

Dan Robertson

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Catawba College senior Dan Robertson doesn't know exactly which career path he will take. But he is absolutely sure it will be "green."

One of the first students to major in Catawba's new Sustainable Business program, Robertson has elected to stay an extra year to complete a double major in Environmental Science and Sustainable Business. "This major is perfect for me," he says.

In the past, people in the environmental and business fields have typically been at odds, Robertson says, and that has not proved productive. "I think the real way to get things accomplished - to make the environment a better place as well as making business a better place - is by combining the two, understanding both business and the environment."

Robertson has already had real world experience in the two. His freshman year, he was tapped to complete an internship with Power Curbers, Inc., a firm headquartered in Salisbury that manufactures curb-and-gutter paving machines which are sold across the globe.

The firm had already implemented environmentally friendly practices before Robertson arrived. "They were doing an amazing job of taking care of their waste," he says. "Even the oil that has splashed on the side of machines is reclaimed so it doesn't get into the environment."

Last summer, Center for the Environment Director John Wear helped Robertson get an internship with the architecture and engineering department at Disney World in Orlando, Fla. Chip Carbiener, director of the department, charged Robertson with asking pertinent questions of his architects and engineers that would help them view their work from an environmental perspective.

"I was to help them explore further what envi-



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ronmental friendliness is," Robertson says. "What does it mean to be 'green'?"

He also did research on lifecycle analysis at Disney - in Robertson's words, "looking at a product or service from the very beginning of its life when it is extracted from the ground to the time that it is disposed of, looking at its environmental impact from cradle to grave."

He points to specific practices at Disney that are environmentally friendly. The organization gives its leftover food to an organization called Second Harvest, which, in turn, gives it to places like homeless shelters. It also collects rainwater for irrigation.

"Not only is this good for the environment; it's also good for business," Robertson says. "They would have to spend more money on water if they hadn't reclaimed the rainwater, and they would have to pay to move the food to the landfill if they didn't give it to Second Harvest, which transports the food to locations where it can be used."

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He also notes that Disney offers free refills to people who buy special Disney cups. Again, this is good for the environment because it cuts down on waste from disposable cups and good for business because people buy the more expensive reusable cup.

Robertson was the only environmental science intern and one of only a few U.S. interns in the architecture and engineering department, which opened his eyes to global job opportunities. "Before this internship, I thought when I graduated that I would get a job in the U.S.," he says. "Well, why? There's a big world to explore out there."

Robertson also studied in England for a semester through a study-abroad program at Catawba. While there, he noted the differences in urban design between the U.S. and Europe. "Some of our old cities, like theirs, are designed on a human perspective," he says. They are designed for people to walk."

But most of U.S. cities today are designed more for cars than people. After World War II, when most families had automobiles, sidewalks disappeared and front porches gave way to patios and carports. "We went from a person-oriented plan to a car-oriented plan," Robertson says.

His internships and the study abroad -- plus opportunities to attend a National Association of Homebuilders Green Building Conference and a U.S. Green Building Council Conference during his undergraduate years -- have had a huge impact on Robertson.

"Because Catawba is a small, liberal arts college where you get to know your professors, they hook you up with learning opportunities outside the classroom that are so valuable," Robertson says. "Sure, classroom learning is important, but Catawba has done a great job of helping me gain real-world experience. I don't believe I could have gotten that anywhere else."