

**Economics Department  
Alumni Newsletter  
July 2009**

It is summer in Fargo-Moorhead and the last few days have been glorious. As you may very well be aware it has been an extraordinary year since the last alumni newsletter. We began with excitement as Minnesota State University Moorhead welcomed its new president, Dr. Edna Mora Szymanski, to campus.

Edna, as she prefers to be called, quickly established herself in the community and on campus with a whirlwind of activity, so much so that the media started referring to her as “Hurricane Edna.” She also brought a new tagline for the university, “Private quality education at a state university price.”

Unfortunately, the worsening economic situation and our own enrollment problems created a \$9+ million deficit for the university (14% of the university’s budget). I am glad to say that it appears that through freezing vacant positions and a number of retirements, combined with other belt-tightening measures, we will not need to lay people off.

Also, as you may know, March was a difficult month in the Moorhead-Fargo area as record flooding occurred. The flood once again showed how valuable MSUM is for the area: MSUM housed national guard members; Nemzek became the headquarters for flood activities and volunteers in Moorhead, faculty members coordinated the food preparation for volunteers, and hundreds of faculty and staff and thousands of students volunteered sandbagging and in other flood related efforts. It would be hard to imagine the city of Moorhead surviving without MSUM.

And yet, after it was over MSUM returned to what it does best: teaching, learning and focusing on students. And so did the Economics Department.

The 2008-09 academic year was an eventful one for the Economics Department. Six students graduated this past May. Two of them graduated Suma Magna Cum Laude and three graduated Cum Laude. One will pursue a Ph.D. in Applied Economics, another has a job at Cargill and a couple are still deciding if they want to stay in the area or try a new location. We celebrated their accomplishments with the by-now-traditional pre-graduation party (you can see pictures at [www.mnstate.edu/economic/studentresources/studentmainpage.cfm](http://www.mnstate.edu/economic/studentresources/studentmainpage.cfm)).

You should know that the academic lives of all of our graduating majors and minors were touched by the generous donations from our alumni. Some received scholarships, others went to present papers at academic conferences, and all used the Economics Student Research Lab partially equipped by your donations. On behalf of our students and the Economics faculty, receive our heartfelt thanks.

This past year, six economics students presented their research at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual MSUM Student Academic Conference. The topics varied widely including papers dealing with the determinants of crime (some of our

students’ results challenge the findings of Steven Levitt of *Freakonomics* fame), structural unemployment in the FM area, the impact of international trade on poverty in less developed countries, and the costs of drug prohibition. For a complete list of topics and presenters, visit our web site at [www.mnstate.edu/economic](http://www.mnstate.edu/economic).

Vanee Dusoruth, Amy Kemp, Derick Hermanson, and Jacob Claussen presented papers at the Eastern Economics Association Conference in New York City. Vanee presented *International Student Enrollment in Midwest Universities*, Amy presented *Factors Affecting Youth Crime*, Jacob presented *Structural Unemployment in the Fargo Moorhead Area*, and Derick presented *Crime in the USA: A Panel Analysis*. The four did outstandingly well both in technical terms and in the style of their presentation. There were presenters from institutions ranked highly by *US News and World Report* including College of Wooster, Austin College and others. After seven years, professors from these colleges have come to expect the high quality of our student's work, but they still seem somewhat surprised by it. We are not for we have always known the quality of our students and the education we provide. **On behalf of our four presenters and the entire Economics Department, I would like to thank Curt Gudmundson ('69), president of Milestone Investments, Inc., for donating \$4,000 to finance the trip and for committing that amount for future student presentations at the EEA meetings. Furthermore, Curt has repeatedly said that he hopes his contribution will serve as an incentive for others to financially support the life changing experience that education provides. Thanks, Curt!**

An important benefit of these presentations is that our students get to see that they are able to compete with students from any college or university. This in turn, affects their expectations and performance. Friends and other professors of some of our past presenters have told me that they could not believe the difference this trip made in the presenters' self-confidence and world view.

Later in April, Vanee Dusoruth was awarded the MSUM Business and Economics Research prize (\$1000) for her paper on *International Student Enrollment at Midwestern Universities*. Among her unique findings is that university policies requiring international students to stay on campus during their first year have a negative impact on international student enrollment. This is the third year in a row an economics student is awarded this prize and eight of the last twelve winners have been economics students. It is a nice trend which we hope to continue.

Our alumni's generosity has made it possible for four students to receive scholarships for the 2009-2010 academic year. The recipients are Brienna Hoban, Jena Thompson, Nicholas Pates and Mark Frenzel.

International travel and study is become increasingly important in this interconnected world. Hence, we thought it would be appropriate to establish a scholarship to study abroad. Robert Wright is this year's scholarship recipient. He will be using his award to study in Portsmouth, England.

I am also happy to report that the interest in economics has grown significantly even as MSU Moorhead's enrollment has slowly decreased. Nine years ago, the average number of majors was in the mid 20s while now the average is nearly 40. I would not be surprised if this coming year we surpass 40 majors: This would have been hard to imagine not too long ago.

While we have not done a regression study to isolate the causes, I am sure a significant factor is that students realize that in the Economics Department they are our focus and you, our alumni, help us significantly both with your donations and with your professional information which we post on our site. Our newest faculty member, Tonya Jo Hanson (TJ as she prefers to be called), says that when a prospective student asks about careers in economics, she shows them our website [www.mnstate.edu/economic/studentresources/careeroptions.cfm](http://www.mnstate.edu/economic/studentresources/careeroptions.cfm). In her words, "That closes the deal." Again, thanks for your keeping us informed of your career experiences and educational endeavors.

On a related topic, Derek Hagen ('05) has started an economics alumni group in LinkedIn, the group is called MSU Moorhead Economics Graduates. We hope to send more frequent department news, but more importantly we hope it serves as a networking opportunity for all of you and our future alumni. We hope you join.

This coming winter Olympics, an Econ alum may be representing the US in the skeleton. Yes, Luke Schulz is training in Lake Placid with the skeleton team and the coach says that even though Luke started the sport relatively recently, there is a good chance Luke will be on the team. Let us hope so!

On faculty news: Professor Stutes led a study tour of China. In addition to the trip, there were readings and lectures students had to attend to if they chose to get credit. The trip was several weeks long and it covered a number of cities and regions. In addition, he continues serving as the director of the Center for Economic Education. Last June, the Moorhead High School Economics Challenge team placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the state.

Professor (TJ) Hanson's dissertation placed first in the graduate student extension competition of the American Agricultural Economics Association. Congratulations to Prof. Hanson for her achievement. Also, she has quickly established herself as a very good instructor and wonderful and patient advisor. We are happy she joined the department last fall.

I am sad to report that Prof. John Trainor died in October 2008. Prof. Trainor taught in the department from 1967 to 1989 and he served as department chair from 1981 until his retirement. During his tenure, he helped build the department into what it is today: a department focused on teaching and students. We are grateful for his many contributions. As anyone who knew him can attest, he was a gentle and kind man who lived a life of principles. He is deeply missed.

Again I ask for your support on behalf of our students. As mentioned above, the professional information many of you have provided has influenced potential majors and minors who were interested in Economics but feared it was not a marketable degree. Students now realize that a major in Economics provides them with a wide range of rewarding career paths. So, if you have not already done so, please send us your professional information or any updates and (or) keep us informed in the LinkedIn group.

Also, we hope you join the MSUM Economics Graduates Linkedingroup for more frequent department information and to network with our alumni. And in these difficult economic times, if you are in a position to hire or you know of an opening in your company, let us know, we might have a soon-to- graduate economics major to recommend. We do not ask that you hire them, just let us know what opportunities exist.

The financial support from our generous alumni as well as current and retired faculty will continue financing student trips, scholarships, guest speakers, as well as help us equip student research lab. We hope you support the Economics Department with your pledge. Enclosed, you will find a self-addressed envelope. Please, feel free to designate your donation as you wish. If you are planning to wait for the next Phonathon to donate, please be sure you tell the caller you want your money to go to the Economics department; otherwise your donation will go to the general Alumni fund.

Most importantly, we hope you keep in touch. We always like to hear from you. Send us an e-mail, give us a call, or keep us informed through LinkedIn. Or better yet, if you are in the area stop for a visit. Kris Pauna ('99) did just a couple of months ago when he came to participate in the Fargo Marathon, he and his family stopped for a visit. Also, Tessa (Launders) Ripley ('00) stopped by when traveling for work. We will keep you updated on department happenings on our web page at [www.mnstate.edu/economic](http://www.mnstate.edu/economic), through LinkedIn, and future newsletters.

Thanks again for your support!

Sincerely,

Oscar Flores,  
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P.S. This coming year, I will be on sabbatical, but I will continue working on alumni relations. If you wish to contact the department you may contact me via e-mail ([flores@mnstate.edu](mailto:flores@mnstate.edu)) or Professor Doug Greenley ([greenley@mnstate.edu](mailto:greenley@mnstate.edu) or 218-477-4031).