



### Using OptSim for teaching optical communications: a virtual lab experience A. Carena, and V. Curri



ATS Alps Telecommunications Software - Politecnico di Torino



Outline

- OptSim history
- Why use a simulator to teach?
  - The great value of learning by doing... at least virtually
- Our experience at Politecnico di Torino
- A typical OptSim Virtual Lab



OptSim history

- Back in 1995 our research group started working toward a numerical fiber simulator for research purposes
- In 1998 OPTCOM began a collaboration with a company to develop a commercial product:
  - Graphic interfaces were added and the tool engineered: OptSim was born!!
- Now OptSim is in the RSoft Design Group product portfolio
- Since 1999 we are using OptSim for teaching optical communications courses at Politecnico di Torino



# Inductive teaching

Inductive teaching vs. Deductive teaching

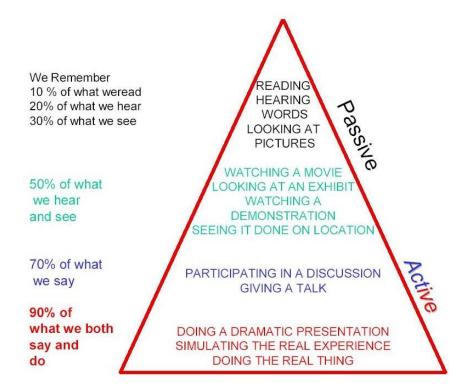
Data and Observations General Principles and Theorems

- Studies have shown that inductive teaching has several advantages for students
- To organize an entire course based on inductive teaching is difficult
- We try to pick 'the best of both' approaches, introducing some learning by doing



# Learning by doing is better

 Learning by doing is better for long time retention and transfer of concepts



DPTCOM



# Why use a simulator to teach?

- Very expensive equipment for real lab experience:
  - In order to show a state-of-the-art transmission experiments we need:
    - BERT 10 Gbit/s
    - Oscilloscope
    - OSA
    - WDM sources (16 or more channels)
    - EDFAs
    - Optical and electrical components
- Moreover we need to replicate each bench in order to accommodate several groups of student: we can not afford it!!
- A simulation tool is a must!!





Our experience

- > At Politecnico di Torino we have several computer labs
- OptSim is always available through all of them
- We decided to introduce OptSim based Virtual Experiences in our optical communications courses



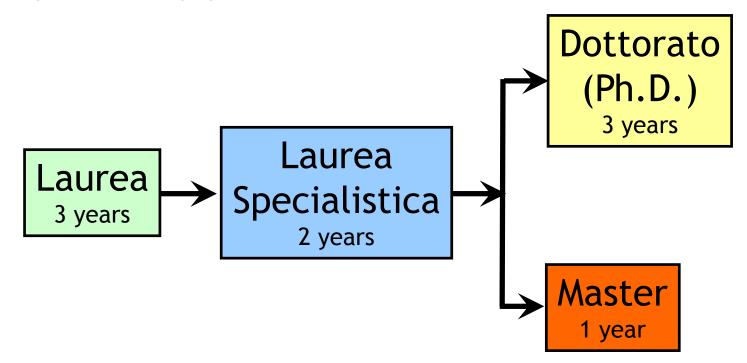
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# Italian University system



In Italy the University systems has three levels:



- We have Optical Communications courses in Laurea and Laurea Specialistica in Telecommunications
- We also have a Master in Optical Communications and Photonic Technologies



Our courses

OPTCOM

#### In particular we teach

- A basic introductory course at Laurea level
  - ~ 100 students
- Two courses at Laurea Specialistica level
  - ~ 120 students for the first course
  - ~ 40 students for the advanced course
- Two courses at Master level
  - ▶ ~ 15 students
- We use OptSim Virtual Lab for teaching in Laurea Specialistica and in Master



## Course organization

- A typical course lasts 7-10 weeks
- A week is organized as follow:
  - 4 hours of lesson
  - 2 hours of exercises presented to students
  - 2 hours of assisted virtual lab

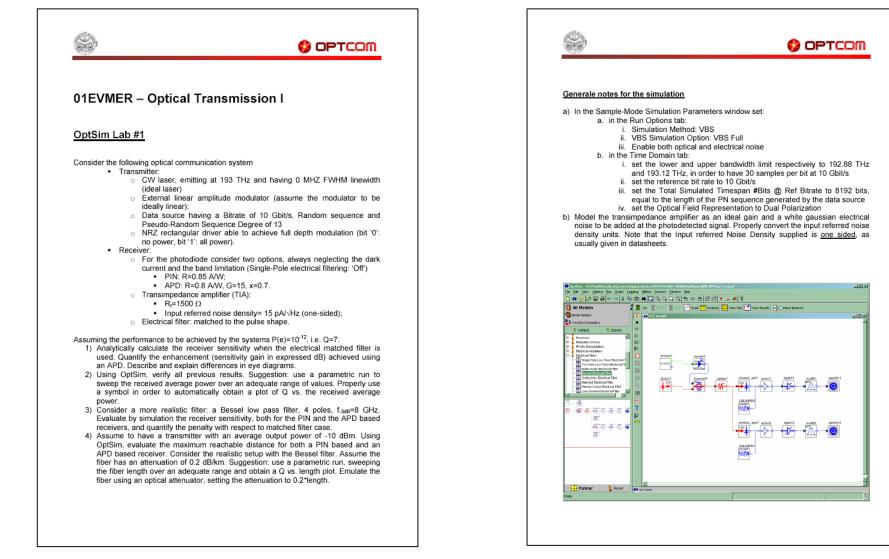


- Two hours introduction lesson on OptSim during first course
  - Guided tour on main software functionalities
- Virtual Lab experiments requirements are published on the course website
  - System data and step-by-step description for critical parameters
- We guarantee at least four hours of assisted OptSim Virtual Lab for each experience
- A short report is required for each experience
  - It is graded and it counts toward the final exam grade



# A typical OptSim Virtual Lab

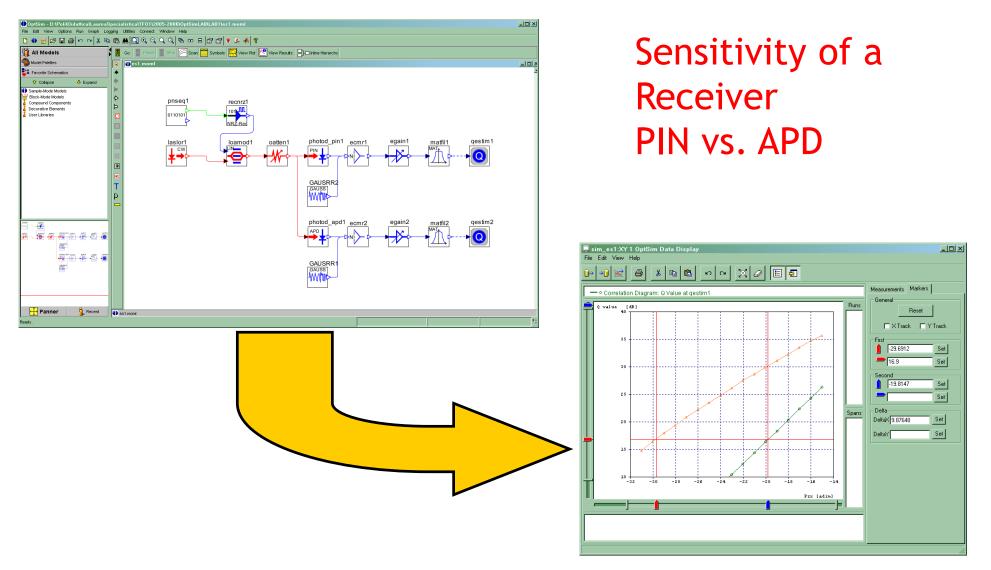






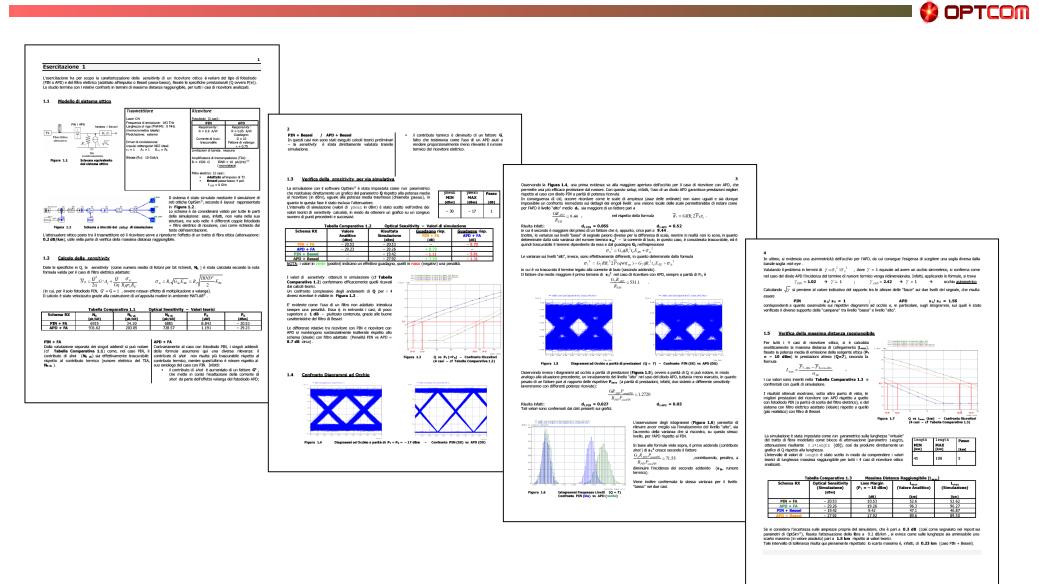
## **OptSim Virtual Lab:** a solution

**OPTCOM** 





### OptSim Virtual Lab: a student report





Conclusions

OPTCOM

- We have several years of experience on using OptSim for teaching optical communications
- OptSim is easy to use: after a quick demo all students are able to start work by themselves
- Students like this approach based on some level of learning by doing

See you this afternoon for a live demo: W1.1 in Room B131