Reflections on the 2008 Professional Development School

Linnea Wahl, 2008 PDS Administrative Dean

If you advertise it, they will come. And then more will come! This is the enviable position we deans of the 2008 Health Physics Society (HPS) Professional Development School (PDS) found ourselves in this past January. Academic Codeans Vashek Vylet and Don Cossairt and I were worried when, with just six weeks to go, only 39 students had registered for the school. In a flurry of emails and Web site postings, we urged colleagues to consider attending the school. Then the holiday season passed and the registration forms flew in. By the time the bell rang on the first day of school, 31 January, 120 students had arrived for an intense three days of learning about “Topics in Accelerator Health Physics.”

What was it that attracted folks to the 2008 school?

**Timely Topic**

Perhaps it was the timeliness of the topic, accelerator health physics. The student body included many state regulators who are responsible for inspecting medical accelerators. Many of these regulators will also be affected by the latest Nuclear Regulatory Commission rule establishing licensing authority for naturally occurring and accelerator-produced radioactive material (NARM). For these folks, the 2008 school was in the right place at the right time.

**Schedule**

The timing of the school, immediately following the 2008 Midyear Topical Meeting on “Radiation-Generating Devices,” was also fortuitous. Many students cited this as their reason for attending—they saved money by taking one trip and time by staying in the same hotel. The midyear and school topics were planned to perfectly complement one another.

**Curriculum**

Certainly, people were drawn to the curriculum put together by Vylet and Cossairt. Breaking all rules for an HPS school, the two academic...
deans set up two parallel tracks. One track provided the basics of accelerator health physics and the other expanded on the basics for more experienced practitioners. The textbook (see accompanying article) spans the subjects covered in both tracks.

**Basics Track**

The basics track was the most popular—it was standing room only on the first day. On subsequent days, students had to forego the tables so that all might at least have a chair to sit on. The sessions were packed, too, with information about accelerator physics, medical physics, materials activation, shielding, monitoring instruments, dosimetry, and more. Handouts from each session, along with a compact disc of all presentations, packed the students’ three-ring binders.

In one very popular lecture from the basics track, Kurt Sickafus from Los Alamos National Laboratory began by regaling us with stories of his six dogs and four cats. Before we knew it, we were deep into a lecture about crystallography and radiation damage, complete with ping-pong ball models. Students left that session with a new understanding of why some materials are better than others for encasing radioactive waste.

**Advanced Track**

Down the hall and around the corner, the advanced track was more lightly attended than the basics track. Although the topics were similar and the faculty was the same, the lectures were twice as long. For those with a background or experience in accelerator health physics, the opportunity to learn from recognized experts in the field was a definite plus.

**Advertising**

Then again, maybe the advertising drew students to the school. In late 2006, the HPS Accelerator Section prepared a gorgeous, eye-catching poster to advertise both the midyear and the school. With help from the Northern California Chapter of the HPS, the poster was sent to people at accelerators, hospitals, universities, and industries worldwide.

Soon after the poster went out, the Web site went up. The look and content of the PDS Web site coordinated well with the meeting Web site. Then there were the articles in *Health Physics News*. If you’re a regular reader of the newsletter, you probably grew tired of hearing about the “upcoming 2008 Professional Development School.” We told you about the scholarship funds raised by the sale of rare volumes so generously donated by Ralph Thomas, about the textbook (in print and on compact disc) written by the faculty and received by each student, and about the wonders of beautiful Oakland and the surrounding San Francisco Bay Area.

**Unforgettable Experience**

Whatever it was that drew folks to the 2008 Professional Development School, we did our best to make it an unforgettable experience.

The students, faculty, and staff enjoyed sumptuous breakfasts and lunches together high atop the Marriott overlooking the beautiful San Francisco Bay. We socialized one evening at a get-to-know-your-classmates reception. On Friday night, we all boarded buses or walked to the nearby Silver Dragon Restaurant in Oakland Chinatown to celebrate the Chinese New Year in style, enjoying a delicious Chinese feast and a traditional lion dance. The dance troupe, the Oakland Police Department’s Asian Youth Services Committee led by Sifu Robert Lee, are to be congratulated for their fascinating performance.
Great Fun Great Success

Looking back, the 2008 Health Physics Society Professional Development School was great fun and a great success.

If you were able to join us, many thanks for helping make it so. If you were not able to join us, there’s always a chance to make up for it—soon we’ll have the 2009 school to look forward to!

Many Thanks!

Many people worked together to make the 2008 Professional Development School a success.

The midyear and school topics were planned to perfectly complement one another. We have the Technical Program Task Force—Scott Walker, Elsa Nimmo, and Kamran Vaziri—and the academic deans, among others, to thank for that.

Thanks go out to all of the faculty who gave their lectures in long and short forms on the parallel tracks: Don Cossairt, George Coutrakon, James Liu, Joseph C. McDonald, Lutz Moritz, Sayed Rokni, Kurt Sickafus, Kamran Vaziri, Vashek Vylet, and Gary Zeman.

Scott Walker deserves credit for the poster that advertised the meeting and the school, and the midyear Local Arrangements Committee—Kathleen Dinnel-Jones, Dawn Banghart, and John Ahlquist—along with Radoslav Radev are to be thanked for their role in getting the word out.

Mike Calvert, Webmaster extraordinaire, did an excellent job coordinating the look and content of both the midyear and school Web sites.

Many thanks are due to Jim Tripodes and the newsletter staff for their efforts in keeping the school foremost in your mind.

The school administrative staff, which included me, Melissa Mannion, and Dawn Banghart, was ably assisted by the next school’s administrative dean, Brian Vetter. Melissa, Dawn, Brian—many, many thanks. Thanks also to Eberline Services, Inc., who donated materials and services for preparing the student handouts, and to Jim Barstow of Canberra, who provided canvas bags.

Professional Development School Faculty and Deans

Back row, left to right: Jame Liu (faculty), Brian Vetter (2009 dean), Dawn Banghart (midyear LAC and PDS staff). Front row, left to right: Kamran Vaziri (faculty), Linnea Wahl (2008 administrative dean), Joe McDonald (faculty), Don Cossairt (faculty and 2008 academic dean), Vashek Vylet (faculty and 2008 academic dean)
I f you attended the 2008 HPS Professional Development School (PDS), you’re already the proud owner of this outstanding textbook, *Topics in Accelerator Health Physics*. But what to do if you couldn’t attend the school? Never fear, the solution is near.

You can purchase this valuable text for just $50 from the publisher, Medical Physics Publishing (http://www.medicalphysics.org and search for the title). And you won’t be disappointed. The editors, J. Donald (Don) Cossairt, Vaclav (Vashek) Vylet, and John W. Edwards, did an excellent job weaving together 13 chapters written by nine PDS faculty members and other accelerator health physics experts.

The text reprises and expands upon the lectures given at the 2008 school. As stated in the preface, the text “provides a solid background on [accelerator health physics] that can serve as a foundation for further understanding, reading, and study.” With topics that range from basic accelerator physics to radiation damage effects, this book is sure to be a reference that you will reach for again and again.

Andrew Karam’s proposal for the 2009 Professional Development School (PDS) has been approved by the Health Physics Society (HPS) Board of Directors. The PDS will focus on various topics regarding naturally occurring radioactive material, accelerator-produced radioactive material, and technologically enhanced naturally occurring radioactive material. All of these types of radioactive materials are somehow, somehow covered under the acronyms NORM, NARM, & TENORM (and maybe more than once).

Since the 2008 PDS was just held this past January immediately following the HPS midyear meeting in Oakland, you will have to wait another 15 months or so before it’s time for “Back to School.” But do not fret, for the topic’s been chosen, the faculty is being assembled, the location has been set (Minneapolis, Minnesota), and we are zeroing in on dates—sometime before or after the 2009 HPS Annual Meeting, also to be held in Minneapolis. How convenient!

Karam, Rochester Institute of Technology, will serve as the academic dean, and I look forward to serving all of you would-be students and faculty as the administrative dean, so stay tuned for further updates, and remember that it’s never too early to start making those 2009 Back-to-School plans!