

New academic programs emerge for sustainability jobs

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He hasn't changed the world — yet — but one student helped change a university's thinking on sustainability issues.

Matt Kondratowicz, who earned an MBA and also a master's of environmental studies degree at the University of Pennsylvania in 2007, urged the university to offer a dual degree combining the two programs, once thought to be at polar extremes of the academic world.

Kondratowicz' idea resonated. Last month, Penn announced it would offer a dual degree in business management and environmental studies, starting officially with classes in fall 2009.

"Matt was a key person. He basically said, 'How can I do this?' He said, 'I'm willing to be the guinea pig on this.' The bureaucracies didn't always work, but we worked it out. He helped convince me to be an internal champion of this. The 'sell point' for any new program is asking: Is there any demand? If you have students knocking on the door ...," said Eric W. Orts, a professor of legal studies and business ethics and management in Penn's Wharton School and director of the Initiative for Global Environmental Leadership at the university.

Kondratowicz, a 28-year-old native of

Teaneck, Bergen County, N.J., now works in Citigroup's alternative-investment group, focusing on sustainable development.

"I've always wanted to work at the intersection of business and the environment," Kondratowicz said by phone from his office in New York City. "Every year, there are tens of thousands of new MBAs. The extra degree gave me something to differentiate myself."

His study of water desalination helped get the attention of interviewers.

"I always say, Wharton got me the interview; the other degree got me the job," said Kondratowicz.



Penn isn't the only school building a new discipline around the future potential for a green economy. Last fall Philadelphia University admitted its first class of declared majors in a new bachelor's degree in environmental sustainability.

The program, which attracted four students in the fall, is designed to prepare students to be environmental managers for businesses and government agencies.

Philadelphia University took its inspiration from the creation by the city, like some other cities nationwide, of a director of sustainability — in this case, Mark Alan Hughes.

"We reverse-engineered this," said

Tom Schrand, who is associate dean of the school of liberal arts at Philadelphia University. "We asked, 'What kind of education would you need to do that job?'"

We wanted to provide students with the vocabulary, the language, to talk to architects, to talk to scientists, to talk to CEOs and business people. If you can't get the companies on board, you're not going to get anywhere."

Philadelphia University requires environmental sustainability majors to cover a range of disciplines, from green architecture and urban planning, to energy systems and public policy, green marketing and management, as well as sustainability for developing nations, industrial ecology, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

The school believes its degree is the only such undergraduate program in the region and one of only a handful in the country, Schrand said.

Other schools that have led in the field of business-and-environmental studies include University of Michigan's Frederick A. and Barbara Erb M. Institute, Yale University's School of Forestry and Duke University. On the undergraduate level, Arizona State University and State University of New York-Southampton have pioneered sustainable studies.

But in business schools, programming related to sustainability, while growing, has been slow.

"At other business schools, there are about zero to three people who specialize in this, I would say," estimated Wharton's Orts. "It's been a very gradual change in this subject. I think you have to ask about the role of a business school: Is it only to provide tools for going out to make a killing, or is there a broader agenda?"

"The reality is business people now have to be versed in environmental issues," said Yvette Bordeaux, director of the master's of environmental studies program at Penn. "In the early days — the 'early days' being not all that long ago — being environmentally aware was 'fashionable.' Now, it's something you have to do, either because of regulation or to get good press."

Students in Penn's program will take business classes full time for three semesters at Wharton and spend a year in the college of liberal and professional studies. The program includes studies in biology, geology, air-quality issues, as well as public policy and regulations. Each student will select a research focus and develop a thesis. The program takes two-and-a-half to three years to finish.

In the first year, Bordeaux expects a small number of students, perhaps 10. MBA candidates are now being considered, and applications to the college of liberal and professional studies are due April 15. **ENR**