In our ongoing look at turf management degree programs we stop to look at the program offered through Rutgers University.

According to University information, Rutgers College became the land grant college of New Jersey in 1864, resulting in the establishment of the Rutgers Scientific School. Further expansion in the sciences came with the founding of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station in 1880, the College of Engineering (now the School of Engineering) in 1914 and the College of Agriculture (now Cook College) in 1921.

Rutgers has a unique history as a colonial college, a land grant institution and a state university. Chartered in 1766 as Queen's College and the eighth institution of higher learning to be founded in the colonies, the school opened its doors in New Brunswick in 1771. Today, with more than 50,000 students on campuses in Camden, Newark and New Brunswick/Piscataway, Rutgers is one of the nation’s major state universities.

Cook College is the land grant college of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. It was created in 1973, and named in honor of George Hammell Cook (1818-1889), a renowned geologist and teacher at what was then called the Rutgers Scientific School. Cook College expanded the focus of its predecessors by including the College of Agriculture and then the College of Agriculture and Environmental Science.

Cook College was designated a professional school by the Board of Governors of Rutgers in 1982 as part of a major reorganization of the New Brunswick campus. As a professional school, Cook refocused its curricula on the land grant mission of educational scholarship designed to develop knowledge and skills, enabling students and the public to address challenges facing society in the areas of agriculture, food, environment and natural resources.

Today, there are about 3,253 undergraduate students. In addition, 120 faculty members are associated with Rutgers Cooperative Extension and funded through federal, state and county contributions.

A primary function of Cook College is educational: the personal and professional development of its students in a small college campus setting within the larger New Brunswick campus of Rutgers. Instruction also takes place off-campus through the efforts of RCE (Rutgers Cooperative Extension) and the OCPE (Office of Continuing Professional Education).

The plant science program prepares students for careers or further study in areas related to food, fiber, turfgrass, ornamental plant production, pest management, plant breeding, plant pathology and agricultural education. The curriculum offers options focused on industry for students intending to pursue business careers; research for students intending to pursue careers in laboratories or graduate study; professional certification for students intending to pursue careers in education or horticulture therapy; and plant protection.

"Rutgers University/Cook College has had a long history of providing turf management education. The first turfgrass evaluation plots were established in 1923. During the 1920s, Dr. Howard Sprague was the first full-time turf faculty member involved in the turf program," states Dr. Richard Hurley, who is responsible for working with turf student recruitment in the turfgrass management program at Rutgers Cook College. A graduate of Rutgers with a Ph.D. in turf breeding, Hurley is also advisor to the student Turf Club and one of the instructors teaching turf-related courses in the program.

According to Hurley, after World War II,
Dr. Ralph Engel started as a full-time turf faculty member. The 10-week Winter Turf Course was started at Rutgers in 1946. The five-day Turf Short Course was offered from 1929 until 1957.

Major degree options include: Turf and Horticulture Industry Option, Plant Science Research Option and Plant Protection Certification Option, to name a few. In its Professional Studies division, the college offers a Professional Golf Turf Management Program. Rutgers offers a two-year certificate program in Professional Golf Turf Management through the certificate program in Professional Golf Turf Management Studies division, the college offers a long-standing position as one of the leaders in turfgrass research. In 1960, Dr. C. Reed Funk became the first full-time cool-season turfgrass breeder at a University in the United States. Dr. Funk had a productive career that spanned over four decades, and produced hundreds of new turfgrass varieties, revolutionizing the turf seed industry.

Dr. Henry Indyk joined Rutgers in 1960 as Turfgrass Extension Specialist, and was instrumental in advancing the sod industry in New Jersey. Dr. Bruce Clarke, director of Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science at Rutgers/Cook College, was hired in the early 1980s as an Extension plant pathologist working with turf and ornamentals. Today, Dr. Clarke is one of the most respected turfgrass pathologists in the world.

By the mid-1980s, Rutgers was a recognized leader in turf research and extension. During the next few years, additional new faculty members were added to the Rutgers program, including Dr. James Murphy, turfgrass management specialist, in 1991; Dr. James White, endophyte expert, in 1995; Dr. Bill Meyer, turfgrass breeder, in 1996; Dr. Stephen Hart, weed scientist, and Dr. Albrect Kippenhofer, turfgrass entomologist, in 1999; and Dr. Bingru Huang, turfgrass physiologist, in 2000,” states Hurley.

Rutgers/Cook College offers an undergraduate program that leads to a degree in plant science with an option in turfgrass management. Turfgrass management is designed for students who desire a background in applied science and entry into the turfgrass industry upon graduation. The turfgrass program at Cook College/Rutgers has over 25 faculty members working in turf. Students in turfgrass programs receive personalized instruction from world-renowned faculty.

During the past 10 years, the four-year program leading to a Bachelor’s degree has had approximately 15 to 20...
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students, with four or five graduates each year. Over the past three years, Dr. Richard Hurley has been assigned the responsibility of developing recruitment for the turfgrass program. “The goal is to increase enrollment to approximately 40 students attending the program at any one time,” states Hurley.

The efforts of Dr. Hurley have been successful to date, recruiting high quality students to enroll in the plant science degree program with a focus on turfgrass studies. “We are well on our way to attracting some of the brightest and highly motivated students interested in turf education,” says Dr. Hurley. "At Rutgers we are doing something, to my knowledge, that no other University has done, and that is recruit high school students and offer turf scholarships to students as incoming freshmen. We currently have quite a few student scholarships available to students majoring in turfgrass management. Last year, more than $60,000 was awarded to over 60 turf students at Rutgers.” In addition to the undergraduate program, in the past 30 years, Rutgers has graduated over 50 students with advanced degrees in turfgrass science.

Rutgers also attracts quite a few transfer students who have graduated from two-year programs. Most of those students possess Associate’s degrees in horticulture or landscape majors, and are seeking more skills and knowledge. Hurley reports, “Each year we have five or so transfer students coming into Rutgers to focus on attaining a four-year degree in turf. As long as the student has a 3.0 GPA from an accredited two-year school, they should have no problem with acceptance by admissions and transfer credits. Additionally, we have offered some students scholarships shortly after the transfer contingent upon a sincere interest in studying turf at Rutgers.”

In addition to the scholarships available, Rutgers places students in summer intern positions at top golf courses around the world. As with most other turf programs, it is strongly encouraged that all students work during the summer in a turf-related position. “Last summer, one of our students went to St. Andrews, Scotland, and worked on the Old

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Course for the summer as a turf intern. We can arrange working summer internships for students either close to home in New Jersey, around the East Coast, such as Pine Valley, or in other parts of the country, depending on the student's interest. We have had students intern at some of the best respected golf courses in the United States,” notes Hurley.

Rutgers also offers a certification program for those not pursuing a degree. Subject matter is divided into several courses to accommodate the differing interests of students in Golf Turf and Lawn and Landscape programs. Currently, each year the 20-week Turf Management School graduates approximately 90 students in this certificate program. “Offered in two sessions (fall and winter), the students are provided with 10 weeks of education before returning to seasonal employment at a golf course, then return to Rutgers the following year to complete the second 10-week session,” explains Hurley.

Hurley adds that the graduates of all of programs have entered the industry, whether working for lawn and landscape companies or within the fertilizer and chemical industries. Some graduates go on to become leaders in the fields of sports turf and golf courses, as well as educators at high school and college levels.

With a range of options, in-depth learning opportunities and a scholarship initiative, the Rutgers program is well on its way to meeting and exceeding its goals of educating the best in the business.

The author is a freelance writer from Dryden, N.Y., and a frequent contributor to Turf.