

Academics Going Green with New Environmental Studies Minor

Contributed by Tobie Baker
11/10/2008

Student environmental awareness group forming Nov. 12

OXFORD, Miss. - Among steps the University of Mississippi is taking to become more eco-friendly is a new 18-hour academic minor in environmental studies.

Responding to the incredible growth of environmental studies programs across the country, the university this fall began offering the new course ENVS 101, or Classics of Modern Environmental Literature. Twenty-three students enrolled in the course, and nearly three-quarters of those students have expressed an interest in pursuing the new related minor.

"Our students are excited," said Ann Fisher-Wirth, professor of English. "There is an urgent need for students to study environmental issues, and this type of academic pursuit is the wave of the future."

Frank Butz, a 20-year-old sophomore international studies major from Ocean Springs, enrolled in the course as a role model for other students to become involved with environmental issues.

"The wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population consumes some 80 percent of the earth's resources," Butz said. "So, it's easy to recognize that we have a problem."

Maggie Savely, a 19-year-old sophomore international studies major from Pontotoc, also enrolled in the course to help play an active role in bringing the green movement to the UM campus. She and Butz are working to establish a student-led environmental awareness group. The group holds its first meeting at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday (Nov. 12) in Croft, Room 107.

"We want to make students aware of the small, inexpensive things that can be done in order to make huge impacts on our campus," Savely said.

The new minor is interdisciplinary in nature, involving coursework in the sciences, social sciences and the humanities. Courses include Southern environmental writing, environmental ethics, global environmental issues, conservation and restoration ecology, and introduction to environmental toxicology. Incorporating a rigorous reading program, the new environmental minor also features films, journal writing, collaborative classroom projects and field trips.

"ENVS 101 is a launch pad for future environmental studies at Ole Miss," said Fisher-Wirth, who is teaching the course.

Fisher-Wirth has led a small group of faculty for the past several years to develop the new academic option. Tapped as academic adviser for the program, Fisher-Wirth is hopeful the program will expand to offer an environmental studies major.

"Every American citizen - and especially college students - needs to be aware of the environment," Fisher-Wirth said. "We need to help educate them in all aspects of the ongoing and increasing efforts to work toward environmental sustainability."

For more information, call Fisher-Wirth at 662-915-5929.