will not be issued by mail unless specifically requested. For more information, visit the University Bursar website (http://www.bursar.vt.edu).

Refunds are available if you drop a course depending on the date you drop the course. Refunds are payable to you (not necessarily the check-writer) and mailed back to your permanent address. Please refer to the University Bursar to determine how much of a refund you might expect.

Registration

Students must have a unique Personal Identifier (PID) and password if he or she is taking a course through Virginia Tech. The PID is used to register for courses, access Virginia Tech e-mail, MyVT, Scholar (course management system), some of the library databases, and more. The University will assign the PID after the student is enrolled. The University will also assign a temporary password, which students will need to change once they have access to their accounts. Once you get your PID, you must activate it before you can access University services. To activate the PID, visit Your PID (http://www.computing.vt.edu/accounts_and_access/pid).

All the information entered into our online enrollment form is completely secure. Data are passed in an encrypted format, and only Virginia Tech enrollment personnel are able to access the data (http://www.vto.vt.edu/privacy.php).

Virginia Tech has a drop period when a student can drop courses from his or her schedule. Notify vto@vt.edu as soon as the decision to drop is made. Students who drop a course will
receive a full refund if dropped prior to the start of the course, and a partial refund depending on how long the course has been in progress.

**Hardware and Software Requirements**

Students of an online course will need daily access to an up-to-date computer that meets minimum hardware and software requirements. Have a back-up plan for accessing a second computer should any technical problems arise. High-speed access is not required, but it does make it easier to view online presentations and download files. Online students should have a working knowledge of the minimum hardware and software requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardware</th>
<th>Minimum Requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operating System</strong></td>
<td>• Microsoft Windows 2000, 2003, or XP</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Macintosh OSX 10.0 or higher</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Processor</strong></td>
<td>500 MHz or faster (700 MHz recommended)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RAM</strong></td>
<td>128 MB RAM or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitor</strong></td>
<td>800 x 600 or higher resolution monitor with 256 colors minimum (1024 x 768 recommended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sound</strong></td>
<td>Speakers and a microphone or a headset with a microphone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internet Connection</strong></td>
<td>56.6 kbps or faster modem (High-speed access recommended)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Software</th>
<th>Uses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Web Browser</strong> (Firefox or Internet Explorer)</td>
<td>Course access in Scholar (<a href="https://scholar.vt.edu/portal">https://scholar.vt.edu/portal</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macromedia Flash Player</strong></td>
<td>Playing online course presentations and animations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adobe Acrobat Reader</strong></td>
<td>Reading PDF files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail Client</strong></td>
<td>Sending and receiving e-mail from instructors and peers (VT webmail is preferred)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-virus software</strong></td>
<td>Protect your computer from viruses, worms and trojans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Microsoft Office</strong> (2000 or higher)</td>
<td>Creating and reading documents in Microsoft Word, Excel, or PowerPoint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please refer to the Scholar Online User Guide (https://scholar.vt.edu/portal/help/main) if there are any user questions. Contact Online Course Support (oes@vt.edu) if the online user guide does not answer the question. Virginia Tech 4Help Customer Support Center at (540) 231-HELP (540-231-4357) can also be of assistance.

Graduate Advisory Committee

All students are assigned a faculty advisor (major professor) prior to, or immediately after, initial enrollment. Assignments should be mutually agreeable to both student and faculty member. A primary consideration for matching students with advisors is that the student’s professional interests match well with the advisor’s expertise.

Within the first two semesters of enrollment, each student should work with his/her faculty advisor to establish an advisory committee. A Master’s committee should consist of three members. Two committee members should be from the department, one being their faculty advisor. The third member should be a full time, tenure track, teaching/research faculty or other qualified individual, inside or outside the university as requested by the department. Please refer to the Graduate School policies for a detailed description on the requirements and functions of the graduate advisory committee (http://graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/policies.htm?policy=002d14432c654287012c6542e38200d8).

The committee will assist in the development of a program of study and completion of the final project. Committee members are expected to provide appropriate and timely input to the academic and research programs of the student. Conversely, both students and faculty advisors are expected to assure appropriate involvement of the advisory committee in each student’s program. Students should discuss any problems related to their advisory committee with their faculty advisor and, if needed, with the department head.

Credit Hour Loads

One of the major benefits of the online program is that it allows you to complete the program at your own pace. On average, students will take two courses (6 credit hours) a semester leading to completion of the program in five semesters. Courses are offered fall, spring and summer semester, so a student could finish the program in 2 years based on the two-course minimum per semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Minimum Number of Credit Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Concentration</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project and Report</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Minimum total credits: 30 credit hours

Minimum graded credits: 24 credit hours

• May include a maximum of 6 credits of Virginia Tech 4000-level undergraduate courses.
• The 6 credits of Virginia Tech 4000-level course work may include Special Study (4984) courses but may not include Undergraduate Independent Study (4974) or Undergraduate Research (4994) courses.
• All other graded course work must be 5000 level or higher (i.e., graduate course work).
• The 5000-level course work may include a maximum of 9 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 3 credits of seminar.
• May include a maximum of 6 credits of Project & Report (5904) credits taken at Virginia Tech

Plan of Study
The Plan of Study is due no later than the end of the academic semester in which 24 credit hours is completed (see Appendix). Below is a general academic advising outline to guide the selection of courses in the Education Concentration. New courses are added periodically, so it is a good idea to discuss current course options with the faculty advisor. In addition, courses can be substituted as approved by the advising committee. Copies of the forms (saved as Word documents) have also been sent to your major professor and to you, and are available from the department’s graduate coordinator.

MALS Education Concentration Course Advising

Foundations of AEE – 6 Credit Hours
AEE 5074 Foundations of AEE
AEE 5114 Serving International Agriculture & Education

Teaching Methodology – 3 Credit Hours
AEE 5744 Methods, Materials, and Practices in Instruction
or
LDRS 5454 Leadership Foundation for Diverse Contexts

Concentration Electives – 6 Credit Hours
Choose from:
AEE 4884 Youth Program Management
AEE 5014 Non-Formal Teaching & Learning
AEE 5044 Program and Curriculum Design in AEE
AEE 5054 STEM Integration in Agricultural Education
AEE 5154 Partnerships and Volunteerism
LDRS 5464 Leadership in a Global Society

Research Methodology and Final Project – 9 Credit Hours
AEE 5104 Research Applications in AEE
AEE 5904 Project and Report

Non-Concentration Electives – 6 Credit Hours
Choose from Approved List

Transfer Credit
No more than 50% of the graded credit hours needed to satisfy the requirements for a Virginia Tech graduate degree may be transferred in from a regionally accredited university. All such credits must have earned grades of "B" or better, have been earned while in good

Revised: August 8, 2012
standing in graduate status, and must have been graduate courses (numbered 5000 or higher) at the institution where the student took the courses. Grades of "S" or "P" are not acceptable for transfer credit. All transfer courses must be acceptable to the student’s Advisory Committee and the Graduate Program Director or Department Head. For transfer course work more than five years old, a Justification of 'Old' Course Work form must be filed with the Plan of Study.

Credits from other universities are transferred to a Virginia Tech graduate degree at the time the Plan of Study that includes those courses is approved by the Graduate School. Transferred courses count only as credit hours and are not included in the calculation of the Virginia Tech GPA. Official transcripts are required before transfer course work can be approved for the Plan of Study.

Research, Project and Report, Practicum or Internship credit hours may not be transferred in from another university to meet Virginia Tech graduate degree requirements (i.e., they cannot be included on the Plan of Study). Credits taken while in undergraduate status or for an undergraduate degree cannot be used as transfer credit for a graduate degree.

**Evaluation of Performance and Progress toward Degree**

In an effort to foster communication between graduate students, their faculty advisor, and advisory committees, the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and the graduate school requires an annual evaluation and communication of graduate student performance and progress toward either the M.S. degree. The process is initiated with a written report, from each graduate student to his/her faculty advisor, which appropriately details the graduate student’s academic and research program progress during the preceding year.

The form of the report is the prerogative of the faculty advisor and due by **February 1st** of each year or earlier as designated by the faculty advisor. In response, faculty advisors will, by **March 1st** of each year, write a letter that details the advisor’s evaluation of each graduate student’s performance and progress toward a degree.

Graduate students and faculty advisors should meet at an appropriate and convenient time to discuss the student’s report and advisor’s evaluation, concentrating most especially on any differences in expectations or evaluation between the student and advisor. Both the student’s report and advisor’s letter will become a part of the student’s file. It is expected that advisory committee members will be used appropriately to develop each student’s academic program, in the planning and execution of the research project, and in contributing to the evaluation letter. To assist you and your advisor, the department has created a [Graduate Student Check List](#), [Graduate Student Annual Evaluation Cover Form](#), and [Graduate Student Annual Progress Report](#) (see Appendix). The [Graduate Student Professional Development Plan](#) should be submitted by the completion of 12 credit hours. Copies of the forms (saved as Word documents) have also been sent to your major professor and to you, and are available from the department’s graduate coordinator.

The annual evaluation of graduate students provides an opportunity to insure that appropriate progress toward degree requirements is occurring and to allow for adjustments in the program of study, teaching activities, or research efforts. Clearly, it is also important to keep the advisory committees informed.
Remember your advisory committee is not likely to seek you out. It is your responsibility to use your advisory committee effectively. These members can provide excellent insight, perspective, and encouragement, but only if you engage them. Since the evaluations occur in the spring semester, your first evaluation may well be rather brief. However, the following elements are expected to be part of your evaluation documentation as appropriate:

- Signatures of the Major Advisor and Committee Members (likely not applicable during your first evaluation cycle).
- Milestones accomplished – for example, filing of the plan of study.
- List of publications.
- List of professional presentations.
- Documentation of teaching or training activities.
- Listing of outreach or service activities.
- Awards and other honors.
- General academic progress – i.e. satisfactory progress in class work.
- Comments by the student
- Signature of Student – to indicate that he or she read and understands the document.

### Degree Completion Requirements

Students are expected to do a final project in order to complete the requirements of this degree. Students will prepare a project proposal as part of the research methods course to present to their advising committee. Upon approval by the advising committee, students will work with their advisor to set up and conduct the project as part of the first three credit hours of AEE 5904 Project and Report course. Upon successful completion of the project, students will enroll in the second three credit hours of AEE 5904 Project and Report course to complete the project analysis, final report and report defense. There are two versions of the final report (see Appendix). Please work with your Advisor to determine which version you will use. A full description of the report requirements (saved as a Word document) is available through the departmental Scholar site for MALS or the graduate program coordinator.

In addition to the above requirements, students are expected to present a concise 30-minute or less (20-25 minute presentation with 5-10 minutes for discussion), non-credit seminar on their final project, immediately preceding their project defense. This seminar is intended to keep faculty and graduate students informed regarding departmental projects. All graduate students are requested to complete a graduate program evaluation and to schedule a completing student interview with the department head prior to leaving the university. Information provided by students, which is confidential with respect to source, contributes significantly to the evolution and improvement of departmental graduate programs.

### Graduate Honor Code

All graduate students are expected to abide by the standards of academic integrity and ethical behavior established in the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code. Details of the Code, including penalties for violations are included on the website for the Graduate Honor System (http://ghs.graduateschool.vt.edu/). Because some aspects of appropriate conduct are course-
specific (e.g., collaborative work with other students on assignments), the syllabus for each course should be examined carefully to determine instructor expectations.

**Professional Associations**

The department strongly encourages graduate student membership in professional associations. Students should consult with their advisor to determine appropriate professional affiliations. Many professional societies are available for students and offer student membership rates.

**Student Advice**

Remember that your advisor has several advisees. It is a good idea to re-cap where you are and what stage you want to discuss. Ultimately it’s your career and your future that is at stake – take the responsibility to keep on top of the details and keep a copy of your records.

If you have any questions about the education concentration or concerns during your time in this MALS program, don’t hesitate to contact the program coordinator for assistance.

**MALS Program Coordinator**

Dr. James C. Anderson II
268 Litton-Reaves Hall
(540) 231-2608 (ph)
(540) 231-3824 (fax)
jcanders@vt.edu
APPENDIX A: Graduate Student Professional Development Plan

This plan is provided to assist in facilitating a conversation with your faculty advisor. The plan should be completed within the first 12 credit hours of coursework. Submit a copy to the graduate coordinator after it has been discussed with your faculty advisor for inclusion in your student records.

Student name: __________________________ ID #: __________________

Expected graduation date (semester and year): __________

Student professional goals upon graduation:

   In the area of research or program evaluation:

   In the area of teaching or training:

   In the area of extension or outreach:

Proposed project topic:

Professional development goals during the program:

1.

2.

3.

4.

What do you need to do or provide to accomplish these goals?

What resources, materials, or support do you need from me to assist you in accomplishing your goals?

What is a realistic timeline for accomplishing your goals?

Student Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________
APPENDIX B: Graduate Student Annual Evaluation Cover Form

This form should be submitted with a copy of all of the student’s annual review documents to the Departmental Graduate Coordinator for inclusion in the student file.

Student Name: ______________________________________ ID #: _____________

The above named student’s academic progressed for ____________ is:

Calendar Year

_______ Satisfactory

_______ Unsatisfactory

Signatures of the Faculty Advisor and Graduate Coordinator:

____________________________________
Faculty Advisor

____________________________________
Graduate Coordinator

Assessment of Progress toward the Degree
(Please list the documents that have been included in this evaluation.)

Student Written Acknowledgement:
(Additional materials may be attached as needed)

Student Signature: ___________________________ Date __________________
(Indicates the student has read and understands the document but does not necessarily indicate agreement)
APPENDIX C: Graduate Student Annual Progress Report

AEE requests completion of this form so that faculty and staff can better support students based on expressed needs. AEE also needs to comply with the Grad School requirements to provide evidence regarding student progress in the chosen degree program. This form should be completed in January and submitted to your faculty advisor by February 1. Please attach an up-to-date program of study, including grades earned for courses that have been completed and intended courses for the following year. You can expect a written response from your academic advisor by March 1. This document will be kept in your student file.

Student Name: ______________________________________________________

Degree and Concentration: ____________

Expected graduation date (semester and year): __________

Current GPA: _________

Proposed Thesis / Dissertation topic or project title:

Professional Goal(s) upon Graduation:

Assistantship Activities during the Previous Year (if applicable):

Other Research Activities during the Previous Year:

Other Extension Activities during the Previous Year:

Other Teaching Activities during the Previous Year:

Other Professional Development Activities during the Previous Year:

Professional Development Goals for this Calendar Year:

Other Comments:

Student Signature: ______________________________  Date: __________________
APPENDIX D: MALS STUDENT PLAN OF STUDY

ONLINE MASTERS IN AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
Education Concentration

Research Courses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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5000 Level Courses: *(do not include transferred courses)*

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<th>Semester</th>
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<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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Subtotal

4000 Level Courses: *(do not include transferred courses)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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</table>

Supporting Courses: *(do not include transferred courses)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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Subtotal

Transferred 5000 Level Courses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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Subtotal
**Transferred 4000 Level Courses:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
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</table>

**Transferred Supporting Courses:**

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<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total Credit Hours: [TOTAL]**

**Advisory Committee:**

Chair: [Type NAME and DEPT/ORG here]

___________________________

Signature

Co-Chair (optional): [Type NAME and DEPT/ORG here]

___________________________

Signature

Committee Member: [Type NAME and DEPT/ORG here]

___________________________

Signature

Committee Member: [Type NAME and DEPT/ORG here]

___________________________

Signature

**Signature of Candidate**

___________________________

Date Submitted

Submit a signed copy to James Anderson, Dept. of AEE Mail Stop: 0343, 268 Litton-Reaves Hall, Blacksburg, VA 24061.
APPENDIX E: Graduate Student Check List
MS Student in Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

This checklist is provided to assist in tracking progress toward the degree. The form will become a part of the student’s permanent record and should be updated annually. A final version should be submitted to the graduate coordinator at the completion of the program.

Student Name: _______________________________ ID #: __________

Date Completed:

________ Enrolled

________ Formation of advisory committee

________ Submit annual progress report 1.

________ Submit annual progress report 2.

________ Submit plan of study¹

________ Submit annual progress report 3.

________ Advisory committee meets and submits progress report.

________ Anticipated project defense date²

________ Submission of draft journal article to faculty advisor

¹The Plan of Study is due by the completion of 24 credit hours of course work.
²The request to schedule a project defense must be received by the Graduate School (with a copy to the departmental graduate coordinator or your Major Professor) at least two weeks before the defense.

Student Signature: _____________________________ Date: __________

Faculty Advisor Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX F: FINAL PROJECT SHORT FORM OUTLINE
ONLINE MASTERS IN AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
EDUCATION CONCENTRATION

1. Cover Page
2. Executive Summary
3. Table of Contents
4. Introduction
   a. Background and Setting
   b. Statement of the Problem
   c. Purpose of the Project
   d. Project Objectives
   e. Definition of Terms
   f. Review of Literature
   g. Theoretical or Conceptual Framework
   e. Summary and Significance of the Problem
5. Project Overview
   a. Targeted Population and Participating Audience
   b. Project Methodology
   c. Data Collection
6. Summary of Outcomes, Discussion, and Recommendations
   a. Project outcomes
   c. Project analysis
   d. Implications
   e. Recommendations
7. References
8. Appendices
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ONLINE MASTERS IN AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
EDUCATION CONCENTRATION

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