

## College curriculum shift means interests vary

by John Walsh

It's no secret managing a golf course involves much more than managing turfgrass. Because of that, university turfgrass professors are helping students become more well-rounded in preparation for the real world. They're doing this by tweaking their curriculums and offering more business and communication courses.

Kansas State University in Manhattan made significant changes to its turfgrass program in 1998, and as a result, the number of students who entered the program increased. It all started with professional golfer and KSU alumnus Jim Colbert giving back to the university by helping fund and build a golf course for the school to help attract more students, according to Jack Fry, professor in the horticulture division at KSU.

KSU had a turfgrass program for decades but wanted to improve it, so some of the university's professors asked the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America for direction to develop a cutting-edge program. As a result, KSU incorporated a business minor into its program and added six to nine credits of communication that involved writing and speaking.

"We had a different twist on the turfgrass program," Fry says. "We also had the students take 12 credits of hotel and restaurant management, which gave them an idea of what it's like to work in the clubhouse even if they don't want to work there."

KSU turfgrass students also have to complete two internships worth six credits. Students can complete both internships on the golf course, or complete one on the golf course and one in the clubhouse.

If a student completes the program, he will earn a B.S. in agriculture with a major in horticulture with an option of majoring in golf course management, according to Fry. With that degree, students inevitably receive a minor in business.

The revamped program was implemented in 1998 and had 40 to 50 students enrolled, then it jumped to 160 in the early 2000s, and now it's down

to 110, partly because of the golf market economy.

"We hope to put out better quality students," Fry says. "One thing the change in the program did was broaden the pool of students, such as those who like golf, want to work in the pro shop, or in sales for manufacturers or distributors. But we tell those students to keep their options open with the possibility of becoming a golf course superintendent."

Since the program's inception, the school has worked to improve it. For example, the department brought back 30 graduates to have them tell the university where improvements could be made. The graduates said an introductory course to mechanics was needed. Based on that response, the university is looking to partner with a company to provide that education, according to Fry.

KSU also received feedback from other universities.

"Most of the feedback we got when we started the program was from institutions with high enrollment, such as many of the Big Ten schools who found it difficult to change their turfgrass programs because they have a long history of focused turfgrass programs and because of political reasons," Fry says. "However, we were encouraged to do this from the top down — from the president's office."

Despite the perceived difficulty, change is occurring at The Ohio State University in Columbus. If a student majors in turfgrass science, there's a 25-hour minor component to that. At least half of the 100 students minor in agriculture or business, according to turfgrass professor Karl Danneberger.

"We're also working with the hospitality school so the kids can get experience with food and beverage," he says.

Iowa State University in Ames offers its students majoring in horticulture a minor in business, which is 15 credits and taken through the business department. Someone who doesn't want a minor in business can be directed into more business-related classes. There are also business majors who minor in horticulture, and all students take accounting, according to Nick Christians, university professor of horticulture at Iowa State.

Christians says these business options have developed during the past 10 years,

but it's difficult to make the changes because the business college has high enrollment with little available space for those who aren't business majors.

Overall, the trend is to offer more specific classes and majors, Christians says, noting it's always a battle between offering nonturf courses such as English and philosophy or more specific courses within a major.

However, Christians says the horticulture department is always able to meet the demand for more business education through the business minor. Additionally, a number of Christians' students are earning MBAs through evening programs.

Danneberger says the classes students take are changing based on their interests not because Ohio State is mandating change.

"As advisors, we encourage them to do that," he says. "They're given advice, and a lot of students are moving that way. We introduced a sports-turf class involving budgeting and communications. We would have never done this years ago. We are adjusting to the market."

"Most students in turf come into this business to work outside," he adds. "It's what they like to do. But as they progress, they realize they need to communicate, budget, deal with people, etc. As advisors, we push them into professional support areas such as human resources, communication and accounting."

Fry says this kind of change to a school's turfgrass program is long overdue and more of it is needed at other turfgrass programs throughout the country. However, there are drawbacks.

"There's no doubt you have to give something up, such as a biochemistry class for an accounting class," he says. "But it can be difficult to do that because of the politics involved and because so many students are enrolled in business classes there's no need to require additional students to take them."

Overall, recent turfgrass science students are more well-rounded compared to students in the past, Danneberger says.

"Students should have a more global view," he says. "Golf course management is more than cutting greens one-eighth of an inch. It's about dealing with people. Our job is to expand the students' views."



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## "Green" no more

Bayer Environmental Science and John Deere partner to operate Green Start Academy for assistant superintendents looking to further their careers

by Heather Wood

Justin Peloquin learned about bentgrass and Bermudagrass in college, but only recently did he learn what it really takes to be a golf course superintendent or assistant superintendent.

"It's not just growing grass," says Peloquin, assistant superintendent at La Quinta Resort & Club in Palm Desert, Calif., of the job. "You have to have good financial, public relations and human resource skills."

This is one of the reasons the Green Start Academy was formed. Bayer Environmental Science and John Deere have teamed up to present the program for aspiring assistant golf course superintendents who want to further their skills and network with colleagues.

A maximum of 50 applicants will be accepted into the inaugural program, which will be held Sept. 27-28 at the Bayer Environmental Science Training and Development Center in Clayton, N.C., and John Deere's Turf Care Factory in Fuquay-Varina, N.C. Education sessions, a tour of the John Deere factory and an evening of entertainment are on the academy's syllabus.

"We wanted to be able to help assistant superintendents who want to further their careers," says Matt Armbrister, segment manager at John Deere's golf and turf group and one of the lead organizers of Green Start Academy. "When you have

somebody who has a willingness to commit to their career, it's crazy for us not to assist them to get to a higher level."

The golf course management industry can be competitive, and the two companies want to help those who are committed to their careers, Armbrister adds.

Aaron Wells is one of those assistant superintendents who is committed to his career. He started working on a golf course when he was too young to drive and now has been an assistant superintendent for seven years. Currently, he works at Belmont Country Club in Ashburn, Va.

Because there are fewer golf courses in cooler, northern climates, there are less top positions available, and thus, more competition, Wells says. He remains positive about his chances of advancing, though.

"I've been an assistant for quite a few years, and I do a lot of the things that a superintendent does at other courses," Wells says. "I'm just waiting for the right opportunity to advance to the superintendent role."

Still, having a program like the Green Start Academy on his resume couldn't hurt, Wells says.

"I would be interested in seeing how my skills would compare to other assistant superintendents' skills," he says. "I don't think there are any other programs like that out there."

Todd Marten, an assistant golf course

superintendent at Pine Hills Country Club in Sheboygan, Wis., agrees that networking is an important tool.

"It's good to be able to sit with other superintendents or others in the business and talk about our experiences," Marten

### Green Start Academy

Networking and education for assistant golf course superintendents. As many as 50 golf course superintendents will be chosen. Sept. 27-28, 2006

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says. "You learn a lot that way.

"Just being in the group of assistants can be an accomplishment today," he adds. "It seems like there's not as many jobs to go around as there used to be."

Meeting with colleagues always has paid off for Peloquin. People he has met through various professional channels have remembered him years later.

"It can never hurt to network," he says. "Anything you can do to get your name out there in the industry is a plus."

Interested assistant superintendents need to be recommended by a superintendent and must write an essay. Entrants will be judged by a panel of golf course superintendents. For more information, visit [www.johndeere.com/academy](http://www.johndeere.com/academy).



## High fuel prices force operational tweaks

By John Walsh

Superintendents still are paying high prices for fuel, and public facilities seem to be more affected by the higher prices than private facilities.

At the private, nine-hole River Isle Golf Course in Bradenton, Fla., golf course superintendent George Cook, who has a 250-gallon storage tank on site, purchases fuel from suppliers Bradenton Fuel and JH Williams. Cook shops around for fuel because he needs to buy it from more than one source in case one of the suppliers doesn't have it available. For Cook, fuel prices have increased 50 percent more than what they were last year, he says.

"Everybody is experiencing high fuel prices," he says.

Fuel prices for Adam Wright increased 45 percent this year compared to last and 20 percent last year compared to

the year before that. Wright is golf course superintendent at Laurel Oak Country Club, a 36-hole facility in Sarasota, Fla. He purchases fuel from only one supplier, Bradenton Fuel, because it gives him the best price — \$3.03 a gallon for 89 octane.

Across the country, the city of Sacramento, Calif., purchases fuel for the 36-hole Haggin Oaks Golf Complex based on the lowest bid. Currently, the city is paying more than \$3.25 per gallon, according to Sam Samuelson, CGCS. The city-run complex stores fuel in two 1,000-gallon above-ground tanks — one for diesel and one for regular gas.

Despite the increased fuel price, Cook has maintained much of his mowing practices, however, he has increased the size of the rough areas. And by using Primo Maxx, a growth regulator, he can reduce fairway mowings from three or

four times a week to two or three. By reducing the number of mowings, Cook can have a staff member trim trees or edge bunkers instead of hiring another person to do those tasks.

Samuelson, too, says he's been consistent with his mowing practices for areas of maintained turf and has applied plant growth regulators to decrease the number of mowings by one time a week.

Yet the increased fuel price hasn't forced Cook or Wright to change any other areas of their budgets. But that hasn't been the case for Samuelson, who has a maintenance budget of \$2.1 million.

"I've been borrowing from other categories such as labor and supplies," he says. "I've cut back on seasonal workers."

Even though fuel prices have increased, Wright hasn't changed his mowing practices, however, he does try to save money by carpooling workers in utility



vehicles, each of which holds seven gallons of gas.

"Anything helps," he says.

Because of the fuel-price hike, Wright is looking into convert his gas-powered utility vehicle fleet to electric or hybrid vehicles.

Additionally, when one of the facilities' golf courses was renovated recently, low-mow or low-maintenance areas increased, so now 5 percent to 8 percent of the course is considered low maintenance.

Wright says Laurel Oak members don't want to change course conditions and are willing to suck up the increased fuel cost and deal with it until the price comes back down.

Overall, Wright says high-end clubs haven't been affected by the increase in fuel prices and superintendents at those type of clubs aren't changing their maintenance practice much. However, some facilities are more affected by the fuel price hike and are using more plant growth regulators, changing mowing

practices and switching gas-powered utility vehicle fleets to electric ones. Samuelson says the city of Sacramento wants to purchase more electric utility vehicles. Of a fleet of 12, two are electric. All the golf cars on the courses are electric. And Samuelson recently purchased two Jacobsen E-Plex electric triplex mowers.

"The biggest impact of fuel prices is with fertilizer and chemicals," he says. "They have gone up 30 percent. A lot of that has to do with making the materials and shipping them."

Because of the increased cost of fertilizer and chemicals, Samuelson has made fewer applications.

"The budget is tight, and the market is competitive, but you don't want to drop in quality," he says. "The fuel prices are impacting everybody, and it's not going to get better. Sooner or later, the cost of fuel will hit the golfer."

Samuelson says there was a boom of golf course development in Sacramento recently but there are only so many golf-

ers out there.

"You have to put out the best product for the best price," he says, adding that one of the courses at Haggin Oaks is \$50 with a cart on weekends and the other is \$29.

At the same time, Samuelson says the Sacramento market is struggling a bit – one course went out of business last year, and he says he wouldn't be surprised if another went out of business this year or next.

For next year, Cook says he'll prepare the membership and budget for a worst-case scenario regarding fuel prices. If he doesn't spend the budgeted amount because of cheaper fuel prices, it will be an unexpected plus.

"In the past, fuel prices have gone up and down, but not as significantly as recently," Cook says. "The effect of fuel prices on the conditions of the course are ultimately controlled by the membership. They will determine how far back to cut." GCN


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