



The University of South Dakota

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## **USD's Brittany Neiles is 2009 Madison Fellowship recipient**

**VERMILLION, S.D. -- Brittany Neiles, a student at The University of South Dakota, is passionate about history, loves to talk about government and looks forward to a long career in teaching – significant reasons why the graduating senior is a 2009 recipient of the James Madison Memorial Fellowship.**

According to Susan Hackemer, coordinator of competitive scholarships at USD, Neiles is the first USD undergraduate to win this award, which is for teachers or students who plan to teach history or political science in secondary education. Hackemer said most fellowships are awarded to teachers who are already in the field, only a select few undergraduates win.

"I'm really excited about this opportunity," said Neiles, who intends on pursuing a master's degree at the University of Vermont with the fellowship. "I believe it's an experience that will make me a better teacher."

Neiles, a graduate of Roosevelt High School in Sioux Falls, S.D., has been putting in time teaching even though she is still finishing up as a college student. For 12 weeks, the daughter of Joe and Chris Neiles of Sioux Falls has been teaching American History at her old high school.

"I have observed her teach at Roosevelt High School four times this semester," noted Steven Bucklin, Ph.D., professor in the department of history at The U, "and each time she demonstrated the poise, the professionalism and the passion that really great teachers have."

Neiles was a History Day intern for Bucklin last year and he noted that she was a great resource when the South Dakota contingent competed in the National History Day competition. Her passion for teaching, she admitted, comes from a love of history and government. Neiles has fostered that love by dedicating her time as a volunteer to several political efforts, including the South Dakota Campaign for Healthy Families, president of the USD College Democrats and as a deputy field organizer for President Barack Obama's "Obama for America" campaign, which resulted in her attending the 2009 Inauguration Ceremony in Washington, D.C. in January.

"It was an amazing trip," stated Neiles, who will graduate with a bachelor's degree in education (history and English) this month. "We got to experience an event of a lifetime."

It's something that I'll never forget."

In addition to working on the Obama campaign, Neiles served as an intern for two of South Dakota's Congressional representatives: Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin and U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson. Those experiences coupled with her work as a member of the Center for Academic Engagement's Alternative Week of Off-campus Learning (AWOL) and her study abroad experience in England have shaped her into the teacher she hopes to be.

"It's one thing to be able to explain to your students what they need to learn," she noted. "It's another thing to be able to show them through your experiences."

Through AWOL, Neiles has seen the public school system of Washington, D.C. firsthand. She's talked with administrators about poverty and education issues affecting the public schools of the nation's Capitol. Her goal someday is to teach history or government in an inner city school. Right now, Neiles enjoys teaching at her old high school gaining experience before she enters graduate school.

"I've learned a lot and it's reaffirmed that I definitely want to be in the classroom," she admitted. "I love working with the students and being able to teach every day."

Neiles had a difficult time deciding where she wanted to go to college. It didn't hurt USD's chances that her father is an alumnus, but the tipping point was an opportunity to study abroad – something she really wanted out of her college experience. USD afforded her that opportunity the second semester of her sophomore year when she studied at the University of Warwick in England. It was only her second time on a plane but she came away from the experience with one thought: everyone should be required to study abroad.

"Whether it's a service-learning trip or related to your major, I think everyone should be required to study abroad for a semester," she said with a smile. "I loved it. I got to travel to England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, France and Italy, and I learned a lot about myself and academics."

Because she's a student willing to learn, Bucklin foresees a bright future for Neiles and her teaching career – no matter where it takes her.

"Brittany's the kind of person who can light up a room just by smiling," he explained. "What is even more inspiring is that when you get to know her, you understand that when she confronts a problem, she does not surrender if the first course of action does not succeed."

James Madison Fellowships support the graduate study of American history by aspiring and experienced secondary school teachers of American history, American government, and social studies. Named in honor of the fourth president of the United States and acknowledged "Father of the Constitution and Bill of Rights," a James Madison Fellowship funds up to \$24,000 of each Fellow's course of study towards a master's degree. That program must include a concentration of courses on the history and principles of the United States Constitution. Founded by an Act of Congress in 1986, the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation is an independent establishment of the executive branch of the federal government.

A photo of Neiles is available for download at  
[www.usd.edu/urelations/images/Brittany\\_Neiles001.jpg](http://www.usd.edu/urelations/images/Brittany_Neiles001.jpg).

### About The University of South Dakota

Founded in 1862, The University of South Dakota is designated as the only public liberal arts university in the state and is home to a comprehensive College of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, School of Health Sciences, the state's only School of Law, School of Medicine, the accredited Beacom School of Business and the College of Fine Arts. It has an enrollment of approximately 9,200 students taught by 400 faculty members. More information is available at [www.usd.edu/press/news](http://www.usd.edu/press/news).

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