Exceptional students look for more than just a degree when they embark on their college career. A cohort of thirteen students was accepted into a newly instituted honors program in fall 2008 at the University of Minnesota, Crookston. Exposure to a culturally-rich array of experiences through the program will encourage students to develop a global perspective and learn important leadership skills.

Under the direction of Assistant Professor Brian Dingmann, Ph.D., the honors program was developed to inspire and transform student writing, discussion, and critical thinking skills. Selection for the program includes such criteria as high school rank, grade point average, and the rigor of their high school academic career.

The honors coursework culminates in an honors essay, research or creative project that requires a public defense. “We wanted the honors program to enrich the student experience,” says Dingmann, who teaches in the Math, Science, and Technology Department. “Our goal is to encourage outstanding undergraduates and enhance their collegiate career in a way we have not had the chance to do before this program was developed.”

During fall semester 2008, Dingmann used the book The Power of Critical Thinking by Lewis Vaughn to help students strengthen their ability to reason, to think analytically, and to use discernment when looking at an issue.

Sophomore Heather Donati-Lewis, believes the honors program has enhanced her academic experience. “I never realized about the importance of sustainability or how much it matters that we think and act responsibly when it comes to the environment,” she remarks. “I have come out of my college cell and connected to the world. I have an impact on the globe, and I can’t just sit on the fence.”

Donati-Lewis is currently working on a research paper for Dingmann’s zoology class to help meet the requirements of the honors program. She is also the Alpha Lambda Delta representative to the Crookston Student Association, serves as vice president of personal success skills in Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), and works in the Academic Assistant Center as part of Student Support Services.

“I have learned how to process information and how to form opinions based on what I think rather than on my emotions or what others are saying,” Donati-Lewis explains. “I have applied what I already learned in the honors program to choices I have had to make, and I like to believe it has helped me do an even better job in my decision making.”

To learn more about the honors program at the U of M, Crookston, visit www.UMCrookston.edu/honors.