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## Cal Poly to Offer Online Irrigation Classes Thanks to \$500,000 Donation

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly will soon offer students and professionals across California and the West a chance to earn university credit for irrigation classes – without leaving their jobs or their hometowns.

Cal Poly alumni Fred Hamisch and his wife Virginia jump-started the online irrigation classes with a donation of \$500,000 in December to the BioResource and Agricultural Engineering Department (BRAE) in Cal Poly's College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAFES).

Cal Poly's Irrigation Training and Research Center (ITRC) is currently seeking additional matching funding for the online courses from the US Department of Agriculture and from industry supporters. The funding will be used to create a large assortment of high quality online irrigation courses and continual updating of those courses.

"This program will mean people who cannot physically move to San Luis Obispo will be able to take state-of-the-art irrigation classes for professional development, or for university credit applicable here at Cal Poly or at other universities," said BRAE Professor and ITRC Chairman Charles Burt.

There is a growing lack of trained irrigation specialists, said CAFES Dean David Wehner. "California is the largest agricultural region in the United States, and we're facing a catastrophic lack of people capable of designing and installing the complex irrigation systems the industry relies on," Wehner said.

The shortage is partly due to the fact that most of the major agricultural universities in the West have reduced or eliminated irrigation classes over the past 20 years.

In contrast, Cal Poly offers extensive irrigation training. Cal Poly currently offers a bachelor's degree in BioResource and Agricultural Engineering that includes a specialty in irrigation, as well as a Water Science (irrigation) minor for non-BRAE students. The department also offers an MS in Agriculture with a focus on irrigation.

Students in those programs get hands-on experience in Cal Poly's outdoor irrigation laboratories. The campus irrigation training labs are funded by industry and by ITRC contracts with irrigation districts, the California Energy Commission, California Department of Water Resources, US Bureau of Reclamation, manufacturers, and others.

Hamisch, the initial donor for the online program, graduated from Cal Poly in 1963 with a degree in Agricultural Engineering, and his wife Virginia attended Cal Poly and studied elementary education. After serving in the Marine Corps, Hamisch worked in irrigation dealerships, eventually purchasing Hydratec in Delano in 1988.

Hydratec is an irrigation dealership that focuses on providing efficient and economic farm irrigation systems to farmers. Hamisch received the "Industry Person of the Year" award from The Irrigation Association in 2007 in recognition of his outstanding service to agricultural irrigation.

The couple recently sold Hydratec, enabling them to make the \$500,000 gift. "Cal Poly gave us a strong foundation

to launch our careers,” said Fred Hamisch. “We just hope this gift will provide future students the same opportunity. They are the ones who will be producing the crops that feed the world.”

For details on contributing to the online irrigation classes at Cal Poly, contact Tanya Kiani at [tkiani@calpoly.edu](mailto:tkiani@calpoly.edu).

For details on the irrigation program, contact Professor Burt at [cburt@calpoly.edu](mailto:cburt@calpoly.edu). For more information on the ITRC or the programs and services it offers to industry, visit its web site at [www.itrc.org](http://www.itrc.org).

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