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Empowering to create change

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Empowering to create change

Summary: "Culture can come from so many different places," said sophomore Sarah Vig. Vig and sophomore Linsey McMurrin, along with about 60 other participants, attended the Multi-Cultural Student Leadership Retreat.

(March 1, 2006)-"Culture can come from so many different places," said Sarah Vig, a UMM sophomore from Rochester. Vig and Linsey McMurrin, Leech Lake Anishinaabe from Walker and also a UMM sophomore, along with about 60 other participants, attended the Multi-Cultural Student Leadership Retreat (MSLR) in January. Focus of the annual retreat is to help UMM students, staff and faculty to have a thorough understanding of multiculturalism and to work effectively with individuals of different backgrounds. The retreat also empowers them to create change in their everyday life.

"I had a pretty good idea of what it was going to be," said McMurrin, "but I was really surprised by the level of bonding that took place. There were lots of people I might not have approached otherwise in another place. We were all there for the same reason." The MSLR helps to create a community of compassion, justice, and equality, which fosters mutual respect and safety for all, something both Vig and McMurrin felt happened at this retreat.

"I think there is a misconception that you need to be visibly diverse, but that really wasn't the case," said Vig, who recommends the retreat to anyone, "as long as they have an open mind that is a necessity." Vig most appreciated the small group time, which allowed students to open up and deeply and honestly discuss cultural and diversity issues many do not even know concerns them. The retreat is set up over a three-day period and is broken into large group time, run by guest facilitators, and small group time, run by faculty, staff and returning students.

Dave Swenson, UMM director of Student Activities, helps to coordinate the retreat. Swenson believes the retreat, "gives students the opportunity to explore these issues in a safe environment. It helps them to understand themselves and others and through that it can help improve the cultural climate of campus." Swenson wonders about the focus of future retreats: whether the campus needs two retreats, one for returning students and one for new students. Swenson wants to challenge those who return for a second retreat in the same way they were challenged the first time they attended.

The Multi-Cultural Student Leadership Retreat was inspired by a model taken from Colorado State University, and was implemented at UMM in 1999 under the leadership of Sandra Olson-Loy in her role as director of Student Activities. Olson-Loy now serves as UMM vice chancellor for student affairs. A Vision Committee comprised of student affairs staff, faculty and student leaders plans the retreat, which is held off campus each year. Participation is open to any UMM student. Students complete an application, available in the fall, and pay a \$10 deposit fee. Applicants are advised before Thanksgiving break that they have been accepted to attend the retreat.

McMurrin said, "I think it is really important for the spirit of the retreat to live on. The morals and values of the retreat are something that the campus body needs to embrace."

UMM's academic courses, co-curricular programs like the Multicultural Student Leadership Retreat and study-abroad

opportunities prepare Morris graduates to be effective leaders in an increasingly diverse and global society. The Office of Student Affairs creates and implements student programs and services that develop student potential and extend UMM's liberal arts mission beyond the classroom.

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.