

ACE Professional Educational Initiative Creates Opportunities for All

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Three years ago, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) faced three personnel challenges: the impending retirement of many senior staff, finding a way to remain competitive in recruiting new staff, and training a new generation of water resource managers to be as comfortable with nonstructural methods and approaches as with pouring concrete. ACE developed a "Hire-Train-Retain" initiative, the centerpiece of which is a Master of Science degree program in water resources planning for midcareer employees. The program was developed to help ACE rapidly rebuild capability by providing a significant incentive for hiring and retaining planning talent, as well as enhancing that talent through the opportunity for professional growth offered by an advanced professional education.

ACE turned to the Universities Council on Water Resources (UCOWR) for help in developing content requirements.

An advisory panel worked with Corps planners to define a model curriculum and schedule that would allow midcareer ACE employees with bachelors' degrees to complete requirements for the master's degree at government expense in a relatively compressed time frame. ACE then sought out universities with strong but diverse programs in water resources management who were willing and able to offer such a degree program, enlisting Johns Hopkins University, Southern Illinois University, the University of Arizona, the University of Florida, and Washington State University.

ACE employees receive a paid leave of absence from their field offices to attend courses on campus during the fall semester. The balance of credit hours can be met with Web-based courses and transfer credits from local colleges and



Students in the University of Arizona's Interdisciplinary Master's of Engineering Program in Water Resources are from Alaska, Arizona, Tennessee, and Utah.

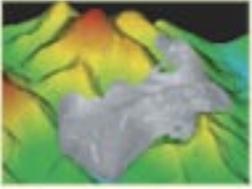
universities. The degree can be completed in 16 to 24 months, with only four months spent away from the office. For example, the University of Arizona program requires 30 credit hours, half of which can be earned in the semester in residence. In lieu of a thesis, students return to their field office and complete a six credit-hour project, applying what they have learned to a real-world problem. The remaining nine credit hours are earned through Web-based courses and/or transfer credits.

Budget constraints slowed implementation of the program, but this fall the first cohort of students entered the program. Initial numbers are small, with the University of Arizona's class of four constituting the largest group. But ACE is committed to dozens of employees participating in the program next fall, and other federal agencies have shown interest.

The participating universities have also begun marketing the program to state and local water agencies and consulting firms. While the degree program was designed with ACE needs in mind, it is open to those who received their bachelors' degrees a number of years ago and have been working in a water resources field. By confronting personnel challenges directly and with creativity, ACE has created continuing educational opportunities for all water resource professionals.

Visit www.usace.army.mil/mastersdegree for more information on the ACE program.



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