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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
MORRIS

Fate and a commitment to students brings Jordan Cofer to UMN Morris

(August 5, 2024) For Jordan Cofer, it seems as though the fates conspired to bring him to the University of Minnesota Morris.

Well, fate and a deep commitment to improving students' lives.

Cofer stepped into the role of vice chancellor of academic affairs and dean on July 1, after serving as associate provost at Georgia College, as well as the director of the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities. He has also held administrative positions of interim dean of arts and sciences, assistant vice president of academic affairs, and director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

Cofer first heard of UMN Morris while serving on the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC), an alliance of public liberal arts colleges and universities. UMN Morris is a founding member of the consortium, which includes 30 public liberal arts colleges and universities in 27 states and one Canadian province.

Cofer is a keen advocate of the public liberal arts curriculum, which he says is a life-changing education.

"I was lucky enough to attend a liberal arts institution. The liberal arts model has survived because we know it works. In fact, it works so well that a lot of the major land grants try to duplicate it. The fact that you can offer this kind of high touch experience that a private school offers, but do it at a public price point, is amazing."

Although Cofer enjoyed his work at Georgia College, he was also looking for a way to expand the impact that higher education can have, particularly for first-generation students. A public liberal arts college like UMN Morris seemed like a good fit.

"Cole Woodcox, COPLAC's executive director, called me and said, 'Hey, I don't know if you know about this but the University of Minnesota Morris is going to have an opening for the vice chancellor of academic affairs. You should really take a look when the ad comes out and think about it.'"

While waiting for the opening to be announced, fate stepped in again.

“I was at the American Association of Colleges and Universities event in Chicago and I happened to be at a table with John Hoffman, the president of Bemidji State University, and his wife. He had been at University of Minnesota Crookston, so he knew Janet [Schrunk Ericksen] very well.

“So as this dinner progressed, I started kind of asking questions and then I told [John], hey, there's this opening. He talked so much about how great Morris is. Then his wife mentioned how they're from California and they love Minnesota.”

It was, apparently, just the sign that Cofer needed. His selection for the position was announced in December 2023.

Cofer is excited to help further UMN Morris's public liberal arts mission. He founded the journal, *Undergraduate Research*, and served on the executive board for the Georgia Undergraduate Research Consortium. He has been active working on high impact practices and innovative pedagogies, specifically undergraduate research.

“I've done a lot of work around high-impact practices, basically 11 practices that make a big impact on students' deep learning. UMN Morris feels like the kind of place where you have that big impact for students, providing some signature experiences. I really want to help support faculty and staff who are creating these experiences.”

Morris is the smallest community that Cofer and his wife have lived in, but he's found the community and the campus to be very welcoming.

“‘Minnesota nice’ is such a stereotype, but it's very true. Plus, I love the walkability of the town. I can walk everywhere, you know walk my dogs and see all these people, and walking downtown is huge! Seeing how the town has really bought into sustainability—you don't see that with small farm towns everywhere. I certainly didn't see that in Georgia and I was at an agricultural school.”

Other things Cofer didn't see in Georgia include butter carvings and pull-tabs, so he's looking forward to the Minnesota State Fair and buying his first pull-tab.

