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NEWS

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Contact: Nancy Kolsti
UNT News Service
(940) 565-3509
or metro (817) 267-0651
nkolsti@unt.edu

UNT student selected for USAID internship

DENTON (UNT), Texas — Sarah Mathis of Denton, a graduate student at the University of North Texas, has been chosen for a summer internship with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Washington, D.C. office. She is the daughter of Harry and Sherry Mathis of Alexandria, Va.

USAID is responsible for administering the United States government's economic and humanitarian foreign assistance program. Beginning June 1, Mathis will work in the agency's Bureau for Africa for eight to nine weeks. She will work with a health team that focuses on sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In recent years, the region has experienced severe drought, resulting in loss of tens of thousands of goats, sheep, cattle and even camels for approximately 7 million farmers and herders in the region. Villagers have been displaced from their homes and normal herding areas in search of food and water, with rainfall predicted to be lower than the annual average in the coming months.

Mathis, who is earning a master of public administration degree from UNT, received a bachelor's degree in emergency administration and planning from UNT in May 2005. As an undergraduate, she served an emergency administration and disaster planning internship in Botswana, Africa, where she oversaw teams doing mission work and managed a budget as a project director of Teen Mania, a non-denominational Christian youth organization that offers mission trips for teenagers.

"I've wanted to work with USAID since I became interested in sustainable development, and I knew that the Bureau for Africa was exactly where I wanted to work. I'm excited to have an insiders' view of the region and the response," she said.

Mathis also visited Botswana while she was a high school student in Millbrook, Ala. She

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participated in Teen Mania mission trips to that country as well as to Vietnam, Spain, Tanager and Morocco. In addition, she was an exchange student at the University of Hanoi in Vietnam during the summers of 1996 and 1997.

A 1999 graduate of New Life Christian Academy in Millbrook, where she was class valedictorian, Mathis enrolled at UNT in 2001 intending to be a pre-medical student, but decided UNT's emergency administration and disaster planning program would allow her "to focus on the entire relief process, not just the medical aspect" of developing nations.

"I realized that disaster policy is underrepresented, getting little attention until disaster strikes, then losing that attention after the crisis passes. When an underdeveloped country is stricken by disaster or conflict, its government often crumbles, its economy plummets and disease and famine wreak havoc," she said. "I am convinced that disaster mitigation and relief must be paired with development."

As a UNT undergraduate, Mathis was a member of the University Honors Program and Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society. She was the first UNT student selected for the university's NTDC Cooperative Governmental Intern Scholarship, which places students in Washington, D.C., for an in-depth look at the American political process. Mathis was press assistant to U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison during the fall 2003 semester. In addition, she was the first recipient of the Texas State Society's D.C. Scholarship, which is offered to any student from a Texas college or university who will be an intern in Washington, D.C.

In March 2004, Mathis was selected as a finalist for a Harry S. Truman Scholarship, which provides up to \$30,000 to outstanding students who have demonstrated interest in federal, state or local government careers.

She was also a resident assistant in Bruce Hall, executive secretary of the Residence Life Advisor Council and a member of the Residence Hall Association and National Residence Hall Honorary Society. Mathis continues to work for the UNT Office of Housing and Residence Life as a special assistant, overseeing recruitment, selection and training of resident assistants. She is also a research assistant for the UNT Department of Public Administration.

After receiving her master of public administration degree in May 2007, Mathis hopes to work with USAID, eventually becoming a foreign officer for project development for the agency.

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