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Illinois Graphics Production Manager and Press Supervisor Jim Hoeniges, front, works as Jeff Wilmoth, back, walks behind him at Illinois Graphics in Bloomington. Hoeniges is in the pilot group of a new weekend bachelor's degree program under way at Eureka College.

A new twist on college

Eureka College offers bachelor's degree in weekend program

By Michele Steinbacher
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EUREKA — For a tiny institution tucked away in Central Illinois, Eureka College has produced some impressive leaders.

President Reagan comes to mind first. But the private liberal arts college also has graduated three state governors, four members of Congress, and more than 40 college presidents.

So it's only natural that a new weekend bachelor's degree program under way at Eureka celebrates that history of leadership, said Junius Rodriguez, a history professor and

faculty adviser to the new program.

"We've been doing leadership here for more than 150 years," he said.

Thirteen Central Illinois residents enrolled for the new organizational leadership degree completion program this spring, and a second group begins next month.

The new major offers nontraditional students, who have an associate's degree, a path toward a bachelor's degree by attending classes every other weekend for about 20 months. Tuition, books, fees and supplies cost \$27,200 for the whole program. Financial aid is available.

Jim Hoeniges of Bloomington is among the pilot group. As a married father of three who works as a production manager, Hoeniges said the Eureka program is perfect for someone like himself.

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In December, he finished an associate's degree at Heartland Community College in Normal. But his full-time position at Illinois Graphics in Bloomington makes attending traditional daytime college classes toward a bachelor's degree nearly impossible.

"This is an excellent opportunity for a nontraditional student," he said.

Like his fellow students, Hoeniges arrives on the Eureka campus about 5 p.m. every other Friday for four hours of evening class. He then returns at 9 a.m. the following day for an all-day lineup. It's an intense schedule.

"The accelerated format is demanding. But getting this degree in 20 months versus the five or six years it would take otherwise is appealing to some people," said Shari Rich, Eureka career services director, and program coordinator.

Rich said the format allows a group college experience for the otherwise isolated nontraditional students.

Though weekend master's degree programs are common in the state's higher education landscape, weekend bachelor's versions are a new wave, said Don Sevener, Illinois Board of Higher Education spokesman.

Education experts at the Springfield based state agency say they expect to see more programs such as Eureka's weekend bachelor's offering popping up, he said.

Privately owned higher education institutions tend to respond to market needs earlier than public institutions, said Sevener.

He pointed to the popularity of online-degree programs. The now common form of higher education began and thrived first with such private schools as the University of Phoenix. Many public colleges and universities now also offer online degree enrollment.

Christine Price of Bartonville has worked in Caterpillar Inc.'s technical writing department for years. She considered enrolling in an online bachelor's degree program, but is glad she found Eureka's offering instead.

"I like coming to the classroom," she said, noting the interaction with fellow students is important to her.

The group completes one course each six week period, and also takes part in separate "practicums" that apply skills and theories learned in class, said Rich.

Most recently, students researched how a town becomes an Illinois Main Street community under a state economic-development agency program. The group then presented its findings, and the pros and cons of such a venture, to local Eureka leaders.



Wilmoth, left, looks on as Hoeniges pulls a print from the press at Illinois Graphics in Bloomington. Hoeniges is enrolled in a new organizational leadership degree completion program at Eureka College.

Rich describes the organizational leadership program as a hybrid between communications, business and community leadership.

"I'm in a leadership role where I work, so it fit nicely," said Hoeniges, describing this program as a perfect complement to his role at Illinois Graphics.

People who work in office positions for Twin City-based insurance companies, a local university staff member, a Peoria School District 150 teaching assistant, a Eureka homemaker, and a tennis coach from Pekin are among the current group.

"We all have different reasons we're here," said Betsy Bladel, a student in the program, who works as a reading tutor in Peoria's District 150.

She thinks working as a group also fits in well with the organizational leadership concept.

"We're going to sink or swim together," she said.

Organizing Leaders

Eureka College now enrolls students in an organizational leadership bachelor's degree program. It targets adults who have earned associate's degrees and whose schedules make an accelerated weekend-only program attractive.

- ▶ Students work through the degree program as a group, enrolling in all classes together. They must attend class every other weekend for 20 months, including summer.
- ▶ Organizational leadership program participants are considered full-time students, due to the accelerated workload.
- ▶ Classes meet Friday nights and all day on Saturdays. Students complete one course at a time, each lasting about six weeks. Besides classroom seminars, students also must enroll in programs for practical application.
- ▶ Sample courses include: Organizational Management, Small Group Communication and Philosophy of Leadership.
- ▶ The inaugural group began in March. Eureka plans to start another group in August and a third in January. Ideally groups will include about 20 students.
- ▶ Prerequisites: An associate's degree, or enough transferable credits that puts one close to attaining an associate's. For more information, call the Center for Lifelong Learning at 309-467-6678 or email LLEdCtr@eureka.edu.