

# U partners with Minnetonka

This is the first collaboration of many for a new outreach program.

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In an effort to make connections outside of the University of Minnesota campus, the Sustainability Education Network launched the Resilient Communities Project this semester in Minnetonka, its first partner city.

Hundreds of students and faculty members from a variety of disciplines like architecture and social policy will work with the city

to complete eight sustainability projects this fall, said Mike Greco, program director for the project.

The project is supported by the Institute on the Environment and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. It's modeled after the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program.

"There were lots of different faculty and students and groups on campus interested in sustainability, but there [wasn't] any very deliberate effort to get that infused into the curriculum," Greco said.

Members of the network designed the project as a hands-on response to this need.

The program will partner with one city each year, Greco said. Organizers chose Minnetonka as a pilot for the project because of its proximity and past relationship with the University.

"The city has a history of wanting to be innovative in all of our work dynamics and all of our processes we go through," said Jeff Thomson, a Minnetonka city planner. "I think this really gets to that mission."

In addition to overseeing the program as a whole, Thomson serves as a project lead for the Neighborhood Identity Project, one of the program's initiatives this fall.

"Minnetonka doesn't

really have formal neighborhood organizations like some communities do, but we know there are neighborhood groups out there," he said.

The project will examine models for establishing a sense of community and what role the city should play.

In keeping with the interdisciplinary approach of the program, two different classes will explore this issue. One Humphrey School of Public Affairs course will focus on neighborhood revitalization, and the other is a design course in the College of Design.

Jo Ann Hendricks, a senior studying in CDes, said

she usually brainstorms ideas for projects by herself. But with this project, she had to change her approach and talk to members of a community.

She said the experiential learning approach of the program has been an ideal way to finish her degree.

"It's the reverse of being lectured to and then applying it — it's actually applying while you learn," she said.

As one of the coordinators of the Sustainability Education Network, Carissa Schively Slotterback has worked with the Resilient Communities Project from its earliest stages. Now that the program is on its

feet, Slotterback is planning Minnetonka's spring project. The University will send out requests to cities this fall seeking proposals for next year.

Other University of Minnesota campuses might get involved in the future, Greco said.

"We're really interested in working with another city next year and ... how we can convene the resources to do that," she said.

The project staff will evaluate the first year to determine how to structure the program in the future.

"We're pulling out the lessons where we can about how to move it forward," she said.