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From Las Vegas to Maui to Banff

DRAMA CLUB
Kevin Dillon Hits the Links with a Golfing Entourage all his own

BIRTHING BIG BERTHA
How Callaway Launched a Revolution

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Exclusivity has its Privileges

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'Shanks' Illustrated: Rick Reilly Returns to Ponky
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Swinging for Sheepskin

To Be Today’s Best PGA Pro, Give It the New College Try

So you want to be a golf pro. It’s all you’ve ever wanted, since that first day you broke 90, then 80. You’ve put in the swing time, but somehow you know that playing and practicing isn’t enough. You want to make the game your life, and your livelihood. And you’re not of a mind to take the one-in-a-million PGA Tour shot, though you’ve got game. You see more solid opportunities at that swanky private club down the road, or your favorite public courses. Now all that’s left is putting in your hard knocks, cleaning carts, shuffling driving range rocks and stocking shelves, right? That’ll get you behind the counter eventually, then back onto the range to give some lessons, then who knows... manager, maybe.

Hold on a second there, ladies and gentlemen. There’s a lot more to being a card-carrying PGA professional than beating balls and scaring up some lessons. It’s big business, and to really make a career out of it, you’ve gotta have an arsenal of skills that put you in a position to not only make yourself and your course money, but keep the all-important customer coming back. You’ve gotta have it all — the communication and marketing savvy, the accounting background, the sales tactics, the knowledge of agronomy and course architecture, the planning ability... and, of course, a deep knowledge of the golf swing, plus its history, rules and culture, too. That’s always helped.

You can go directly through the PGA to get your card, and that’s not a bad thing. Over the years they’ve turned their accreditation program into a full-fledged business curriculum, turning out more-prepared and well-rounded professionals. But many prospective pros are looking for more than that. They want a college degree to go along with their card — so why not combine them? Why not wrap the PGA’s Professional Golf Management program into a university setting?

That’s just what they’ve done at 17 schools throughout the nation to date, including seven in the West, from Nevada to Las Vegas, Idaho to Texas. All offer the accredited PGA’s Professional Golf Management curriculum, which takes 4½ to 5 years and 120 to 125 credits to complete, including core studies in all the things you’d expect for an undergraduate degree depending on the college to which it is attached. At the University of Nevada Las Vegas, for instance, it’s through the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration’s Recreation Management program. At Arizona State, it’s through the Morrison School of Agribusiness, a polytechnic or “applied learning” scenario. The University of Idaho puts prospective pros through their paces in the College of Business & Economics at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, they go through the College of Business and Administration. (Other west of the Mississippi schools with PGM programs are Sam Houston State, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and New Mexico State.) At the end of it all, they come out with a Bachelor’s of Science sheepskin and a PGA card, wrapped into one very marketable package.

Students are accepted based on high school GPA, SAT or ACT score, USGA handicap and PGA Player’s Ability Test. Each school has its strengths. Idaho has its own on-campus public golf course, while UNLV prides itself as being at the center of the West’s hospitality capital, with dozens of excellent resort and private courses within an hour’s drive from the campus. ASU is even richer in nearby golf product — more than 100 courses in the Phoenix-Scottsdale-Mesa area.

“Anybody looking to get into the profession in general, the PGA PGM programs are

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the way to go," says Chris Cain, director of UNLV's PGM program and a PGA professional. "At UNLV, we offer a wonderful opportunity for students in that they can be here in Las Vegas and experience a PGA trade show, they can experience what it's like to run tournament operations for PGA, LPGA and senior tour events that all come to town. It helps them understand what it takes to operate at that high level."

The PGA accredited UNLV in 2002, and Cain took the helm three years ago. He'll oversee 75 to 80 students this fall (the PGA limits each class to 100 students), and a big part of their experience — and that of students at other schools — will come off-campus as either a paid intern at local golf facilities or a volunteer at various events, or a combination. The PGA requires six months of internship, which makes the PGM program in essence a five-year deal. "All these students are above average as players and academically. But now that they're part of this family, when they arrive at UNLV they're average again, because they're competing against each other. We have to find ways for the students to set themselves apart. So all the opportunities that Vegas provides, not only in tournaments and trade shows but the 70 golf courses within an hour's drive that run from a $10 greens fee to a $790 greens fee, give them the chance to do that."

An $8000 yearly fee gives them year-round access to Las Vegas Country Club, UNLV's home course. And students can also play Badlands, Painted Desert and Desert Rose.
The Path to Pro
How to get more info on the PGM's Professional Golf Management programs in the West.

Arizona State University
Mesa, Ariz.
www.poly.asu.edu/mosab/pgm
480-965-1700

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
www.business.aces.edu
719-262-5674

University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho
www.uidaho.edu/design/college
800-940-3033

University of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska
www.pgmn.msu.edu
402-472-1467

University of Nevada
Las Vegas, Nevada
www.hotel.unlv.edu/pgm
702-895-1909

New Mexico State University
www.pgm.nmsu.edu
505-646-2014

Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, Texas
www.sshu.edu/pgm
936-294-4810

Down the road at Arizona State, Director Curt Hudek says his 60 students per year also have plenty of internship and practice options, as well as the latest in teaching and learning technology on campus to complement the book studies—swing simulators, all kinds of gadgets, plus a double-sided driving range. It’s clear that teaching is at the school’s curricular core, along with marketing, management, accounting and other business-related classes.

“Our program has a lot of flexibility,” Hudek says. “Golf’s a second career for me. I was a CPA before I got into golf. If I hadn’t been able to teach that first year, it would have been hard to pay the bills because they don’t pay a lot when you start. When I got here, they asked me what classes they needed. I said first, curriculum to support completing the PGA education, and second, a couple of education classes, so when these guys start to work they have opportunity to make some money teaching.

“If you can’t teach, it’s really hard because no one will go out of their way to show you how. So that’s an advantage of our program—everybody has the ability to teach a little, and guys who are really interested in have the ability to work in that arena.”

Arizona State has graduated 680 PGM students since 1999, and they’re landed jobs from coast to coast. “They’re from everywhere, so they go everywhere,” Hudek says. “About 20 to 25 percent of students are from Arizona. We have guys working at Bandon Dunes, the Country Club at Brookline, Pinetree. I worked here for four years and wasn’t sure they were going to be able to get a job, now I’m tickled to death with where they’re going, and how fast they’re moving up. We’ve got a half dozen head pros already, and that makes me feel real good.”

The University of Idaho in Moscow started its PGM program in 2002, and Director Dave Marlett is confident that when its first crop of graduates heads out next spring, every one of them will have a job waiting for them. “The placement rate could certainly be 100 percent. The industry is showing there’s a big need for professionals in the golf shop,” he says. “This program helps students have problem solving skills and managerial skills, so they can attract jobs where they’ll be decision makers instead of just being a guy standing behind the counter.”

Marlett likes to keep his class sizes smaller to keep the team concept intact and assure that all students can get in valuable time at the University’s on-campus course. “We only enroll up to 40 students a year. It’s quality-driven instead of quantity-driven. More than 40 spreads the program too thin; we can’t keep the face-to-face contact we want.”

Time in the trenches also means that each 22-year-old the schools turn out heads into golf’s working world with a wealth of practical experience. All that’s left is turning that into a career’s worth of green, whether it’s working for private club members, most munis or resort customers.

“They’ll go to teaching academies. PGA section offices, take administrative roles,

“For anybody looking to get into the profession, the PGA Golf Management programs are the way to go,” says UNLV’s Chris Cain.

go to retail shops,” Marlett says. “Those experiences let them build their resume, polish their portfolio with letters of recommendation, so when they graduate they can showcase their skills and talents—more than just the degree they’ve earned, they’ve got the experiences throughout the five-year program.”

Adds Arizona State’s Hudek, “All the schools get along great together, they’re all good programs. It’s where PGA pros will come from for the next 20 years.” UNLV’s Cain agrees. “When students go through their first or second internship they go, ‘Wow, there’s so much more out there.’ We have one student who wants to be a golf coach, so he’s minoring in education and will also get his PGA degree and recreation management degree. So he’s taking the necessary steps to be a university golf coach. That’s going to be more evident, not only at UNLV but all the PGA PGM programs. More specialized fields—journalism, golf equipment specialist. That’s the future of the PGA.”