

Where To Find the Next Generation of Leaders

CIM Growth Continues to Meet Industry Needs

By Brian Gallagher



CSU Chico students on a field trip to Knife River – Northern California Aggregates in Lodi.

Despite the sluggish economy, there is much opportunity for the design and construction industry related to stimulus projects, as well as improvements to our national infrastructure. And, where there's construction, there's concrete and the variety of jobs required to meet demand. However, in order to respond to this need, there have to be professionals trained in concrete technology and management.

Recognizing the need for people with enhanced technical, communication, and management skills, the Concrete Industry Management (CIM) program was developed. The CIM program is the first of its kind in U.S.—a 4-year Bachelor of Science degree in Concrete Industry Management. In 1996, the CIM program enrolled its first two students at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). The popularity of the program has taken off ever since, with more than 500 students pursuing degrees in CIM. To meet the vast interest of the program and recognizing the need to expand, the CIM program is currently offered not only at MTSU but also at Arizona State University, California State University, Chico, Texas State University, and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

The concrete industry is looking to the CIM program to develop the next generation of leaders, and to avoid losing that knowledge base, companies are hiring and will continue to hire industry-knowledgeable graduates to work side-by-side with their long-standing production, operations, technical support and project managers, sales representatives, and others who serve as their mentors to train and develop the future professionals of the concrete industry.

According to Kenneth Derucher, former dean of engineering at Chico State University, “the concrete industry is looking

to the CIM program to develop the work force that's going to assume the roles of the concrete professionals who will be retiring during the next 10 to 15 years. But instead of just looking at the university to fill the void, the industry companies, individuals, and associations have stepped in as partners to help develop, refine, and grow the program.”

To date, the concrete industry has invested more than \$2 million in CIM. A recent study conducted by the CIM National Steering Committee indicated that the concrete industry could easily support more than 500 CIM graduates per year. To increase enrollment in the CIM programs, the concrete industry continues to invest in the program and its graduates by offering scholarships.

The CIM Patrons continue to play a major role in helping support and advance the CIM program by helping provide concrete professionals, association leaders, and industry consultants who work with administrators to make sure CIM graduates are fully prepared for a career in the concrete industry. Dr. Tanya Wattenburg Komars, CIM Director/Program Coordinator at California State University, Chico says the patrons' contributions go well beyond funding to also adding value in the classroom as guest lecturers, providing students with fresh perspectives and a glimpse at the industry they wouldn't get otherwise. “The patrons share their expertise and business skills, and give students the opportunity to understand the industry and what opportunities are out there. They love the interaction and we believe that showing the students that the industry is involved in this program really makes a difference.”

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The CIM program is a business intensive program, providing solid management skills that can be used in any industry, but

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has been developed specifically for the concrete industry. The program gives students entering the concrete workforce an advantage since they gain valuable industry experience early in their careers, unlike others who have generic business degrees.

The program entails a broad range of courses, from English and history to science and mathematics. A series of required business courses such as finance, marketing, management, and business law are also taken throughout the length of the program. The concrete-specific courses teach the fundamentals of concrete, properties and testing, concrete construction, operations, concrete sales, and more. All of these courses provide much more than what is simply in the text—they emphasize problem-solving, quality assurance, and customer satisfaction. They utilize practical case studies and an internship to make sure the student obtains real-world experience essential to starting a successful career. Additional opportunities for growth include mentoring, on-campus company socials, and other organized events providing industry networking and professional development. Further, the program directors at each school as well as industry volunteers work closely with the CIM National Steering Committee on course content that is both useful and relevant.

SUCCESS TO DATE

Graduates of the CIM Program are hired for management positions throughout the concrete industry including production, material supply, contracting, manufacturing, testing, and associations. More than 400 students have graduated from CIM programs with starting salaries competitive with other high-tech industries.

According to Michael Shydowski, past vice chairman of the CIM National Steering Committee, “We find that CIM graduates join our industry with a strong awareness and knowledge of the concrete industry. This competitive edge enables them to make a positive contribution to their companies and the industry as a whole,” says Shydowski.

But, beyond accolades from the industry, the students also have declared the program a success. Lee Thrasher, a CIM Graduate now employed with Ready Mix USA, states that his involvement in the CIM program was an unbelievable experience.

“As someone who is working in the concrete industry today, I can say we received a quality, valuable education,” says Thrasher. “The seemingly endless opportunities offered by the CIM Program, and all the aspects covered by the curriculum, provide one of the best educational experiences available anywhere.”

THE FUTURE

“The CIM program will set the pace for our industry,” notes Jim Speakman, Patrons Group member for the CIM program at MTSU. “The concrete industry is global, and always in need of qualified workers. CIM is the provider of young professionals for every facet of the concrete arena. CIM will continue to be the hub for solidifying all of the concrete-related industries to coordinate the future promotion and use of concrete worldwide. Ultimately, I see the CIM program as a world center for concrete technology and management training. This would include interface with architects, engineers, and concrete-related associations, as well as federal, state, and local agencies.” ■

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