

Educating Future Energy Leaders

The 50-year-old energy-management program in the University of Oklahoma's Price College of Business continues to nurture new industry leaders.

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University of Oklahoma president David L. Boren, left, and Robert M. Zinke, a 1976 alum and chairman, president and chief executive of Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Zenergy Inc., at a gala celebrating the Energy Management Program's 50th anniversary.

The first university to launch a curriculum for petroleum landmen, the University of Oklahoma began offering a petroleum land-management program in 1958. Fifty years and 1,400 graduates later, the program has evolved into the Energy Management Program, a curriculum that trains landmen, energy financiers and other professionals in the oil and gas industry. In 2008, OU faculty, staff, students and alumni celebrated the program's golden anniversary while taking a look back on the years that shaped the industry as well as the education of industry leaders.

The beginning

Prior to the program's inception, T.H. Kaplan, a charter member of the American Association of Petroleum Landmen (AAPL), noted the need for a well-rounded education for this group of industry professionals. "He needs to be part-lawyer, -geologist, -engineer, -scout, -psychiatrist, -salesman, -horse-trader and -diplomat," Kaplan wrote in *Path to Professionalism*, a history of the AAPL.

Students began filling the classrooms' seats in the 1958-59 school year as the OU Petroleum Land Management (PLM) Program kicked off, under the direction of Dr. William H. Keown. By the spring of 1960, just four semesters after the program launched with eight men, more than 100 students were enrolled in the curriculum.

David Bole, currently a managing director of Houston-based private-equity firm Quantum Energy Partners, was one of the program's first graduates, earning his bachelor's degree in 1961. Bole, who is presently on the board of OU's Energy Management Program, which is the current version of the PLM program, says the program was crucial to his career in the energy industry. "When I came out of college, I had a really good idea of what kind of tools I should bring in my toolkit to be successful."

The program gradually grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s, finally hitting a peak in the 1980-81 school year with almost 800 enrolled students. But with the bust of the oil boom, the PLM student enrollment dropped to only 12 by the 1988-89 school year.

During the 1990s, enrollment remained low, and the nature of the energy job market was shifting. The university quickly adjusted the program to the changing business climate. With the advent of the deregulation of natural gas and the need for new commercial and financial skills, a new curriculum and a new name were introduced in 1999.

The new Energy Management Program curriculum provided energy-concentrated classes from the various disciplines across campus in the business, geology, engineering and law colleges. The modified curriculum included courses in meteorology, energy risk management, and commodities marketing and trading.

In 2000, the curriculum's debut year, OU received the "Most Innovative in Excellence Award for Curriculum Design" from the Southwestern Business Deans Association. Two hundred business schools in the Southwest U.S. competed for the award.

Today's Energy Management Program students are graduating at a perfect time, since the oil and gas industry has virtually lost a generation of leaders by not actively recruiting in more than two decades. The American Petroleum Institute (API) estimates that the average age of oil and gas industry professionals is 49—the oldest of any American industry. Various estimates are that the average is advancing 11 months a year.

To lead and mentor this new generation of OU students came a new program director in 2006—Steve Long, a 1976 alumnus. Since graduating from OU, Long gained 30

years of domestic and international experience in the energy industry working with PFC Energy, Unocal, Enron and Gulf Oil. His background includes project economics, corporate planning, business development, and commercial negotiations in the E&P and pipeline and power sectors. Long says the program is still fundamentally for landmen, but since the curriculum re-design it has branched into the commercial side.

“Some students are going to work for business-development departments, financial institutions, private-equity firms and even banks in commodities marketing and trading. We’re responding to the industry’s needs. A lot of the new shale plays have infrastructure constraints, so it’s opening new opportunities for gathering systems and gas pipeline rights-of-way issues and natural gas marketing,” Long says.

The program continues to attract a diversity of employers looking for young technology-savvy talent, with a nearly 100% employment-upon-graduation rate. In the fall of 2008, 40 energy companies and financial institutions interviewed the program’s students.

“When you have 50 years of history, you have 50 years of reputation,” Long says. “For the E&P companies, since OU was the first program, everybody knows to come to OU.”

An alumnus of the program and chairman of the OU Energy Management Advisory Board, Bob Zinke, president of Zenergy Inc., based in Tulsa, says OU’s energy program is distinctive from other universities’ energy programs due to the amount of participation from the industry, including providing mentorships and scholarship opportunities.

“The William M. Majors Mentoring Program has allowed industry leaders, on an individual basis, to act not only as mentors, but also as career advisors and life counselors to our energy-management students,” Zinke says. “The industry has also provided unprecedented financial support to our energy management program and its students, with a substantial, dedicated scholarship program.”

The program includes six endowed scholarships from alums and 40 scholarships from industry partners.

Michael Bishop, who received the AAPL outstanding graduate award in 2008, was immediately hired by Houston-based producer Southwestern Energy Co. as a landman upon his graduation in May. Bishop says the curriculum, partnered with the three internships he held with Nichols Land Service, Jones Energy and ConocoPhillips, prepared him to enter the workforce.

“Thanks to the coursework, I was already confident in my role and responsibilities,” Bishop says. “I am not only familiar with oil and gas terminology, but I have a better understanding of the global implications of oil and gas exploration. The program prepares you for opportunities to go into land, marketing and trading, and energy finance.”

Long says the program is constantly evolving in response to the introduction of new technologies and needs in the industry. For example, the program has formed a partnership with the geography department to introduce new Energy Management Program classes in GIS mapping.

Also, students took a field trip to a wind farm in October to understand emerging opportunities in alternative energy. And, a new program for studying energy management abroad in Aberdeen, Scotland, will expose the students to the global energy marketplace. It is to be launched this summer.

Those who have been with the program since the beginning, like Bole, think the strong OU administration, support of faculty and backing of the energy industry will help the program continue to produce top-notch students.

Bole says, “It’s no coincidence that (OU) president David Boren arrived and then Steve Long came in to be the director of the program. That has really jump-started the curriculum.”

Other notable OU Energy Management Program alumni include Tom Ward, chief executive officer of Oklahoma City-based, publicly held SandRidge Energy Inc., and Ron Barnes, senior vice president, auctions, of Houston-based The Oil & Gas Asset Clearinghouse.