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WMU in the News

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A degree of knowledge

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A degree of knowledge

Will new communications technology widen or close the gap between the third-world and the developed nations? Education is the key and a new course at the WMU is to provide it.

The World Maritime University in Sweden (WMU) has unveiled a new initiative designed to introduce the full potential of modern communication techniques to a much broader audience and in particular to shipping industry executives from the developing countries.

With satcoms sparking a communications revolution in shipping and helping to shrink the world, high-quality education and training in how to make the most of new techniques is one of the most important services anyone can provide. The policy at WMU is to keep abreast of the very latest advances in shipping and related industries, which means having the flexibility to re-tailor their courses and weave new material into them as and when required.

To demonstrate that the policy applies in practice and not just in theory, the university is to inaugurate, later this year, a major series of lectures and seminars on modern maritime communication, one of the most rapidly advancing and dynamic facets of today's shipping world.

It is communication that ties the threads of the shipping industry together. WMU plans to devote an entire week to all aspects of the subject, from the details and implications of the global maritime distress and safety system to the potential of satellite communication as a fleet management tool. So important and fundamental is this subject considered to be, that the week of lectures will form part of the syllabus for all students at WMU, regardless of which course they may be following.

The expertise and, indeed, the lecturers for the communication programme will be provided by Inmarsat. Inmarsat is already well established as a contributor to the WMU, providing lectures on distress communication and on the Inmarsat system itself as a regular part of the university's programme. But the week-long seminar will go far beyond basic principles. It will show students how today's methods of communication, allied with computers and data processing technology, are forcing fundamental changes in working requirements, procedures and organisation throughout the shipping industry.

The students at the WMU are drawn from all sectors of the industry – typically fleet operation, port administration, government departments and inspectorates – but the vast majority are from developing nations. The university is a melting pot of cultural backgrounds. More than 100 countries, as disparate as Pakistan and Panama, Chile and China, have been represented there. What unites them is the desire to expand and improve their shipping industries and infrastructures and close the gap between themselves and the traditional maritime powers.

To gain acceptance to the WMU, students are required not only to be of a

benefited from the gift of 12 IBM-compatible personal computers from the Hong Kong Shipowners Association and a donation has been promised from Japan that will enable the university to buy 16 more PCs installed on a local area network.

Education is the key to advancement and staff at the university are keen to stress that what they offer is something much more than just training. Thus, while a basic grounding in the use of computers is given, the purpose is not simply to produce expert computer operators. WMU students are expected to devote much of their efforts towards an examination of the strategic role of computers as management tools and training aids. They are encouraged to develop their own ideas about how best to adapt computer technology to the needs of their own countries or companies.

Since opening its doors to its first student in 1983, the World Maritime University (WMU) in Sweden has



The bustling maritime city of Malmö in Sweden provides an ideal setting for the World Maritime University's headquarters (left). The use of computers and satcoms is already part of the syllabus (below) but will become a major focus this year in an intensive week-long course



high calibre but also to have already proved themselves as high achievers. Depending on their area of specialisation, all students must be qualified Master Mariners or have an academic degree.

The timing of the modern communications course is particularly significant. It acknowledges the danger that the increased importance of computers and advanced technology in all aspects of shipping may serve to widen, rather than diminish, the gap between the developing and developed shipping nations. It also comes at a time when the WMU is becoming much better equipped to address the use of computers and information technology in the maritime world. Already it has

already become firmly established as one of the foremost centres of shipping related education anywhere in the world. There are many reasons for its success. But one of the key points has been a recognition that the only effective education programme for industry is one which constantly adapts to reflect the developments taking place within that industry.

The modern communications programme will continue to place the emphasis on concepts and ideas rather than just how to use equipment. This will give the students and, by definition, the developing countries, the best possible opportunity to gain maximum advantage of the new, smaller world in which we all now live. ●