

FILE PHOTO

Clemson University is known for its highly ranked men's golf program and immaculate Walker Golf Course, seen above. The university is also among 20 universities throughout the country to offer a bachelor's degree in golf management as part of the PGA Golf Management University program.

Clemson among universities offering PGA program

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — In 1973, master professional and former Michigan State University golf team captain Don Perne came up with the idea to combine a college degree with PGA business school.

In so doing, he established a marketing and golf management degree.

Today, there are 2,500 students in 20 golf management universities around the country. Clemson University is among those universities, having established its program in 2001, and produces 50 to 60 graduates per year.

The PGA Golf Management University Program, as it was renamed in 2009, is a four-and-a-half to five-year college curriculum for aspiring PGA professionals. Students in the program acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the golf industry through extensive classroom studies and internship experience.

Graduates not only earn a college degree, they become a PGA member with 100 percent job placement.

Rick Lucas, director of the PGA Golf Management University Program at Clemson, said the university's participation began through Larry Allen.

"Dr. Allen started the program in conjunction with Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management (PRTM)," Lucas said. "There was a need for more people in the business and industry."

Cheri Tschetschot, director of PGA Golf Management University Program for PGA of America, said students study all aspects of golf — including golf course operation, turf operation and running the business of golf. She said students also learn about customer service, one of the most important things taught.

Tschetschot added that students must undergo 16 months of apprenticeship and that each of the 20 universities are required to appoint an internship coordinator to place students in various areas. She said criteria standards must be met to be considered for a golf management university, including the availability of academic courses in the curriculum, golf course access for internship, a player development program and an RFP (Request for Proposals) process.

Despite the current economic recession, officials say the golf industry has an impact of nearly two million jobs in the United States and approximately $60 billion in wage income. Tschetschot said that, upon graduation, students are often initially hired as assistant professional before moving on to head professional, director of golf and, if they possess long-term aspirations, general manager.

Despite the availability of jobs, Tschetschot admits the golf industry has not been immune to the economic recession.

"Fortunately, the decline has been less than 10 percent and the PGA is formulating a plan that will hopefully address growth in the next decade," she said.

Lucas said curriculum is being geared more towards the needs of the marketplace.

"We have an oversupply of golf courses," Lucas said. "We added too many golf courses when the industry was booming so we see an oversupply of tee times. I'm training students on key metrics in order to maximize individuals return on their investment."

According to Lucas, between 100 and 200 golf courses throughout the country are in decline and 500 to 1,000 are expected to close within the next 10 years.

"Golf will remain a viable sport in business, but it will have to be the right size," Lucas said.

In order to prepare students — in which there are as many as 70 to 80 that are active in the program — to meet the new economy, Lucas said social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are being used to bring in new customers.

"Our students grab technology easily, but it's about change, it's about the changing demographics and our students need to learn to work in a more diverse workplace," he said.

Other universities offering the program are Arizona State, Campbell, Coastal Carolina, Eastern Kentucky, Ferris State, Florida Gulf Coast, Florida State, Methodist, Mississippi State, New Mexico State, N.C. State, Penn State, Sam Houston State, Central Oklahoma, Colorado at Colorado Springs, Idaho, Maryland Eastern Shore, Nebraska and Nevada Las Vegas.

Clemson, Campbell, N.C. State, Methodist and Coastal Carolina are the only five universities in the Carolinas to participate.

greg@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-5687