University adds online option to master's degree in informatics

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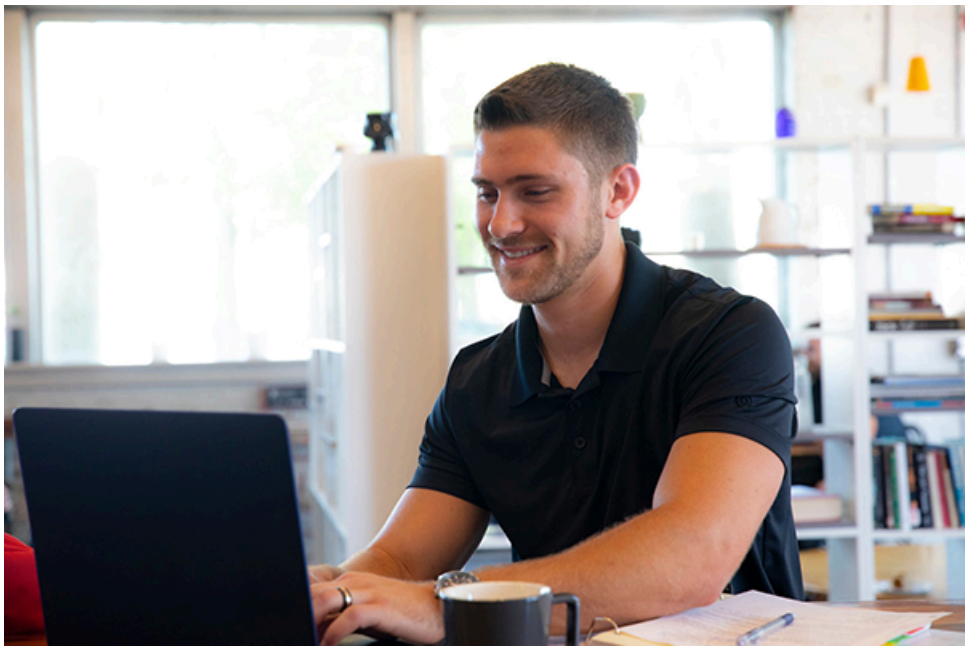

University of Louisiana at Lafayette students who enroll in the state's only master's in informatics program will soon be able to complete degree requirements online or in a traditional classroom setting.

The Louisiana Board of Regents approved an online option for UL Lafayette's existing master's degree in informatics in January; students who opt for the online format and are accepted into the program will begin taking courses in August.

"Both options feature the same interdisciplinary curriculum taught by the same faculty members with the same intent – to prepare students to secure the jobs they want and to thrive in them," said Dr. Mary Farmer-Kaiser, dean of the Graduate School.

Informatics is applied computer science that centers on ways people interact with and share information. Informatics students learn to design and adapt information systems to solve problems that arise in everyday life. Businesses and governments value such systems because they enable them to operate more efficiently.

Prospective students with a bachelor's degree in many fields including sciences, engineering, business, social sciences and health sciences may apply for admission into the University's master's degree in informatics program.

Its focus is the information technology aspect of enterprise computing, said Dr. Azmy S. Ackleh, dean of Ray P. Authement College of Sciences. Enterprise computing incorporates analytics, reporting, database management and other software solutions systems.

"By definition, informatics is applied computing across multiple domains – business, health sciences, engineering. So we train students to have applied computing skills," Ackleh explained.

UL Lafayette launched the state's only informatics master's degree in 2018. The University began offering a bachelor's degree in informatics in Fall 2011. The programs are part of the College of Sciences' School of Computing and Informatics.

The programs were established – and the online option was added – to help address workforce needs in the city, state and nation, Ackleh said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, national employment for computer and information technology professionals is projected to grow by 15 percent by the end of the decade.

That trend is evident in Lafayette, where CGI, Perficient and Enquero are among many companies that hire computing and informatics graduates. Each of the large technology companies has opened facilities in the city since 2015. CGI is located in UL Lafayette's University Research Park; Perficient and Enquero are in downtown Lafayette.

The trend is also evident across Louisiana. Over the last decade, companies such as IBM in Baton Rouge, DXC Technology in New Orleans and CenturyLink in Monroe have either relocated to the state or expanded existing operations.

The 33-hour master's degree in informatics is in place to provide advanced knowledge and training that will prepare graduates for a number of computing-related careers, said Dr. Michael W. Totaro, an associate professor who coordinates the informatics program.

The curriculum incorporates courses in informatics and computing, emphasizes research, and includes thesis and non-thesis options. Students learn about subjects such as human-computer interaction, network infrastructures, systems development, IT security, data analysis and visualization, distributed databases, cloud computing and big data applications.

"If a person has interest in technology, computing, information, and data, and how all that can be wrapped together – bundled together and used for specific purposes – informatics is certainly worth considering," Totaro explained.

Learn more about the new online option for UL Lafayette's master's degree in informatics or email online@louisiana.edu.

Photo caption: The University of Louisiana at Lafayette will begin offering an online option for its master's degree in informatics. The master's degree, the only of its kind in the state, was launched in 2018. Students who opt for the online format and are accepted into the program will begin taking courses in August. **Photo credit:** Doug Dugas / University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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