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James Morales embraces Morris, UMM as new head of enrollment

Summary:

(August 2, 2004)-James Morales is so excited to be in Morris that he and his family began the process of building a new house even before they arrived in town.

"Some people might rent a house for a certain amount of time to test the waters we decided to jump in feet first and show our commitment to the community as well as to the University," said Morales.

Morales, who is the new associate vice chancellor for enrollment at the University of Minnesota, Morris, is already enthusiastically embracing both the local community and the campus.

"UMM is a wonderful school, a great place to work," said Morales. "It's a great place to come and obtain one's education - for students coming out of high school, or others who want to get a degree."

What makes UMM distinctive is part of what piqued Morales' interest to apply for the position. He had previously been a part of the University of Minnesota system in the 1990s when he worked at the Duluth campus. He knew about all of the U's campuses, and had already worked with colleagues at UMM.

"What makes UMM distinct is the fact that it is a liberal arts college within the U system," said Morales. "I don't think that there is any other liberal arts college in the nation that can lay claim to being part of such a reputable U system. "The two components together are a very strong, winning combination," added Morales. "That's what attracted me here."

It is Morales' hope that he brings a lot of experience to UMM in the area of enrollment. He earned a bachelor's degree in speech communications from the University of Utah in 1991. He received his doctorate in education from the University of Minnesota in 2000.

He has since served for over 10 years in various admissions and enrollment management capacities including admissions counselor, assistant director of admissions, associate director of admissions, assistant to the vice chancellor for academic support and student life, and director of undergraduate admissions. Most recently he has been the director of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn.

While at U-Conn, a very competitive, large public institution that was very aggressive about maintaining its position in the market place - not to mention on the basketball court - Morales honed the skills that he now brings to the Morris campus.

"One of the most important things that I bring to UMM is the ability to really market this institution from an enrollment perspective and to be able to reach the right audience with the messages about how unique and wonderful UMM is," said

Morales.

The quality of the institution that is UMM has never been in question, said Morales. "In fact, another solid incoming class will enroll here this fall as many of the best and brightest students from Minnesota and beyond continue to choose UMM, contrary to the unfounded rumors sometimes heard in the community. What has really been tarnished to a certain degree is that visible polish that needs to be readily evident to the public. I will be working closely with others at UMM to dust off that image and get it out in the right places where it needs to be. It's a matter of reawakening people's awareness of what UMM has to offer."

How does one approach this process of "reawakening"? Morales outlined three basic steps:

The first one: "Everyone has to have the same messages about UMM, and we need to be very vocal with those messages. Everyone at UMM and in the community needs to be looking in the same direction. We need to get the word out about how wonderful this institution is," said Morales.

Second, UMM needs to identify its target audiences. It's not enough, said Morales, to employ the "shot-gun approach," where UMM tries to enroll as many students as possible. A better approach, he continued, is to identify those students who are most likely to enroll and go after those students aggressively.

Finally, and one of the most critical components, said Morales, is the financial aid piece. "You can't recruit a student successfully without the right kind of financial support to offer them," he said. "We'll be looking at the use of our financial aid dollars, our scholarship dollars, to ensure that we're optimizing the awarding of those monies in such a way that makes it attractive - in other words, affordable - for a student to come to UMM."

While the enrollment process appears to some to be a "numbers game," to Morales, "what's more important than just the numbers is the actual people themselves. These are young people who have aspirations, they have goals, they want to do something and be something in life.

"UMM is that springboard for them to become whatever it is that they want to become...and that's important to our local community, as well as to our region and our state, and, beyond that, to our nation.

"So everyone needs to understand that the work we're doing at the U to attract these wonderful students from our local region, from the state, from beyond our borders, is a long-term investment that will pay off year after year after year in the lives of these people and the lives of our communities. And that's what enrollment is really all about," said Morales.

To say that Morales is excited to be in Morris and at UMM is an understatement.

"We've already been embraced by so many people," said Morales. "It's remarkable how many people have come to us and reached out to us, and to our children especially, which, to any parent, is a big concern when you make a transition. I've remarked to people that we've made more friends in our short time here than in the three years we were on the East Coast."

"I'm excited about UMM and its future," said Morales. "(The campus) has a wonderful history, and I'm glad that I get to be a part of determining its future."

Ultimately, concluded Morales, "people will come to realize once again...Wow!...This is the place where my son or daughter should be."

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