Reaching Out To Educate the Survey Practitioner

by

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With new and sophisticated technologies, degree or course requirements for licensure, and mandatory continuing professional education requirements, survey practitioners are now expected to up-date their formal education. While professional societies and speakers have done an excellent job of providing workshops and seminars on specific subjects, it has fallen on the colleges and universities to provide a basic theoretical foundation, scope, and depth to the surveyor's education. However, not all states have collegiate and university based surveying programs or faculty capable of teaching the appropriate courses. Prospective surveying students often do not have the time to take off work and travel great distances to their state institutions to attend traditional classes offered during the day. Consequently, there is a large number of licensed surveyors and prospective surveyors who have been unable to obtain college credits in surveying.

To respond to this growing need and to provide flexibility to practitioners and students, some colleges and universities, including the University of Maine, are using distance education techniques. In many states, distance education approaches involve the use of satellite relay or line transmission of a live class to remote sites. Students view a television screen and ask questions by toggling a microphone or using a telephone. Through its Center for Engineering Studies at the University of Maine, both undergraduates and graduate courses have been offered statewide for five years using this form of live television instruction. While this system has been successful in reaching more practitioners, it does have several drawbacks. First, the system continues to require that students attend class at prescribed times. Second, students are still required to drive to designated "receive" sites. Although these sites may be more convenient than the main campus, they can still present problems for the rural practitioner or the practitioner who may spend a lot of time traveling "on the job."

To alleviate these problems, the University of Maine's College of Engineering in conjunction with the Continuing Education Division will begin experimenting with a course on boundary retracement principles and procedures using pre-recorded classroom video tapes. Under this program, students who enroll in the three credit course will receive a set of VCR tapes, text, and a package of handout materials that include home-work assignments, grading criteria, course information, and supplemental notes. Students will watch the tapes and work on the course at their leisure. Homework will be mailed to the University of Maine for grading and exams will be scheduled with a local proctor.

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To begin in the 1994 Fall Semester, the course will be offered on both a regional and national basis. If this distance education project proves successful, tapes will be developed specifically for the "home" viewing audience rather than relying on a pre-recorded class. Other surveying engineering video courses are also being planned. Additionally, it is anticipated that arrangements would be made to provide the tapes to other colleges who would otherwise be unable to provide the course(s) in their programs of study. Professional societies would also be able to obtain the tapes for showing to groups. As technological advances occur, so will the ability to provide courses to practitioners and students at their convenience.

For additional information about distance education courses contact your local college or the Center for Engineering Studies, University of Maine, 7 Chamberlain Avenue, Portland, ME 04103 (207-780-4896/4601).

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