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Seth Elsen '12 explores renewable energy options for Upper Sioux Community

Summary: The project is conducted through the Center for Small Town's AmeriCorps Students In Service program.

(November 30, 2011)-At the University of Minnesota, Morris, it's hard not to be environmentally conscious. Two massive wind turbines whirl on the horizon, reflective solar panels dot the campus, and a gasification plant periodically billows steam near the athletic fields. Apparently, environmental consciousness rubbed off on Seth Elsen '12, Shelton, Washington. Last year Elsen, a political science and American Indian Studies major, coordinated publicity for the Regional Fitness Center's solar thermal panels through the Students Using Natural Energy (SUN-E) project. This year he's working as an AmeriCorps Student In Service exploring the possibilities of renewable energy for the Upper Sioux Indian Community.

The Upper Sioux Community is interested in lessening its environmental footprint. So, when the opportunity arose to work with a student through the University of Minnesota, Morris Center for Small Towns, they took it. Located just south of Granite Falls, the area holds a wealth of wind and solar potential. Elsen is researching which combination of renewable energy options would make the most sense for the community. His research is based on maps and data compiled by the United States Department of Energy, as well as studies conducted on the area. He is also analyzing current energy use throughout the community and pinpointing needs.

A presentation by Elsen to the tribal council will be the end result of this project. His research will be a blueprint from which they can move forward, if they so choose.

Elsen says the project really captured his interests, both in American Indian Studies and in renewable energy. He appreciates the experience working directly with the tribe. Elsen, a Native American, would like to go into tribal policy after graduation. He says, "It's a great way to give back."

[Students In Service](#) is an AmeriCorps program that encourages college students to enroll as part-time AmeriCorps members. Coordinated by Minnesota Campus Compact, an organization that promotes civic engagement on Minnesota college campuses, the program allows interested students to work in a variety of positions to help better their communities. Qualifying activities include academic and co-curricular service learning, internships with nonprofit organizations, certain kinds of practicum hours, federal or state-funded community service work-study, and most kinds of volunteer work. Students commit to 300 hours of service throughout the year.

The [Center for Small Towns](#) is a community outreach program housed on the Morris campus that serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize CST's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. CST's mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues while creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

Photo: Seth Elsen '12, Shelton, Washington

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.