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# UMN Morris Offers Experiential Course on Indigenous Education

Communications and Marketing

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This summer Associate Professor of English and Native American and Indigenous Studies Becca Gercken and Assistant Professor of History and Native American and Indigenous Studies Kevin Whalen '08 co-taught a new course on indigenous education, past and present, in the United States and Canada.

Called "field school" because of its experiential approach, the course asked students to study contextual literature and use that knowledge to craft an understanding of the campus's boarding school history.

"They're actually doing the work themselves and deciding what information is important to them," says Gercken. "To have that kind of opportunity to do the active archival work and be using original sources rather than reading secondary source materials is unusual in undergraduate courses."

## A Unique Experience

The two-week course offered University of Minnesota Morris and Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC)-participating students chances not only to travel to tribal colleges, but also to learn about residential schools and their continuing legacy—all on the former site of an American Indian boarding school.

"Being outside and wandering around campus feels so different knowing what was here," said Jack Kitson '19, State University of New York at Geneseo. "This experience has been something I couldn't have gotten without coming to Morris."

"Being in the archives and having all the documents related to this place, and then being outside and stepping through the actual spaces where this stuff happened, it's really profound and heavy," added Whalen.

## Recognizing the Past and Present

Throughout the course, students answered tough questions like, "How do we tell this story about indigenous people when their voices aren't recorded in our archives?" and "How can the work of this class help Morris students, faculty, and staff confront our past?"

"Morris is open to trying to offer current students and visitors a better understanding about what our history as a boarding school means to this campus," said Gercken.

Morgan Alene Miller '20 added, "Morris has a lot of history, and the fact that we are working to make it better known to its current students is something really important."

In its last week, the class set out to create an interactive Google Map containing information on the significance of each location of the former boarding school, which they collected through their archival work. Viewing the map—and this first class—as only phase one of many to come, Gercken notes that the aim of the project is to build deeper institutional understanding of the significance of the boarding school era.

**"The students feel really strongly that they want this to be a foundation project," said Gercken.**

**With the support of COPLAC and the Teagle Foundation, Gercken and Whalen will continue to offer the class, allowing current and future students to build on work done this summer.**

**This activity was made possible by the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) Teagle Foundation Grant for Hybrid Course Sharing in American Indian Studies. To learn more about the course and COPLAC hybrid courses, visit [coplac.org/teagle](http://coplac.org/teagle)**