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Humphrey School of Public Affairs graduate student Kelly Asche conducts internship with Center for Small Towns

Summary: Asche helped set up a first of its kind rural data portal and renew the consulting service.

(September 20, 2011)—Kelly Asche, a graduate student of the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs, completed an internship with the Center for Small Towns (CST). Asche has been working with CST and the Statistics Department to set up a first of its kind computer portal that provides rural data for small cities and townships in Minnesota.

Rural data is currently collected and distributed by a number of agencies and organizations, making it difficult to compile and interpret. The new rural data portal will have a basic use option that allows users access to rural data and interpretations. It will also contain a more advanced component for users to share queries, information, and research findings.

The second part of this project is a renovation of CST’s long standing data consulting service. This is an affordable option that provides statistical and economic analysis for small towns. The data project is supported by a recent grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation.

Asche, Professor of Statistics Engin Sungur, and CST’s David Fluegel have been meeting with potential partners for the rural data project. Asche says there have been a lot of conversations and a lot of interest. He says there is a serious lack of rural data available, especially on a sub-county level, which is often a problem for small town organizations. When applying for a grant, for example, organizations are often required to provide data about their community. The CST data portal is making this data available, often, for some communities, the first time they’ve had access to it. Asche says that Morris’s cutting edge faculty and CST’s knowledge of small towns and rural connections makes a powerful combination.

Originally from Hancock, Asche has spent the last 10 years in St. Paul, and he says he wanted to come back and live in a rural area. The focus of his graduate studies is rural policy, so the internship ties in nicely. Though his internship has ended, Asche is hoping to continue working on the project through a grant. Sungur and his students will also be working on the on-going project. Asche says that he believes it could take more than two years to get all of the historical data compiled. They already have great connections for the portal development and are currently providing data consulting services for clients.

As far as working at CST is concerned, he says, “I love it here. I love the work they’re doing and the connections I’ve made.” Compared to some of his classmates’ internships, he calls this one a “dream internship.” He refers to the undergraduates he’s worked with, most specifically Anwar Ahmed and Jessica Orth, as “phenomenal. The caliber here is absolutely amazing.”

If you are interested in learning more about this rural data project, or other CST programs, contact David Fluegel at
Created in 1944, the Otto Bremer Foundation assists people in achieving full economic, civic, and social participation in and for the betterment of their communities. The Foundation’s work to help build and maintain vibrant communities is based on the vision and legacy of Otto Bremer, whose commitment to Bremer Bank communities and to those working to make their lives better, continues to guide the Foundation. The Otto Bremer Foundation owns the majority share of Bremer Bank, and a portion of the bank’s profits comes to the Foundation as dividends, enabling the Foundation to invest back in the bank communities in the form of grants and program-related investments. In 2010, more than $24 million in charitable donations were given across the Bremer footprint. Organizations whose beneficiaries are residents of Minnesota, North Dakota, or Wisconsin are eligible to apply for Foundation grants, with priority given to communities served by Bremer Bank.

The Center for Small Towns is a community outreach program housed on the Morris campus that serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K–12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize CST’s resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. CST’s mission is to focus the University’s attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota’s small towns with locally identified issues while creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

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