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University Relations

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**Two Morris students to study the Latino experience in Morris**

*Summary: Jordan Wentz '15, Dodge Center, and Cristina Montanez '12, El Paso, Texas, are working with Spanish faculty Windy Roberts and Stacey Aronson to chronicle the Latino experience in Morris.*

(February 6, 2012)-The city of Morris is gaining a reputation for harmoniously integrating Latino immigrants into the community. Two University of Minnesota, Morris students, Jordan Wentz '15, Dodge Center, and Cristina Montanez '12, El Paso, Texas, are working with Spanish faculty Windy Roberts, teaching specialist, and Stacey Aronson, associate professor, to chronicle the Latino experience in Morris through a Center for Small Towns project.

In the past 10 years, the Latino population in Morris has risen 274 percent, which is substantial for a small town. Montanez and Wentz are meeting with the Latino community in focus groups to determine what sets Morris apart from other communities. The students want to go beyond the official numbers and connect with the Latino community on a personal level. They feel the focus groups will create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

Montanez, a Spanish and psychology major with a minor in gender and women's sexuality studies, has conducted focus groups before, and her background in sociology and psychology made the position especially appealing. She was also intrigued because she is Hispanic and from a town much closer to the Mexican border than Minnesota. "I see so many people flourish and succeed here. It doesn't work like that in border towns there's so much more violence there. I wanted to find out what it is that makes it work here."

Wentz, a statistics and economics major with a minor in Spanish, thought the position would be a good opportunity to pursue his interest in economic development. And overall, the project seemed like a good experience. Both Wentz and Montanez are fluent in Spanish.

Wentz and Montanez plan to meet with both newcomers and people who have been in Morris awhile. Their hope is to find out if people are getting the services they need, such as financial and English as a Second Language (ESL) services, and how these services have impacted their lives. "We want to see if the events and programs we are providing are actually working," says Wentz. After the focus groups conclude, Montanez and Wentz will work on translating the transcriptions and compiling data. They will be looking for similar themes from different people and different focus groups.

While the focus groups will be about the individuals within the group, Wentz and Montanez hope to learn more about families, too. For example, are the children of Latino immigrants integrating well into their schools? Are the schools providing adequate support, especially with ESL classes?

Roberts has had both Montanez and Wentz in her Spanish classes. She says: "I have known Cristina for two years now. She is an excellent person and a terrific student. When the Latino project came to me, I immediately thought of her. She accepted the job, and we have been working in organizing the focus groups, where she'll have a big role. I am confident that the project will be a success in all its components thanks to Cristina's involvement."

I had the pleasure to meet Jordan last spring as he visited one of my Spanish classes while making his decision about which college he'd attend in the fall. Jordan's Spanish is superb, and I immediately thought about him for the Latino project as well. We had several meetings, and his contributions have been great." Roberts says she is looking forward to "working more with these two outstanding UMM students in the spring to finish the project."

Funding for this project was provided in part by the Otto Bremer Foundation. Created in 1944, the Otto Bremer Foundation assists people in achieving full economic, civic, and social participation in and for the betterment of their communities. The foundation's work to help build and maintain vibrant communities is based on the vision and legacy of Otto Bremer, whose commitment to Bremer Bank communities and to those working to make their lives better, continues to guide the foundation. The Otto Bremer Foundation owns the majority share of Bremer Bank, and a portion of the bank's profits comes to the Foundation as dividends, enabling the Foundation to invest back in the bank communities in the form of grants and program-related investments. In 2010, more than \$24 million in charitable donations were given across the Bremer footprint. Organizations whose beneficiaries are residents of Minnesota, North Dakota, or Wisconsin are eligible to apply for foundation grants, with priority given to communities served by Bremer Bank.

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