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#MorrisMission Earns Shirley Bird Perry Staff-Driven Program of the Year

The award recognizes innovative and impactful programs on college campuses.

#MorrisMission at the University of Minnesota Morris has earned Association of College Unions International’s (ACUI) 2021 Shirley Bird Perry Staff-Driven Program of the Year award. The award recognizes an innovative and impactful program implemented primarily by staff on campus.

When the COVID-19 pandemic sent students across the country back home in March 2020, colleges and universities struggled to find ways to keep their students engaged and connected from afar. According to David Israels-Swenson, senior director of Student Activities, Health and Wellness, it was amidst this chaos of Zoom meetings, campus streaming services, and online trivia programs that the #MorrisMission was born.

“The challenge to provide support, distraction, and community in a time of crisis was not unique to Morris, but one of the things that makes Morris feel like home to many, is the close knit community that it provides,” says Israels-Swenson. “It was critical to find some way to keep our students, faculty, and staff together while not adding to the ever-building Zoom fatigue. The Student Activities, Conferences and Events staff, put their heads together and came up with a program idea that utilized social media and asked students to create innovative and exciting images and videos addressing weekly challenges.”

The goals of the program were simple, and so were the rules: prompts were posted each week, and students responded with short video entries on social media. Challenges ranged from showing off school spirit to recreating famous artworks to “taking out” the recycling. In keeping things simple, the team easily met their goals of encouraging students to engage with each other and the campus through social media, increasing institutional video content, and highlighting familiar faculty and staff in new ways.

“It quickly became apparent that the #MorrisMission program was a tether to what it means to be a Morris student—engaged, creative, clever, connected to each other, and always willing to be a bit silly,” Israels-Swenson adds. “For a few hundred dollars in gift cards and less than 5 staff hours per week, we created a six-week program that reminded our students, faculty, and staff of what it means to be a member of the Morris community and helped them to maintain a sense of connection with each other and the campus during a tumultuous time.”

After a successful spring series, the #MorrisMission returned in fall 2020. All #MorrisMission materials are available on the Morris campus Youtube channel.