



News Release

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WESTERN INSTITUTE TRAINS INMATES ON GIS

St. Joseph, Mo. —Oct. 6, 2005—Reducing the inmate recidivism rate and providing a service to small towns that they otherwise could not afford are the goals behind a program recently initiated by Missouri Western State University's Western Institute.

Since June, the Community Information Service program has trained inmates at the Western Reception Diagnostic Correctional Center in St. Joseph in the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and computer mapping. To date, 24 inmates have completed the three-week, four hours per day training. The data entered by the inmates is customized by Western Institute staff and Western students for use by small towns in Missouri for economic development.

"I know from experience that all cities in the United States want GIS data for community economic development," said Dr. Chris Shove, Western Institute Executive Director. "And the small towns would never be able to afford this."

Lisa Miller, a conservation/wildlife major from California, Mo., has been working on customizing GIS data for Trimble, Mo.'s economic development plan. "I've always been interested in GIS. I enjoy it," she said. "I've learned the general aspects of GIS. There are so many things you can work on with it."

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Dr. Shove, who was formerly the director of the Center for Geographic Information Science and Applied Geographics for the University of Toledo, noted that careers using GIS and Geographic Positioning Systems (GPS) skills are some of the fastest growing industries in the United States. When released from prison, he said the inmates with this skill would have the ability to work in GIS operations or start their own businesses.

Dr. Shove recently received a letter from one of the inmates who had been trained on GIS operations, requesting certification information. “Through your compassion and personal commitment to those of us incarcerated, I have found great hope and desire knowing that I will be able to compete in the job market with a skill that is needed.”

The program is partially funded by the Youthful Offenders Program, whose goal is to teach job skills to inmates under age 25. Dr. Shove said the next focus of the Community Information Services program is to train the inmates to do the GIS training in the future for other inmates.

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Missouri Western State University is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The university offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.