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University Relations

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**New sports management major kicks off this fall**

*Summary: Alumni enthusiastically commend the new major.*

(September 2, 2011)-The Board of Regents approved a Morris sport management major, an interdisciplinary program housed in the Division of Education. Most of the courses, to be taught by existing faculty, are in place, and a mix of others will be realigned to meet requirements. New introductory and capstone courses were designed.

The most popular concentration area for more than 10 years, the sports management concentration was created 13 years ago, explains Kevin Stefanek, assistant professor of management, but much has changed since then. The new streamlined major with updated curriculum will be a huge benefit to students.

Featuring a format comparable to other institutions, the program was crafted with a Morris twist, a curriculum, says Stefanek, “that is truly interdisciplinary, grounded in the liberal arts, that will provide students an education that includes a breadth of knowledge that is traditional at UMM.” Students will be prepared for graduate study in fields such as business, law, or sport management, or careers in sport or fitness industries.

Athletics Director Mark Fohl observes that society has determined that sports is an important part of life. The major “will allow students to have a leading role in the industry,” he says. Alumni who chose the sports management concentration couldn’t agree more.

Dan Kramer '04

A baseball and football player, Dan Kramer '04, Eyota, identified his own sports management concentration, setting it up with football Head Coach Todd Hickman’s help. He thinks the new major is great because “sports is one of the biggest industries out there right now.” But he has noticed that the industry needs more focus. “A certain expertise is needed in the sport management area,” he says. People coming from a general marketing or public relations background often miss the big picture. He appreciates that Morris’s concentration was comprehensive, combining the liberal arts with accounting and business management.

Kramer earned a master of science in management from Minnesota State University Mankato. He worked with the St. Louis Blues Hockey Club for three years and works now for the River City Rascals Baseball Club in O’Fallon, Missouri. He manages ticket sales, maintains the website and social media, and places advertising. “The 10-hour days don’t feel like it,” he says.

Matthew Thomas, '08

Matthew Thomas, '08, South St. Paul, loved his time at Morris and says he wouldn’t be where he is today without it. He earned a speech communication major, now Communication, Media, and Rhetoric (CMR), with a sports management concentration.

Thomas has had a whirlwind career, and he is just getting started. During his Morris years, he gained field experience

coaching boys' hockey at Morris and Benson high schools. When he started helping in the athletics office, including a summer '07 internship as assistant events manager, he found his calling. His adviser, Mary Elizabeth Bezanson, professor of CMR, recommended her alma mater, Seattle University, for graduate work. While waiting for admission, he was accepted at the University of Washington and immediately got an internship managing sports events. He transferred to Seattle University in 2009 and worked in game operations, helping the program transition from Division II to Division I.

In 2010, he accepted a facilities operations supervisor position handling production and logistics for all events at the University's TCF Bank Stadium. This year, Contemporary Services Corporation (CSC), the world's largest event management company, recruited him as the event manager in its Des Moines office. Many will recognize CSC as the yellow-jacketed staffers at large events around the country. Ultimately, Thomas aspires to be a university athletics director.

Katie Torbert '04

Katie Torbert '04, Little Falls, is the new promoter at North Central Speedway, a racetrack in Brainerd. Torbert moved to Brainerd to care for her ailing grandmother. After learning the ins and outs of dirt racing, she progressed from intern to concession stand manager. Then, another's misfortune changed her life. Torbert stepped up when the track's promoter was unable to continue working after an accident. As one of only two women promoters in the state—the other in Crookston— she rebuilt the organization in the aftermath of the track accident and overcame negative gender perceptions. Her creativity earned respect.

When giving workshops, says Torbert, "Everyone comments on how they can tell I have a sports management background instead of a racing background. They say I am great for the sport, because I think outside of the norm and get what it takes." She most loves the reaction, "You're so wicked smart," when someone learns she's a Morris grad.

But Torbert doesn't have a "one-track" mind. She spent time at Morris in music and theatre productions and now plays the flute in the Heartland Orchestra and is learning to play the oboe. She invites everyone from Morris out to the track and promises you'll be treated like VIPs!

Fohl notes that demand by students, as illustrated by Kramer, Thomas, and Torbert, set the stage for the new sport management major. "Now," he says, "we can better answer that demand."

From left to right:

Matthew Thomas, '08, Katie Torbert '04, Dan Kramer '04

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