

News Release

DeMuth Finds Her Identity at UMN Crookston as She Etches a Career Path in Agricultural Education

By Shawn Smith on Wednesday, March 3, 2021

"For me, that is exactly what UMN Crookston became," said UMN Crookston Eleora DeMuth, an agricultural education and communications double major. "It was a platform for me to be able to open up and experience who I was and what my identity was and who I could become during college and beyond."

A native of Grand Rapids, Minn., DeMuth's life always revolved around FFA and 4-H growing up. She was elected a state officer for Minnesota FFA as a senior and it was always passionate about. FFA and her agricultural education teacher, Shawn Linder, a 2001 graduate of UMN Crookston, first introduced DeMuth to the University of Minnesota Crookston.

"My ag teacher in high school (Shawn Linder) was actually a UMC grad," DeMuth said. "He is one of the biggest advocates for the campus, and his wife is as well. I have always heard about UMC and the campus and all of their programs and how much he loved them. He spoke so highly of people like Lyle (Westrom) and Phil Baird and people that absolutely transformed his life. There was always something in the back of my head saying this would be a really cool place."

If Linder was the one who introduced DeMuth to UMN Crookston, it was her experience through Agriculture and Natural Resources Activities Days (ANRAD) at the Crookston campus that prompted her next step toward making it her collegiate home.

"I was really able to experience campus through our Ag and Natural Resources Activities Days (ANRAD)," DeMuth recalled. "ANRAD is really where it skyrocketed for me. I was competing in horse contests, watching how campus worked, and how students were. ANRAD allowed me to meet faculty and staff. This was my first launch pad into Crookston. I knew exactly what type of program interested me and knew it was agricultural education. I applied to a few other places and only got halfway through those applications after visiting Crookston. After visiting the UMN Crookston campus - it was somewhere I wanted to be. There is a lot of one-on-one attention and hands-on experiences - this being many of the things we talk about and advocate for. All of those components were really what brought me to UMC. The culture and the experience is what kept me."

DeMuth further pursued attending UMN Crookston through her interactions with the admissions department. It was Brooke Novak, the current Director of Orientation and Community Outreach at UMN Crookston, who first made her feel at home.

"I ended up doing a college visit my junior summer of high school going into senior year," DeMuth said. "I got one-on-one personal attention with admissions counselors and tour guides and was paired with Brooke Novak. Brooke was that first person who got me into Crookston and made me feel like this could be a possibility. Years later I told her about this experience, her impact on me, and that I still had her business card."

While DeMuth was very involved in FFA and 4-H in high school, UMN Crookston would open up a door of wide-ranging experiences. Being in a close-knit environment helped her to grow and take chances in areas she might not have explored at a bigger school.

"To be 100 percent honest, coming into Crookston, it wasn't like an overarching mission of mine," DeMuth stated. "I wasn't one of those students who came in and said 'I am going to be a part of every single club and activity.' I wanted to be involved in collegiate FFA and was a state officer at the time. FFA was everything I knew and wasn't super adamant about being involved in other things. It was one of those things - I believe Crookston really knew what I needed before I did. I approached an opportunity in the admissions department to work with them as a student employee. Everything kind of spiraled up from there. I ended up in positions working with our Golden Eagle Entertainment (GEE), the Crookston Student Association (CSA), and other programs around campus. It was pretty unintentional to be honest."

DeMuth always kept an open mind to new experiences, but UMN Crookston was where she was able to take advantage of every opportunity presented to her and grow as a person. It is a place where she realized another love she didn't envision being part of her future, communications.

"I have a communications major, which in no way, shape, or form, ever did I anticipate having until Jacob Bell told me in one of my classes, to take a look at the communications program," DeMuth said. "It was people like Mark Huglen, Megan Pederson, and Megan Bell who shared what I can do with it. I worked closely with Megan Pederson and Megan Bell on different projects. Megan Bell was the supervisor for my undergraduate research. She gave me all the opportunities within communications that I didn't expect. She showed me the pathway of something I was already passionate about but just didn't know what it was called."

DeMuth is also very thankful to the staff in the agriculture and natural resources department, who have allowed her to tap into her passion and figure out what it is she wants to do for a living.

"Lyle (Westrom) was the person who got me in the door, Nathan Purrington was the person who kept me here, and Phil (Baird) was the one who helped me figure out what side of agriculture I was passionate about," DeMuth stated. "They were the three people who really made me passionate about working with people in the capacity that I did. They have also given me a sense of belonging at UMN Crookston."

DeMuth is currently pursuing a career in agricultural education. She is serving as a student teacher in agricultural education at Redwood Valley High School in Redwood Falls, Minn., this semester.

"I always thought I would be a northern Minnesota girl, so it has definitely been a different experience (being in southern Minnesota)," DeMuth said. "I am really enjoying the experience so far. My cooperating teacher is Lisa Orren, she was Nathan Purrington's last student teacher, and I absolutely adore her. He knew it would be a perfect match, so he contacted her and got it all set up. I have plenty of challenges working during COVID and social distancing and distance learners and hybrid learners. Teachers never thought in their lives they would have to work in this way, but it has created an interesting challenge many are up for."

The challenges created by COVID-19 have allowed DeMuth to flex her creativity muscle, something that has grown with her experiences in communications and while helping admissions and other departments with graphic design. She was also selected for the prestigious George Washington Carver Internship Program, where she served as a graphic designer for the World Food Prize Organization. DeMuth has thoroughly enjoyed her interactions with the students at Redwood Valley High School, as they have allowed her to grow and get her ready for a future career.

"I have some really incredible students who put their hearts into everything and want to make things better for everyone else," DeMuth said. "It has been great to work with those students and also my cooperating teacher. They have both been incredible and the entire school has been welcoming and supportive of me. They are excited to see where I am going and they have offered a lot of professional experience and advice."

DeMuth is currently focusing on getting a job in agricultural education, but she has stated that "fortunately, but unfortunately, Megan Bell and the communications department have made it really hard on me to decide my future." This is because of her passions for the communications field. But for now her focus has been on a future career as a teacher. She is excited to get into the real world and she knows she is ready because of the experience she has gained in her multifaceted experience at UMN Crookston.

"From the hard skills perspective, Crookston gave me the opportunity to try everything I could be in a future career and in professional opportunities and out in the real world," DeMuth stated. "Whether it was hands-on experience in what it is like to work with a specific type of animal, or what it is like to do a communication audit - those are the opportunities that professionals look for in the real world."

While UMN Crookston has made DeMuth ready for what is next, it has been a spring board for great things to come in her life, but it has also found a special place in her heart.

"From the more emotional side, I would say UMN Crookston really did help me find what my identity is," DeMuth opined. "It also helped me find the different things I was passionate about. I went to UMN Crookston and am getting ready to leave feeling more passionate about the people I get the opportunity to work with and those relationships. Minnesota Crookston provided so much for me and gave me a launch pad to get ready for one of the best adventures, which is yet to come."

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