

# Studying for a degree in sustainability

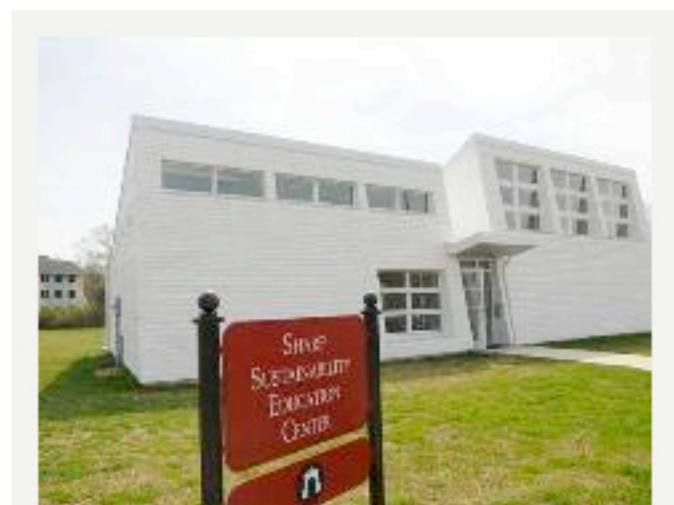
Friday, April 9, 2010

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THE RECORD  
STAFF WRITER

1 Comment

Ramapo College is launching a new master's degree in sustainability studies, the first in the state, with an eye toward a small but growing trend among businesses creating positions to handle corporate sustainability issues.



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**This facility is part of Ramapo College's master's program in environmental sustainability, the first in New Jersey.**

The program will extend its focus well beyond climate change, and will seek to provide students with the skills to weigh and analyze the financial, environmental, societal and generational costs associated with small personal decisions within their own lives and broader policy decisions within larger communities.

"Our students will be living in a fundamentally different world in 10 years, where the basis on which they will have to make decisions will be very different," said Ashwani Vasishth, an environmental studies professor and director of the new Ramapo program.

Vasishth said climate change and the booming human population – from 6.8 billion now to an estimated 9 to 10 billion by 2050 – "will put immense pressure on natural resources and pollution effects. That all makes this a very special time."

The Ramapo program will "allow students to think differently about how to make choices," Vasishth said.

Each decision related to sustainability should be measured using three sets of values: ecological, economic and ethical, Vasishth said.

"Depending on the decision and situation, the weight given to each of these varies, but you can't throw any one of them out of the equation," he said.

The two-year program begins this fall. Each class will be limited to 20 students, who will take all of the program's foundation courses together at night at Ramapo's campus in Mahwah. The program will include summer internships and the second year will include a lecture series and project.

The Denver-based Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, lists on its Web site only 15 academic institutions nationwide that offer master's degree programs in sustainability studies.

"Climate change has been one of the hottest topics driving the conversation about sustainability, but there's also a lot more talk about green buildings, food services on campuses using more locally grown and organic produce, and how to dispose of food waste," said Paul Rowland, the association's executive director.

"The growth in these programs also parallels the growth in various industries to add positions for sustainability policy, so it's a new employment opportunity for the schools' graduates," Rowland said.

Ramapo President Peter Philip Mercer said the college wants to build on its undergraduate degree programs in environmental science and environmental studies. "This is the fulfillment of a trend that began here 30 years ago, and it has caught the imagination of students," Mercer said.

Rachel Wieland, a math professor at Bergen Community College and administrator of the student environmental club, has signed up for the new Ramapo degree. She said she hopes to use the degree to promote sustainability education at the K-12 level and teach the subject at the college level.

"These are important issues that are not really being raised in the educational system," Wieland said. "We are an incredibly intelligent society but we have not been very wise. We need to come up with solutions to these enormous complex problems, in the food and energy sectors and other areas."

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