



Residency Week

An Intensive Learning Experience on Campus

As part of the Master of Industrial Distribution program at Texas A&M University, students spend four days on campus in College Station, Texas before each of its two academic years. Residency week is an intensive learning experience, designed to kick off the year with in-person breakout sessions and lectures. Students also solidify relationships with their faculty mentors and members of their cohort, a unique benefit for an online program. While the first-year student residency week experience is more focused on becoming familiar with the program and online learning in general, the second-year experience is geared toward the capstone project, which all students complete during their second year as a final culminating project for graduation.

Building a Network

In 2021, both cohorts stepped foot on campus for the first-time for an MID residency week experience due to COVID-19. “To be welcomed into a very strong and unique community was a wonderful experience. It was top-notch,” says Jon Berleth, a second-year student and customer service manager for Bray International.

On the first night of residency week is a Welcome Social, which acts as an opportunity for students to connect not only with their cohort but also members from the other class, faculty, and staff. Given the diversity of the MID program, students can mix and mingle with professionals from all segments and functional roles within industrial distribution.

“Being in person brings a sense of camaraderie with our classmates and the professors. It puts a face to the name beyond an email or discussion board,” says Berleth. “Residency week provides the human aspect that we need — that personal connection.”

When Ivan Perez walked into the social, he immediately saw groups of people already chatting like friends. Within minutes, Perez says he was absorbed into conversation with peers. “From the start, I’ve felt welcome,” says the first-year student and district manager for SRS Distribution.

Even the professors made Perez feel at home with their approachability. In between sessions, Perez had multiple faculty members come over and introduce themselves. “The professors are very personable,” he says. Residency week allows students this opportunity to meet with their faculty members one-on-one beyond the virtual classroom setting.

Within the week students were also treated to panels featuring former students, who shared tips on how to succeed in the MID program, as well as how they utilized what they learned in their careers.

Practical Learning

In addition to networking, students attend lectures on special topics, such as profitability and distribution maps. Perez enjoyed a presentation about customer stratification because it directly related to what he was dealing with at work. “Everyone in the room had a lot of experience and opinions on how best to attack certain problems, so a great discussion came out of that lecture.”

Campus resources such as the student services, the writing center, and library presented, as well, which is especially beneficial for first-year students. One session provided students with tips on succeeding in graduate school.

Students also got a chance to meet with their faculty for the year through course overview sessions. These meetings are designated spaces for students to review their course syllabus with the professor, gain an understanding of what the class will be about and ask any relevant questions.

Team-Building Exercise

For first-year students, part of the residency week included a few sessions focused on team building. It’s an exercise that gives students the chance to identify their strong suits, join with their working groups, and strategize how they will best achieve success as students, together. Given the remote nature of the program, identifying these characteristics can help students navigate schedules and homework with peers who are also working full-time and potentially in different time zones.



“It was a really good experience,” says Perez. “Some of us are better at initiating or organizing. If we can recognize our strengths and weaknesses, we can help each other succeed. Plus, we got to learn a lot about each other, which was awesome.”

Michael Chase, a second-year student and product specialist for Motic US, echoes this sentiment. Since his cohort began without a residency week last year due to the pandemic, meeting in person helped everyone connect on a deeper level. “Residency week is of immense value to the program. It allows for that Aggie network and tradition to be built in a week and to connect with people.”

Kickstarting the Capstone Project

As part of the curriculum of the MID program, second-year students are required to complete a capstone project. These projects can be from their own idea or a problem identified that their company is currently facing. Students work with faculty and their company steering committee members to create a strategy to solve the issue as well as an actionable timeline.

During residency week, second-year students spend time in breakout sessions of 15-20 students. These sessions are designed for talking about their capstone project in great detail. While first-year students are treated to one session that introduces them to the concept of a capstone project to get them thinking about potential ideas, second-year students meet in small groups with their professors to talk through their ideas and receive feedback that springboards them to success throughout their entire year-long project.

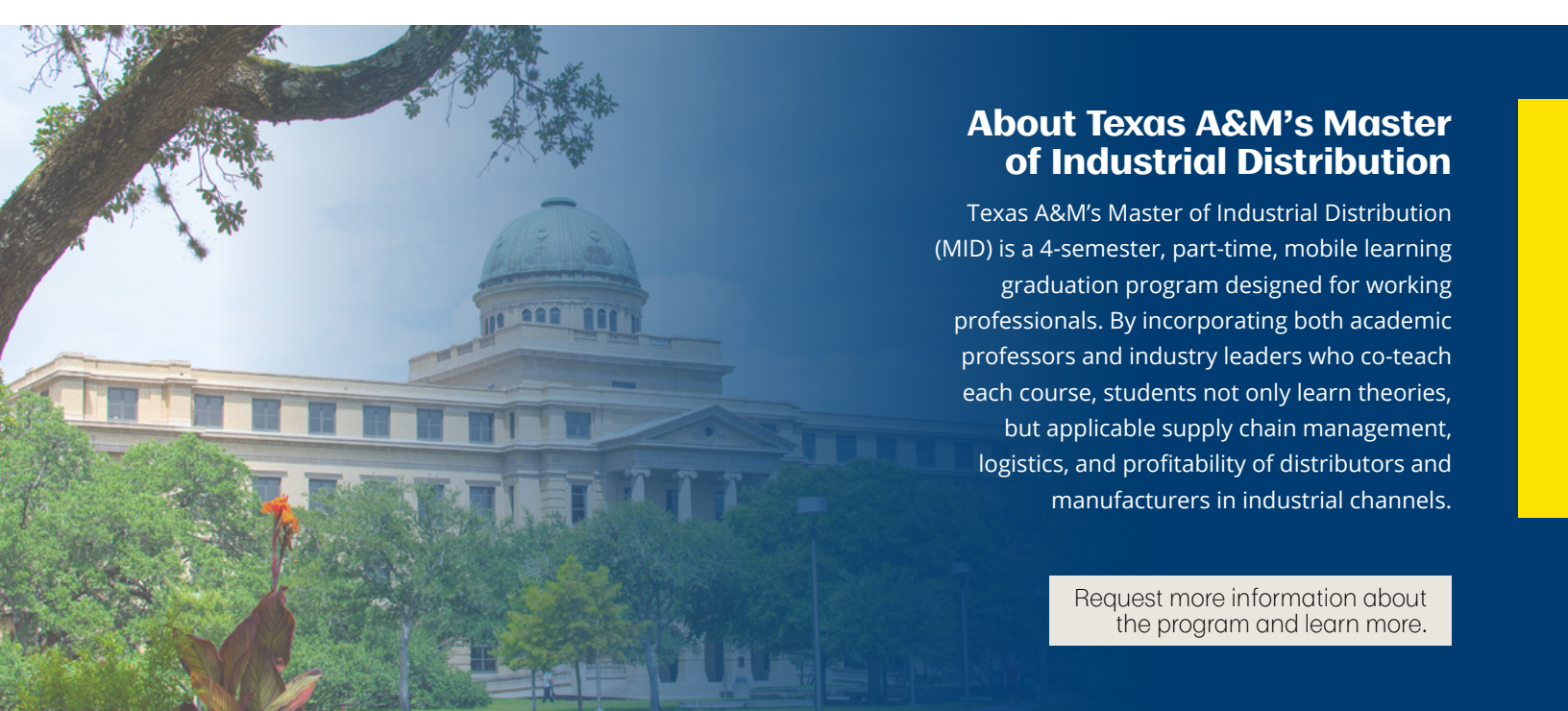
For Chase, the roundtable discussion with his peers and professor helped him refine his project’s focus. “I would say that this part of residency week was the most impactful for me. The discussion led to good feedback, and having other people critique and ask questions allowed me to dive deeper into the issue.”

Chase says these discussions were a form of networking, as well. “We were talking with each other and providing feedback, but I also got to see insight into everybody else’s work and culture. What are some of the issues they’re dealing with?” Many students comment on the benefit of speaking with peers from different parts of the industry. Although their segments might differ, companies often face the same general issues. Residency week and these discussions allow students to learn from one another — in person.

“Being in person is always really conducive to open-forum discussions. It allows people to bounce ideas off one another,” says Berleth. “And being in the classroom with people helps me focus, pay attention and really absorb the conversation. Because we’re in the same room, you’re really in the mindset of the program. Having these discussions helped me understand some of the things that I need to set up for success in the program.”

Benefits of Residency Week

- Increase familiarity with online learning structure
- Network with fellow student from a variety of industrial channels
- Interact with MID faculty throughout the entire week
- Discuss the capstone project in detail to obtain a springboard for success
- Explore Texas A&M University’s traditions and culture staying on campus.
- Hear tips and tricks from guest lecturers and former students.
- Learn best practices on the latest trends and research in the industry.



About Texas A&M’s Master of Industrial Distribution

Texas A&M’s Master of Industrial Distribution (MID) is a 4-semester, part-time, mobile learning graduation program designed for working professionals. By incorporating both academic professors and industry leaders who co-teach each course, students not only learn theories, but applicable supply chain management, logistics, and profitability of distributors and manufacturers in industrial channels.

Request more information about the program and learn more.