The University of Southern California’s (USC) Marshall School of Business provides students with numerous opportunities to study social and environmental themes in business through electives, club-sponsored learning events, guest speaking engagements, opportunities to take classes across numerous disciplines, and programs offered by the Society and Business Lab (SBL). SBL is a Center of Excellence that provides USC students, faculty, and other individuals the tools to creatively apply business principles to solve world problems.

USC Marshall’s core curriculum is focused on ensuring a common breadth of knowledge across all business disciplines to facilitate understanding and communication. The curriculum addresses social and environmental themes in a variety of different ways. Some professors integrate these themes into all their classes by presenting case studies of social entrepreneurial ventures that have achieved double or triple bottom lines. Dedicated special topic courses are offered each semester based on student interest: in spring 2011, the course Sustainability and Competitive Advantage was offered in the Management and Organization track, fall 2011 includes an operations course on Sustainable Supply Chains, and each spring, SBL offers Social Entrepreneurship. There is significant student interest and involvement in working towards including more social and environmental themes into the curriculum, and the administration is responding to those demands.

Students can also take up to nine units outside of Marshall during their time in the program. Applicable programs on the USC campus include, but are not limited to, the USC School of Policy, Planning and Development, the USC School of Social Work, and the Annenberg School of Communications. These programs offer courses on topics such as community development and housing, corporate social responsibility, nonprofit and public sector accounting, economics and management, environmental impact and sustainability, and international development. The Viterbi School of Engineering offers classes on topics such as power generation and distribution and environmental sciences. USC is also home to the Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies, which does significant research on environmental impact, and the USC Energy Institute, which focuses on energy policy. These programs expose business students to other disciplines and professionals across a wide range of fields.

Social and environment awareness begins at orientation, when the director of the USC Marshall Society and Business Lab (SBL) and the President of Challenge for Charity (C4C) present at a mandatory gathering of incoming first-year students on the importance of community involvement and corporate social responsibility. Marshall
Net Impact (MNI) furthers this theme at the first Marshall Club Fair soon thereafter.

MNI is one of the most active clubs on campus. MNI encompasses several areas of interest including, but not limited to, social enterprise, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). It also offers Service Corps, a nonprofit consulting opportunity, and Board Fellows, which provides students the opportunity to sit on the Board of Directors for a nonprofit.

In partnership with the Keenan Career Resource Center, the chapter hosts Net Impact Night, an annual event that attracts executive from California’s top social enterprises as well as Fortune 500 companies such as Disney to recruit for CSR and other positions. MNI also hosts statewide conferences such as alterEnergy and individual speakers and panels featuring numerous high-profile corporate figures. For less formal exposure to social business and the opportunity to learn from peers, MNI sponsors the Social Enterprise Forum, where students from all disciplines who are currently involved or in the early stages of launching a social enterprise share experiences and ideas.

SBL hosts a monthly Lunch & Learn speaker series with influential local business and community leaders in a diverse number of socially responsible industries. SBL also provides students access to the Los Angeles Social Venture Partners’ yearly Fast Pitch competition—a coaching program that organizes competitions for innovative local nonprofits to pitch their business plans to local financiers.

The most visible campus club is C4C, an organization that is active across West Coast business schools to support local and national nonprofits by ensuring every student can participate in at least 10 hours of community service and additional fundraising activities.

USC Marshall also provides the opportunity to participate in an international volunteer experience as an extension to the mandatory Pacific Rim International Management Education program that is the culmination of the first year. Students can choose to work with either a healthcare initiative in Argentina or an organization that combats human trafficking in Cambodia with a Marshall professor, who helps facilitate the use of business skills cultivated over the past year to make a meaningful contribution to these organizations’ operations.

CAREER SERVICES & ALUMNI

USC’s renowned Trojan alumni network is unparalleled among MBA programs. Alumni are extremely approachable and always willing to give guidance and advice to fellow Trojans to advance their careers.

The Keenan Career Resource Center (CRC) continues to devote resources to support students striving to find socially or environmentally related jobs. The CRC has built strong relationships with organizations that specialize in education, international development, nonprofit consulting, and socially conscious Fortune 500 companies. These include Education Pioneers, Southern California Edison, the Broad Fellowship, GE, the Clinton-Orfalea Foundation, Toyota, Disney, Mattel, Blue Garnet and others that are looking for talented business students to fill many positions with a social or environmental focus. It also provides resources to the Marshall Net Impact chapter (MNI), which recruits speakers and coordinates events focusing on social enterprise, corporate social responsibility, and renewable energy.

MNI organizes events and information sessions that provide valuable opportunities for members to network with professionals in sustainability, CSR, and nonprofit management. Some highlights this past year include a site visit to SolarWorld, Net Impact Night, Cleantech LA Career Night, alterEnergy, and CSR presentations from Mattel and Disney.

The USC Marshall Society and Business Lab (SBL) offers a Society and Business Fellowship to Marshall MBA students in each class who are serious about pursuing careers in the social sector, particularly to those interested in poverty, homelessness, education, the environment and healthcare. All incoming graduate students at Marshall are encouraged to apply for the Society and Business Fellowship. SBL also encourages Marshall students to intern at a nonprofit organization by offering a subsidy for such opportunities.
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

With the increasing number of students expressing strong interest in sustainability, social enterprise, and nonprofits, the USC Marshall administration has made sincere efforts to respond to this demand by developing specialized programs and courses.

USC Marshall and the Society and Business Lab provide tremendous support to students who are pursuing careers in non-traditional fields, such as sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and social enterprise. Dean James Ellis notes, “The administration in the old days would say, ‘That’s the idealism of the MBA student.’ Now, administrators say, ‘This is the reality.’”

“There is a strong push from the top starting with Dean Ellis,” a student adds. “The school takes an active role in making sure that when we graduate, we are prepared to apply our business education to environmental and social challenges facing business today. They want us to be both corporate and social leaders.”

REASONS TO ATTEND

The overarching strength of the Marshall School of Business MBA program is the passion of the students and the ongoing relationships students forge as members of Net Impact, the USC Marshall Society and Business Lab, and the USC Trojan network. This passion is exemplified in the consistently increasing membership in the MNI chapter. Each year, students have expressed even greater enthusiasm about social entrepreneurship and environmental responsibility within business than the year before. A highlight of this commitment last year was a student-led initiative to create the Social Enterprise Forum, in which students involved or interested in founding a social venture present and discuss its problems and successes. These forums proved popular among students from across disciplines and were successful at not only providing solutions for the student entrepreneurs, but also increasing awareness among their colleagues about the availability of socially responsible alternatives in business. The chapter’s efforts are student-driven, and there is great opportunity for influencing the future of the chapter and the reputation of the entire university. The school’s administrative leaders, from professors to career counselors to deans, are receptive to students’ suggestions and give every initiative serious consideration.

Marshall’s alumni have achieved careers within alternative energy, nonprofit consulting, education management, and corporate social responsibility, ensuring that Marshall’s extensive network remains strongly aligned with Net Impact’s values. The university’s location in the center of downtown LA gives it the advantage of a hotbed of innovation for environmental solutions, and a strong community of social entrepreneurs striving to address very real issues in their backyards. At Marshall, the community values entrepreneurship, leadership, and creativity—the perfect fit for a student looking to make a difference.