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Environmental Studies major is option for UMM students next fall

Summary: A new interdisciplinary major will be available next fall for students who choose to attend the University of Minnesota, Morris. The new major in environmental studies will complement the renewable energy and sustainability initiatives that are already in place or in progress at UMM.

(February 12, 2008)-A new interdisciplinary major will be available next fall for students who choose to attend the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM). The new major in environmental studies will complement the renewable energy and sustainability initiatives that are already in place or in progress at UMM.

Further, the major will enhance the core of the liberal arts mission of the University's Morris campus that has, since the inception of the campus, offered students an undergraduate education that prepares them for their life's work.

"[The environmental studies major] is a major that draws heavily from existing and newly developed courses in the social sciences and the sciences. In addition, students will be exposed to humanist perspectives on the environment through a required core class. We also look forward to development of new environmentally-themed humanities classes," explained Pete Wyckoff, UMM associate professor of biology and coordinator of the major.

Katherine Beyer graduated from UMM three years ago with an environmental studies area of concentration. Her first job was at the State Attorney General's Office. Now she is the committee administrator in Agriculture, Rural Economies, and Veterans Affairs Finance and Policy for the Minnesota House of Representatives.

"For me, the interdisciplinary nature of the environmental studies area of concentration has proven to be the most beneficial reason for pursuing this major," shared Beyer. "The combination of political science, biology, geology and English courses has prepared me for a variety of jobs. I am currently in the public policy sector and I know others (who graduated from UMM) who have more technical positions. I think there is a lot to be said about a major that allows for as much versatility as environmental studies."

In addition to a range of core courses such as Environmental Problems and Policy, Environmental Biology and an English class, titled The Environmental Imagination, students will also choose a coherent series of electives from choices including Global Change Ecology, Environmental and Natural Resource Economics, GIS and Remote Sensing, Environmental Political Theory and many others. The major will also include a required internship or research experience, perhaps with a local or regional agency, with which UMM is already associated, such as the West Central Research and Outreach Center, the USDA-ARS North Central Soil Conservation Research Lab or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Morris Wetlands Management District.

"UMM continues to demonstrate a commitment to sustainability through physical and educational transformation," said Campus Sustainability Coordinator Troy Goodnough. "Examining how our actions impact the world requires a unique combination of courses. This interdisciplinary major will provide graduates with the knowledge and skills that they need to address some of the difficult issues we face now and in the future. This new major is a great example of how a liberal

arts education prepares future graduates to be engaged and educated citizens.”

Although the major is a new addition to UMM’s curriculum, it has been in the planning stages for some time. It seems appropriate to launch this area of study now, said Wyckoff.

In addition to longstanding faculty with environmental interests, UMM faculty are now conducting wind research in Denmark, as well as research on solar cells and in geology. UMM will add a faculty expert in fisheries management and environmental policy and ethics next fall.

“Ten years ago UMM had only one ecologist, now we have two,” said Wyckoff.

“On the facilities side we are ahead of our competitor schools,” added Wyckoff, in reference to the existing wind turbine—the first large-scale research turbine on a public campus—and the construction of a biomass facility on the Morris campus. “When our wind power is combined with the biomass facility, our campus greenhouse gas emissions from heating, cooling and electricity will have been reduced by 80 percent.”

“Environmental awareness and the focus on renewable energy have increased dramatically in recent years,” said Beyer. “I think Morris is a perfect place to study the need, the implications, the policy and the economics of these issues. Not only does this program showcase some of the best professors on campus and allows students to explore several disciplines, they will be doing so at a school that is dedicated to being green and in the heart of rural Minnesota.”

Planning is also underway to build a new residential life facility, scheduled to open in Fall 2009, which will enhance student life and learning at UMM. Designed for sustainable living, the Green Prairie Community will provide contemporary undergraduate student housing for 80 students in suite-style dwelling.

The University of Minnesota, Morris is on track to be energy self-sufficient through onsite renewable generation by 2010. A 1.65 megawatt wind turbine, a planned second turbine, a biomass gasification plant and energy conservation programs are expected to meet all of the campus’ electrical, heating and cooling needs within the next three years. In addition to supplying campus energy needs, the systems provide a research and demonstration platform for sustainable community-based energy solutions, advancing the University of Minnesota's research and public outreach mission.

For more information about the environmental studies major visit [Environmental Studies](#). An overview of UMM’s green campus initiatives can be found at [Green Campus](#).

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.