

Interactive State-of-the-art Communications Training System Brings Elgin Community College (IL) into the 21st Century

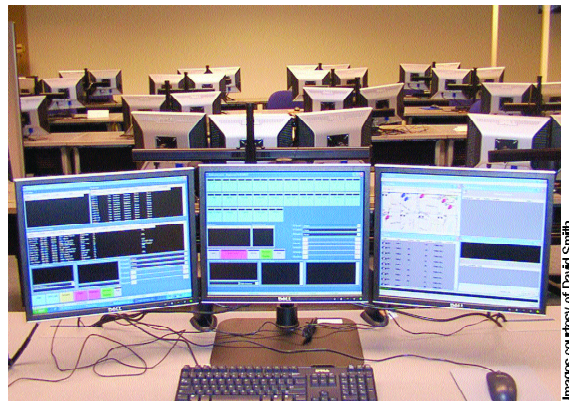
Installed and instructor training conducted, SAVE Corporation's virtual 9-1-1 dispatch simulator training system helps new dispatchers get a professional edge when it comes to finding their first job.

IN AN EMERGENCY, THE FIRST PEOPLE TO ANSWER a 9-1-1 call are public safety communications specialists and police, fire and ambulance dispatchers. These well-trained, highly professional individuals send the appropriate type and number of emergency services units in response to calls for assistance and monitor the activity of emergency services personnel at the scene. They work in a variety of settings, ranging from police and fire stations to hospitals or centralized city communications centers.

Developing a Training Program

In 1998, Elgin Community College (IL) was approached to consider implementing a 9-1-1 dispatcher training program which would offer two certificates leading to careers as public safety dispatchers or communications specialists. A committee of public safety communications professionals, six communications center directors and supervisors, was formed to work with the College to develop a curriculum, finally establishing one which used the State of Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board's recommended basic level training for public safety telecommunicators established in 1996. Two public safety communications program certificates were created as part of the curriculum—Basic Vocational Specialist Certificate, which comprised of Public Safety Telecommunicator I and Public Safety Telecommunicator II courses, and Vocational Specialist Certificate, which included the Telecommunicator courses and others such as:

- The Police Service
- English Composition
- Public Safety Answering Point
- Public Safety Answering Point Application
- Fundamentals of Speech
- Introduction to Criminal Justice
- Stress Management in Law Enforcement
- Emergency Medical Dispatch
- Public Safety Answering Point Practicum
- And one of the following:
 - Career Management



View of the PSC Lab from the Administrator's/Instructor's position.

Images courtesy of David Smith.

- Legal Aspects/Public Safety Communications

In addition, donations of the following equipment from various governmental agencies allowed a classroom setup that included:

- A Motorola Centracom Dispatch Console
- A Dictaphone Veritrac Dictalog
- A Dictaphone Communications Recording System
- A Motorola Mobile Dispatch Console with Mics
- A Motorola Radio Phone
- TTY & TDD Machines

In order to power the equipment, the College purchased a central electronics bank for \$25,000.

In Spring 2000, the first Public Safety Telecommunicator class was held at the downtown Elgin campus. Class sizes were restricted to 15 per class for training purposes. Between 2000 and 2006 class sizes ranged from five to eight students. The Ad-hoc Committee which helped create the program became the College's PSC Advisory Committee and meets three to four times per year. Public Safety Telecommunicator instructors were selected from the Advisory Committee and they group or block-teach the classes.



View of the PSC Lab from the entrance door to the Lab.

Upgrading the Program and Technology

Because training a new dispatcher is one of the most critical tasks a communications professional can assume, since dispatchers are the main point of contact between an organization's personnel and the public, the PSC Advisory Committee met in March 2005 and recommended the following:

- Consolidation of the then current PSC 101 and PSC 102 classes into one class to eliminate mid-semester registrations.
- Upgrading the equipment used to instruct potential dispatchers by bringing existing technology into the classroom to simulate a dispatch center as much as possible.
- Create a short non-credit orientation course for potential public safety dispatchers that would allow career exploration and clarify expectations for entry-level candidates.

With assistance from the local Congressman's Office, the Honorable Dennis Hastert, the College applied for and received a Federal Department of Justice Edward Byrnes Discretionary Grant in the amount of \$ 248,000 and laid out several goals and objectives:

- Develop three new credit level and five to eight non-credit level training seminars identified by local law enforcement personnel.
- Update instructional equipment necessary to provide effective and realistic education for public safety communicators.
- Develop a non-credit orientation course for potential public safety communicators that would allow further career exploration and clarify expectations for entry-level candidates.
- Market and deliver credit and non-credit courses to PSC and CRJ program students in order to increase the overall level of skill and preparedness for first responders.
- Evaluate new credit offerings in CRJ to determine their ability to satisfy demand and improve skills of law enforcement personnel.
- Evaluate the impact of updated equipment in the non-credit orientation class for PSC to determine student preparedness.

As a result, in September of 2005 a curriculum change combining PSC 101 and PSC 102 into PSC 105—Public Safety Telecommunicator was approved. PSC 105 is a six credit hour

course which meets two nights a week for a full semester, and upon completion students receive the Basic Vocational Specialist Certificate.

Bid specifications were developed to upgrade the college's PSC training equipment and all necessary hardware and software for:

- 9-1-1 simulator system
- Computer-aided dispatch system
- Radio simulator system
- Networking
- System upgrades
- Delivery costs
- Travel and necessary consulting costs
- Installation costs
- Training costs
- Warranty costs

Additionally, the system was to include but not be limited to:

- Client/Server based programs
- ANI/ALI editing
- Multiple line configurations
- Customary radio and phone screens
- Student log in and password
- Audio recordings

SAVE to the Rescue

The bid was ultimately awarded to the SAVE Corporation located in Edgewater, FL. Tony Sanders, owner and CEO of SAVE Corporation and owner and president of Sanders Audio Visual Equipment (SAVE), has been providing critical training systems for 25 years. He states, "Working with public safety has always been an important part of our business. Developing interactive state-of-the-art communications training systems is our primary focus."

SAVE Corporation was awarded the contract to provide a 16-position dispatcher training system. David Smith, program director for Criminal Justice Program at Elgin Community College, says that the college shopped around for programs and equipment, and even contacted companies who produced the actual software used in 9-1-1 centers. However, ultimately, the SAVE Corporation actually provided an existing simulator system which provided a computerized radio, phone and CAD in one complete package, allowing the college to create or replicate a generic 9-1-1 center setting for the students to work with. The most sophisticated device of its kind, the new OMNI-COMM Phase II E911 System training simulator is a state-of-the-art virtual training simulator system, duplicating the operation of a 9-1-1 communications center. Incorporating a CAD, radio and an E9-1-1/phone simulator to provide everything necessary for training personnel in a realistic setting using emergency scenarios, the classroom instruction uses students as role players allowing the trainees to learn by giving them freedom to create, explore, prepare for and critique the variety of emergencies they will eventually face. First-time emergency dispatchers have two ways to develop their skills in the workplace, on-the-job, or in an employee sponsored program. Installed and instructor training

conducted, at the FSQ Campus in downtown Elgin, the virtual 9-1-1 dispatch simulator training system from SAVE helps new dispatchers get a professional edge when it comes to finding their first job.

Hands on training prior to the 9-1-1 Training Simulator existed of students sitting at the old training counsel taking simulated calls over a portable radio or phone, or the old TTY/TDD phone, hand writing dispatch cards and dispatching calls to other students located through the classroom. According to Smith, "There is no comparison between how hands-on-training was conducted prior to the training simulator, and how the hands-on-training is now handled. Under the current system, the simulator logs everything a student does during training, and allows them to save both audio and a log kept on the computer to a CD for self-evaluation. The analogy would be like comparing the old process and system of dispatching to the new computer-aided dispatch technology now in use. The current students learn and experience much more in less time using the new simulator system through role playing of realistic type calls for service."

In addition to SAVE's training system, the new PSC Lab was refurbished and the electrical system was upgraded to include a new electrical circuit panel and surge protection system. New computer tables and chairs were bid out and installed in the PSC Lab. The first PSC 105 Public Safety Telecommunicator class was held with SAVE's simulator for the Fall 2006 semester.

The college is required to file bi-annual reports on the Grant with the Department of Justice and is further investigating obtaining another grant to continue to upgrade modern technology in the application of training, and to provide continued training to local law enforcement and telecommunicator personnel in the college district. "The college has talked with SAVE Corporation about incorporating a few more training modules in their system, such as a generic leads system, which dispatchers use everyday," says Smith. "We want to make their training as close as possible to the work which has to be performed in an actual 9-1-1 center. The success of SAVE Corporation's training system has been overwhelming. After an Open House, an additional class was created in addition to the regular class scheduled, to handle students who wished to enroll in the course. Additionally, the college has been contacted to provide specialized training for a 9-1-1 center for new dispatchers they will be hiring. A special two-week, 80-hour course has been approved, and will run shortly." **ENPM**

For more information about SAVE Corporation, contact Tony Sanders at (866) 968-4911 or visit the Web site at www.911simulators.com.

For more information about the Public Safety Communications Program, contact Elgin Community College's Business and Career Technologies Division at (847) 214-7387 or David Smith, Program Director, Criminal Justice Program, at (847) 214-7959.

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