

The Whole World in Their Hands

*Environment, Economics, and Politics majors
find there are no limits to how they can protect the planet*

BY MARGARET LITTMAN



COURTESY BILLY GRAYSON

Billy Grayson '00, here with girlfriend, Julie Handa, at Glacier National Park, Mont., received a \$50,000 grant from the Pew Charitable Trust to launch a statewide college voting program for Maryland colleges and universities. "Maryland Votes" aims to register, educate, and mobilize 10,000 new college voters for the 2006 elections.

As a first-grader, Sedina Banks '00 dressed in her Sunday best and brought her mom's briefcase to school to show how she was going to be a lawyer when she grew up. Now an attorney at the Los Angeles-based firm of Greenberg Glusker, Banks has realized her childhood dream, with a caseload that includes helping municipalities and other organizations clean up contaminated property and pursue those responsible for the contamination.

"This career is not what I imagined," says Banks, who primarily worked for environmental non-profit organizations while in college. "I thought I'd end up at the Sierra Club or Greenpeace. But this is better."

Banks is just one of many CMC-ers challenging preconceived notions about environmental activists, including a special cadre of alumni whose varied preparation as Environment, Economics, and Politics (EEP) majors has led them to a number of eco-friendly careers, ranging from distributing Sierra Club flyers at Lollapalooza concerts to lobbying on Capitol Hill.

Since the early 1990s, about seven graduates each year have completed the EEP major, with classes including biology, chemistry, economics,

government, and mathematics, as well as advanced courses in environmental law, environment and resource economics, government and the environment, and natural resource management. Students also participate in a clinic related to current research at the Roberts Environmental Center and complete a senior thesis.

While their career paths have diverged, the graduates all believe that the EEP curriculum prepared them extremely well for the next phase of their education, whether it was graduate school or on-the-job training.

"I like to think I was better prepared to do my job than my peers from other colleges," says Brent J. Hoberg '99, an environmental health and safety engineer and district manager, Southwest, for automotive industry consulting firm Kip Prahla Associates, LLC. Working with California car dealers to address EH&S issues such as hazardous waste removal, Hoberg has won many of his firm's quality awards and considers himself among the top performers in his office thanks to the foundation EEP built for him.

Megan Wargo '00 agrees that she was well-prepared to pursue a master's degree in environmental management at Duke University. "When I applied," says Wargo, now a conservation

associate for The Pacific Forest Trust in San Francisco, “I was amazed to review the list of classes required for admittance to the program and realize I already had covered them. I felt like I got more out of graduate school because I had a good base.”

Despite her interest in conservation, Wargo knew she didn’t want to be a scientist. “I didn’t want to memorize plant names,” she says. Today she works with land planners and government agencies to help protect private land parcels.

“That’s the great thing about the program—people can go in 100 different directions,” says Billy Grayson ’00, the alumnus who spent his early post-CMC days on the Lollapalooza trail. After managing environmental field campaigns from New Haven, Conn., to Albuquerque, N.M., for Green Corps, he is now working toward a graduate degree at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. Grayson was lured to CMC because of the weather and the opportunity to play tennis, but in EEP he found his life’s work.

“I thought I wanted to go into tropical biology, but in EEP I got to see the policy behind the laws and how courts have shaped environmental policy,” he says. “I realized I had a critical mind for this.”

For all their different areas of emphasis, EEP graduates are agreed on one thing: Emil Morhardt, the Roberts Professor of Environmental Biology and director of the Roberts Environmental Center, made the EEP program as rewarding as it was. Morhardt assumed responsibility for both the Center and the major in 1996, lured back to academia after reading an advertisement in *Science*. Over the last decade there have been changes to the curriculum that have broadened the scope of the major, Morhardt says, including projects on social transparency and environmental

disclosure among corporations, among other topics, but it has remained true to its interdisciplinary roots.

“I do not know of any other programs like this—not even close,” Morhardt says. “Students learn to think three ways.”

Graduates say it wasn’t just the curriculum, but Morhardt’s willingness to help them pursue their own interests and curiosities that had a lasting impact. While a student, Grayson and two classmates were encouraged to start the 5-C Eco Club, spanning all five Claremont Colleges. “Professor Morhardt was a great advocate,” says Grayson. “If you came to him with an idea, he’d empower you to make it happen.”

Because the major is relatively young, most early EEP students didn’t have a cadre of successful alumni to whose careers they could aspire when picking a major.

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do post-college. I was more interested in ideas than jobs,” remembers Greger Larson ’96. “I’d heard the statistic that people change careers five times, so I figured flexibility was key.” Like many EEP alumni, Larson, a graduate student in the Department of Zoology at Oxford University in England, says the economics courses taught him an element of compromise and implementation that he doesn’t think he would have gotten from a more traditional environmental studies program.

Those concepts—compromise and feasibility—are life lessons that EEP graduates say serve them well outside their eco-friendly workplaces. “It had a formative effect on the way I think about things now, both personally and professionally,” Larson says.

Banks concurs: “Working for the environment is fascinating, and CMC really prepared me to do well in this field.”

Margaret Littman is a Chicago-based freelance writer.

Greger Larson displays a bison bone collected near Dawson City, Yukon. As local gold miners melted faces of sloping permafrost with giant water cannons, Larson’s team collected and preserved the mammal bones excavated along with the gold, then extracted their DNA to evaluate why some went extinct and to compare others’ populations from 100,000 years ago with the present.



COURTESY GREGER LARSON

Sedina Banks wrote her senior thesis on environmental disasters, including the Exxon Valdez oil spill. That process, she says, was good training for her law career: “We were taught that if you have an idea, you have to back it up. I remember that during crunch time.”



COURTESY SEDINA BANKS



COURTESY MEGAN WARGO

Megan Wargo spent summer 2005 working on a conservation project with the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust in Homer, Alaska, where several properties were easier to access by kayak than land. “There’s not one part of my job I don’t like,” she says. “The best part is when we get calls out of the blue from landholders and property owners who want to protect their land.”