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Electrical Engineering students work together to succeed

Staff, faculty and students have come together to insure the success of the electrical engineering program at UNM-LA. Pre-engineering program coordinator Oksana Gerlits and Bachelor and Graduate program manager Cindy Leyba are working closely together to ensure a smooth transition to upper division classes for students pursuing a career in electrical engineering.

“Despite the ending of our contract with Los Alamos National Laboratory and the loss of those funds, we have plans to not only continue, but add to the engineering program,” said Leyba.

“There is a strong need at LANL for electrical engineers,” said Gerlits. “We are working together to build a learning community that will give students the opportunity to get into the field. We want to attract students who may not have a traditional math/science background as well as those who do. We want to allow students to learn about engineering and see if it might be a good path for them.”

A cohort of mechanical engineering students is proceeding successfully through a four-year program at UNM-LA. This success inspired Gerlits and Leyba to put together a cohort geared toward future electrical engineers.

One of the students in the newly formed cohort is Chris Hatch. Hatch has recently completed an Associate of Science in Pre-Engineering at UNM-LA. Hatch is employed as an accelerator operator at LANCE (Los Alamos Neutron Science Center).

“I’ve worked with electrical engineers for the past four years,” said Hatch. “This degree leaves your career options wide open. Not much gets done today without circuits.”

Hatch is interested in working with renewable energy when he finishes his degree.

“The good thing about this group is that we are all on the same page. Everyone is working as well as pursuing a degree. The group allows us to have a lot of input in what classes will be offered each semester.”

The group is diverse. A number of students are already working in a technical capacity and want to advance to a bachelor's degree for expanded career opportunities. Others are new to the field. The group is student-driven, said Hatch, but UNM-LA staff has been extremely supportive and helpful. Anyone interested in pursuing electrical engineering at UNM-LA is welcome, including those who are just getting started.

“There is no way you can get an accredited engineering degree online. It’s a really neat opportunity to be able to get this degree here in Los Alamos,” Hatch said. “This is the most flexible program I can imagine.”