

Freshwater experience gives college, career view for students

By Laurie Schlosser
UW OSHKOSH TODAY

Young people interested in freshwater resources had a virtual “laboratory” of options to explore this month on Lake Winnebago and the Fox River, within a stone’s throw from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

Freshwater camp participants take samples of water from the Fox River from a pontoon piloted by Greg Kleinheinz, UWO engineering and engineering technology director.

The first class in a new program offered in a partnership with Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin, was based at UWO’s Environmental Research Innovation Center. About 20 high school students from Wisconsin and Illinois spent three days in the residential camp, conducting hands-on research, studying algae and bacteria, exploring waterways on a pontoon boat and learning about freshwater college majors and careers.

“This helps me be a little more sure about what I want to do,” said Chicagoland high school student Maddie Murphy, who plans to student environmental engineering in college.

Another student from Illinois said he ultimately would like to work for a company focused on water of either of the U.S. coasts or possibly Lake Michigan. He felt the camp provided better insight into his potential college studies.

Greg Kleinheinz, chair of the department of engineering and engineering



UW Oshkosh photo

Maddie Murphy plans to study environmental science after finishing high school.

technology, said the goal was to introduce teens to a variety of aspects of freshwater science and engineering with an opportunity to explore UWO programs that may lead to a variety of careers.

The camp is the first offered and was funded by the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin through a grant to UW Oshkosh.

“In Wisconsin we have 15,000 lakes, major river systems, and border two Great Lakes,” Kleinheinz said. “Water is integral to our culture and economy in so many ways. High school students don’t know

what they don’t know, with regard to opportunities for careers in fields from biology, conservation, electrical engineering, environmental engineering, policy, groundwater, etc.. We hope this program allowed students to explore various academic programs that will lead to careers in everything from water technology development, electrical sensors, drinking water treatment, conservation, policy, water remediation, and more.”

The cohort came from schools in Wisconsin and Illinois and became fast friends as they learned during the day and

enjoyed fun evening activities in the residence halls and the community.

Several upper-level UWO students served as camp counselors, staying with the students throughout the day and at their residence hall.

One of the counselors, Josh Dyer, who is majoring in biology with a minor in astronomy, has plans to continue his studies in graduate school.

Dyer noted that the campers seemed much farther along with their academic and career plans than he was in high school.

“They are definitely a group of very bright kids,” he said. “They like science and to figure (things) out.”

Lisa Koeppen, outreach coordinator for the engineering and engineering technology department, said the freshwater camp generated interest and “filled up right away.”

Plans are being made to increase the capacity for additional campers next year and beyond.

“Because of our location and the diversity of academic programs and the ERIC Lab, UWO is uniquely positioned to help students fill these (freshwater science) talent needs for Wisconsin,” Kleinheinz said.

Kleinheinz said the water sector is “a big open tent” with many opportunities for future professionals in Wisconsin and throughout the world.

“We are spoiled in Wisconsin with our resources,” he added, “but clean, fresh water is the gold of the 21st century.”

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