

Class sets focus, apertures on Mississippi

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Although it defines the campus boundary, contains a world-class fishery and drains the fourth-largest watershed in the world, the Mississippi River remains remarkably unexplored by St. Cloud State University students.

"A lot of people don't take pride in being right on the river," Paige Hanson said, recalling that the Mississippi wasn't mentioned during campus tours that extolled the university's other selling points.

The bio-medical major from Blaine is one of about 15 students enrolled in a freshman-level honors class led by Ivan Bartha of SCSU's Outdoor Endeavors program that aims to increase awareness and infuse a sense of stewardship. The water-level image she shot is part of an online collection of 50 photographs by students that will be matted and displayed for 90 minutes Dec. 3 in Atwood Memorial Center.

"I knew I wanted to build a course around our stretch of the river," Bartha said of Honors 100: A Deep Exploration of Our River, offered for the first time this fall. "My intent was: Let's do a deep exploration of our river and the mile-and-a-half bank that St. Cloud State occupies."

Lindsey Roden, a linguistics major from Cedar, was among those who didn't think about the Mississippi when she arrived at SCSU. She said picking up garbage along the river offered a new perspective. Samantha Weinberg, an undecided major from Eagan, said she lived 10 miles from the river but didn't know much about it.

"It's interesting to see how few people actually know about the river," said Katie Seppelt, a radiology tech major from Rice who had a hard time finding people to comment about the river for a video project.

While many students only see the Mississippi River from the bridge as they cross University Drive, the photo exhibit and the course offer a different perspective. The exhibit features close-ups of flowers and feathers, views of University Bridge and some mist-over-the-water shots.

"It has to do with getting to understand not only what's on top of the water, but what's under the water. What are some of the issues related to it?" Bartha said. While the students are pursuing a range of majors -- and signed up for the honors class without knowing what topic would be explored -- Bartha said he hoped they might incorporate what they learn.

Ashley Toering of Rush City said she was considering communication studies or ecology, but the class led her to choose the latter.

"I've always loved the outdoors, but I didn't realize that there were actually jobs in it," Toering said.

During Monday's class, discussion centered on the book "Mississippi Solo: A River Quest" by Eddy Harris, a black man's adversity-filled account of adventure that included losing his boat in Bemidji. Striving to offer a variety of perspectives, Bartha said he ultimately wants students to pass on their interest in the river.

IF YOU GO ...

What: Photo exhibit, featuring about 50 images shot by members of Honors 100: A Deep Exploration of Our River. Students will be on hand to discuss their work.

When: 9-10:30 a.m. Dec. 3.

Where: Atwood Memorial Center, St. Cloud State University.

Online: Can't make the show? See the gallery online at <http://scsu.mn/RxC8Pr>.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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