

Green U.

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Op-Ed: If the world's industrial and information cultures are going Earth-friendly, then we'll need a new generation of trained technical professionals to be leaders. Universities are catching on to this demand by offering a variety of courses devoted to clean technology.

Here in ECN's home state of New Jersey, three top-flight schools exemplify the trend – the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rutgers University, and Stevens Institute of Technology.

Erv Bales, professor in the NJIT School of Architecture and a research consultant to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, founded his school's certificate program in sustainable design in autumn 2003. This fall he'll accept 10-15 students for a new master's degree option. Clean-energy advocacy may be widespread, but real-world industry urgently needs such graduates, Bales said. "Quite frankly, the engineers are just running to catch up right now. They're still struggling for where's their place in all of this?" he explained.

Down the Turnpike at Rutgers, the official state university is best known for its football team, but Prof. Paul Falkowski hopes to shed light on nature with the new Rutgers Energy Institute. The institute formed by collaboration with the departments of engineering, environmental/biological sciences, and planning/public policy, after a funding visit by the U.S. Department of Energy. Similar to NJIT's plans, Rutgers will offer certificate options, and they are designing minor options. "There's been a tipping point in a way, at least among this new generation of students, that's very interested in solving problems. It's a very dangerous time in some ways for investments, but it's a very exciting time for ideas," not seen since the beginnings of the aerospace and computer industries, Falkowski added. In addition to the REI, Rutgers also hosts the EcoComplex, which is a conference and laboratory facility for local governments, researchers, and incubation-stage companies.

They're thinking alike at Stevens. "We'd like to see a greening of all the engineering fields," said Keith Sheppard, associate dean of engineering. "There's been interest in sustainability going back a while, to the late 1990s. What we're seeing now is a kind of a reemergence of this as an area of interest from students, and also the faculty seeing this as something they should be doing in a serious way. But in the short term we thought offering a minor was a way students could do something outside of their regular program." That may begin this fall, but will definitely happen inside of one year, he said. Stevens also added relevant coursework to the Center

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for Science Writing curriculum, and formed a steering committee for green initiatives on campus. With their location overlooking the Hudson River, anything from a windmill to a water turbine is on the table.

These new programs have plenty of company. Nearby at Princeton University, they're offering an undergraduate engineering class called Energy Solutions for the New Century. But from New York's SUNY Canton, which offers a bachelor's degree in alternative and renewable energy applications, all the way to Sweden's Royal Institute of Technology, which has a master's in sustainable energy engineering, chances are there's a school near you pondering a similar direction.

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