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PLANET-PROFIT REPORT

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An obscure mineral called vanadium could prove crucial in solar and wind energy — and spur a uranium-mining revival in Montrose County

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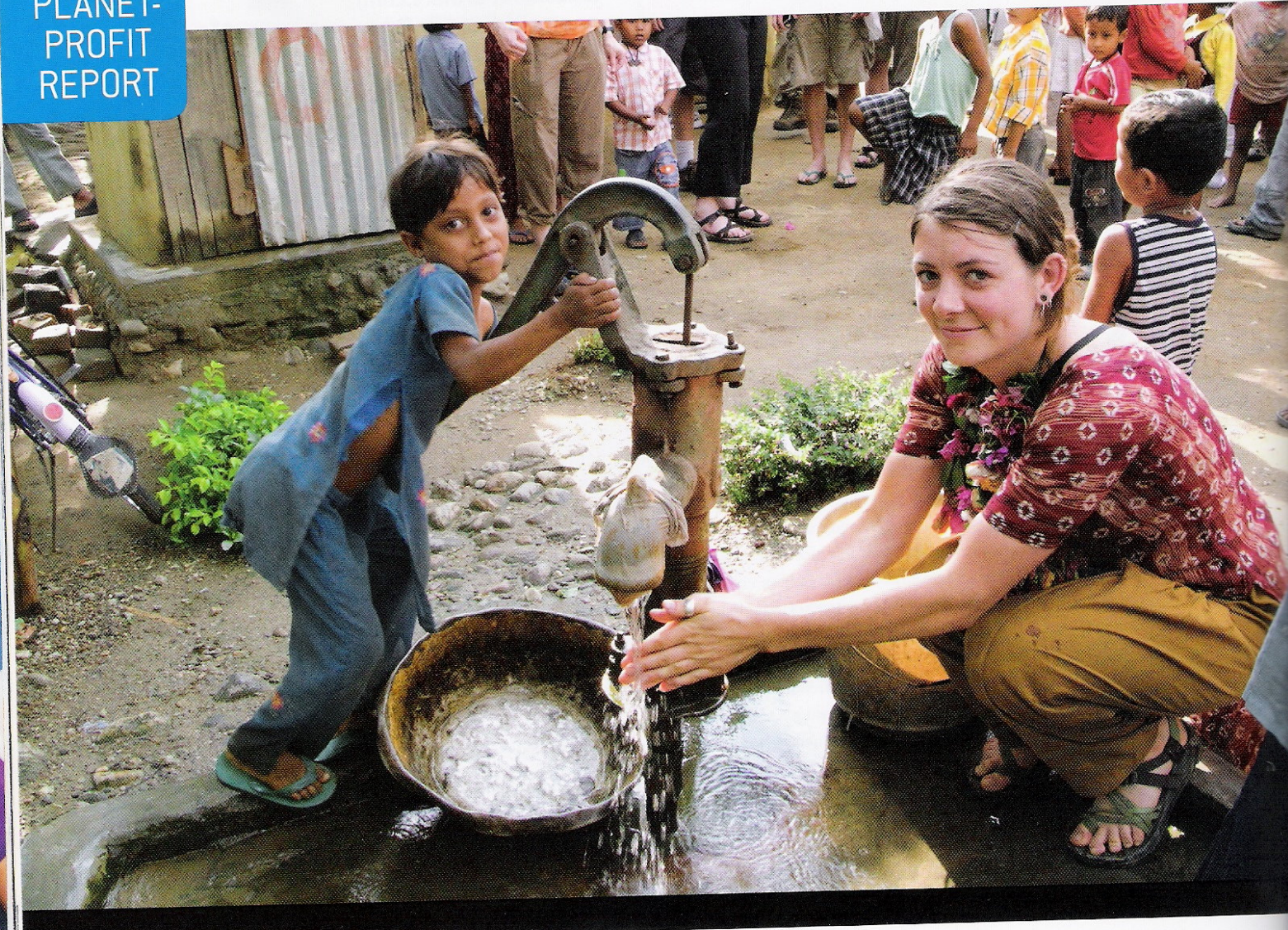
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GOING  
GLOBAL FOR  
THE GREATER  
GOOD

Colorado  
college  
students are  
learning to  
become social  
entrepreneurs

BY CASSI CLARK

PLANET-  
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REPORT





Left: Former CU student Amelia Lyons with Nepali girl pumping water at a school outside Kathmandu. Above: CU students David Sparkman and Christie Chatterley working in Ayaviri, Peru.

# N

gyen Norbu, Matthew Martin, Carolyn Davidson and Jessica Rawley are learning how to start a company called Taka Energy that creates energy from waste and money from energy.

Norbu came to Colorado a year ago because he felt connected to Colorado State University's Global Social and Sustainable Enterprise master's program.

"I flew all the way from Bhutan to study this program, and I'm really glad that I got the opportunity," says Norbu, whose team now has a waste-energy business and feasibility plan to take back to Bhutan and nearby countries.

Norbu, Martin, Davidson and Rawley represent the new breed of students taking on the global problems of poverty, disease and environmental degradation. They call themselves social entrepreneurs, and the Colorado institutions they are graduating from are leading the way.

College students in Colorado are taking classes like Social Entrepreneurship and Microfinance at the University of Denver. Christina Couppis, a second-year International MBA student, went

to the Republic of Georgia with the class to audit a microfinance institution funded by Deutsche Bank.

"The best part was to see the microfinance institutions actually doing good things," she says.

Boston Nyer, the first Building Systems student within Civil Engineering in the Mortenson Center in Engineering for Developing Communities at the University of Colorado, liked the Sustainable Community Development class because of the opportunity to interact with some social entrepreneur pioneers.

"You get to spend some time with Bernard Amadai (faculty director of the MC-EDC and founder of Engineers without Borders) and David Silver (international development consultant and assistant clinical professor at the CU School of Public Health), and they both have a lot of experience," Nyer says. "And it's nice to just work through problems around them. It helps you gain confidence in your approach and gives you some extra insight."

Students are graduating with concentrations in Social Entrepreneurship from DU, certificates in Socially Responsible Enterprise and Engineering for Developing Communities from CU, MBAs in Global Social and Sustainable Enterprise from Colorado





Jennifer Lindgren, an International MBA student at Daniels College of Business, took part in last year's Global Opportunities IMBA Tanzania program last year.

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State University, and minors in Humanitarian Engineering from the Colorado School of Mines.

"The draw for me is taking something that I love to learn about and love to do, and making it a good thing for other people as well," Couppis says.

The curriculum is not universal, but is drawn from course plans created individually by social entrepreneurs who have worked in developing communities and now teach at Colorado institutions.

"There's no formula for a program like this. What's happening is people are just learning as we go along," says Nyer, who will work part-time next year with the MC-EDC to continue heading up the Building Systems side of the program. "For example, the Sustainable Community Development course each year changes a little bit, and it changed dramatically since the first year because there aren't many places doing this, and it isn't naturally an academic topic."

The key approach all the programs have in common is helping students discover their values. CU's Leeds School of Business requires all junior business majors to take Business Applications of Social Responsibility.

"We start by having them look at their own values," says Franci Milner, instructor and associate director of the Center for Education on Social Responsibility. "And then once you start thinking about that, then I think they're easier to move into 'what's my view about how that business ought to behave?'"

During her Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship class, Rebecca Saltman asks her Metropolitan State College of Denver students to ask questions about themselves first: "How does it get better than this?" or "What else is possible for you?" and then lead the communities they want to help with those same questions.

"Those two questions will always open more doors and give me more opportunity to be of service to those communities ... because if one comes to conclusions or judgments or answers, you're never going to be able to move forward in the social entrepreneurial field," Saltman says.

Robyn Sandekian, managing director of CU's MC-EDC, agrees with the approach of her CU Leeds and Metro counterparts. "You have to listen to the people," she says. "You don't come in with a solution ... Bernard (Amadei) has another quote, 'If all of the problems in the world were technical they'd be solved by now.' But that technical is just a tiny portion of the big picture; how does it fit in with the culture and the economics and the politics of wherever it is you're doing this?"

Sandekian points out that often the communities engineers set out to help do not give honest answers when they are not included in the solution discovery process. Unless the process begins with questions, Sandekian says, they won't say, "Women can't use a bicycle-powered pump because they can't show their ankles," or "Women in our culture don't ride bicycles," or "If you pump the water in ... so the women and girls don't have to walk down to the stream they lose this two hours a day that was their only social time to be with other people." The problems need to be defined by the choice of the individuals you are there to help."

Jennifer Spencer, a CU International Affairs graduate and former Social Entrepreneurship for Equitable Development intern, learned this lesson well. "Something that studying social entrepreneurship has really taught me is the importance of every component of society," Spencer says.

This approach, and other creative methods are grabbing the atten-



tion of Ashoka, a global organization that supports the world's leading social entrepreneurs, and being used as examples for other schools to follow. Milner's Business Solutions to Global Poverty: Learning Through Service class garnered recognition this year as one of the "top ten most rigorous and innovative exemplars of the syllabi collected" for the Ashoka U Curriculum and Teaching Resource Guide.

In August 2009, the CU-Boulder campus was selected to be an Ashoka Changemaker Campus, "to accelerate their growth as a hub of social innovation and to set a new standard for social entrepreneurship education."

The Changemaker Campus team, comprised of faculty from SEED and the Mortenson Center, created two Residential Academic Programs in the new Williams Village/40° North community. The "RAPs," which align with the university's Flagship 2030 strategic plan, bring together students from across all disciplines for a curriculum of Sustainable by Design and Social Entrepreneurship for Equitable Development and Sustainability.

"What I think is so cool about this is that it's completely multi-departmental or interdepartmental," said Spencer, who helped SEED lobby CU for the RAPs. The building has five classrooms to "hold specialized classes that deal with the themes of the RAPs and fulfill the core requirements," says Matthew Jelacic, professor and RAP faculty in residence. A learning opportunity in its own right, the building has a gray water recycle system, which will be monitored in a RAP class on water reuse and sustainability, and energy monitoring on every corridor so students can keep track of their energy use. The faculty envisions low-energy-consumption corridor competitions.

For social entrepreneurs, as with businesspeople, it all comes down to the bottom line. For social entrepreneurs, however, there are three bottom lines: corporate profit, social responsibility and environmental responsibility.

CSU's Global Social and Sustainable Enterprise program is teaching students how to develop this triple bottom line.

"In accounting in a normal MBA, you might look at the accounting implications of Ford wanting to capture more market share in Norway," says Carl Hammerdorfer, direc-

Above: CU Leeds School of Business MBA grad Emily Stanley did volunteer work in Kenya. Right: Becca Gentile, an MBA graduate from CU's Leeds School of Business, made valuable career contacts working for a nonprofit in Uganda.

tor of GSSE. "That wouldn't interest us. We'd be interested, in our accounting class, in how you do business at the base of the economic pyramid. We would look at not only the financial part of the accounting, but our students have to look at the social return on investment."

The Taka Energy team used these lessons in their waste-to-energy project.

"Our company (is) a systems integrator that helps to put all of the pieces together that a WTE facility needs to get up and running, including the technology, financing, permitting, contracts, operations and maintenance, etc.," Martin says. "Our goal is to change the way that people view their waste, from being a nuisance that is often dealt with in environmentally harmful ways, to a resource that should be a benefit to both people and the environment."

Other students have used their practicums over the last three years to work on providing wheelchairs to the disabled in Southern Africa, developing and delivering clean technology including solar lights and radios in Peru, and increasing the fuel efficiency of municipal vehicles in India, among many other projects.

Likewise, Colorado School of Mines Humanitarian Engineering

"The draw for me is taking something that I love to learn about and love to do, and making it a good thing for other people as well."

— Christina Couppis, International MBA student at the University of Denver

students have worked on water and sanitation projects, as well as energy projects like designing efficient cook stoves, anaerobic biogas digesters, passive cooler boxes and efficient lighting. Mines Harvey Scholars are also encouraged, with a stipend to cover the cost, to take their knowledge into the world and "pay it forward." Last May, Mines students went to Nepal to help support the tourist economy by rebuilding the historic trail hiked by Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay in the Mount Everest region.

Students in DU's Global Opportunities class work on projects for organizations like the Peace House Africa, a secondary school in Tanzania for AIDS orphans. Over the last four years, projects included conducting environmental analyses for education and job opportunities, and creating finance and entrepreneurship lesson plans. Future Global Opportunities collaborations include wind power projects in Argentina, and sanitation and clean water projects in one of the world's largest slums in Kibera, Nairobi.

Bruce Hutton, dean emeritus at Daniels College of Business,



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says the goal of these hands-on projects, in addition to developing social entrepreneur skills, is to teach students the real-world business practices of handing off projects. Students' endeavors are long term rather than start-to-finish, and teach students the valuable communications skills needed to pass along ongoing projects.

"One of the takeaways for me, after completing the program (CSU's GSSE), is I can take back the concept and other acquired skills and apply this concept when working to be a social entrepreneur in Bhutan, or also apply the acquired skills in other organizations I would work for," Norbu says.

Regis University's Sullivan Chair for Free Enterprise is expanding the Jesuit mission of making a "positive impact on a changing society" by fostering entrepreneurial thinking and collaboration in the Regis Entrepreneurship Club. Jill Schonteich, a sophomore finance major who wants to own her own company someday, says she joined the club because, "It's really up my alley of things I like to do ... I'm in it for the learning, I'm in it for the challenge."

Taking a more local approach, the club facilitates students' work to solve community problems and teach first-hand entrepreneurial skills. New this year, the first projects have students working with organizations on a community impact investment project, and a micro-enterprise street vendor startup.

Seeing that many of the students' practicum venture projects are too good to let fizzle when students graduate, the schools have set up programs beyond classroom education. The CU Deming Center for Entrepreneurship created the CU New Venture Challenge, which brings interdisciplinary teams of student entrepreneurs together to answer the question, "Where do I start?" Competitors take work-

shops to learn how to identify, analyze and act upon venture ideas and connect to the entrepreneurial world, while testing their ideas with local experts. The best teams win cash prizes.

CSU created the New Economy Venture Accelerator, which incubates entrepreneurs with mentoring support from entrepreneurs in residence, financial support, and shared services like copying and receptionists. The Taka Energy team will apply to NEVA this fall. Similarly, five recent CU graduates created the Unreasonable Institute to provide selected social entrepreneurs from around the world "intensive training, effective collaboration, international exposure, and expert guidance" with mentors from successful social enterprises and SE leaders at Colorado schools.

Possibilities abound for Colorado's students. Nyer, in addition to helping the MC-EDC, will continue working with Peter Scott, *Foreign Policy* magazine's 2010 Top Global Thinkers, at the Burn Design Lab in Seattle on environmentally and socially sustainable uses for *Jatropha* tree seeds.

Like Schonteich, Spencer would love to start her own SE business someday, or perhaps work in international development consulting. After graduation in March, Couppis hopes to find a career that will allow her to meld SE and finance.

"Not only are you experiencing something great, and doing something great for other people, but you're also networking and building your own relationships, which is kind of a double wammy for you, for the students there," Spencer said.

"It's the combination of a big idea with a good entrepreneur," said Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, in a 2007 PBS interview. "There's nothing more powerful." ❖