Course offers students access to golf industry

UNLV is one of 20 universities accredited by PGA of America to offer program

By TODD OWEN
Las Vegas Review-Journal

Become a better golfer and a PGA member with guaranteed job placement in the golf industry upon graduation from college.

"Sound too good to be true? It isn’t," Cain said. "It’s the PGA Golf Management Program offered at University of Nevada, Las Vegas and 19 other PGA of America-accredited universities across the country, including Arizona State, Florida State, Penn State and Georgia.

"Our first priority is to make sure you graduate. Our second priority is to ensure your success upon graduation. Our third priority is for you to get cheaper. It’s pretty intense for them," Cain said. "It’s a pretty big academic load, that’s for sure. In order to become a PGA member, students must pass a player’s ability test, a 35-hole event in which participants need to score on or below 15 strokes above the course rating for 36 holes. A typical target score is 75, or about 77 per 18 holes.

"They have to be able to walk the talk," Cain said.

Amid a wide range of courses offered in the program, each student must take mandatory classes that feature video analysis, a simulator room, a computer-generated driving range model and more.

"We make them the best player they can be through the technology we have on campus," said Cain, who is assisted by several PGA pros. "We also do a lot of playing on the course, record statistics and identify strengths and weaknesses." Students take classes that focus on 17 PGA learning objectives, along with classes on turfgrass fundamentals, resort retailing and merchandising, club food and beverage management and more.

"They’re going to be prepared for every aspect of the business," Cain said. "Not just golf, but other revenue streams that happen around golf." Alumni of UNLV’s program are employed at local courses such as TPC Summerlin and Rio Secco, as well as out of state at Oregon’s Pronghorn, a private golf facility, and Bandon Dunes, considered one of the world’s top golf resorts.

Cain expects close to 100 students to be enrolled in the program in the fall, including UNLV’s junior Shonina Richardson, a former Palo Verde golfer who, shortly after entering the program, felt in love with the whole idea and did so for a living.

"I can be a decent golfer and still be around the game working in the business," Richardson said from Bandon Dunes, where she is interning this summer.

While Richardson said she is one of only three girls in the program and hopes to inspire other females to get involved in the game, she said everyday in the program supports each other and "It’s kind of like a big family." Students can pursue a plethora of different positions, from a teaching professional, assistant golf pro, golf clinician, rules official or coach, to jobs in course maintenance, retail, broadcasting, journalism and more.

"We prepare them for a whole bunch of opportunities," Cain said. "Students coming out of this program are not quite ready to be head golf pro or director of golf, but they’ll have the foundation to do well and work their way up to those roles in the next few years."

CHRISTOPHER CAIN
DIRECTOR OF THE PGA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM AT UNLV

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Cain said one recent graduate was initially worried about landing an internship and not only got one of those but also got a great job offer before graduation.

"He could pick and choose his job even before he finished his classes," Cain said.

Guaranteed job placements are one reason McQueen High (Reno) grad Gary Xavier enrolled in the program.

"All of the people that leave this program will have a job waiting for them and that’s really unique among bachelors’ degrees," he said.