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Pawley Institute course offers hands-on experience

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

Students in the **Pawley Institute's** first lean principles graduate course recently got hands-on learning experience at a company already practicing lean management.

NuStep, an Ann Arbor manufacturing company, invited students to visit the company, review their processes and make recommendations about the assembly throughput and volume of the machines produced there.

"We saw it as a unique opportunity," said Mike Steiner, manufacturing manager at NuStep. "We like the approach the Pawley Institute is taking. We want to learn as much as we can about lean."

NuStep produces a cross-training exercise machine used in health clubs and physical therapy and rehabilitation programs. Dick Sarns, owner of NuStep, created the machine and company.

The 24 graduate students in the winter 2004 semester were divided into four groups and given a problem statement related to improving throughput of the product through the plant. Among many other aspects of lean, students learned about a technique called value stream mapping, which they applied to the processes.

"We were impressed with the level of detail and value-stream mapping the students provided in their presentations," Steiner said. "They used the concepts and tools they were being taught in the classroom and put them into practice on the floor."

Based on the success of this experience, Steiner said OU students will be invited back next semester.

"The OU students were very detail oriented, and they understood the philosophy of the company and were in tune with what we were after," Steiner said. "They understand that our people took us where we are today, and they sincerely wanted to help. It wasn't just a grade for them; they really wanted to make a difference.

"Our partnership is evolving into a beneficial experience for both OU and NuStep."

The partnership, engineered by Kevin Yamada, executive director of the **Pawley Institute**, and Sarns, gave students in the first-ever interdisciplinary, lean learning course at Oakland University an opportunity to see firsthand how a lean organization could and should work.

"The expectation was not to fix everything. With limited exposure, two or three times at the company, you can only do so much," Yamada said. "The students had many good ideas and their presentations were very well documented and professional. That's why NuStep wants to continue the relationship with the Pawley Institute and OU students."

"The idea is that the company will progress when we're not there. They will continue to seek out ways to improve their operations."

The course will be offered again in the fall, when the class will be given new problem statements based on NuStep's current situation.

Three schools within OU will collaborate to co-teach the course, known as SYS 595, POM 680 and HRD 605. Up to eight students from each school will learn from the **School of Education and Human Services**, **School of Engineering and Computer Science**, and **School of Business Administration** professors. Guest speakers also will be invited to some of the classes.

SUMMARY

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