

# Board of Trustees

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

September 23, 2021

Thank you, and greetings to all the students, faculty, staff and guests joining us for today's meeting.

As I begin this report, I echo Chair Studley's enthusiasm for and commitment to the future of Central Michigan University. During this meeting, we will candidly discuss the challenges we face. We know there are difficult decisions ahead, yet we are a community that can, and does, work together to achieve our common purpose. I believe we will do more than survive, I believe we will thrive.

As Chair Studley has just mentioned, our focus over the past 18 months was on health, safety and the survival of our institution. While important work on our Strategic Envisioning Process, including our academic program prioritization, continued throughout the year, our emphasis was primarily on remaining open to serve students, serve communities and advance knowledge while mitigating risks associated with the COVID-19 virus.

I remain extremely proud of CMU's response. As I have mentioned previously, our faculty and staff transitioned quickly to ensure we continued to serve our students — implementing HyFlex technology, adopting new health and safety practices, and offering services and support both in person and virtually. Our students demonstrated incredible resilience in the face of challenges, finding new ways to engage with their faculty members, classmates and friends.

As a community, we truly demonstrated a Fired-Up Attitude and a commitment to achieving our mission.

### **Emerging from survival mode**

Now, we are moving out of survival mode and back into engagement mode. We are reestablishing the robust and engaging life on campus that makes CMU such a unique place to learn, work and live.

During yesterday's Trustees-Student Liaison Committee meeting, we heard from several student leaders who were very excited to once again see their classmates and colleagues in person. While they were very creative in maintaining connections virtually last year, they all shared how much more engaged they feel meeting face-to-face.

In August, we welcomed more than a thousand new first-year and transfer students to campus with our IMPACT and Leadership Safari programs. We introduced them to registered student organizations and student services through our Mainstage and Get Acquainted Day events. In the weeks since classes began, we have seen the return of live student performances, and many of our student-athletes are back on the field of competition. We kicked off our year-long New Venture Competition, which prepares students to launch their own small businesses, and we hosted a special football viewing party at Kelly/Shorts Stadium for our returning sophomores, many of whom had a very nontraditional first-year experience.

Engagement is a vital component of student success. Students who actively participate in campus life are more likely to stay on the path to graduation and achieve their personal and professional goals. Therefore, we are making every effort to ensure that our students have opportunities to get involved — and we are making sure they can do so as safely as possible.

### **COVID-19 mitigation strategies**

As we have done throughout the pandemic, CMU has been closely monitoring trends in the COVID-19 virus and adapting our policies according to our circumstances. As the delta variant continues to pose a threat to our community, we have continued to enforce health and safety practices designed to mitigate risk and slow the spread of the virus.

Our “Protect Yourself. Protect Others” plan requires all students, faculty and staff to either be fully vaccinated or to participate in weekly COVID-19 testing. And, in line with recommendations from the CDC and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, we also continue to require mask use in most indoor spaces and daily health screenings for all individuals coming to our campus. We believe this layered approach will be effective in keeping CMU safely open to serve students and communities, and to create and share new knowledge.

### **Enrollment**

I will touch on enrollment in my year-end report later in this meeting, but I do want to briefly address it now. Although our final enrollment data will not be available until later in the year, as we continue to enroll students in our Global Campus Fall II and Fall III sessions, we can make reasonable projections now — and there is both good news and room for improvement.

We have seen lower than expected results in main campus first-year, transfer and graduate students; however, we have seen strong growth in enrollment for all groups in our Global Campus programs. It also has been wonderful to see the return of international students to CMU. Thanks to our outreach efforts, including many virtual recruitment events, undergraduate and graduate international enrollment is up significantly. Welcoming diverse international students from many backgrounds to CMU truly enriches the educational experience for all students.

As one university with both in-person and online offerings and a robust experience to offer international students, we have opportunities to grow in many ways. We will pursue them aggressively.

And, importantly, as we work toward increasing new student enrollment, we also are focused on retaining current students. Our current first-to-second-year retention rate is approximately 77%, and overall student retention is around 89%. With our increased emphasis on proactive academic advising, investment in student support services such as mentoring programs and our Counseling Center, and focus on improving the quality of the entire student experience, we expect to see these rates continue to climb.

### **Budget and finance update**

During the June meeting, we announced our shift away from the Responsibility Center Management model — which the university used for more than 20 years. The RCM model is effective when budgets and enrollments are stable or increasing; it is not effective for our current circumstances. Instead, we are moving toward a model based on actual prior year expenditures and established strategic priorities.

We have enlisted the support of the Huron Consulting Group to assist in the development of this new model. We will establish a committee of faculty, staff and administrators, led by Nick Long, vice president of finance and administrative services, to guide the process. This new model will be both transparent and flexible, allowing us to be nimble in response to the volatility of enrollment cycles and our university's changing needs.

Again, we will approach development of this new model in the spirit of shared governance; we will involve members of our faculty, staff, administration and others in the process.

As we may not achieve our target enrollment goals for this academic year, we must review our budget plan to ensure we remain balanced. It is imperative that we continue to invest in areas of growth for CMU, which may require shifting and reallocating resources. As we update our budget model and adapt to address our fiscal realities, we will do so with our strategic pathways, goals and priorities in mind.

This week, the higher education budget was passed by both chambers of the Michigan state legislature. The budget plan includes a one-time 3.9% increase in operation grant funding to our current appropriation for this fiscal year, which would amount to just over an additional \$3.4 million. In addition, under this budget plan, CMU would receive an additional one-time 1% increase for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins October 1. Combined with funding anticipated for the North American Indian Tuition Waiver reimbursement, this amounts to just over \$90.4 million for CMU in the year ahead. To be very clear: Both increases are one-time only funds. We cannot expect nor rely on them for future years.

The legislature also has approved an appropriation for the seven universities, including CMU, participating in the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System. The amount distributed to each university will be based on their share of the total combined payrolls.

The budget now moves to the governor's office for approval. We will continue to monitor its progress and will report back to our university community as we learn more.

This month, alumni and supporters honored CMU's 129th anniversary with a weeklong giving event. Our donors and friends contributed more than \$360,000 to funds that support student success, including the Students First and Finish Up Chips scholarship funds, the Student

Emergency Fund and Student Food Pantry. As we continue to build our culture of philanthropy at CMU, we will strengthen our ability to weather future crises and sustain our mission.

### **Investing in infrastructure**

CMU continues the important work of our Strategic Envisioning Process, and a key focus of this work is identifying and removing structural impediments that prohibit our growth and success.

Lack of appropriate technology has been one of the most significant challenges to our progress to date. This includes the platforms we have used in the past to communicate with prospective students, the mechanisms we use to offer distance learning and online education, and the management systems we use to coordinate everything from student records to back-end operational processes. We are making significant investments to address these challenges, beginning with the use of a new student engagement platform called Slate. With Slate, we will be able to more accurately target prospective students much earlier in the college exploration process, and to communicate with them in more personalized ways. In addition, our largest marketing tool, our website, is being completely overhauled, and a new, more user-friendly site will launch at the end of this year.

We also are addressing the physical infrastructure of our campus, with the understanding that our campus must continue to offer facilities that meet or exceed students' expectations.

We continue to upgrade our residence halls, as well. Following the success of updates to Carey Hall in 2020, CMU began similar renovations to our living and learning community in Troutman Hall. In addition, today we are asking the Board of Trustees to approve a new investment in campus living — a \$1.5 million apartment project. The new apartments will be located on Washington Street and will eventually replace the Kewadin and Northwest apartment complexes.

We have a truly beautiful residential campus, and we are taking steps to ensure that current and future students can enjoy it fully.

### **Highlights from our first month**

Although we are only a few weeks into the new academic year, we have plenty of good news to celebrate.

First, please join me in congratulating Edwin Williamson for being CMU's first student to be honored by the Academy of American Poets. Edwin, a graduate student studying creative writing in the Department of English Language and Literature, received the Alike Perroti and Seth Frank "Most Promising Young Poet" award for his poem "Life As We Know It."

Edwin, congratulations on this wonderful recognition.

Students returning to campus in August were treated to a beautiful new garden outside Park Library. Students from CMU's Central Sustainability group and the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College established the Three Sisters Ethnobotanical Garden to shine a light on Indigenous culture and traditions. With support from the CMU Greenhouse and several academic departments, this is a visual reminder of our important relationship with our neighbors and friends in the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe.

Also in August, 104 future physicians donned their first white coats as members of the CMU College of Medicine. This class, chosen from more than 6,500 applicants, is one of our most diverse yet. We are excited to follow their journeys to become qualified, compassionate and culturally competent health care leaders. In addition, we built upon our commitment to meeting Michigan's health care needs with a new nursing partnership with Mid Michigan College. This unique start-to-finish pathway allows students to complete their associate degree in nursing at Mid Michigan and their bachelor's degree at CMU, empowering them to begin working right away.

Last month, CMU received a four-year, \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to support faculty research in materials science. With this funding, physics faculty members Koblár Alan Jackson and Juan Peralta will lead CMU's efforts to analyze and predict chemical reactions at the atomic level, opening the door for innovations in quantum computing, improved energy generation and storage, and more.

Earlier this month, we welcomed alumni and friends back to campus for the annual Alumni Awards. We presented 10 recent graduates with our "10 Within 10 Awards" and celebrated the achievements of seven alumni, community partners and friends. Their achievements are a testament to the impact of CMU. We truly are educating and empowering the leaders of today and tomorrow so they can make a difference in communities around the world.

And finally, this evening, CMU students, faculty and alumni from the Fashion Merchandising and Design program are participating for the first time in the Detroit Month of Design. Their exhibit focuses on the connection between fashion and issues including diversity, equity, inclusion and sustainability, and showcases the talent and skill of our university community members.

This is the second community engagement event hosted by our Detroit Office team this month, following a successful and highly entertaining program during the Detroit Jazz Festival. In the months ahead, we have several other opportunities planned to further and more deeply engage current and prospective students, families, alumni, employer partners and friends.

In just a few short weeks, members of our university community have accomplished remarkable things. Their success sets the tone for an exciting year ahead for us all.

### **Closing**

I look forward to sharing additional information on our challenges and successes, as well as our opportunities moving forward, in my year-end report.

We are moving into a new phase. We are not simply returning to normal, we are entering a new normal — one that we will create together.

Chair Studley, this concludes my remarks.

Thank you.