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Winds of Change names Morris one of top 200 institutions in the nation in support of American Indian students

Summary: An active American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) student chapter helps heighten Morris's profile

(September 9, 2011)-Winds of Change has named the University of Minnesota, Morris as one of the top 200 institutions in the nation in support of American Indian students. Published quarterly by the [American Indian Science and Engineering Society](#) (AISES), Winds of Change is the leading nationally distributed magazine published with a single-minded focus on career and educational advancement for American Indian and Alaska Native peoples with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). In addition to the quarterly publication, Winds of Change releases an annual Top 200 Colleges issue.

Tracy Peterson, Morris's associate director of multi-ethnic student programs, explains that the Winds of Change Top 200 College issue is not a ranking. It is an alphabetical listing by state of 200 institutions, including Morris, at which American Indian and Alaskan Native students are especially welcomed and nourished.

Morris offers numerous support programs for American Indian students, including scholarships, mentorships, and academic and social organizations. But its AISES student chapter is a key contributor to its visibility. The Morris chapter was born in spring 2005 backed by faculty co-advisers Joseph Alia, associate professor of chemistry, and Jong-Min Kim, professor of statistics. Alia sees his involvement in the organization as a way to get students interested in STEM careers and to form a nucleus of friends, creating double payback. Besides, he says, "It doesn't feel like work."

Alia's co-adviser, Peterson, observes that having faculty members as AISES advisers is rare. He knows from personal experience that at most other campuses the adviser is usually a staff member from student services. An AISES member for 20 years, it was the impetus for Peterson to attend college, he says. Opportunities for leadership roles led him to become regional representative for colleges in New Mexico and Iowa.

Melissa Carnicle '13, Garretson, South Dakota, AISES chapter co-chair, says, "It's great that UMM has faculty interested in doing this for students." For her, personal relationships with faculty is one of the major draws of UMM because "it encourages the whole person, both social and academic." She and Alia agree that Morris's chapter has really taken off in the last two years. Morris sends the largest number of students to the AISES national conference, billed as a "one-of-a-kind" three-day event convening students, teachers, workforce professionals, corporate partners, and others for professional development, networking opportunities, student presentations, a career fair, awards, and traditional events.

A chemistry, geology, and environmental science major, Carnicle considers the conference "a great way to network," especially since it may be the first time that some students begin to consider graduate school.

Eleven Morris students, supported by travel scholarships and fundraisers, attended the national conference last year, and even more are expected to present their research this year when the conference is held at the Minneapolis Convention

Center in November 2011. Recognizing the host city and region as a major agricultural hub, the conference theme, Food for Thought, centers around issues of food, agriculture, plant science, and technology.

Morris's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Talent Expansion (STEP) and Wind-STEP programs may be part of the reason for increased student interest in the AISES conference. The STEP program seeks to encourage American Indian students to pursue degrees and careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in an effort to address the need for scientists in the United States. Wind-STEP focuses on wind energy and its application to the needs and wants of reservation communities. Program coordinator James Cotter, professor of geology, states in his spring 2011 report, "When the STEP program was implemented in 2007 there were 33 Native American STEM majors and seven new freshmen STEM majors enrolled that fall. UMM now has 64 Native American STEM majors," nearly doubling in four years.

Carnicle describes AISES at UMM as "students who have common interests" and stresses the leadership role as one of its most important aspects. A NorthStar Fellow, she has mentored four students in the Northstar-STEM Alliance, a support group for incoming students. She thrives at Morris and credits AISES for helping her "get out of that shell." Self-described as "not good in high school," the support and mentorship she has received at UMM changed her future, she says.

Sparing no effort to get students involved, AISES co-hosted a Welcome Weekend dance with the Circle of Nations Indigenous Association (CNIA) as a way to introduce students to the organization and the sense of family Carnicle enjoys. "We [AISES members] are all passionate about science," she says. "AISES is a way to share that and inspire other students."

Photos below: Jeff Aday and Josie Skala

Scholar of the College Jeff Aday '11, San Carlos, Arizona, biology, collaborated with Peter Wyckoff, associate professor of biology, on a multi-year project examining the interactions between an invasive tree, European buckthorn, and white tailed deer. Aday initiated the project in spring 2008 by building a set of 10 deer exclosures in the forest at Niemackl Lake Park near Herman. Aday and Wyckoff transplanted 900 seedlings of three species—buckthorn and two native trees—into the exclosures and adjacent control plots exposed to deer browsing. Aday followed the seedlings, monitoring growth and survival, measuring rates of photosynthesis, and evaluating growing conditions. Aday built a data set containing 55,800 measurements documenting performance and established evidence of a previously unreported link between white tailed deer and invasive buckthorn success. He presented the results at the 2010 Undergraduate Research Symposium, a conference in Wisconsin organized by the Great Lakes Intertribal Council, and at the 2010 Ecological Society of America meetings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After final measurements in 2011, Aday and Wyckoff will write a paper on findings for publication in peer reviewed scientific literature. Aday's work was supported by a National Science Foundation (NSF) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Talent Expansion Program (STEP) grant, a Minority Mentorship grant, and funds from the NSF North Star Alliance Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP).

Scholar of the College Josie Skala '11, North Mankato, chemistry: biochemistry, began her research career with Timna Wyckoff, associate professor of biology, in determining antibiotic resistance in a dairy herd that was being transitioned from conventional to organic. She presented that work, "Examination of Phenotypic and Genotypic Pirlimycin Resistance in Staphylococcus from Milk Samples from Conventional and Organic Dairies in West-central Minnesota," in Philadelphia at the American Society for Microbiology 109th General Meeting and at the Undergraduate Research Symposium (URS) in 2010. She presented "Distribution of lincosamide inactivation gene lnu(A) in Staphylococcus strains phenotypically sensitive to the lincosamide pirlimycin" at the Annual American Indian Science and Engineering Society Conference and at the North Central Branch of the American Society for Microbiology 68th Annual Meeting in

2008. Skala also conducted research with Jennifer Goodnough, associate professor of chemistry, taking nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) measurements on hydrogen bonded liquids. Skala presented that research, "Effects of temperature and concentration of Hofmeister series ions NaSCN, NaCl and NaNO₃ on hydrogen bonding in liquid water measured using ¹H NMR," at the National American Chemical Society meeting in March 2011. She also presented her recent research work at the URS in April 2011.

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.