UC SANTA BARBARA

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Program Reboot

There's a good chance you have no idea what UC Santa Barbara Extension does. Bob York, interim dean of the program, understands this. That's one of the reasons he decided to changed its name.

"Nobody knows what 'Extension' means," he explained. "Even people I know who've been here for 30 years didn't know. 'What does extension do?' The academics on campus are mystified by it. Students — most of them have never heard of it. And even a lot of community members, I think, don't really know."

So, out with Extension, in with Professional and Continuing Education. Or, if you want to tempt the gods of language clarity, Extension 2.0.

But York and his team in the campus's Kerr Hall have embarked on something much more substantial than a name change: They're rethinking the program's mission, content and approach. For decades Extension was largely focused on continuing education, like project management and paralegal studies for the public. York, however, sees a much bigger — and largely untapped — audience for professional development courses: UCSB's nearly 22,000 undergraduate students.

He notes that a recent survey of undergrads showed 95 percent want some professional development as part of their education. "Many of them now are sensitive to, 'What am I going to do when go out there on the job market? How can I make myself more attractive to employers?' — that sort of thing," he said.

York, an electrical engineer who previously was chair of UCSB's lauded Technology Management Program (TMP), envisions a raft of courses and certification programs that will complement undergraduate degrees. For example, he said, "You can do a degree in cultural anthropology and maybe get a web development certificate to show an employer you have some tech skills."

The survey found students were interested in a number of topics Extension never offered, such as pre-med, pre-law, nonprofit leadership and fundraising, among others. York noted that UCSB is unique among UC campuses in that it has no traditional professional schools, such as law or medicine. Professional and Continuing Education, however, could help students prepare for the next step.

"I'm excited about some of the things that leverage our core expertise on campus with the great faculty and even staff that we have here in certain topical areas," he said. "My vision is that Extension can be the professional school of UCSB, that students will turn to us for professional course work."

Among the new certificate programs planned are pharmacy technician, EMT training, professional journalist, environmental project management and several focused on technology.

Professional and Continuing Education will model itself, appropriately, after TMP. Under York, its undergraduate certificate program — TMP also offers master's and Ph.D. degrees — was set up so that students took a mix of course work and Extension classes.

"It's structured like a minor but more focused on professional development," he said. "It's a hybrid. This is what the TMP model was. Students take a few classes in TMP, a few classes in Extension and then we package that together."

Beyond undergraduates and the community, the new Professional and Continuing Education will also focus on international students and core training programs for businesses.

For the latter group, York and his team created a "New Manager Boot Camp," an intensive, two-day course designed to give participants the skills they need to step into a management role. An example of what York called "executive education," the boot camp, held June 21 and 22 on campus, was aimed at the rapidly growing companies — many of them technology startups — based on the South Coast.

The idea for the course originated when York was at TMP, which had created the first professional degree program: the master's in technology management. In building the new degree, TMP had hired faculty from business schools from around the country. Most of them came from programs that operated executive education courses for local businesses.

Indeed, the boot camp featured two distinguished instructors: Kyle Lewis, professor and chair of TMP, and Paul Leonardi, the Duca Family Professor of Technology Management and the Investment Group of Santa Barbara Founding Director of the Master of Technology Management Program.

Other new offerings have included an 11-week intensive course in Web Development . The certification program, the first of its kind in the Santa Barbara area, was not for the faint of heart. It met three nights a week for three and a half hours each night. Most taking the course were working professionals on campus or in the community.

It was the sort of course York envisions for students as well. "I'd like to do something like that for students where they could take a class during their studies here to learn about web design or programming, mobile apps, that kind of thing," he said. "I'm a technology guy, so the technology stuff is the low-hanging fruit for me."

As it happens, Extension 2.0 represents something of blank slate for York and his team. Many of its senior managers retired around the time he took over, giving him the opportunity to reshape the program.

"We have a pretty lean operation in terms of staff," he said. "It's not just me that's new; a big fraction of the staff is new, so we're reinventing ourselves right now."

For a guy who started his own tech company in the 1990s, Professional and Continuing Education feels a little like those heady and challenging days.

"It's been a lot of fun," he said, "but it's liberating in some ways, too. Extension is obviously connected to UCSB, but it's its own self-supporting unit, so we have a lot of freedom to operate. I can wake up tomorrow morning and go, 'I think we should create a class in this,' and it's a reality a month later."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.