

UA PR Student Earns Prestigious Grant to Intern with Black Warrior Riverkeeper

For Immediate Release

June 12, 2015

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. – Kristen Ellis, a native of Letohatchee, Ala., has received a grant from the Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation to work with the nonprofit clean water advocacy organization Black Warrior Riverkeeper. Ellis, a senior majoring in public relations at The University of Alabama, will be working as a communications intern for the group throughout the summer. This grant is the highest honor that the [College of Communication and Information Sciences](#) bestows on a student. UA's nationally ranked public relations program has received numerous awards in recent years.

“It’s a huge honor to work with an organization like Black Warrior Riverkeeper that has such a great impact on my home state and is dedicated to preserving its natural beauty,” said Ellis. “Being able to craft public relations strategies for an organization with such far-reaching influence is allowing me to apply what I’ve learned in the classroom and to stretch the limits of what I can really do.”

Black Warrior Riverkeeper works to improve public health, recreation and wildlife habitat by monitoring the Black Warrior River basin, which drains parts of 17 Alabama counties. [American Rivers](#), a national organization, selected the Black Warrior as one of America’s Most Endangered Rivers due to the [Shepherd Bend Mine](#) proposal, which would be built on property primarily owned by The University of Alabama. The proposed coal mine site is directly across the river from a Birmingham Water Works Board intake that supplies drinking water to 200,000 people. Since 2007, Black Warrior Riverkeeper and a growing coalition of over 150 groups have urged UA System Trustees to stop the proposal and thus protect not only the river but also the people that would be impacted by polluted drinking water and increased water bills.

Black Warrior Riverkeeper has steadily forged many positive partnerships with groups at The University of Alabama, including the Alabama Panhellenic Association, UA Center for Sustainable Service & Volunteerism, UA Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility, UA Department of Advertising and Public Relations, UA Environmental Council, UA Environmental Law Society, UA Museums, UA NAACP and numerous UA professors, students, employees and alumni. 542 volunteers generously donated 6,898 community service hours through Black Warrior Riverkeeper projects last year. The vast majority of those volunteers were UA students.

[The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation](#) funds the conservation of natural resources in North America and the Caribbean Basin with emphasis on the United States. The relationship between the Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, The University of Alabama and Black Warrior

Riverkeeper will benefit over a million people living throughout the Black Warrior River watershed, in addition to countless visitors.

“We are so grateful that the Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation supports our exciting partnership with The University of Alabama’s nationally ranked PR program,” said Charles Scribner, Executive Director of Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

“In addition to providing financial support directly to conservation organizations, the Munson Foundation developed a partnership with the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at The University of Alabama,” said Dr. Joseph Phelps, chairman of the department. “The student receives the financial support and excellent experience, and the nonprofit organizations benefit from the student’s efforts in an area that they typically do not have the funds to staff on a full-time basis.”

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Black Warrior Riverkeeper’s mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. The citizen-based nonprofit organization promotes clean water for the sake of public health, recreation, and wildlife habitat throughout the Black Warrior River watershed. To learn more, visit www.BlackWarriorRiver.org.