

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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Is An Environmental Education Right For You?

Over the past few months, you may have had the opportunity to read one or more of my articles about the environment with respect to its current status, why it has been deteriorating, and what can be done to correct the situation. And you may have also thought about learning more about the environment than can be presented in a series of writings for a monthly periodical. How does one learn more and can someone have a successful career in some aspect of the environment?

Young people are being exposed to some of the environmental concepts as they attend elementary school, high school and then on to college. Unfortunately, obtaining a thorough knowledge of the environment can be accomplished only at a few universities that offer programs in Environmental Studies or Environment Science. A more thorough understanding of this field requires attending a graduate school program.

One option would be to take the very technical route and study environmental engineering at the masters or doctorate level. I suggest the graduate level because very few schools today offer undergraduate studies in Environmental Engineering. However, you may be able to earn a minor as part of a major discipline like Civil Engineering or Chemical Engineering. Another alternative is to take the less technical route and study Environmental Management. While Environmental Engineering consists of mostly environmental science and engineering courses, Environmental Management is more interdisciplinary in that it includes law and business, as well as the environmental sciences.

The environmental manager for a corporation is usually responsible for all aspects of environmental issues such as setting policies, instituting waste minimization and recycling programs, complying with regulations, submitting reports to government agencies, and communicating with environmental engineers. The engineers design the environmental systems that the managers eventually require for their company. It is for that reason that the manager does not need to be as technically literate as the engineer.

The traditional environmental manager was trained to understand pollution prevention and compliance; i.e. making sure that the generated waste does not pollute the air, water or soil. Some of the more progressive schools now go one step further and offer courses, or even programs, in *sustainability*. This concept challenges companies to manufacture products without producing waste, or at least really minimizing the quantity of waste generated. But someone might ask -- can I have a good career in the environmental field? Is it really that important?

In the March 21, 2005 issue of Fortune magazine, there is an article about the “Hot Careers for the Next 10 Years”. The fastest growing professional job projected for the period 2002 to 2012 is that of environmental engineers, which also includes environmental managers. “But the greatest increase in demand by far will be for folks who know how to clean up spaceship earth. That’s because an increasingly health-conscious public is eager to find environmental engineers who can prevent problems rather than simply control those that already exist.” Preventing the environmental problems is the real focus of *sustainability*. The Fortune article goes on to say, “We expect the U.S. to start exporting environmental expertise to Europe and Asia, including to emerging markets like India.”

To show further how the demand for environmental careers is increasing, a recent article from GreenBiz.com focuses on a small business school in Washington State that offers an MBA in Sustainable Business. Applications to this school have tripled while top MBA programs across the country are seeing a 30% drop in applications. Anyone interested in the top business schools focusing on sustainability should review the World Resources Institute survey of over 500 accredited graduate business schools worldwide by going to www.beyondgreypinstripes.org. With the world population continuing to grow coupled with limited natural resources, environmental issues will continue to mount.

If you would like to read earlier articles in this series, they are posted at www.stuart.iit.edu/news/releases/ASustainableEnvironment.html.