

APPROVALS

- ☐ Managing Editor
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From First-Generation to Professor Foraging the Road Ahead: First Generation Professor The Ugly Passion: German Language

(by order of preference)

TEASER TEXT *Write this after you finish the story. All 3 must be different.*

WEBSITE TEASER <i>This will appear in both the department newsletter and on their website.</i>	The road to education can be difficult and exciting. Ross Etherton was a first-generation student who struggled to make it through school and is now an Assistant Professor here in GNSD. His trials and triumphs to make it to the UMN are what make him a good professor and addition to the department.
CLA FACEBOOK TEASER	Are you a first-generation student? Do you want to be? Assistant Professor Ross Etherton in German, Nordic, Slavic, and Dutch studies was one and has found joy in education: the research and the students.
CLA TWITTER TEASER <i>280 characters or fewer--URL and @/# count as characters</i>	Being a first-generation student is hard, but new Assistant Professor Ross Etherton in German, Nordic, Slavic, and Dutch studies knows what it's like. His story is filled with difficulties and triumphs to make it where he is today.

<p>DEPARTMENT FACEBOOK POST</p> <p><i>This is not the same as the CLA teaser.</i></p>	<p>Did you loathe school as a kid? Was there a class you just could not stand? Assistant Professor Ross Etherton did not like high school English and failed it, but begrudgingly, he found he loved the German language.</p>
<p>DEPARTMENT TWITTER POST</p> <p><i>280 characters or fewer--URL and @/# count as characters</i></p>	<p>Being a first-gen student is hard, but Assistant Prof. Ross Etherton found his way. College was a mystery at first, but now he finds joy in education, research, and his students.</p>

By Jadin Orne



Photo by Gavin Schuster, CLAgency student

Were you ever a young teen who hated school? Did you flunk your least favorite class? Ross Etherton, a new Assistant Professor in German, Nordic, Slavic, and Dutch studies did. He hated school and failed high school English, but still become a professor here at

the UMN. The journey to get here was ironic in many ways but was filled with hard work, dedication, and hope for a good future.

Why German?

Etherton grew up in a small town in Nebraska called _____. It was an industrial farm town. His dad was a letter carrier and he hoped to follow in his footsteps. He went to high school begrudgingly, until he took Spanish. Languages of all kinds excited him. The books with 1,000 different phrases in different languages made him want to learn. He loved all the languages except for one, German. "For some reason, I never wanted to learn German. I thought it was an ugly language," Etherton reflects.

After high school, he chose to travel around. College was a mystery, but he knew he wanted to get out of Nebraska. He worked jobs around the country and rode Greyhound buses everywhere. A friend in the rotary exchange student program suggested he apply. The rotary exchange student program accepted him and asked where Etherton wanted to go, "I wanted to go to Spain. My second choice was Sweden. My third choice was Italy. I don't even know if there was room for a fourth choice but in parenthesis, I could go anywhere in Central Europe except Germany, because I still did not want to learn German." They sent him to Austria, and of course, he fell in love with the language.

Making it to College, and Back, and Back Again

While in this program, he applied to the University of Northern Colorado and was accepted. "I took German and fell in love with the program and the great people there. I switched my major from photography to German after two years." Now that Etherton found his passion, he ran out of money to go to school as a first-generation student and worked all sorts of jobs again. Eventually, he made it back to school, took a math course (to prove he could go back to college), and pursued his degree in German. When he started his master's degree, he found the TRIO program. TRIO is a program that helps students from low-income, diverse, and first-generation student backgrounds to succeed in college. They teach skills and ask students what can be better in the courses they are taking, but also how students can make the most out of their classes.

When Etherton found out his graduate school offered TRIO to undergraduates at the university, he asked how he could help, hoping to give students the support he did not have as an undergraduate student. He emailed the program director but never heard back. Later on, he saw a graduate student mentor and case manager position with TRIO and applied. He got to work with them for three years and in summer programs. He reflects, "Some of my biggest joys were watching students move from something that

they ended up not liking to something they ended up falling in love with, like a women's literature course or medicine."

Great Beginnings at UMN

Now, as Etherton teaches classes here at UMN, he incorporates the things he's learned in his life into his classes. He tries to instill hard work into his students but also asks them what they can do to help themselves and the course succeed. He is currently looking to get involved with the TRIO program here at the UMN to help first-generation, low-income, and other students from diverse backgrounds succeed. Etherton is excited to be here and to add to the University community and the German, Nordic, Slavic, and Dutch studies department. "My favorite part of my job is working. I love my research and I get to combine that with working with students. That's why I'm here, education and research. I get to do both."

This story was written by an undergraduate student in CLAgency. [Meet the team.](#)