



## New Institute Promotes Kingdom Practices of Sustainability

by Kami L. Rice

**J**uliana Lezama tells the story of her 9-year-old self who, while riding with her mother, was writing down license plate numbers of cars emitting excessive amounts of pollution. She then wrote a letter to the Ministry of the Environment of her native Colombia to report the polluters.

Her passion hasn't waned from its early beginning, so it's no surprise that she joined the first cohort to enter programs offered by **Lipscomb University's (TN)** new Institute for Sustainable Practice, following the completion of her undergrad degree in political science.

"I found my calling," she said, speaking of sustainability. "It's not only what I want to do with my career, but it's a way of life. ...It's really refreshing to study what is my passion in life." She couldn't find anything like this program back home in Colombia. While she would love to work in sustainability there, she said it's difficult because underdeveloped countries don't yet have the resources to support sustainability. Companies aren't interested yet, and one can't find supplies to provide products necessary for energy-efficient homes and businesses.

Lipscomb is positioning itself as a leader in the emerging field of sustainability. With the October 2007 inception of the Institute for Sustainable Practice, the university launched an undergraduate major and minor in sustainability, as well as a graduate certificate program and a terminal master's degree. The first students were welcomed into these programs during the 2008-09 academic term.

The Institute's first and second cohorts have attracted students with an excitingly diverse array of backgrounds: a pharmacist, a waitress, a stay-at-home mother/accountant, a civil engineer, a farmer's market employee, a coffeehouse manager, a landscape architect, a homebuilder and more.

Preston Clark, a U.S. Army officer in the sustainability concentration of Lipscomb's MBA program, is an example of a Christian whose perspective has shifted. He came from an



KRISTI JONES

**ABOVE: LIPSCOMB AND THE INSTITUTE** is taking the lead on green initiatives, including the construction of the new Burton Health Sciences Center and Villages at Lipscomb Residential Complex, which represents a \$21 million renewable energy and green building effort by the campus and by hosting the 2008 Tennessee Green Business Expo (**RIGHT**).

anti-environmental movement perspective before he began to be interested in emerging trends in green marketing. That led to learning about the environmental side effects of production, which took him to study consumerism and finally deposited him in the sustainability movement. "I stumbled across the word sustainability and was like, that's what I'm looking at," he said. The uniqueness of Lipscomb's program and the fact that it was faith-based drew him to the school, as did its location in Nashville.

Lipscomb is the first—and currently the only—school in Tennessee to offer majors in sustainability. Before beginning these programs, Lipscomb was already going green. When the school's Ezell Center was constructed in 2005-06, it was the first academic building in Nashville to use geothermal heating and cooling systems. All-new construction on campus since then has included this energy-saving system.

Sustainability's goal is to "holistically integrate the needs of people, the planet and prosperity," explained Dodd Galbreath,

executive director of the Institute. A truly trans-disciplinary field, the sustainability movement is rooted in “love for all generations and all species across time that do not deserve to inherit our wastes, depleted resources and eroded quality of life.”

“Fundamentally, sustainability is the secular world’s alternative to kingdom living,” said Galbreath. “It has emerged as a way to achieve justice and prosperity in the world.” It’s critical that Christians be part of this movement because without their participation, the world “will miss out on the opportunity to know that this kingdom living of today can be extended forever.”

Much about the principles of sustainability fit closely with Jesus’ teaching. “It amazes me that secular people have figured out the holistic aspect of Jesus’ teaching before many Christians have,” Galbreath added.

Historically, the environmental movement has had an uneasy relationship with much of the evangelical Christian world for several reasons, including the perception that environmentalism worshipped creation more than the Creator and ignored real needs for jobs and livelihood. But Galbreath explained that a more fact-driven approach has quietly emerged, largely supported by corporations, non-profit organizations and other bottom-up sources that aren’t as political. “As sustainability emerged as the new and much-improved environmental movement, it began to make more sense to people. ‘Hey, this is rational,’ [they realized]...Sustainability has the potential to connect eternal thinking with sustainable thinking and to create more faith rather than less faith.”

The Institute for Sustainable Practice was created to meet the growing need for “trained, credentialed leaders who understand sustainability from its

Lipscomb is the first—and currently the only—school in Tennessee to offer majors in sustainability.

broadest intent: to create a better life for people, the planet and prosperity,” Galbreath explained. The Institute model was chosen because it supports an innovative approach to education that includes service to the local community and connection to the wider world.

The Institute is involved in both passive and active partnerships with other organizations in Nashville. Passive partnerships take the form of providing free meeting space on campus to organizations working on various aspects of sustainability. Active partnerships include organizing and hosting an annual Green Business and Living Summit. The second annual summit will be held in April 2009.


Additionally, Galbreath and the Institute have relationships with the other higher education institutions in Nashville. Fellow CCCU member **Trevecca Nazarene University (TN)** has brought students to tour Lipscomb’s campus, and Galbreath has participated with Trevecca’s president, Dr. Dan Boone, in events on faith and the environment. Galbreath has also participated in conferences at Vanderbilt University and served as a guest lecturer there. He anticipates that Vanderbilt will be a significant partner in sustainability research.

In August 2008, Lipscomb dedicated almost \$21 million in new green construction, including the Burton

Health Sciences Center, which has been submitted for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification and is expected to be the first LEED-certified academic building in the state.

True sustainability programs are particularly rare at faith-based schools, though some, including some CCCU schools, are incorporating sustainability elements into environmental studies programs. Most notably, **John Brown University (AR)** has announced the addition of a bachelor of science degree in renewable energy beginning in fall 2009. It is the first university in Arkansas and one of only a few in the U.S. offering a four-year degree in the field.

In addition, the CCCU announced that six institutions were awarded mini-grants up to \$5,000 to begin the implementation of creation care programs on their respective campuses.

While sustainability is best done in partnership with others, Lezama noted, “It’s important to educate people about the problem and let them know everything they do has an impact on the environment.” 

**Kami Rice** ([www.kamirice.com](http://www.kamirice.com)), a 1997 graduate of **Asbury College (KY)** and an alumna of the **American Studies Program**, is based in Nashville and loves working as a freelance writer.

