

THE JOURNAL RECORD

Friday, May 11, 2012

www.journalrecord.com

Vol. 117, No. 94 • Two Sections

Seeking growth in the boom

Opportunities abound in energy industry

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THE JOURNAL RECORD

OKLAHOMA CITY – Brian Martin said he thinks about communities as a whole system, thanks to studying geography. That holistic mentality is also what attracted him to the oil and gas industry.

Martin is a geographic information systems tech at Oklahoma City-based Enogex, the natural gas pipeline division of OGE Energy Corp. He has been with the company for 18 months. Part of his job is to map existing pipelines and analyze where future pipelines should be built.

“GIS is big in the industry,” Martin said at the annual meeting of the MidContinent Gas Processors Association at the Magnuson Hotel on Thursday. “It’s tied to geology. We need to know what’s underground, as well as where people live and where our wells are, and avoid environmental obstacles.”

Martin is also interested in the business side of the industry – in particular, management.

During the meeting, Tim Coburn, a professor at the University of Tulsa, discussed a new degree program that could help Martin achieve his future goals of moving into management.

Coburn is the director of TU’s master’s degree program in energy business. The online program offers a specialized MBA-like curriculum that caters to the energy industry. The 24-month program targets working professionals with two to 10 years of experience and begins its first offering in the fall.

Hiring young engineers isn’t a problem, Coburn told the crowd of more than 100. But finding employees with management experience is difficult, due in part



Professor Tim Coburn addresses the audience at the Midcontinent Gas Processors Association meeting Thursday at the Magnuson Hotel in Oklahoma City. Coburn is director of the University of Tulsa’s master degree program in energy business. PHOTO BY BRENT FUCHS

to the bust that happened in the 1980s. People simply weren’t trained since then, he said. Now, many in middle management are nearing retirement age.

An audience member asked Coburn how a young professional could replace someone with decades of experience in a matter of 10 years.

“You have to prepare yourself; position yourself to go into those seats fast,” Coburn said. “Going to school is a proxy for experience; they will count that as initiative on your part.”

When Coburn was a technical employee at Marathon, he told the audience, his boss gave him a day’s notice that he would be promoted

to supervisor.

“I didn’t know what a balance sheet was,” he said. “I didn’t know what a vendor was. It took me two years to get up to speed in that position.”

Industry demand for employees with management skills, communication skills and financial and economic knowledge is, in part, what drove TU to develop this program, Coburn said. Targeting professionals who are already working in small to midlevel companies also means they don’t have to learn the energy industry from scratch, he said.

Bob Dougherty, an operations engineer with Oneok Partners, said he has run a small business before,

but is interested in moving up in his current career.

“If this degree helps me advance in my career, that would be very beneficial,” he told *The Journal Record*.

Martin said he would like to capitalize on the middle-management gap that was created by the boom and bust cycle in the oil and gas industry. Enogex provides great opportunities, Martin said, from allowing him to take a half-day to attend the Midcontinent Gas Processors Association meeting, to a tuition reimbursement program.

“I want to take advantage of the opportunity to move up within the company,” he said.