

Life's Mulligan

By Luke McGhee, Undergraduate Student, UW-Madison

EDITORS NOTE: This submitted student article is eligible for the Monroe Miller Literary Scholarship, awarded each year to the author of a selected article.

"Dad, you got to come out here and check out the stripes I put down in the lawn." I guess you could say growing up I wanted to be a part of the turf industry, but didn't quite know it yet. In high school and even my first couple years of college, I had a strong appreciation for landscape design, and I still do, but I became fond of an entire new industry that I didn't even know existed.

When junior year of high school came around, I had one university that I wanted to attend and that was UW-Madison. Growing up and being able to visit my brother all 4 years of high school was some of the best memories with him and because of that I knew there was no other place like the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Unfortunately, I was put on the waiting list for a few months and never got accepted, so I ended up attending UW-Oshkosh for my first year of college. In the back of my mind, I knew I wanted to attend Madison, so I started filling out the transfer information immediately. I loved Oshkosh, and it was an excellent school to attend, but there were two problems: it wasn't Madison, and it didn't have landscape architecture.

When I arrived at Madison, I knew it was the right choice to transfer, but deep down I missed Oshkosh and my friends there. I started off double majoring in landscape architecture and Spanish. The three years of schooling for these two majors was great and I learned plenty. My next step to take was to study abroad for a semester and I planned on going to Costa Rica in the fall of 2013, but my path for landscape architecture started to unwind.

"What are you going to do with your degree?" That simple question not only changed my major here at University of Wisconsin-Madison, but it also changed my life and career choice.

Being a sophomore now but technically a freshman at Madison, I knew I needed to get a job. My first thoughts on jobs were something in athletics. As mentioned earlier, I had the opportunity of visiting my brother on several occasions. Two of his roommates were managers for the UW basketball team and when I would come to visit they would have gear and tickets to the games for my brother and I and because of this, I applied to be a manager and successfully got the position.

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Turf Club Members Adam Wepfer (Assistant Superintendent at University Ridge, Tyler Gerritts (Vice President of the Club), and Luke McGhee (President) promoting the club for the CAI's Day For Kids.

that question. At that time, I was still majoring in landscape architecture and Spanish and my only intentions were to have my own business where I could do all of the planting designs and run an installation crew at the same time; similar to the internship I had in the summer. I never really even thought about another option. My co-worker mentioned to me turf management because his family friend is the Superintendent at Pine Hills Country Club in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Once he said this and explained to me what the job entailed, it was a true awakening for me and completely changed me for the better.

After the basketball game that night I was supposed to study for an important Spanish midterm, but that didn't turn out to be the case at all. I instead spent my night in the library until 4 a.m. researching turf management, e-mailing advisors to see what I had to do to make this drastic switch in my career, as well as calling my mom in tears because I have never been so sure of something in my life. My mom's exact words were, "I have never heard you this happy or excited about something since you have been in college."

After about a week of talking with different advisors day-to-day and breaking the news to fellow classmates and professors that I would be dropping out of the landscape architecture program, the next thing to do on my list was to find an internship. Since it was almost April, I didn't think there was any possibility of being able to find anything.

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I knew that Erin Hills golf course near my hometown was going to host the 2017 US Open so I thought that would be the first course to get in touch with. It was apparent that I had more than just luck on my side when I opened my email the next day and Zach Reineking, former Badger and Superintendent of Erin Hills golf course asked when I could come meet with him and discuss the job. I took the first chance I could get and made the trip to Hartford, Wisconsin where I would spend my first summer as an intern at a golf course.

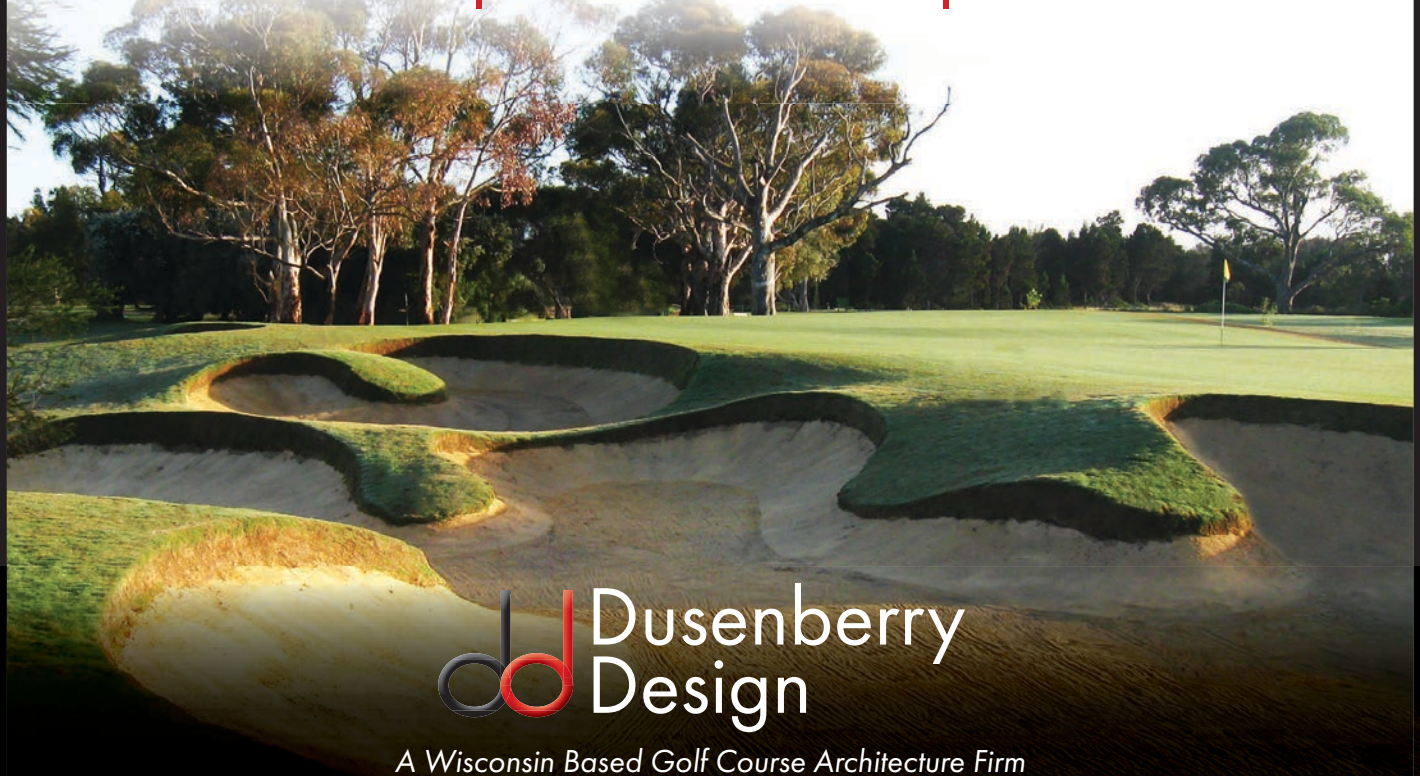
Both my advisors didn't want me to make the official change of majors until I saw how the golf course industry was and if it was really what I wanted to do. Within the first couple days of working, I knew that this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The summer at Erin Hills was not only the most knowledge I have ever gained and one of the best experiences, but it was also the most inspirational work I have ever done because I know that it will prepare me in my days to becoming an Assistant Superintendent as well as someday of becoming the head Superintendent.

The summer at Erin Hills went by quick and I can't thank the staff over there enough for how much they were able to teach me. When the internship came to an end, I knew it was time to start thinking about my next internship. I wanted to stay in Wisconsin because this is where I want to be for work to start and I thought the more knowledge and connections I can get within the state, the better I will be. With that being said, I ended up visiting Blackwolf Run in the fall and decided that is where I wanted to be.



Luke needle tining greens a putting green at Blackwolf Run during his internship.

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Above and Left: Luke McGhee along with fellow intern Alec Hindman from Illinois State helped to renovate a tee box by seeding, spiking, brushing and watering.

Below Left: Luke aerifying a nursery green.

Below Right: Luke spraying fairways.



STUDENT ARTICLE

My first year as a soil science major was completely different than anything I have ever done in school before. It was the first time I didn't have any studio classes, and it was a complete transition of study habits and in general, an entire different major. I was lucky enough to have some classes from landscape architecture count towards my new degree, however, I knew it wasn't going to be easy to fulfill the required turfgrass management credits in 3 semesters, but I'm doing it, and graduating in December of 2014.

This past summer at Blackwolf Run was simply put, amazing, and has helped prepare me as I take my next steps. One of the main reasons I interned there is because I was told by many people that I would get to do plenty of different things; I never expected I would be spraying greens, tees and fairways within my first week on the job though. From there, I was involved with plenty of small projects, flood clean up and irrigation work, sometimes cleaning up my own mess but that's exactly how I learned and the staff at Blackwolf Run made it clear that it was going to be a learning experience. One of the neatest parts about my internship there was that I was able to split time between the two courses along with another intern. Almost every three weeks we would switch between the River course and the Meadow Valleys course and I was able to get to see plenty this way. Not only was this a great internship and taught me a surreal amount, but I got to play plenty of golf too.

Now, I sit a 5th year senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, counting down the days until graduation and checking for jobs postings every minute. Working at University Ridge, taking 17 credits, being the President of the Badger Turf and Grounds Club and a manager for the men's basketball team will make the semester fly. Everyone says that I'm going to miss it, which I am, but for anyone that knows me, I just want to get out there and start working. I can't thank God, my family, friends and staff I've worked for enough for helping me along this journey. I have been given the opportunity to shoot a mulligan and this time, I am going to make sure that the shot sets me up for success. 🍀



Luke McGhee (left) with other Senior Managers of the Badgers Basketball Team.



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