NEW ORLEANS - The United Motorcoach Association has announced the launch of the Bus & Motorcoach Academy, a major continuing education program for the industry.

The academy will tackle a pair of the private bus industry's most pressing and longest running challenges: The need to broaden and deepen the business acumen of operators - especially small operators, and the dearth of readily accessible industry-specific resources available to bus company owners, executives and managers to develop vital business and operational skills.

The solution, says UMA President and CEO Victor Parra is to establish "an institution of comprehensive learning. One that consolidates and coordinates existing and new talent to provide authoritative business knowledge to not only motorcoach owners and operators but also to drivers, school bus operators and other key industry personnel."

To execute its plan, UMA is establishing a relationship with the College of Southern Maryland, which will host the Bus & Motorcoach Academy, and has lined up industry consultant Carmen Daecher to be dean.

The various programs to be offered by the academy will carry either a certification or an accreditation. For example, there will be an Accredited Passenger Transportation Operator module and a Certified Motorcoach and Bus Operator program.

The academy's wide range of courses will be developed and offered in single units, or the individual courses may be combined to culminate in an accreditation. Likewise, an instruction program will be developed that will culminate in driver certification.

"We will expand the business and operational knowledge of the motorcoach and bus industry," said Ken Presley, vice president of industry relations at UMA and the driving force behind creation of the academy. "And, in doing that, we will considerably improve and increase the confidence necessary for operators to take the measured business risk needed to seize and expand opportunities offered by an increasingly mobile society," said Presley.

"Bus & Motorcoach Academy will be a single, reputable and affordable resource available to operators for comprehensive instruction and certification of achievement in such areas as business operations, accounting, marketing, human resources, safe operations and driver training," he added.

Most of the academy's courses and programs will be delivered via the Internet, which in the past decade has become widely accepted as a credible and often preferred structure for distance education. The method is particularly favorable for individuals whose schedules do not permit attending structured classroom instruction.
The College of Southern Maryland has extensive experience in industrial and online training. Currently, 2,000 students are enrolled in almost 150 distance learning courses offered via the Internet by the college.

"The college's success in distance learning is due in large part to a commitment to teach and reach adult learners wherever learning occurs through an academically sound approach," said Presley.

The college, which traces its roots back nearly 50 years, is a four-campus community college located, as its name implies, in southern Maryland, directly south of Washington, D.C.

It offers associate degree programs, industry certifications, career training, and is home to the Corporate and Community Training Institute. It prides itself on offering quality educational services and providing the resources and tools needed to succeed in a competitive marketplace.

The college's background, proximity to UMA, which has its office in nearby Alexandria, Va., and previous experience with industry leaders makes it a natural choice to host the academy and help develop its programs, according to Presley.

To lead the academy, UMA turned to Daecher, a motorcoach industry and transportation specialist with more than 30 years of experience. He holds a master's degree in transportation engineering from Villanova University.

He is an accredited accident reconstructionist and has appeared as an expert witness in numerous cases during the past 20 years.

Daecher has developed and provided training to motor carriers, insurance companies, attorneys and other groups in the areas of accident investigation, empathic communication, and safety and loss prevention techniques and processes.

He consults with public and private clients, including municipalities, attorneys, insurance companies, commercial motor carriers and other professional groups.

Also assisting in development of the academy has been Spader Business Management, the Sioux Falls, S.D.-based organization that developed the 20 Group business development concept for the motorcoach industry.

"The content expertise of the United Motorcoach Association, Carmen Daecher and other industry professionals, combined with the College of Southern Maryland's experience in developing and delivering a quality distance learning courses, will result in sound and effective education program for the passenger transportation industry," said Parra.

End.