

# Cyber Turf

It's the second day of Turfgrass Management 235, and agronomy professor Al Turgeon is checking his class roster. One student has been to class 190 times already. Another, only 9 times, "Well, I guess it's better than this guy," Turgeon says, pointing to a name on the computer. "He hasn't even logged on yet."

"Logging on" is how students attend Turgeon's class. Students log on from Nevada. They log on from Puerto Rico. In fact, they can log on from anywhere in the world.

Turfgrass Management 235 is the first up-and-running, on-line class offered by Penn State's World Campus. Instead of bricks and steel, this "virtual campus" is built with Internet Web pages. Since University President Graham Spanier announced the project in 1996, the campus has been pieced together page by page. On January 19, Penn State's first cyber-semester finally began, with Al Turgeon as Penn State's first cyber-teacher.

According to Turgeon, one advantage of the World Campus is that students control when and where they take class. "You can read lessons on your lunch break, or you can sit home in your pajamas at 11:00 at night." Although Turgeon gives deadlines for homework assignments, students can move through lessons at their own pace.

Turgeon posts the same course materials online that he uses in his conventional classroom classes. Because it takes time and money to put everything on the Internet, however, tuition is higher: \$745 for the World

Campus course compared to \$573 for the University Park classroom version.

Right now, the five-course World Campus turfgrass program doesn't offer a degree, just a certificate. By the end of this year, the World Campus will include other programs such as noise control engineering and business logistics. Gary Miller, '70, '75 MA Lib, '85 Ded Edu, associate vice president for Distance Education and director of the World Campus initiative, expects the campus to offer graduate degrees by the end of 1998. Furthermore, the campus could easily become Penn State's largest campus by reaching more than 40,000 students, says James Ryan, vice president for Outreach and Cooperative Extension.

But Turgeon doesn't foresee online education taking the place of old-fashioned classrooms. "It's not a substitute for a four-year undergraduate degree," he says. "But it's perfect for the person who already has a degree and wants to take up golf course care as a pastime or for someone who isn't ready for college but wants to start somewhere. How people want to use it is up to them."



*Credit: March/April 1998 The Penn Stater*

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