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First-ever environmental studies major registers

Summary: Sophomore Katie Laughlin registered for her fall 2008 classes as the first ever environmental studies major at UMM. The major will be available for students who choose to attend UMM this fall.

(April 14, 2008)-By Jesh Livstrom - University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) sophomore Katie Laughlin has registered for her fall 2008 classes as the first ever environmental studies major at UMM. The foundation for an environmental studies major at UMM has been laid over the past several years and will be available for students who choose to attend UMM this fall.

Laughlin said, "It's a lot of pressure to set a standard, but I am very excited to pave the way for something that will be really great." Laughlin appreciates the flexibility that the major will offer in the areas of study, research and out-of-classroom projects. The environmental studies major presents, "many directions and possibilities," she said.

As with other UMM majors that have an interdisciplinary focus, there are few stringent guidelines to restrict environmental studies majors. Laughlin said that as long as a course has relevance to the environment, legitimate credit can be received if the student can justify the course as part of a coherent plan of study. Laughlin chose an emphasis in biology. After college she plans to pursue a career in non-profit work to promote environmentally-safe practices, focusing in particular on alternative energy.

Although Laughlin is the first environmental studies major at UMM, other students are showing great interest registering for the future. Laughlin encourages other students to not be intimidated by the novelty of the major. Besides the obvious career pathways an environmental studies students can pursue such as government or non-profit work, as well as working for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are ample opportunities in other areas as well. "Along with the ever-growing green movement we have seen in recent years, employers are taking more and more interest in environmental experts," she said.

Laughlin was an invited speaker, along with her Uncle, Duane Ninneman, during a recent Stevens County League of Women Voters meeting on the topic of water issues. The focus of their presentation was to explain simple practices a homeowner can develop to conserve water. Three simple things that Laughlin and Ninneman suggested, that any homeowner can follow, are running the dishwasher only if it's completely full, avoid taking unnecessarily long showers and making sure that regular maintenance is completed on pipes under all drains in their homes.

Peter Wyckoff, UMM associate professor of biology, coordinator of the environmental studies major and Laughlin's adviser, added, "Katie is the kind of student I envision filling the ranks of the new major. Her coursework thus far has been chosen to give her experience in a broad range of fields relevant to environmental problems: chemistry, biology, economics and philosophy. She gained practical experience last summer as an intern at CURE (Clean Up the River Environment), a regional environmental group. They must have been impressed with her work, for they are taking her back again this summer."

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