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4-29-2020

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Recommended Citation

Communications and Marketing, "Olson-Loy Earns NASPA Pillar of the Profession Award" (2020). *Campus News Archive*. 2773.

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Olson-Loy Earns NASPA Pillar of the Profession Award

Senior student affairs officer at UMN Morris for two decades, Olson-Loy has devoted her career to developing a comprehensive student-life program rooted in the University's mission as a selective, rural public liberal arts college.

Sandra Olson-Loy, vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of Minnesota Morris, has been named a 2020 Pillar of the Profession by the NASPA Foundation—one of the organization's highest honors. Senior student affairs officer at UMN Morris for two decades, Olson-Loy has devoted her career to developing a comprehensive student-life program rooted in the University's mission as a selective, rural public liberal arts college.

Transforming Students Lives

“Sandy's work has been centered in bringing our UMN Morris public liberal arts mission and vision to life,” says Leslie Meek, professor emerita of psychology and a long-time collaborator with Olson-Loy. “She has done so in ways that have transformed this campus and the lives of our students. Her leadership in student affairs on our campus, as well as systemwide within the University of Minnesota, is truly worthy of such recognition.”

UMN Morris students agree. “Vice Chancellor Olson-Loy, above all else, is immensely supportive of all students of the University of Minnesota Morris,” write Sam Rosemark '21, student body president, and Parker Smith '20, student residential hall director. “She has a passion for encouraging and aiding students to be their best selves.”

Students note Olson-Loy's role in shaping a campus with a strong legacy of student leadership and resources to support the success of students from all backgrounds.

Meek and other colleagues describe the enthusiasm, leadership, breadth of vision, and successful collaborations with faculty, staff, and student leaders that characterize Olson-Loy's work. Chancellor Emerita Jacqueline Johnson cites Olson-Loy's leadership of planning teams for a new LEED Gold “green” residence hall – the Green Prairie Community – and Morris Healthy Eating with its local food partnerships as part of UMN Morris's national top-10 rating on the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) Sustainable Campus Index for baccalaureate colleges.

“Sandy Olson-Loy is a pillar of the University of Minnesota Morris community,” states Chancellor Michelle Behr. “Sandy's strong institutional knowledge and experience are well balanced by her forward-looking understanding of the changes that are impacting higher education and our institution.” Behr notes Olson-Loy's leadership in a UMN systemwide mental health resource

network and campus recognition as a federally recognized Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institution as just two examples of how Olson-Loy's "leadership and collaboration have materially and meaningfully improved the quality of our students' experiences."

Professional Home

Following her appointment as UMN Morris Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Olson-Loy found her professional home in NASPA. An active volunteer, educational session presenter, and leader, she co-chaired NASPA's Small Colleges and Universities Institute for senior student affairs officers in 2006 and, a year later, was invited to serve as the first division chair for small colleges on the NASPA board of directors.

About Pillars of the Profession

The Pillar of the Profession Award honors individuals who have created a lasting impact on their institutions, leaving a legacy of extraordinary service, and who have demonstrated a sustained lifetime professional distinction in student affairs and higher education.

NASPA will celebrate the Class of 2020 Pillars of the Profession at the 2020 Awards Celebration Virtual Watch Party live on their Facebook page, Thursday, April 30, at 7 p.m. CDT.

About NASPA

NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education is a leading association in university student affairs with more than 15,000 members at 1,500 institutions in the U.S. and around the world.