The University of Minnesota, Morris Student Experience: Exceptional Students, Engaged Learning

The first pillar of University of Minnesota strategic positioning is to ‘recruit, educate, and graduate outstanding students who become highly motivated lifelong learners, leaders and global citizens.’ The University of Minnesota, Morris mission of providing an undergraduate liberal arts education of uncompromising rigor for a diverse student body aligns very directly with this vision. A tightly focused mission as a public honors college has been at the core of the Morris experience since UMM opened its doors in 1960. Campus strategic positioning efforts celebrate long-time success in engaged student learning and raise the bar for ‘the Morris experience’ of the future.

The Morris campus brings the hallmarks of a liberal arts education to students in Minnesota, the U.S., and beyond, within the research and land-grant mission and culture of the University of Minnesota. The University of Minnesota, Morris offers a rigorous and integrated student experience, with virtually all students engaged in the academic community and campus life. The Carnegie Foundation in their Classification of Institutions of Higher Education places the University of Minnesota, Morris in the Baccalaureate Colleges – Arts and Sciences classification. These 274 colleges emphasize undergraduate education, awarding at least half of their degrees at the bachelor’s level and at least half of these degrees in arts and science fields. UMM fills a distinctive niche as one of only 37 public liberal arts colleges included in this classification.

Who are University of Minnesota, Morris Students? Morris students tend to be self-starters who have high expectations. They are involved students who believe in working hard for things that matter to them and who have been successful in doing so. Some statistics that matter include:

- Over 80% of students are from Minnesota, the majority from non-metro counties.
- Entering students have strong academic credentials: 28% from top 10% of high school class, 56% from top 25% of high school class, with an average ACT of 25.
- UMM students are more likely than students at other midwestern universities to be part of historically underrepresented student populations.
  - Students of color comprise 17% of the student body, 21% of first year students; American Indian students comprise 10% of the student body.
  - 30% of students receive Federal PELL grants for families with high financial need.
  - 40% of graduates are first generation college graduates.
- Full-time degree-seeking undergraduates comprise 90% of a +/- 1700 student body.

Work is in progress to realize the campus vision for the future: a student body of 2100 students, increasingly diverse by a variety of measures.

Exceptional Students -- Engaged Learning. Morris students live an exciting integrated undergraduate experience; virtually every student participates actively in campus and community life. While it is rare to find this breadth of student engagement and participation on a campus, it is one
of the hallmarks of a rigorous residential undergraduate liberal arts experience. Student involvement in core engagement areas is increasing (Table 1). Participation levels exceed UM averages by 8% (attending intercollegiate sports events) to 40% (taking a freshman seminar.)

### Table 1. Percent of Morris graduates who:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>Change 02 to 07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attended a performance, concert or exhibit on campus</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attended a special talk, lecture, or panel discussion held on campus</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voted in a federal or state election</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>+12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belonged to a university club or organization</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>took a freshman seminar</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>+76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attended an intercollegiate sports game or match</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>+13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University of Minnesota 2007 Student Experience Survey.

Initiatives to foster similarly high levels of student engagement in additional transformational student learning opportunities (e.g. service learning, study abroad, undergraduate research, civic engagement, multicultural/intercultural opportunities, and green campus programs) are underway. While current engagement rates (summarized in Table 2) lead the UM system and public liberal arts peers, through campus strategic positioning work Morris faculty, staff, and students have articulated a vision for more universal participation as part of the core UMM experience. These experiences are recognized as best practice in undergraduate education, fostering transformational learning and student success. They directly support UMM’s mission to prepare interculturally competent graduates equipped for lives of leadership and service in a diverse, global society.

### Table 2. Percent of Morris graduates who:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>Change 02 to 07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>participated in a community service project</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>+28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participated in a study abroad program</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worked with a faculty member on a shared research or artistic project</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>+18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University of Minnesota 2007 Student Experience Survey.

**A National Leader.** The University of Minnesota, Morris is recognized as a leader among public liberal arts colleges. The National Survey of Student Engagement shows UMM seniors rate their ‘entire educational experience’ significantly higher than seniors across the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges consortium. Morris seniors’ engagement levels significantly exceed COPLAC seniors in key engagement areas:

- Attending art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or theatre performances.
- Working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, etc.)
- Completing foreign language coursework.
- Studying abroad.
Voting in local, state, or national elections.
Tutoring or teaching other students.
Working with a faculty member on a research project outside course/program requirements.
Participating in co-curricular activities.

*National Survey of Student Engagement, Spring 2006.*

The University of Minnesota, Morris student experience is nationally recognized because it links motivated students with a challenging curriculum, strong student-faculty-staff collaborations, enriching educational experiences, and a responsive, human-scaled community. The University of Minnesota, Morris attracts and nurtures students with a passionate spirit for learning and leadership. We offer them a highly integrated, rich educational experience.

Morris students report the highest level of student satisfaction of UM campuses. Graduating seniors’ satisfaction reached a new high of 5.4 (6pt. scale, with 6 = very satisfied) in Spring 2007. These resounding levels of student satisfaction and the success of Morris graduates speak to the value of a public liberal arts college within the University of Minnesota and Minnesota higher education.

**Strengthening the Student Experience.** A presentation to the Faculty, Staff and Student Affairs Committee in October 2000 highlighted three priorities for improving the student experience: food service contract and facilities, intercollegiate athletics, and residential life facilities. Significant progress has been made in each of these priority areas; additional critical work in moving these areas from liabilities to fully realized assets is scheduled for this academic year.

**Current Challenges:**
- Student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.
- Campus living environments to foster learning, meet student demand, support summer programs.
- Fostering intercultural competence for all graduates/members of the campus community.
- Making the liberal arts to ‘life’s work/career’ links visible.

**Current Opportunities:**
- Student Engagement Planner and Portfolio….webs of engagement and learning
- First Year Experience
- Green Prairie Living and Learning Community
- Partnerships for student learning and success

**Policy questions:**
- What are the current challenges and opportunities facing a rigorous, human scaled, residential liberal arts college within the University of Minnesota?
- What are the best ways to help citizens of Minnesota recognize, utilize, and benefit from the University of Minnesota’s distinctive campuses and their programs?
- Strategic positioning efforts have sharpened the University of Minnesota’s focus, fostered reflection and strategic decision-making, increased collaboration across the university, and fostered new partnerships throughout the system. How do we best build structures, policy and practice to continue this good work into the future?