

## 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."



Visit the Golf Course News Web site for daily news updates about golf course developments and renovations, people, suppliers, associations and industry events.

