

Telecom Degree Program

NACTEL Online

Learning Program

Enables All IBEW

Members to Pursue

Associate's Degree

to Prepare for

Technical Jobs in

Telecommunications

Industry

Imagine it is a cold January night in Nova Scotia. The wind is howling; the roads are icy—not a time to be heading out to a class at night after a hard day at work. Or imagine it is a sunny, warm January morning in Hawaii. An IBEW member wants to learn more about the technical side of telecommunications, but the nearest campus offering such courses is on the next island.

None of this needs to be an obstacle to any IBEW member who wishes to pursue an Associate's Degree in telecommunications technology. Thanks to the IBEW's participation in the NACTEL program, members can earn this degree exclusively via the Internet without ever setting foot inside a classroom.

Like many industries, telecommunications is facing a potential shortage of skilled workers to fill the increasingly technical jobs of the future. Unlike many industries, four major employers, two unions, a noted university and specialists in adult education and learning have banded together to address this issue.

The National Advisory Coalition for Telecommunications Education and Learning (NACTEL) has developed an Associate's Degree program in telecommunications technology, offered exclusively via the Internet, to enable workers to acquire the background needed to fill openings in the network technician category. The NACTEL partners have developed a curriculum that meets academic standards and offers practical courses to prepare for *real* jobs in the industry. In addition, all credits earned in this degree program are transferable for the pursuit of a full four-year degree.


NACTEL consists of the IBEW and the Communications Workers of America (CWA), Bell Atlantic, SBC, US West and GTE. Pace University in White Plains, New York, a leader in developing on-line educational programs, offers the degree. The Center for Adult Education and Learning (CAEL), an organization dedicated to continuing education for working people, has provided guidance in development of the program. International President J.J. Barry noted: "The NACTEL partners have worked hard to put together a curriculum

designed to help our members and others prepare for the jobs of the 21st century. This is not theory. This type of knowledge and education are what the industry needs."

The Associate's Degree is available entirely online. A pilot program was conducted the first six months of 1999, as reported in the January/February issue of the *IBEW Journal* (see "Online Telecommunications Degree Program," p.18). Participants were every enthusiastic. The first full semester, marketed primarily to workers at the four partner companies, began in September. The next set of classes will begin in November, and is open to all IBEW members. Applications for this semester are being accepted now, so those interested should act as soon as possible. In January 2000, the program will be open to anyone.

Taking instructor-led online courses gives students more flexibility than a traditional classroom setting. The program is not entirely self-paced, but students can log on at any time from any location to complete the weekly requirements during the semester. Applicants who have previous training or education related to the program may be eligible to receive credit for such training through prior learning assessment.

The program does have tuition fees, which are based on an applicant's employment status and career plans. The web site will provide complete information. Employees of the four participating telecommunications companies are eligible for tuition assistance. Members working for Bell Atlantic, US West, GTE or SBC should contact their local union office for information on the specific aid available under their contract. All IBEW members are eligible for discounted tuition.

President Barry called the degree program "a valuable opportunity for IBEW members to obtain practical educational experience that will help them advance in the information-oriented industries of the future. We believe this program represents the cutting edge of working education." All interested members can visit www.nactel.org to learn more. 

Opens Its Virtual Doors

A green-tinted image of a laptop keyboard. Overlaid on the keyboard is a glowing globe of the Earth. Below the globe, the URL "www.nactel.org" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. The background shows the keys of the laptop keyboard, with some keys like "1", "2", "3", "4", "5", "6", "7", "8", "9", "0", and "F1" visible.

www.nactel.org

Where Do I Start?

Each student desiring to pursue the Associate's Degree under the NACTEL program *must* have access to a computer with Internet access on his or her own time. The hardware and software requirements are not burdensome, but older machines may not be adequate.

To learn more about the program and its requirements, as well as to register, visit the NACTEL web site www.nactel.org. This user-friendly site will provide complete information on the program, and guide you through the registration process. It will also help applicants to assess their computer skills to determine if an online degree program is right for them.

Because this is exclusively an online learning program, no

informational materials are available in print form. (There are books used in the course). The NACTEL web site is the only source of information about the program. There is a link on the site whereby applicants can contact a person for further information. The IBEW plays an integral role in the ongoing development, evaluation, marketing and governance of NACTEL, but does not administer the program. Those interested are urged to contact the NACTEL web site first for information and submit any questions through the link provided there. ☐