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Environmental visionary MSES Leadership Option pays tribute to late professor

Jun 5, 2009

By Quadia Muhammad

Come this June, many Ohio University graduates will wade into environmental vocations. But one recent alumnus and two soon-to-be-graduates are already knee-deep in the profession, thanks to a new, field-based alternative to the traditional thesis through the Master of Science program in Environmental Studies (MSES).

Envisioned by the late Mary Stoertz, formerly an associate professor of geological sciences at Ohio University, the MSES Leadership Option attempts to prepare students for careers that bridge environmental studies and public policy. A key component of the program is a 100-hour internship with a non-profit agency involved in environmental work.

Alumnus Eric Gibson became the first to complete the Leadership Option this past winter quarter. Wren Kruse and Samantha Williams will round out the program's first three graduates this June.

For Gibson, completing the Leadership Option was a chance to contribute to society, one of the underlining aims of the program.

"Instead of looking for a problem that may not help the community, the Leadership Option gave me the opportunity to work on solving a current problem," he explained.

Gibson completed his internship with Sunday Creek Watershed Group, an agency that monitors waterways running orange due to acid mine drainage. During the internship, he created an interactive GIS map to locate monitoring wells affected by acid mine drainage. He also conducted field work, visiting potential sites to install wells in Athens County.

A world of difference

The Leadership Option is not the only program for which Stoertz laid the groundwork. She was involved with the planning of the university's Sustainable Living Organization and the OHIO Ecohouse, a university-owned model of affordable green technology and sustainable living.

In addition, Stoertz worked with the Voinovich School, advocating environmental issues. In 2004, she helped the Voinovich School's Appalachian Watershed Research Group to secure an \$869,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency. She also provided expertise to the Sunday and Monday Creek watershed groups.

In the midst of planning the MSES Leadership Option, Stoertz suffered a fatal heart attack in 2007. However, with plans for the Leadership Option already in place, Environmental Studies faculty director Michelle Morrone was able to move forward with Stoertz's dream. The MSES Leadership Option was established in Stoertz's honor in 2008.

Leaving a legacy

It seems serendipitous that Gibson's project paralleled Stoertz's research



Alumnus Eric Gibson became the first to complete the MSES Leadership Option, which attempts to prepare students for careers that bridge environmental studies and public policy.



The late Mary Stoertz, who was also involved with the OHIO Ecohouse and Sustainable Living Organization, was responsible for the creation of the MSES Leadership Option.

Photo(s) courtesy of Environmental Studies

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concerning the effects of acid mine drainage in Athens County.

"I wish she were here to see it," Morrone said. "Eric's work is the best flagship project because it concerns an issue Mary was passionate about."

"Mary would be pleased," added Stoertz's husband, Doug Green, an associate professor of geological sciences. "She felt strongly that there should be a connection between research and society...For Mary the point of doing science was to produce a useful deliverable."

And while only a handful of students have completed the program, its implementation and the success of the first projects ensure that Stoertz's legacy will live on.

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