



CenturyCollege

News Release

November 21, 2008

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Century College Hosts Climate Expert Dr. Mark Seeley

Straight-talking climatologist and meteorologist Dr. Mark Seeley of the University of Minnesota told a Century College audience recently that human actions are a part of the reason for climate change “no ifs, ands or buts.”

“The media often give us messages on climate that are polar extremes,” said Seeley, a frequent guest on Minnesota Public Radio. “It’s either end of the world or there’s nothing going on. The scientific truth is somewhere in the middle.”

While natural variability (volcanic eruptions) and landscape change (de-forestation) play a part in changing our climate, “anthropogenic emissions” (greenhouse gases) also play a strong role, Seeley said.

In Minnesota, the minimum temperatures are trending upward and changing more than the maximums. For example, the average minimum temperature in January was minus 11 from 1951 to 1980; from 1978 to 2007 it was minus 6. Nine of the past 11 heating seasons have been far warmer than average.

While we have fewer nights of extreme cold, we also have a higher frequency of extreme warmth. In addition, the wetter periods are wetter and the dryer periods are dryer. In August 2007, Minnesota for the first time had some counties that were declared federal drought disasters, and others that were declared federal flood disasters.

“It’s the pace of change that is most disturbing,” said Seeley. “We are not only getting warmer, but our water vapor is changing. We are having more frequent outbreaks of tropical weather in Minnesota than we ever had in the past.

Sometimes it feels more like Cancun than Minnesota. Health consequences and the use of air-conditioning are on the increase.”

Unusually warm winters in Minnesota are resulting in shorter frozen periods for lakes and soils, longer outdoor construction seasons, the survival of organisms that used to die out over the winter, reduced energy use for heating and more roadway damage due to increased freezing/thawing cycles.

“Climate change is going to affect the things we care about – the ecosystem, people, animals, water and food, energy and recreation,” said Seeley. “There is a significant role for the conservation ethic and lifestyle. This could help reduce the human footprint on the environment.”

For more information, please visit the website www.climate.umn.edu/seeley.

Seeley’s appearance was part of a series of events and presentations related to Century’s 2008-2009 Common Book selection *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* by Elizabeth Kolbert. Kolbert will speak at Century on Tuesday, March 10, at 7 p.m. in the West Campus Theatre. The public is invited to attend this free event.



Photo: Dr. Mark Seeley at Century College