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[Kemp '19 and Severson '20 Talk Science of Social Justice with David Ebershoff](#)

Two UMN Morris students interview award-winning author thanks to connections made on campus

Most undergraduates don't get to have conversations with award-winning novelists. Most undergraduates aren't Bailey Kemp '19 or Sarah Severson '20. [This week the University of Minnesota Morris students got to interview David Ebershoff, author of *The Danish Girl* in a public forum, thanks to connections made on the Morris campus.](#)

Ebershoff's first book is a biographical novel inspired by the life of transgender pioneer Lili Elbe, who in the 1930s became one of the first people to have gender confirmation surgery. Kemp and Severson were able to interview the author about his novel, exploring issues of gender identity, history, and representation in literature and society, publicly.

"I never imagined that I would be sitting on a stage talking with the author of such an impactful novel," says Kemp. "David was so kind and personable, and I really felt like I was contributing to something meaningful. I felt like my voice was valid."

"It is really amazing to be able to have David here and engaging with students" says Severson. "It's a testament to the kind of powerful work that happens on the Morris campus."

This forum was possible thanks to connections between the students, the author, and Distinguished McKnight University Professor Michael Lackey. Lackey interviewed Ebershoff for his book *Conversations with Biographical Novelists: Truthful Fictions across the Globe*. The two became friends, and Lackey knew that, when it came time to host Ebershoff in a public forum, Severson and Kemp were up to the task.

"My teaching is about empowering students by giving them the opportunity to do something that even they could not imagine themselves doing," says Lackey. "Through hard work and after numerous conversations, Bailey and Sarah have accomplished everything that I knew they would; students can do extraordinary things if we just believe in and trust them."

Lackey also notes that this opportunity for Kemp and Severson is possible only at a place like UMN Morris. Somewhere larger, it likely would be handled by graduate students.

To learn more about research opportunities at UMN Morris, visit academics.morris.umn.edu.

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