1-28-2010

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Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/1262
University of Dayton, Ohio (url: http://www.udayton.edu/index.php)

Minoring in 'Green'

01.28.2010 | Students, Energy and Environment  The minor in sustainability, energy and environment (SEE), which began accepting students into an introductory course this semester, is the latest development in the University of Dayton's overall initiative to be a responsible steward of the environment and educate students to think about their impact on the planet.

"Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed the stewardship of earth’s resources as a moral issue, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for education, action and advocacy for public policy that reduces the impacts of climate change on the disadvantaged and vulnerable," said Paul Benson, dean of the University's College of Arts and Sciences. "The SEE minor responds to these imperatives."

Junior Sarah Peterson saw a perfect opportunity in the SEE minor to prepare her for a career as an advocate for environmental justice. Currently majoring in sociology with minors in both anthropology and SEE, Peterson plans to pursue a master's degree in sustainability.

"As a sociology major, I have learned about many of the issues that come with environmental injustices," she said. "The SEE minor will help me learn about possible solutions to some of these problems and lay a good foundation for a master's degree."

Although some courses are still under development, the SEE curriculum will emphasize learning across several disciplines to include societal, economic, engineering, science, political, artistic, historical and ethical perspectives.

"We want to reinforce the idea that all disciplines can contribute to SEE issues and that students should be challenged to consider the many complex problems of sustainability within their own interests," said Bob Brecha, physics professor and coordinator of the University's SEE initiative.

The 18-credit hour minor will fulfill general education requirements and include a choice of core courses as well as flexibility in research that can be tailored to individual interests, which is expected to attract students from a variety of majors.

Sophomore AJ. Ferguson said pursuing the SEE minor was an easy choice. As a mechanical engineering major with an emphasis on energy systems, as a River Steward and with plans to pursue a master's degree in public administration, Ferguson believes sustainability issues will be central to his life.

"Understanding the connections between local, regional, national and global sustainability issues will be vital to my career and equally important to my role as an engaged citizen," he said.

Peter West, a sophomore entrepreneurship major, is a little less certain about his future, but he finds value in incorporating SEE issues into his education.

"I choose to take SEE courses because I want to open my mind to what's out there, and I have definitely been introduced to new ways of viewing the world as well as my own life," West said. "Plus, the values that the SEE minor stresses directly apply to economics such as alternative 'green' energies, which are becoming a major issue in our economy."

Sustainability refers to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It also implies the responsibility of wealthier nations to use resources in ways that do not compromise the potential of developing nations to meet their needs.

Brecha summarizes the University's overall SEE initiative as "living for the future."

"In the decades ahead, we are going to see big changes in how we do business and how we live, our use of fossil fuels and the push to become more sustainable," he said. "This ties in very well with the University's Marianist identity as we consider the effects of our consumption on others across the planet and how we affect the climate."
Since the implementation of the SEE initiative in 2006, the University of Dayton has supported several successful programs and areas of development led by students, faculty, staff and academic departments. These include:

- a new master's degree program in clean and renewable energy.
- a SEE learning-living community
- the hiring of an environmental sustainability manager to oversee use of campus resources
- the student-led Rivers Institute in the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community
- a composting program in dining facilities to reduce food waste by 90 percent
- a campus-wide commitment to reduce energy use by 10 percent.
- seed grants to support student and faculty research relating to sustainability, energy and environmental concerns.

For more information on the University's SEE initiative, follow the related link.

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