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Quantifying Sustainability Efforts on the Morris Campus

Summary: Morris student working on comprehensive sustainability survey

(February 23, 2012)-It doesn't matter if you're playing Scrabble® or basketball, everybody loves winning points. What most of the University of Minnesota, Morris campus might not realize is that we are garnering "points" in sustainability. Heidi Eger '13, Woodbury is currently working on a project called STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System). This is a comprehensive sustainability survey created by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), which focuses on campuses across North America. The Morris campus was a pilot site for this new system when it was launched, and is now a current charter member and participant. Morris Chancellor Jacquie Johnson registered the campus as a charter signatory in this program, and she also serves on the AASHE board of directors.

The STARS project at Morris has three goals: to quantify and assess the work currently taking place on campus, to celebrate what is being done now, and to prompt future work. Institutions earn points in three main categories: Education and Research Operations and Planning, Administration, and Engagement. The survey asks a series of questions relating to these areas. Eger has been meeting and emailing various campus personnel to answer the survey questions. She says, "I am grateful for all of the feedback from the many people on campus that have helped to answer my questions. We couldn't have completed this project without their help." Eger adds that this project is a wonderful opportunity to interact with people on campus that she normally wouldn't meet and that she has been amazed at all the good work that is taking place across campus. Lisa Harris, a key contact for Heidi's work, says, "we really appreciate opportunities to engage with students and support their interests."

Eger has met with administrative staff to learn more about the University's dining services. Among other things, Morris avoids trans-fat oil, and Highbies, the new coffee shop, offers a 10¢ discount if you bring your own mug. She met with grounds crew to discuss the irrigation system, which is soon to be computer run. "The computers will be able to check the forecast and realize, for example, if it's raining, they should shut off." They will also be able to detect broken sprinkler heads and turn off the water. Other areas that Eger investigated were: snow and ice removal (grounds crew are pre-treating for ice this winter), sustainable compensation, the amount of "green" energy generated on campus, and programs for supporting equity and diversity.

Schools can receive a STARS rating of platinum, gold, silver, or bronze. Eger says that it's important to be able to quantify what we are doing and to share that information with others. She notes, "If you can measure it, you can manage it." The Morris campus intends to complete the STARS survey and receive a rating.

Participation in this program has several benefits. According to the AASHE website: "STARS will help schools set and meet sustainability goals and will foster information sharing about practices and performance among the campus sustainability community." Eger concludes, "We have so many initiatives taking place across campus, it's fun to share it and celebrate it."

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.