

# New course for industry education

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## Designations to be integrated with college degrees

by Pat Healy

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BOSTON — A brand new educational process could nullify the need for insurance personnel to choose between an industry designation program and a college degree.

Last week three major educational institutions announced a collaboration aimed to add value to the insurance industry's professional designation programs by formally integrating industry programs into degree tracks at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Years in the making, the Insurance Industry Educational Consortium was created by the New England College of Finance (NECF), the American Institute for CPCU/Insurance Institute of America (AICPCU/IIA) and LOMA.

NECF President Bob Regan could hardly contain his enthusiasm in discussing the development.

"To see all these institutions cooperating like this is a marvelous thing," he said.

Regan said the idea began to take shape after Liberty Mutual and Chubb Insurance approached NECF with the idea of having professional designation credits transfer into degree programs. Then in 2002 when the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation selected NECF to be its partner in delivering online education to the financial services industry, all the pieces were in place.

Regan said it is the online component they're offering, thanks to the Sloan Foundation, that he finds most exciting.

"We can now provide anytime, anywhere access for financial services personnel throughout the U.S., and indeed worldwide," he said.

The programs will also be available on-ground for employees who prefer a more traditional face-to-face learning experience.

Some of the academic institutions across the country being invited to participate in the Consortium include Philadelphia's Drexel University, the continuing and professional education divisions of NYU, University of Maryland and University of California, Berkeley. All insurance industry designations delivered by AICPCU/IIA and LOMA will be recognized for credit transfer within the Consortium. NECF will deliver the Associate's Degree; Drexel and University of Maryland will accept appropriate designation credits into several bachelor's degree programs as well as their MBA programs; and NYU's School of Continuing and Professional Studies will deliver an M.S. degree in management and systems with a concentration in insurance and risk management. NECF and UC Berkeley Extension are also finalizing a new accelerated program in financial services with concentrations in insurance, banking, investment management, and trust services.

Contracts between the schools and the Consortium are on a three-year basis and they are all renewable.

NECF Vice President of Academic Affairs Diane Monaghan said the Consortium is looking into possible southern institutions and is talking to a school in the Midwest, but it is too soon to name any names.

"We don't plan on adding lots and lots of colleges," she said. "Mainly because we want to provide students and industry with choice on certain levels and plus if we were to add many more schools, we would be doing nothing but negotiating contracts all the time."

In negotiating the contracts, the parties reviewed and coordinated all the designation programs and identified where in the academic food chain they thought they should go, whether the programs should be Associate's, bachelor's or Masters.

Because of the Consortium's coordinated efforts insurance professionals going for their CPCU designation and their Masters' simultaneously will no longer face redundancy in curriculum.

Regan said finding where each program belonged was at times difficult.

"That was the sensitive thing about this," said Regan. "We had to make it so students weren't confused about this and colleges weren't confused."

Regan also said deans will no longer be the gatekeepers of credit transfer.

"Whether or not you could transfer a credit used to be a matter of what dean you were dealing with and on what day you were dealing with him. Now all the risk of credit transfer has been eliminated and we were able to contract with come of the finest colleges in the country."

Monaghan said the founding institutions of the Consortium are beginning to send out notices to those who hold insurance designations, informing them that credit transfer through this new development is retroactive.

"It could be a strong motivator for some to finish their designation," she said.

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Karen Burger, director of public relations and advertising with AICPCU/IIA, said she imagines a lot of CPCU designees will use the retroactive aspect of the Consortium for continuing education.

"About 80 percent of the CPCU class have a college degree but there are a lot of people for whom the Masters degree is of interest," she said.

AICPCU/IIA President and CEO Terrie E. Troxell said the Consortium will save a lot of time for younger people in the industry.

"By having professional designation credits transfer into degree programs, students achieve their academic goals more quickly, and the industry reduces its education expense," he said.

Thomas P. Donaldson, president and CEO of LOMA, said with the way things were the industry was spending the same amount of money for designations as it would for college courses, but people were getting less out of it.

"We will be enriching the value of our industry programs, reducing costs to the individual employee and company, and providing universal access to higher education to all employees regardless of location," he said.

As for monitoring the educational standards, the Consortium will be governed by an advisory board consisting of the three founding institutions as well as executives selected from major insurance companies within their membership ranks. These member companies will include representatives from Liberty Mutual, Chubb and Sons, The Hartford, AIG, John Hancock, Sun Life, Amica, and other prominent insurance companies throughout the U.S. and overseas. □