LEADING INTO SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Getting down to business is difficult, but even more so when considering a triple bottom line.

The triple bottom line is the notion that companies must measure and be measured on how well they use economic, natural and human capital – often abbreviated as a focus on People, Plant and Profit. That is why in the Fall 2010, Fisher’s Professor Neil Drobny began teaching the Energy and Sustainability Cluster. As one of the first industry-focused programs offered at Fisher, the E&S Cluster captures high achieving business students who have a passion for learning about sustainability. Students learn about sustainability and corporate responsibility and the skills necessary to make a difference in their future.

Kelly Wheeler, an E&S Cluster student, currently pursues her interests by working on a marketing project with The Dow Chemical Company. “I like my business classes,” says Wheeler, “but energy and sustainability is new and constantly changing. This goes beyond going ‘green.’ I feel I have obtained a unique perspective [through the E&S Cluster] that the average Fisher student may not have.”

The E&S Cluster meets twice a week for a full academic year with the expectation of at least ten hours of work outside the classroom. The last 10 weeks of the 2nd semester, students work exclusively on projects in teams of four and are encouraged to devote at least 10 hours of outside classroom attention. However, as Drobny explains, “Students are actually putting in twice the amount of work and sometimes even more on their projects. I don’t even have to take attendance because these students are so passionate, highly motivated, and very accomplished.”

TRAINING FOR A TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

Richard Makiuchi is part of the 1%—the one percent that were selected to attend Green University, that is. Only fourteen applicants received admittance out of over 2,600 high school and college students who applied to Green University, a three-day summit in California focused on sustainability and environmental awareness. Makiuchi, a Finance major at Fisher, was among the fourteen who participated in the event.

Throughout the three days, the finalists at Green University learned from businesses, eco-leaders, and mentors to create platforms for social action. Makiuchi reflects, “I am now able to look at sustainability from a professional aspect. We [the other finalists] learned how to run a meeting with the focus on sustainability as well as coming away with an understanding on how to use these meetings to focus and create ideas into functioning green projects.”

At the end of the summit, the 14 finalists presented their sustainability ideas and goals to a panel of judges. (Cont’d next page.)

Professor Drobny engages with students in team building exercises at the 2012 Industry Clusters Program Kick-Off.

“Students Becoming Eco-heroes” themed Makiuchi (center) posing at the Green University Summit.

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What can a major in "Creativity, Innovation and Consumer Insights" possibly result in? For Fisher student Zach Friedman who created his own major through the Fisher College of Business, the result may be a new approach for company sustainability in the future.

Friedman has looked into the dynamics of corporate sustainability by co-creating a Net Impact program at Ohio State. Net Impact awards points to members as they work towards a program certification, and serves as a way to combine members of different sustainability groups around campus.

Through the Net Impact program and Fisher’s Industry Cluster of Energy and Sustainability, Friedman learned about alternatives to the current industrial model. “Essentially the idea is that waste is itself a design flaw,” says Friedman. “A sustainable product is one where all materials can be cycled in a way where waste is non-existent. This is known as a “cradle to cradle” design and systems thinking.”

Friedman’s passion for sustainability gave him the opportunity to serve as a guest lecturer in the E&S Cluster as well as the MBA Sustainability course in Collaborative Consumption at Fisher. He also led a creativity workshop and gave a keynote presentation at the 2012 Association of Ohio Recyclers Conference.

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In addition to his lecturing experiences, Friedman found success doing research. His honors thesis on consumer behavior and co-creation placed him second in the 2012 Ohio State Denman Undergraduate Research Forum. He also presented his research at the 2012 Product Development and Management Association’s Annual Research Forum, and published his paper with the Journal of Undergraduate Research at Ohio State (JUROS).

Friedman is currently working on a permaculture and organic agriculture farm in Israel before he begins working at Kalypso in September 2013. He is seeing firsthand how a sustainable farm runs and getting to live “off-the-grid” for a while. At the end of the project, Friedman will create a permaculture design and implementation on the farm.