

University of Minnesota team launches seven-continent education expedition

Earthducation team members will set out on Jan. 7 for their first quest exploring education and sustainability via climate hot spots around the world

Media Note: Expedition team members will be available for interviews until noon Friday, Jan. 7, and will provide regular updates via the Earthducation website as they travel. Basecamp team members are available for interviews and other media assistance throughout the duration of the expedition.

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The group making the seven-continent journey, including U of M professors Aaron Doering (back row, second from right) and Charles Miller (back row, far right).

MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL (01/05/2011) —Two University of Minnesota faculty, a graduate student and a videographer will set out for Burkina Faso, Africa, Jan. 7 on the first leg of Earthducation, a seven-continent journey to explore the meaning of education in different cultures and create a global narrative describing the connections between education, environment and sustainability.

Funded in part by a Discovery Grant from the university's Institute on the Environment, Earthducation seeks to meet a challenge put forth by the United Nations as part of its 2005–2014 Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into education and learning.

Traveling by motorcycle, foot, bike and SUV, expedition members led by Aaron Doering and Charles Miller, professors of Learning Technologies in the U of M College of Education and Human Development, will visit seven “climate hot spots” around the world – places particularly impacted by climate change.

In each location, team members will interview local people about their beliefs on education and sustainability; visit schools and document educational experiences; and explore cultural and physical geography. Web-based daily updates, lesson plans and video feeds from the trail will connect team members and the diverse cultures and communities they visit with classrooms and learners of all ages around the world. Visitors to the Earthducation EnviroNetwork website will be invited to share their video stories, bringing individual threads of experience together to weave a global tapestry depicting how education and sustainability can inform and complement each other.

At the conclusion of the five-year expedition series, the Earthducation team plans to maintain Earthducation's EnviroNetwork website as an ongoing hub for communication, social networking and collaboration engaging the global public around issues at the crossroads of education and sustainability.

"By gathering stories about education and environment from around the world, we hope to create a foundation for embedding sustainability in learning at all levels and in all cultures," Doering says. "Ultimately, we anticipate that the Earthducation EnviroNetwork will be the world's leading online community focused exclusively on the increasingly vital fusion of education and sustainability."

The current expedition to Burkina Faso was preceded by an "Expedition 0" journey to the Canadian Arctic in March 2010. There, the explorers learned about the importance of fitting the rhythms of education and the rhythms of nature together by studying education-disrupting disconnects between seasonal hunting and the academic year and between cultural experiences and traditional textbook learning. Expeditions 2–7 are planned for Europe (June 2011), Australia (January 2012), South America (June 2012), Asia (January 2013), North America (June 2013) and Antarctica (January 2014).

Doering has delivered adventure learning to tens of millions of students and teachers around the world over the past decade through the GoNorth! Adventure Learning series. GoNorth! used adventure learning to raise awareness and understanding of the Arctic and its environmental issues.

For more information on Earthducation, to follow the expedition, and to contribute to the global narrative, please visit the Earthducation EnviroNetwork at www.earthducation.com.