As organizations move toward a greener, more sustainable future, they require the skills of management professionals trained in sustainability issues such as energy efficiency and managing water resources. Where can an organization find such a unique combination of skills? A new degree developed by the Earth Institute and Columbia’s School of Continuing Education, the Master of Science in Sustainability Management, which launched this fall, will prepare students to become invaluable members of organizations looking to integrate sustainability measures into their operations.

Directed by Steven Cohen, executive director of the Earth Institute, the degree will utilize environmental measurement tools, cutting-edge environmental science, and management and policy studies to help students fully understand the role of sustainability in any organization. “There are not many programs, especially part-time programs geared toward working adults, training people in sustainability management,” says Louise Rosen, director of the Office of Academic and Research Programs. “There is a very real understanding that sustainability issues are key to the success of any organization.”

The Earth Institute has excelled in providing programming in sustainable development education—from the doctoral level to the undergraduate level. This fall, the eagerly anticipated undergraduate sustainable development major was offered for the first time to Columbia College and School of General Studies students. Like these degrees, the M.S. in Sustainability Management draws from the rich intellectual resources of the Earth Institute and the University.

Dedicated to transforming knowledge and understanding in service of the greater good, the School of Continuing Education is uniquely placed to offer a degree that meets the needs of a rapidly changing society. “Our programs typically start with compelling and complex issues that concern the world and that cross many sectors of human activity,” says Kristine Billmyer, dean of the School of Continuing Education. “The very interdisciplinary approach of the Earth Institute as well as its vast academic resources and the deep research it is doing make it the perfect partner for us.”

To give students hands-on training, the program will place them in real-life settings, working with organizations. “We won’t just talk about solutions,” said Steven Cohen at an information session for the degree. “We will train you to find and implement solutions. In the near future, all traditional management education will need to include study of the physical dimensions of sustainability. Before long, all managers will need to be sustainability managers.”

Incoming students have high-level backgrounds in finance, the automotive industry, the military and other fields. One student, Grace Arnold, is the sustainability manager for over one thousand branches of Citibank, North America. She expects that having this degree will allow her to better communicate with the engineers, financial managers, policymakers and others she works with daily. “My job looks to me to make the right sustainability decisions,” says Grace. “This program will help me become the resident expert.”

Students in the new M.S. in Sustainability Management gathered in June 2010 to meet each other and professors in the program (above), which will train professionals who can help organizations increase the sustainability of their operations.