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# Service learning course receives Minnesota State Student Service Award from the Governor

University Relations

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**Service learning course receives Minnesota State Student Service Award from the Governor**

*Summary:*

(May 13, 2005)-Students in Paula O'Loughlin's American Government class at the University of Minnesota, Morris are recipients of a Minnesota State Student Service Award from the Governor for their involvement in the Kids' Voting program in Morris. They were nominated by Cheryl Kuhn, service-learning coordinator with the Morris Area School District, who served as the community partner for the project. The award was presented at the Minnesota Department of Education in Roseville on May 12.

As part of the UMM course requirements, students could choose between two service learning projects: participation in a voter registration/voter information drive for on- and off-campus voters, or assisting with the Kids' Voting Program. Students who chose The Kids' Voting Program received training from Kuhn. They then visited local classrooms and taught students in grades K-6 about how democracy works, including the process of and importance of voting. They provided non-partisan information about the candidates on the ballot. On election day, Morris Area Elementary and High School students were able to vote in a mock election, and the UMM students, along with other community members, served as election judges.

"The Kids Voting project allowed students to put what they had learned in their American Government class into practice," said Kuhn. "They used their knowledge about the nature of political participation to understand the importance of educating young people about voting. The goal of the Kids Voting program is to increase future voter turnout by getting young people in the habit of voting and increase present voter turnout by making political participation a family experience.

"For many University students, the Kids Voting program was their first introduction to the Morris community. They were able to meet students and teachers in the classroom and many community members when staffing the polls on Election Day. Primarily senior citizens and college students staffed the polls. For both groups this service-learning project was very valuable because they were united by the common cause of assisting the elementary and high school students. This common goal prompted communication between the two groups that would not have existed otherwise.

"The college students learned to view the community of Morris as a connected, caring, civically active town. The senior citizens and other community members had to opportunity to see the University students as responsible people giving back to the community. Both of these views help to break down the stereotypes that inhibit communication in the community," said Kuhn.

This is UMM's second MN State Student Service Award the first was received in 2000 by students in Argie Manolis' College Writing and Introduction to Creative Writing courses who worked with elders at West Wind Village.

Founded in 1988, the Minnesota Student Service Award (formerly known as Star Award) annually seeks to celebrate and recognize programs and organizations throughout Minnesota that involve students in community service and/or

service learning. The Minnesota Student Services award program is administered by the Minnesota Office of Citizenship and Volunteer Service (MOCVS) in partnership with the Minnesota Alliance with Youth, Minnesota Campus Compact, Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service, and National Youth Leadership Council.

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.