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Peter Turpin '04 helps agriculture workers receive adequate healthcare

Summary: Turpin puts his human services and Spanish majors to work in service to others, including Morris and Hancock area workers.

(September 6, 2010)-Peter Turpin '04, a liberal arts for the human services and Spanish graduate, found a way to make both of his majors work together. Turpin is a community health specialist for Migrant Health Service, Inc. (MHSI). In this role, he is the liaison between patients and the health center staff and between the health center staff and the community. Based in Moorhead, MHSI is a private, nonprofit organization that serves the health needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their family members regardless of their ability to pay. It operates nine nurse-managed clinics in Minnesota and North Dakota. This summer, MHSI brought its mobile clinic to Morris and Hancock.

Through its voucher program, anyone, not only migrants, who has worked in agriculture for the previous 24 months and members of their household, as well as retired and disabled farmworkers, qualifies for services.

Turpin provides everything but medical care, identifying and registering new patients, conducting needs assessments, making referrals, arranging for support groups, and helping people apply for medical assistance, prescription programs, and social services. This is a good fit, Turpin says, for his Spanish skills and interest in helping people.

Attending UMM contributed to his ability to deliver culturally appropriate services. Turpin's personal testimony accentuates the importance of the principles of intercultural communication. Through his participation in the English Language Teaching Assistant Program (ELTAP) in Chile and by taking the Intercultural Communication Theory and Research course taught by Rujira Rojjanaprayon, former Morris assistant professor of speech communication, he became more sensitive to the ways in which people from different cultures communicate.

Turpin also appreciated the freedom UMM gives students to pursue their prime interests, specifically a directed study with Donna Chollett, associate professor of anthropology, on Globalization, Emigration, and Border Control Issues in Mexico and Guatemala that gave him a greater understanding of the lives of immigrants from these countries. Turpin also received Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) funding to study the concept of *marianismo*—veneration for feminine virtues like purity and moral strength—as represented in Latin American and Spanish literature. Though this concept is surrounded by some controversy, he holds to the belief that it offers helpful cultural considerations for someone who provides services to, and alongside of, Latina women.

Turpin can be found traversing Minnesota's Red River Valley, raising the effectiveness of MHSI's North Mobile Unit, an RV that has been fitted to serve as a mobile clinic, but this year he came back to familiar territory. Recognizing the healthcare needs of the growing migrant farmworker population in the region, MHSI expanded into Morris and Hancock. The North Mobile Unit visited twice last summer and hopes to stop regularly. Turpin will be on hand to organize these visits and get the word out.

Established in 1973, MHSI also operates The Battered Women's Program and Sexual Assault Intervention Project, with

facilities in Moorhead and Crookston, providing bilingual victim advocacy services to women, children, and men who have been affected by domestic abuse.

photos: Peter Turpin and the North Mobile Unit

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