

# Course offers students access to golf industry

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

By TODD DEWEY

GOLFING LAS VEGAS

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.

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 Clemson.

"Our first priority is to make sure every student who enters the program leaves with a degree. Our second hope is for them to earn their PGA membership and our third priority is for them to become the best golfer they can be," said Christopher Cain, director of the program at UNLV.

In addition to classroom studies, each student in the program

must complete 16 months of an internship at a minimum of three different types of facilities — public, private and resort.

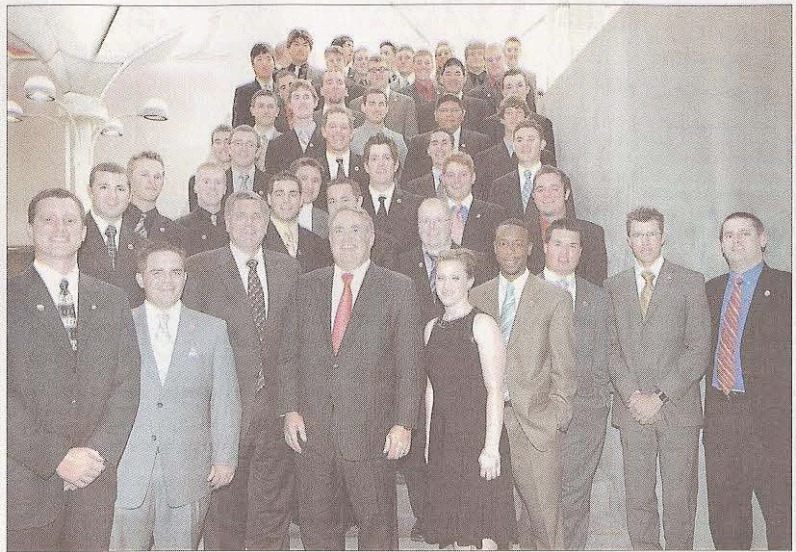
"It's a really good blend," Cain said. "They get all the theory and knowledge in the classroom and apply it on the internship."

"Then they come back and talk about their experience and we put together a work experience portfolio and prepare them for PGA examinations on campus."

The program is anything but all fun and games of golf as students must fulfill requirements for their bachelor's degree and PGA membership at essentially the same time.

"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 36-hole event in which participants need



COURTESY UNLV PHOTO SERVICES

PGA of America president Brian Whitcomb and chief operating officer Joe Steranka visited with the students of UNLV's PGA Golf Management Program in May. It was the first time that both of these influential figures of the golf industry visited a PGA Golf Management Program together. Steranka is front and center with the red tie, and Whitcomb is to the left of Steranka.

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Students gain golf skills

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to score on or below 15 strokes above the course rating for 36 holes. A typical target score is 155, or about 77 per 18 holes.

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

While averaging 77 amounts to a 5-handicap, students only need a 12-handicap to qualify for the program.

"Typically, a person with a 5- or 6-handicap will have the skills to pass a player's ability test," Cain said. "We put the mark at 12 or lower because we feel the program can develop their skills to pass the test by the time they graduate."

Amid a wide range of courses offered in the program, each student must take mandatory player development classes that feature video analysis, a simulator room, a computer-generated swing 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 courses that focus on 17 PGA learning objectives, along with classes on turf grass fundamentals, resort retailing and merchandising, club food and beverage management and more.

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CHRISTOPHER CAIN

DIRECTOR OF THE PGA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM AT UNLV

ness," 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 junior Shawna Richardson, a former Palo Verde golfer who, shortly after entering the program "fell in love with the whole idea I can do this 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 everybody 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."

Cain said one recent graduate was initially worried about landing an internship and not only got one of those but weighed five job offers before graduation.

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

Guaranteed job placement is 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 bachelor's degrees," he said.