



# INTERSECT™

2 Professionals 2 Opinions 2 Points of View

## Geomatics Education

Should I start, continue, finish, or forget it? Part 2

### ■ GIS JANET says ...

**M**y motto is, "When hard times hit, hit school." In the past, I have begun searching for a new job by evaluating how much money and time it would take to learn a new job skill (one that is in demand) so that I could return to the work force and begin earning a paycheck as soon as possible. For me, that has most often meant expanding my education.

Usually, the quickest and easiest way to gain new education, training, or both is to check out the course offerings at your local community college. Most cities have a community college with a wide variety of courses that might quickly get you back among the gainfully employed and/or improve your opportunities.

The mission of most community colleges is to provide education and training for a specific field, such as GIS and surveying, in an effort to support the regional industries that require employees with that specialized knowledge. I am a big believer in community colleges, as I have seen the strategic and successful role they play in communities.

The administrators of the civil engineering and surveying technology program at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina, recently gave Randy and me an up-close view of how their program is accommodating the needs of the recently unemployed. "Our typical civil/survey student is 28 years of age, has good field experience and usually some military background," said Jim Hester, the department head. "Our program concentrates on helping them pass the surveying fundamentals exam, and I am happy to say we have a 95 percent pass rate.

"We offer our students solid, practical fundamentals with a variety of field experience, so they are well equipped to continue to a four-year-degree program or jump straight into the job market. Either way, they are educated, trained, and ready to take on real world challenges."

Jim also commented on Wake Tech's expanding geospatial (GIS) curriculum. "Every time a GIS course is offered, it fills up quickly, so we know we need to offer more GIS courses because GIS is becoming a core part of more subjects than just ▶

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### ■ SURVEYOR RANDY says ...

**J**anet's solution of expanding her job skills by expanding her education to recover from hard times has certainly been echoed by many people in the last several years. Thousands of employees across our state of North Carolina and across America have been forced to seek new employment for multiple reasons. Prior to this recession, many jobs were lost in the manufacturing and textile industries in North Carolina, and many workers were displaced as manufacturing facilities were moved to other countries. This meant aging workers, as well as younger workers, were pursuing jobs in fields for which they had not been trained or educated.

We do have one small comfort as surveyors: much of our work cannot be performed out of the country. While all of our work does not require it, surveyors still need to be physically on the site to perform many of our tasks. This is only a small comfort, however, because surveyors have certainly been affected

substantially by the current recession. For several years preceding 2008, it was nearly impossible to find employees for your surveying staff. Not only could you not find experienced surveyors with geomatics degrees to hire in our region of the country, you couldn't even recruit people with no surveying background at all! They just weren't interested in surveying.

The lack of persons pursuing surveying careers was so widespread in our state that the North Carolina

Board of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors and the North Carolina Society of Surveyors joined in a collaborative effort to attract new talent to the surveying profession. Part of that collaboration was with community colleges. We worked with the schools to broaden their surveying technology programs so students could transfer many of those course credits to obtain an undergraduate degree.

Unfortunately, just as this collaboration and other efforts were poised to bring new blood into the profession, the recession sent surveying into a tailspin. However, I do not believe all is lost. I am extremely hopeful that the worst is behind us. Although the recovery will probably be at a slower pace than previous recoveries, I do believe there will be a recovery in the surveying field. I also believe the foundation has been laid in North Carolina and is waiting to be built upon. ▶

**As technology continues to advance, education is critical to success in the surveying field.**

▶ surveying. Our environmental program uses GIS, and our landscaping program will offer GIS as part of their curriculum in the near future. We are hoping to expand our GIS course offerings by partnering with other local community colleges. These are uncertain but exciting times. We are eager to help the returning student do well in whatever curriculum is chosen.”

Our interview with Jim ended with a brief review of the school’s enrollment facts and figures. Overall, the general enrollment for the college has steadily climbed over the past three and a half years, by a total of 3.5 percent. However, the enrollment in the civil engineering and surveying technology program is down by 40 percent from the 2008 enrollment.

What is the trend? The numbers support my motto that “when hard times hit, hit school.” However, due to the concentration of market layoffs in surveying and GIS, other programs might be more attractive right now than civil technology and surveying. Let’s hope this downturn in trend is seen as a door wide open for those returning students looking to gain the education, training, and lasting skills to compete in our ever-changing world. †



**JANET JACKSON, GISP**, is certified as a GIS professional and heads McKim & Creed’s GIS activities.

▶ I applaud the community colleges that offer surveying technology programs. They are making—and will continue to make—a very significant contribution to providing qualified personnel for our profession. In Janet’s and my discussion at Wake Technical Community College with Jim Hester and Byron Latil, a surveying technology instructor, it was obvious they have the tools and are serious about preparing students for a surveying profession. As the technology continues to advance, the education being offered by the community colleges is critical to the student’s success in the surveying field as well as to the success of the surveying profession in tomorrow’s world.

I encourage any individual who is taking a different career path—from high school graduate to the more mature individual—either to start, continue, or finish his or her geomatics education. By doing that, you can be ready to capitalize on the economic recovery in a rewarding and challenging profession. †



**RANDY RAMBEAU, PLS**, is the geomatics office manager in McKim & Creed’s Raleigh, North Carolina office, overseeing conventional land surveying services. He is also a licensed professional surveyor in North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee.

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**While Janet and Randy may not see eye-to-eye on all surveying and GIS issues, they do work together on a daily basis, respect each other’s perspective and point of view, and attempt to “intersect” their professions whenever possible. Randy and Janet invite you to submit your questions to “Intersect.” Contact them via email at [intersect@mckimcreed.com](mailto:intersect@mckimcreed.com) or at 919-233-8091.**

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