

Young Professionals and Academia: **What's Ahead?**

Welcome to Academia.edu@TWA!

Academia.edu@TWA, formerly called the Student Link section, has been refocused to make it more appealing to a broader TWA readership. This new section is dedicated to interesting and exciting topics related to training, education, and academia. Student Link concentrated on news about students and confined itself to the instruction function of the academe. Though students will continue to be one of the major focal points of Academia.edu@TWA, the new section will also feature other benefits that academe can offer industry, aside from producing graduates.

Over the past few decades, the field of petroleum engineering has undergone major changes. The evolution of technology as well as the increasing presence of computerized tools has revolutionized energy education. There is a pressing demand for young professionals (YPs) to acquire the necessary skill sets needed to ace their daily jobs and push the envelope further. We believe that academia has a big role to play here and we hope to better connect YPs to it.

The revamp of the section widens its coverage to the research, extension, and linkage functions of colleges and universities. It also expands its target audience to include those taking up post-graduate courses and others interested in topics concerning training and education of the conventional and nonconventional kinds. To reflect these changes, the section has been renamed Academia.edu@TWA. We gave the name an Internet-related format to reflect the fact that the section, like education, is expanding its frontiers to the technologies of the digital age. It is our intention to provide our readers with coverage of this transformation as seen through the eyes of students and professors from all over the world.

With this change in focus, the section intends to provide more relevant and motivational material for young E&P professionals and university students on various subjects related to the academe, especially new developments in research. The section aims to act as a bridge between the academic sector, young E&P professionals, and university students. The driving force for the strategic shift of focus is the undeniable fact that today's YPs and university students are continuously being called to meet the challenges to increase recovery and find new energy resources. Reaching out to YPs and students early through the section will assist in address-

ing this concern and will make the section more appealing to a broader TWA readership.

Academia.edu@TWA will feature brief articles from renowned professors/experts in the field of petroleum engineering (upstream and downstream) about cutting-edge technologies, new developments in academia, and profiles of renowned professors from different geographical regions. The purpose of these articles is to support universities in building a talent pool for the petroleum industry through interesting topics targeted to YPs and students. The next generation of individuals needs to be engaged in developing new technologies to respond to an ever-increasing global demand for energy and to recover much more from existing fields.

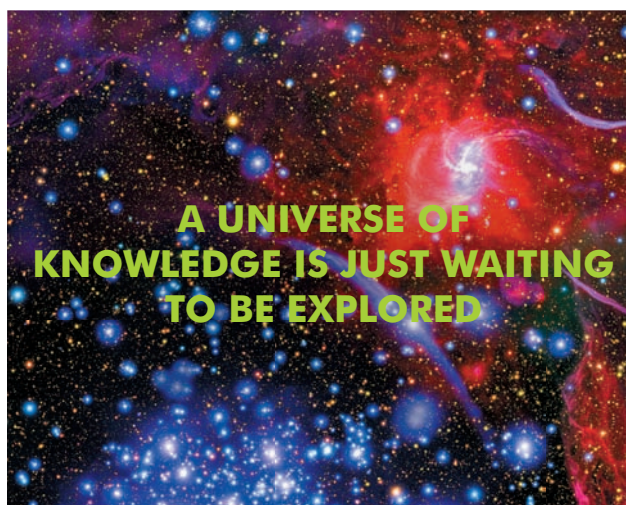
We hope to see greater involvement from YPs and university students in the continuing evolution of Academia.edu@TWA. We hope you like this change to your TWA. We are hoping to receive feedback regarding the material featured in this new section as well as suggestions for its improvement. Feel free to write to us at EditorTWA@spemail.org

Change is in the air, are you ready to join the fray?

TWA

In the past 4 years, it has been an exciting journey for Student Link. Change brings innovation and as we transition to Academia.edu@TWA, we are very excited to have Tony Fernandez as our first author. He shares with us his personal experience on obtaining a distance-learning graduate degree in petroleum engineering. It is never too late for adults to go back to school and earn an additional degree. Deciding the right time to pursue a graduate degree is a tricky affair. Often young professionals ask questions about the pros and cons of getting a graduate degree and the potential benefit it brings to a career. Fernandez brings some fresh ideas to the table through his confessions as a distance learner and the challenges he faced. We are excited about this new section and seek your active feedback to improve future issues.

Abhishek Anchliya, J. Shaun S. Toralde, Hui Pu, and Reza Rastegar, Editors, Academia.edu@TWA



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Confessions of a Distance-Learning Student

Antonio Fernandez



Fernandez

The case for enrolling in distance-learning (DL) programs, such as the one I recently finished, can be unique to each student's history, credentials, and career aspirations. Some students who recognize the value of a graduate degree appreciate being able to pursue higher education while working full time. Others enroll to reinforce their knowledge or to become an expert in a specific discipline.

An increasingly larger number of individuals are using DL programs to switch career gears and enter the lucrative E&P industry. I represent all of the above.

My Story

Some of us simply are not the prototypical oil industry engineers. I have a bachelor's degree in economics from Duke, and while I am proud of my undergraduate education, my job hunt after graduation led me to the stark realization that the majority of careers at E&P companies call for engineering or geoscience degrees. Therefore, I opted for the closest job I could find, an economic analyst position at a refining company, where I familiarized myself with the economic drivers, major players, and jargon of our industry.

To break through to upstream, a DL program fit the bill: I could learn petroleum engineering, obtain a technical degree, and continue to work at the same time. Merely 6 months after I began the program, I landed a job in upstream, and 2 years later I would obtain my degree. Mission accomplished.

Every Situation is Unique

This is, of course, a gross summarization of my experience but my purpose is merely to illustrate the uniqueness of my situation. Every student has used DL programs uniquely, so their "value" varies greatly. In fact, that value cannot be measured financially, but instead from a utility theory perspective. In other words, the degree's perceived value to one individual will be different than another's.

Throughout my tenure in the program, I have morphed from a recently graduated bachelor with a pipedream to a family man with a defined career goal. I have met peers in the DL program that range from a blue-collared newlywed to a seasoned technical expert and father of four. It is a great opportunity and a unique

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way of shaping your education to help steer your career in the direction you want it go.

The Ultimate Balance Trick

The one constant I have observed in the program is that the distance learner is essentially three persons in one: student, employee, and family member. The percentage of time and effort each facet requires depends solely on the individual. This is what makes every situation different.

Regardless of the balance trick, a DL education is a serious commitment that will require you to surrender some luxuries. When I was a bachelor, my life balance was approximately 40% studies, 40% work, and 20% family as I was able to absorb the coursework into my everyday life, only conceding "down time." Some people may, however, require "down time" to keep sane, and it should be a factor in their decision. Toward the end of my degree, life events changed my balance to 25/25/50, respectively, yet I still had to postpone planning my wedding because my plate was too full. These are not deal-breakers, but potential DL students should be keenly aware of which luxuries will have to be relinquished or temporarily postponed.

Curve Balls

Lastly, prioritizing should not be understated, because there will be times when one of these facets will monopolize your time. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, my family required 100% of my time as we struggled to repair our living situation and regain electric power over 2 weeks. Because my DL university was unaffected, classes went as scheduled and I fell seriously behind in my studies. I had to be nimble enough to focus on my family when it was crucial, and then fiercely concentrate on catching up to my studies later. The balance among studies, work, and family is incredibly fragile. While it is difficult enough to manage time during routine times, it takes serious dedication to reachieve normalcy when life throws a curve ball.

When deliberating on a DL education, one must establish a personal goal and understand the potential value of the degree. Determine how it will affect your work/life balance and identify the luxuries you will lose. Admit to flexibility and recognize that the ride will be full of ups and downs, because curve balls will inevitably be thrown at you. Finally, once committed, allow your goal to steer you in the right direction. Implementing this decision-making process will ensure that your result is as satisfying and rewarding an experience as it was to me.

Once you've prepared yourself mentally as explained above and you find that the value of the degree outweighs the sacrifices, I encourage you to pursue it. You will discover pathways towards career advancement and become a better manager of your resources all at the same time. Good luck and happy distance learning! **TWA**