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International Pipeline

Lewis Energy Group teams up with UTSA to offer a certificate program in oil and gas management

Premium content from San Antonio Business Journal by Rick Klaw

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Since work began on the Eagle Ford Shale play, the industry has suffered from a lack of qualified workers such as experienced supervisors, field technicians, and equipment operators. Due to the cyclical nature of oil and gas prices, the industry always has been “boom or bust.” During a 15-year depressed cycle that ended in 2005, companies stopped hiring.

Workers retired.

Since jobs did not exist, no one trained for the positions.

To fill the void, San Antonio-based Lewis Energy Group has embarked on an ambitious educational project — one that includes a certificate program under development at the **University of Texas at San Antonio**.

“We’re going to develop a pool of skilled, qualified employees, both at the entry level — which is very critical to us — and at the higher educational levels such as geologists, degreed land men, and things like that,” explains [Randy Dill](#), global director of human resources at Lewis Energy Group. “We’re going to be able to hire local employees, people who are committed to the area, not only for a job but for a lifestyle.”

Lewis Energy Group drilled its first horizontal well in the booming Eagle Ford eight years ago, making industry giants comparative newcomers. The company is hiring 350 workers this year and has invested \$30 million to expand its corporate campus in Encinal, two hours south of the Alamo City.

ABCs of collaboration

Lewis recruited several institutions including Laredo United Independent School District, Laredo Community College, and UTSA to help fulfill its mission.

[C. Mauli Agrawal](#), Ph.D., P.E., dean for the College of Engineering at UTSA, endorses the vision.

“These people are from here. They will stay here. They will work here. And give them the ability to partake in the benefits of the Eagle Ford. [Lewis] is looking at the bigger picture, and I applaud them for that,” he says.

UTSA hopes to roll out the first certificate program for Oil and Gas Land Management in 2013.

The certificate will focus on training land managers or landmen, which currently are in high demand. These professionals manage a wide range of assets on the land including leases, titles, maps, rights of ways and more. According to a 2012 study by the American Association of Professional Landmen, average San Antonio landmen salaries ranged from \$86,000 to \$125,000 in 2010 and are expected to be even higher now. Earning certain levels of certification give landmen extra boosts in salary.

“The data suggests these current days are very good times for landmen and their profession. At no another time in the last 20 years have landmen enjoyed such strong compensation and a positive view of the future,” the study reports.

Still a work in progress, courses being considered for this UTSA two-year certificate include: Land Management, Land Management Economics, Sustainable Land Management, Lease & Contract Negotiation, Title Management, and Oil & Gas Laws. The classes would be offered through the colleges of both engineering and business. “We intend it to be a nights-and-weekend type program, because we realize people interested in this line of work probably already have a job and need maximum flexibility,” Agrawal says.

Lewis Energy has donated seed money for the program. But with constant educational cutbacks, UTSA needs further funding to cement the deal.

“We’re not in a position to launch new programs unless we get help,” Agrawal says. “Once launched, the program can be self-sustaining, but we’ll need other companies to come to the table.”

Meanwhile, the university also is designing a track in the mechanical engineering degree with an emphasis on the oil and gas industry. UTSA currently does not offer a petroleum engineering degree.

“We would like to employ people from the area that have established roots,” [Scott Wilkinson](#), Lewis Energy Group COO, elaborates. “The economic impact for the area from the Eagle Ford in 2011 alone was \$25 billion and support of 47,000 full time jobs. This will grow as the play continues to develop, and we would hope to make students from the area a big part of this impact.”

Grade school prospects

Looking further down the engineering workforce pipeline, UTSA already has developed an outreach program for kids known as the Interactive Technology Experience Center (iTEC), which offers programs in robotics and science.

“We are talking to Eagle Ford Shale companies as they are building their presence in the small towns,” shares Agrawal. “We’d like to use the iTEC system to provide outreach to those small communities.”

The university is quick to point out that it plays a neutral and educational role in the area of hydraulic fracturing. It provides research for industry and community that tackles not only the business side, but the environmental issues as well.

“We realize that on both sides there are still differing opinions,” Agrawal says.

Lewis Energy Group team members consult with the schools to help structure the curricula of several certification programs. “We’re a big part of the Eagle Ford Shale Consortium. We partnered with them on ways to identify opportunities for education,” says Dill. “We’re working with Laredo Unified Independent School District to identify the basic skills that should be taught — both hard skills such as math and PC skills and soft skills such as problem solving and business ethics.”

The company also is collaborating on a welding certificate program with the Laredo Community College. And the company offers paid internships, at a time when college students are clamoring for paid work.

“We had 18 interns here this past summer from schools all over the United States but primarily from Texas A & M, Baylor, UT, and UTSA,” Dill says.

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