

## U.Va. Launches Interdisciplinary Minor in Global Sustainability

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[Jane Ford](#)

February 11, 2011 — The University of Virginia has launched an interdisciplinary minor in global sustainability, open to students from all the undergraduate schools at the University.

Students who meet the program requirements are eligible to graduate with the minor this May. The **Office of the Provost** approved the curriculum initiative on Jan. 28.

The requirements include a foundation course, "Global Sustainability," which has been offered since Spring 2009. Students then have a range of courses from various disciplines across the University from which to choose, with options within three categories of environment, equity and economy, plus a mandatory capstone course that embraces community collaboration to address a sustainability-related issue. They will be required to take 15 credit hours to complete the minor. (**Details are available here.**)

The minor will have its administrative home in the **School of Architecture**.

"The Global Sustainability minor, one of three sustainability minors focused on global engagement offered nationally, is also U Va.'s first interdisciplinary minor," Architecture School Dean Kim Tanzer said.

"By connecting disciplines within the University we will model the kind of interconnected thinking and problem-solving necessary to preserve and replenish our planet's natural capital. By developing capstone courses focused on real-world problems, we will reach beyond the academy to make contributions locally, regionally and across the world."

Phoebe Crisman, director of the minor and an associate dean for research in the School of Architecture, said, "Students participating in the minor will develop key competencies for sustainability literacy, understand complex and multidisciplinary issues through systems thinking and civic engagement, and become future agents of sustainable change."

The creation of the sustainability minor was a student initiative. After the "Global Sustainability" course was offered in fall 2009, Carla Jones, now a first-year architecture graduate student in the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning, and seven other student leaders carried through on an end-of-semester discussion about the need for additional courses.

"Global Sustainability" started as a University Seminar organized by McIntire School of Commerce professor Mark White with Crisman and Paxton Marshall, an electrical and computer engineering professor in the School of Engineering and Applied Science. It grew into an introductory-level

course that looks at themes and issues of sustainability. The goal of the course is to present the issues of sustainability from an interdisciplinary perspective and provide students with a broad foundation for further study. To that end, faculty from a variety of disciplines across Grounds guest-lecture and present their sustainability-related research and teaching initiatives.

The interdisciplinary approach of the course led the students to see the possibility of a global sustainability minor.

"Before taking that course, I knew very little about sustainability, but really found a passion through my project in that course," Jones said. "It taught me the concept of systems thinking and how to approach some of these very challenging problems. Since then I have focused my studies in urban and environmental planning around environmental sustainability."

The student group researched resources available at U.Va. for a sustainability minor and also looked at similar programs at other institutions.

They then formally proposed an interdisciplinary sustainability minor with involvement from all the schools at the University.

"The students did a remarkable job, interviewing virtually every faculty member who seemed to have an interest, meeting with representatives from the provost's office and that of the vice president for research," Marshall said.

"This minor provides an excellent opportunity for students to take the work that they have been doing through their extra-curricular activities and apply it to their coursework," Jones said.

"Students who graduate with the minor will have a strong understanding of the opportunities for sustainable change in communities. We hope that the students of the minor will be empowered through their experiences here and step up to meet the pressing challenges that our generation faces today."

A governing board includes representatives from the University's six undergraduate schools and includes Crisman, White, Marshall, Hank Shugart and Rachel Most in the **College of Arts & Sciences**, Rebecca Kneeder in the **Curry School of Education**, Doris Glick in the **School of Nursing** and Jeffrey Plank in the **Office of the Vice President for Research**.

The launch of the Global Sustainability minor is supported by significant gifts from George P. Mitchell of Houston and by U.Va. alumni Martin S. Brown and Margaret "Nina" Brown de Clercq through the W.L. Lyons Brown Family Foundation.

Mitchell is a long-time champion of sustainability at a national level through his work in energy, his development of The Woodlands outside Houston and his philanthropy, most notably at Texas A&M University and the National Academies of Science. At U.Va., he supports urban and environmental planning professor Timothy Beatley's research in sustainable cities.

Brown, a 1960 graduate of the McIntire School, and his daughter, Nina Brown deClercq, a 1990 alumna of College of Arts & Sciences, and the W.L. Lyons Brown Family Foundation are long-time supporters of the arts and sustainability at U.Va. They have also been generous stewards of the **U.Va. Art Museum**, **Jefferson Scholars Foundation**, **McIntire School of Commerce**, College of Arts & Sciences and the **Brown Residential College**.

The University will seek additional private funds to support the new minor.

— *By Jane Ford*

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