



## Math Professor Puts LMU on Map With Books

The far reach of **Dennis G. Zill's** mathematics textbooks became obvious to Herbert Medina, Zill's colleague in the Frank R. Seaver College of Science and Engineering's mathematics department, while Medina was co-directing a summer program at the University of Puerto Rico-Humacao.

Students Medina met from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez were very familiar with one of Zill's books on differential equations—it was the book used by all students at that institution, the largest and most prestigious engineering school on the island.

The 13 textbooks, not counting revisions, that Zill has authored since joining the LMU faculty in 1972 have cast a net not only across the continental United States and the Puerto Rican island but also into many parts of Canada, Central America, South America, Europe and Asia. Zill's 1979 text on differential equations, now in its eighth edition, has remained among the five best sellers of its kind for more than two decades. Some 11,000 copies of his book on advanced engineering and math, published in 1992 and now in its third edition, have made their way to faraway places such as Saudi Arabia and the former Yugoslavia.

What's behind this success? To be sure, Zill's expertise in calculus content has much to do with it. "Dennis is one of the colleagues I go to when I have questions about why things are done in certain ways in calculus," says Curtis Bennett, an associate professor in the department. "His knowledge of the subject and why we approach topics in certain orders is unparalleled."

But Zill also suspects readers respond to what he calls the "plain talk" in his texts, an approach that reflects his Midwestern upbringing. "I've never tried to overwhelm the students with my eruditeness," he says. "Rather, I just talk to them at what would be described as a common level—neither too high nor too low."

Zill notes that books of all kinds have always been his passion; he calls himself a frustrated English literature major. He involves himself in every aspect of his textbooks, including cover designs. "To me, each textbook is a piece of art," he says. "It's still a thrill to be able to hold up the finished product and say, 'I did that.'"