

# the front office

## Get ahead from a distance

**M**y first encounter with "distance education" was a seat in the back row of 200-level college French class. I figured the more distance between the instructor and me the less likelihood of her asking to hear my French.

Two years ago I took a nonfiction writing course from a New York school via the Internet. Hesitant initially after coughing up nearly \$400, I quickly was absorbed in the assignments and critiques, and enjoyed the experience so much I signed up for another online course from the same folks.

"Distance learning" is easier than ever to experience because of the Internet, but those who prefer pencil and paper also have many options when it comes to advancing their turfgrass management education. "Many universities are 'reaching out beyond campus' via the Internet as well as traditional correspondence courses," says Dr. Keith Karnok of the University of Georgia's Crop and Soil Sciences Department.

Dr. Karnok knows a working turf manager who gladly reimburses his staff upon their receiving a Certificate from UGA's Continuing Education Unit (CEU) program. "These aren't college credits but the unit credits are recognized by groups such as GCSAA and Professional Lawn Care Association of America," he says.

Georgia has a new turf management program for college credit that leads to "certification." In the 28-credit hour program, students take horticulture and turfgrass classes, plus two electives such as accounting, Spanish, or business management. "There are not any distance learning programs that lead to a college degree," says Dr. Karnok, and he should know since he volunteers his time as editor of *Turfgrass Management Information Directory*, which lists (among a ton of info) certification programs, correspondence courses, and turf management programs. (For a copy call 800-487-2323.)

At Penn State, Dr. Al Turgeon, senior faculty coordinator for the World Campus Turfgrass Management program, says, "We've extended our reach to all 50 states, but our goal is to reach worldwide. We won't be satisfied until we have students on every continent where turfgrass is important."

Penn State launched its Internet-based turfgrass program 4 years ago with a single course, "Introduction to Turfgrass Management," which had only 10 students. Today the program has grown to more than 1,400 enrollments and offers two certificates: Turfgrass Management and Advanced Turfgrass Management.

"What we teach are those basic principles that are relevant globally. Our students need to be able to think globally about turfgrass issues and be able to apply those principles wherever they go," says Turgeon. The experience and insight the students bring to the classes are very valuable. "It's the closest thing to a true learning community. Everybody learns from everybody, even the instructors," he says.

Georgia and Penn State are just two of many universities offering distance learning for turf managers and would-be turf managers. The specialization in the workplace trend isn't going away, so any certificate or other paper you earn should be accompanied by a pay raise or better job.



Comments always welcome.  
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