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# The Cavalier Daily

## A minor with a major impact

### The new sustainability minor draws on every school at the University

by Romae Kelly | Sep 12 2011 | 09/12/11 2:09am

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This past spring, the University introduced a new minor in response to widespread local and global concerns about sustainability and the environment. Springing from the efforts of undergraduate students led by their teaching assistant, Carla Jones, the global sustainability minor was officially offered to students in the spring of 2011. Even though the program aims to address the science behind improving our world, the program - and its relevance - spans across a multitude of disciplines, offering students a chance to fully engage with the challenges of tomorrow.

Although the minor is offered by the Architecture School, the governing body of the minor has representatives from the six undergraduate schools at the University. The College, Education, Commerce, Architecture, Engineering and Nursing schools all participate in guiding the minor and enforcing its rules, along with Jones, who serves on the governing board as a student representative. The application for the minor requires students to carve a plan of study, from the courses offered, that aligns with an interest in sustaining their global and local communities. The program consists of five courses: the required foundation course, "Global Sustainability," three elective courses chosen from a pre-approved list of courses and one capstone course - that is chosen from upper-level courses in departments across the University. Accordingly, students are expected to take at most two classes from the department in which they are majoring, so as to make their minor experience as far-reaching as possible.

The foundation course is taught by Assoc. Architecture Prof. Phoebe Crisman, who is also director of the minor. The foundation course is "project-based" and places a heavy emphasis on group work, Crisman said.



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"Action-based learning is really important to the minor" since its focus is to "empower students to bring about a real change in their local and global communities," Crisman said.

To gain perspective from multiple disciplines, guest lecturers are brought into the foundation class on a regular basis to speak about their area of expertise, and how they accomplish projects in a sustainable way. Urban and Environmental Planning Prof. Timothy Beatley, for example, spoke with students regarding the world's leading cities in sustainable efforts.

"As we are an increasingly urban planet (having passed the 50% mark in 2008) cities must play an increasingly important role in addressing our global challenges, from shifting away from fossil fuels and promoting renewables, to conserving biodiversity," Beatley said in an email, explaining what he told the students.

Graduate Arts & Sciences student Ethan Heil appreciated having to find solutions to real-life issues using a variety of disciplines.

"I had to step outside of my [engineering] discipline to collaborate with students from architecture, planning, economics and public policy," he said. Heil coupled the global sustainability minor with a major in civil and environmental engineering as an undergraduate, and is now studying environmental sciences at the graduate level. He is grateful for the practical experience he gained from the minor. "As I plan to pursue a career path that incorporates sustainability, this minor helped prepare me for such a job," Heil said.

Faculty members hope that other students will gain the same enriching experience from the minor as Heil has, mindful of the far-reaching implications of the subject matter.

"We need to be educating the next generation to think about the issues," Beatley said. "We need to think about the long-term future of the place in which we live"

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