

Michelle's remarks to the Board of Regents
June 2021

I'd like -- in my very few minutes before the Board this morning -- to serenade you with a love song of sorts to Morris: how this campus represents the best of what the University of Minnesota has to offer. I am not a fan of the word "unique," which I believe to be overused and seldom true. But in many ways, the Morris campus is an institution of higher education unlike any other in the United States, and I hope to elevate just a few of the ways that this assertion is true. One has only to step foot on campus to feel the magic that happens at Morris.

I like to think about UMN Morris as a school with an unwavering dedication to its liberal arts mission overlain by an abiding commitment to social justice. The liberal arts are a mindset, an approach, a set of educational values rather than a particular curriculum or set of disciplines. Morris's excellence as a liberal arts institution is recognized widely: just one indication of this is its ranking among the top ten public liberal arts colleges nationally by US News for each of the last 22 years.

While personalized attention from faculty and staff, an abundance of student leadership opportunities, and an education of breadth, depth, and flexibility characterize liberal arts colleges generally, unlike most liberal arts institutions our student body is composed of a significant percentage of first generation college goers and students from low-income backgrounds. UMN Morris is also the only federally recognized four year Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution in the upper Midwest. Measures such as CollegeNET's Social Mobility Index suggest just how well UMN Morris does to prepare students from all backgrounds for rewarding lives that include personal satisfaction as well as economic and social mobility.

Morris graduates contribute to Minnesota in significant ways, with impact that belies our small size and relatively short history as a University of Minnesota campus. Among our alumni we count the Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, the director of Indian Education for the Minneapolis public schools, the newly named dean of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities' College of Education and Human Development, and tens of thousands of others who are making a difference every day in their communities.

It is a testament to the commitment and strength of our campus's relationships with our alumni and friends that we are finishing our "A model for living and learning" campaign, part of the *Driven*. campaign, having achieved more than 150% of our campaign goal, and setting private giving records for 4 of the last 5 years.

The campus was situated in Morris in 1960 because committed community members recognized the power of having a residential liberal arts college located in this rural community and lobbied tirelessly to bring their collective dream to fruition. The University of Minnesota Morris continues to be deeply embedded in significant ways as a local partner, enhancing the quality of life in west central Minnesota and beyond. We collaborate with local government, local schools, local nonprofits, and local businesses.

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Our campus is host to facilities where the community swims, works out, practices, and competes in and watches sporting events, possible because of joint use agreements with the city, county, local school district, and other partners.

We are a key leader in the Morris Model, a broad partnership that focuses on community resilience. With our community partners, UMN Morris has become an internationally recognized leader in sustainability. This week, in fact, we celebrated the one year anniversary of achieving carbon neutrality in electricity, and we produce on campus the most renewable electricity per student of any university in the country.

An important hallmark of UMN Morris is our highly engaged campus community. From across the institution our constituents are invested in our mission, our community, and all that we accomplish here. Led by an active Campus Assembly of some 200 faculty, staff, and students, campus governance is a vital component of life at Morris. That tradition of deep commitment and consultation was the backbone of our robust and highly participatory strategic visioning and planning process, about which you will hear more next month from incoming Acting Chancellor Janet Schrunk Ericksen. The Morris vision and plan endorsed by Campus Assembly sets forth our campus's path as a vibrant center for liberal arts education engaged with the region, state, nation and world. It charts our course with strategic investments launched, new structures and collaborations in place, vital work underway toward sustainable enrollments, and a renewed and shared vision for all of the work that we do.

It has been my privilege to become a member of the Morris community, to work with my colleagues to provide a singular undergraduate experience for our students, to elevate the unrivaled work of the University of Minnesota system, and to ensure that the University of Minnesota Morris will thrive into the future.