

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

Campus News Archive

Campus News, Newsletters, and Events

10-13-2008

Civic engagement is hallmark of UMM student experience

University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news

Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Civic engagement is hallmark of UMM student experience" (2008). *Campus News Archive*. 1189.

https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/1189

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus News, Newsletters, and Events at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus News Archive by an authorized administrator of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.

Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Civic engagement is hallmark of UMM student experience

Summary: Student activism and civic engagement have been a tradition since the University of Minnesota, Morris began as a campus. UMM students have taken leadership roles to encourage political participation by youth in the Morris community.

(October 13, 2008)-Student activism and civic engagement have been a tradition since the University of Minnesota, Morris began as a campus. UMM students have taken leadership roles to encourage political participation by youth in the Morris community.

Cheryl Kuhn, service-learning coordinator for the Morris Area School District, approached the UMM Service-Learning program during the recent presidential election about involving students in the Kids Voting program, a national organization to promote voting and democratic engagement.

Four years ago, and again this year, students in Associate Professor of Political Science Paula O'Loughlin's American Government and Politics class could elect to participate in Kids Voting as one of many options for a civic engagement project in the class.

"The project is a good fit for Paula O'Loughlin's class," explained Argie Manolis, UMM Service-Learning coordinator.

UMM students received training from Kuhn on how to help K-6 grade students understand the responsibility of voting. Students worked in pairs with other students or with members of the League of Women Voters to teach the Kids Voting curriculum in Morris Area Elementary School classrooms. Members of the class also volunteered, along with community members from a number of civic organizations, to serve as judges in the election. This opportunity provided students with the chance to practice their leadership and presentation skills and to provide a needed service to the Kids Voting organizers.

Teaching Assistant Chris Merrigan said, "Even though they are not old enough to vote, it is a cool way to get youth involved in the process. The more engaged they are now, the more active they will continue to be in the future."

Kids Voting operates nationally by connecting community-based chapters that work with schools and election officials. The program educates students on the importance of civic engagement and citizen responsibility and focuses on developing long-term habits of political participation. In 2004 the Morris Kids Voting project received a Minnesota State Student Service Award, an award reserved for Minnesota programs and organizations that involve students in community service and service-learning.

O'Loughlin said of the partnership, "Kids Voting is an important way to connect UMM to the community. UMM students get to learn by teaching and the students can pick up on the excitement of their peers and older students. Plus, kids are fun."

Involvement in the Kids Voting project is a natural fit for Morris campus students. For 2007, 94 percent of UMM graduates had voted in a federal or state election, a 12 percent increase in the last five years. This is the highest of any of the University of Minnesota campuses. (Source: University of Minnesota 2007 Student Experience Survey.)

Part of the reason that voter turnout is so high at UMM may be due to its fertile environment for student clubs and coalitions, combined with students' tendency to actively encourage participation from their peers. The Morris Votes Coalition, a nonpartisan student group dedicated to getting every UMM student registered to vote, visited most Morris campus classrooms prior to the October 14 registration deadline to hand out voter registration cards and hearten participation. Student organizations with specific political agendas regularly invite political candidates to the campus for discussion, lectures and classroom interaction.

UMM students are engaged in the political process in other ways as well. UMM senior and political science major Douglas Williams served as a delegate during the recent Democratic Convention in Denver, Colo. He said, "I was proud to represent UMM at the Democratic Convention. My activities there reflect the UMM tradition of civic commitment."

Other UMM political science classes have conducted exit polls during most political seasons. Currently, students from the course, Political Participation and Voting Behavior, are devising survey strategies to help understand the tide of voter sentiments.

Student participation in Kids Voting, along with other ways of political engagement, complements a noteworthy tradition of UMM civic engagement and community service. Students and others from the Morris campus participate, along with other University of Minnesota campuses, in the annual Support the U Day at the State Capitol.

It's not surprising that, in the late 1990s, UMM was ranked number four out of the top 10 activist college campuses according to *Mother Jones* magazine. The magazine ranked "schools where students are taking a stand on issues that concern them—from campus politics to foreign policy."

Photo: UMM students—along with their chancellor—annually join other University of Minnesota campuses during Support the U Day at the Minnesota State Capitol.

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.