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Distance Learning—How to include laboratory experiments over the internet?

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The Manufacturing Engineering Technology Department at the Rochester Institute of Technology offers several of its courses in distance learning format. Traditionally, the courses were videotaped and sent to the distance sites. If the courses included laboratory experiments, they posed severe restrictions on the geographical location of the sites. The students had to come to campus, several times in a year, to complete the various laboratory experiments. This defeated the purpose and the intention of the distance learning opportunity.

The advent of internet and various net tools, has expanded the opportunity for distance education. Some of these options are currently being explored. The specific course that has been chosen for the study is the "Controls for Manufacturing Automation". This course utilizes Allen Bradley programmable logic controllers (AB-PLC) for controlling manufacturing applications. The students enrolled in this course are required to complete five laboratory experiments.

Methodology:

The methodology formulated for implementation of the task is graphically represented below and the work is currently in progress.