

# Members Gain Professional Recognition Through Certification Program

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Today's complex oil and gas industry and the increased workload caused by strains on the talent base leave little room for error in ensuring the technical competence of the workforce. And while the US, the UK, and some other countries have registration programs for engineers, many countries do not. In response, SPE has developed a certification program for engineers that allows them to demonstrate their technical knowledge.

Part of SPE's mission is to help members further their technical and professional competence and skills. The certification program defines required knowledge in different areas of engineering and offers members an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge through examination.

SPE Petroleum Engineering Certification offers an international credential recognizing petroleum engineering expertise. The certification is obtained by applying for and passing the SPE certification exam. Prerequisites to taking the exam include an undergraduate engineering degree and 4 years engineering experience.

"The certification exam is targeted to areas of the world that do not have governmental licensing bodies to regulate the practice of engineering in that country," said Byron Haynes Jr., development planning team leader for Petroleum Development Oman, and chairperson of the SPE Engineering Professionalism Committee. "Engineers working in these parts of the world can take this exam to show that they possess engineering skills that can be verified through examination by an international body such as SPE.

"By taking the exam, people show their employers that they have engineering skills and experience that is recognized by an international standard—this metric has been used for

internal promotions," said Haynes. "This exam is useful when applying for jobs to show prospective employers that they are qualified and that they have basic petroleum engineering skills that are recognized internationally."

## Employer Support

Many employers support their employees taking the exam and offer incentives for doing so. "There are in many cases incentives such as the company paying for the exam, giving the employee time off to sit for the exam, and some companies are actually giving raises to engineers who sit and take the exam successfully," Haynes said. "This sends a message to the engineering community that these companies are supporting the establishment of an engineering certification program. These companies also use this exam as a training tool to verify engineering competence within the company and placement for other engineering assignments."

There are other benefits to gaining certification, including:

- Public and professional recognition of compliance with the standards established by SPE for the petroleum professional
- Satisfaction of completing the certification voluntarily to demonstrate commitment to the profession
- Demonstrate technical knowledge with recognition of skills
- Receive recognition from peers and employer
- Promote career advancement
- Enhance the reputation of a petroleum professional

The SPE petroleum certification program was initiated by the SPE Board of Directors in 2003 based on demand by several SPE local sections, including the SPE Abu Dhabi section, said Ali R. Al-Jarwan, general manager of Abu

Dhabi Marine Operating. "The purpose was to provide professional assessment for petroleum engineering members of SPE to recognize their industrial and academic skills and knowledge according to international standards needed," he said. "Oil and gas companies in the gulf region appreciated such programs and have encouraged their professional petroleum engineers to attend such popular certification programs."

Al-Jarwan said that "having a recognized independent international professional body [SPE] providing the certification was of value to the credential. SPE succeeded in opening the minds of engineers to not focus only on one part of their job, but to develop additional skills. The engineers were able to identify gaps in their knowledge and focus on increasing their knowledge and skills."

Engineering certification has become more important as the industry has become more globalized. "The primary benefits of the SPE certification process are objectivity and normalization for an employer," said James Bobo, chairperson of the SPE Petroleum Engineering Certification Committee. "The certification process is targeted for countries where employers are hiring and deploying engineers globally. The undergraduate program may or may not be accredited and may not have been related to petroleum engineering. When an employee demonstrates technical knowledge associated with the certification process, they have passed through an objective process similar to the other licensure or credentialing processes."

## Exam Qualifications

The SPE Petroleum Engineering Certification Program requires that applicants demonstrate a minimum level of tech-

nical knowledge to be certified through an evaluation that includes

- Education—An undergraduate engineering degree from an accredited institution.

- Examination—An examination to measure the level of engineering fundamentals learned from education and to measure the applicant's ability to solve practical engineering problems. The examination may be waived if the applicant has previously passed a written examination qualifying them to practice in petroleum engineering as a registered, licensed, chartered, or professional engineer.

- Experience—Experience and training in the engineering community, usually for a minimum of 4 years.

- Ethics—Professional peer references for performance and attitudes.

- Membership—Member in good standing with SPE.

The exam is a 100-question, multiple-choice test designed around three areas of technical knowledge: drilling; completion, production, and facilities; and the reservoir. The exam problems

are based on common problems seen in actual daily operations. Twenty exam problems cover general questions about petroleum. The exam is an open-book test and participants are allowed to bring as many references as they want.

The application and exam fee is USD 125. Applications and related forms can be found at [www.spe.org](http://www.spe.org) in the Career/Education section. To prepare for the examination, applicants can download a Study Guide that includes a sample exam along with recommendations for study and references. Additionally, SPE offers an exam review course at conferences and other venues. Exam sessions and review courses are held throughout the year, and a calendar of events can be found on the SPE website.

The Petroleum Professional Certification Subcommittee of SPE is responsible for the content of the examination. Upon passing the examination, the applicant may refer to himself or herself as having achieved certification under the SPE Petroleum Engineering Certification Program. The applicant may use the acronym

of SPEC (SPE Certification) on any public document or on any marketing materials, including, without limitation, brochures, business cards, letterhead, and advertisements.

For a member to maintain SPE certification, SPE requires that they participate in 15 hours of continued professional development and education annually. This could consist of courses, workshops, attendance at conferences, online learning, and society activities.

Since the program was developed, Haynes says that the number of people taking the exam has increased. "This is evident from the rise in the number of exam sessions being held in Oman and Abu Dhabi." In 2006, 24 people passed the exam offered in Abu Dhabi and 21 people passed the exam in another session in 2007. Later that year, 17 passed the exam in Bahrain, 1 in Jakarta, and 3 people took the exam at the SPE Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition. In 2008, 22 passed the exam conducted in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, engineers from France and Nigeria have traveled to Middle East exam sessions. **JPT**

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