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New on-campus TREC program encourages young readers and provides service learning opportunities

Summary: Literacy Track TREC enhances students' literacy, academic, personal, and social readiness skills.

(April 26, 2010)-The University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) has a rich history with the [Tutoring, Reading, Enabling Children \(TREC\) program](#) in the Morris community. Begun in 1997 to promote literacy in school-age children and to provide tutoring and mentoring experiences in Morris Area Public Schools, TREC provides meaningful service learning for UMM students. Last fall, an after school program, Literacy TREC Track (LTT), was added in a new location: the Morris campus.

Through a program for students in grades K–3, LTT enhances students' literacy, academic, personal, and social readiness skills, and puts students early on the road to higher education.

“LTT was initiated because of a nationally identified need at the state and local levels for increased attention to literacy skills development for struggling early readers,” shares Pam Solvie, associate professor of education and TREC coordinator. “Skill instruction in basic learning principles for striving readers and work with trained literacy tutors on campus help counteract behaviors that prevent success, not only in reading, but in learning in general. Struggling young readers begin to see themselves as learners and develop confidence to continue learning.”

The social capital afforded to students who become comfortable learning and interacting with others on a campus is an innovative feature of LTT. Creating positive relationships in a culture of learning positively affirms students' behaviors in the learning process and encourages further effort, responsibility, and constructive attitudes toward learning. And LTT has built positive relationships between the campus community, Morris public schools, and participants' parents.

TREC: a unique educational experience for UMM students

Children participating in LTT arrive on campus by bus after school Monday through Thursday for one-on-one tutoring and small group activities. Nine trained UMM TREC tutors, both work study and volunteers, plan and implement the literacy development projects and lessons, and work with students until 5:30 p.m.

While Jodee Dittbenner '10, Morris, history, plans to teach at the secondary education level, she found the TREC experience with elementary children instrumental in sharpening teaching skills and a wonderful way to “give back.”

“This experience was amazing,” says Dittbenner. “I truly loved spending time at the TREC program. I read many books to the children, assisted in reading comprehension and strategies, writing skills, and computerized reading games. Reading and writing are two of the utmost skills every student should have in order to be successful academically and in life. To be able take the time out of my schedule to give back to my hometown community is something that I enjoy and will continue to do for years to come.”

Lauren Seashore '13, Woodbury, and Rachel Nelson '12, Princeton, elementary education majors, appreciate the real-life experience. “I am gaining the tools I need to work with kids,” says Seashore. “I have to be able to motivate, but

also be likable and adaptable to their needs. It is gratifying to see kids improve as readers and students. Parents have said to me that they have seen their child improve in school and how much this program makes a difference. Even the children I work with have told me how they did in school and how this has helped them!”

And, notes Nelson, “It is beneficial to my educational experience because [TREC] gives me hands on experience and gives me ideas on how to teach.”

Samantha Massmann '13, Osakis, elementary education, notes that while there are challenges in finding the best techniques or learning material for each student, the UMM TREC students work together to find solutions. “Seeing the students progress in learning new materials and being able to see the progression through the daily and weekly progress checks is the most rewarding,” states Massman. “The benefit for me is learning countless techniques and methods for teaching and gaining experience that strengthen my desire to become a teacher.”

TREC benefits infants through high school

TREC tutors lead story time at the Morris Public Library. They participate in learning activities with infants and preschoolers in Early Childhood Family Education. Tutors provide in-class tutoring at the elementary school. After school, they serve at TREC ZONE, assisting with homework, reading, writing, math, and computer skills. At the high school study lounge, they provide after school assistance to junior and senior high students.

Support for TREC, a collaborative effort, comes from the University of Minnesota, Morris, Morris Area Public Schools, Morris Area Community Education, and the Stevens County Collaborative. Recently, the campus received financial support from the University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium through a Ramp Up to Readiness grant of \$9,998 to further the work of LTT.

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