

Aviation degree on horizon

UNT's new B.S. program will fill a hole in state's public college offerings

By Candace Carlisle / Staff Writer

Laura Rusnok pilots a single-engine aircraft off the runway at the Denton Airport on Friday, carefully logging her flight hours.

Each hour logged will help the University of North Texas senior toward a newly approved Bachelor of Science aviation logistics degree.

The aviation logistics program, housed in the university's College of Business, was approved earlier this month, and students will be able to officially take courses for the fall 2010 semester.

The program is the only four-year aviation degree at a Texas public college and will keep aviation students on this side of the Red River, said Stephen Swartz, a marketing and logistics professor.

"There is a current and predictive shortfall of people [in the aviation industry]," Swartz said. "There is a problem in the near and long-term future in filling the needs of the aviation industry."

The regional shortfall of qualified aviation personnel has hurt the North Texas area, where aviation-related firms such as American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, Lockheed Martin, Bell Helicopter and Labinal reside, he said.

Before UNT could offer the aviation logistics program, the school had to show a need for the degree plan, Swartz said.

A recent study conducted by the North Texas Council of Governments showed about 1,000 Texans were leaving the state to study at four-year degree flight schools, Swartz said.

Rusnok said she knew she wanted to be a pilot after she took her first demonstration flight at 14.

But she couldn't find a public aviation program in Texas.

"There were no four-year institutions, only private programs, and they were very expensive," Rusnok said.

Rusnok said she resigned herself to a generic business degree at UNT and saved money, hoping one day to put herself through flight school.

And that day has come, she said.

The UNT senior has about a year of aviation logistic classes to complete before she graduates with her degree, and then, she said, she's hoping to become a business jet pilot.

The approval of the degree program is important to the Denton community, said Rick Woolfolk, former chairman of the Denton Airport advisory board.

“This will enhance our ability of bringing research dollars to the area and will have the impact on the economy,” said Woolfolk, who has helped work on the project since 1997.

UNT’s new program will be able to compete with other programs throughout the nation and world, he said.

After receiving the thumbs-up from the coordinating board, Swartz said he and Terrance Pohlen, director of the Center for Logistics Education and Research, realized they still have a lot to do.

It was like receiving a pilot’s license — you realize the work has just begun, Swartz said.

“We have a lot of work to do to get this program off the ground and it will take an awful lot of work,” he said. “Now it’s game on and the real intense work begins. The rpm needed just went all the way up.”