



Board of Trustees

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

June 25, 2024

Thank you and good morning Chair Regis, Trustees and welcome to everyone joining us in the room and watching the livestream.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to acknowledge an outstanding achievement by one of our Trustees.

We have learned that Trustee Ed Plawecki will be awarded the 2024 Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award by the State Bar of Michigan. The honor is awarded to those who demonstrate the highest standards of integrity, fairness, leadership, excellence, dedication to principle and dedication to the ideals of democracy.

The award not only recognizes Ed's service on the CMU Board of Trustees, but a lifetime of public service roles that include serving as a Wayne County Circuit Court Judge, Wayne County Commissioner, Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority Board Member and Deputy Mayor of Dearborn Heights.

Congratulations Trustee Plawecki on this well-deserved honor! We are fortunate to benefit from your dedication to serving others.

Much has taken place in the weeks since we last met, including one of my favorite events... commencement.

In May, we celebrated the graduation of more than 2,400 Central Michigan University students who are now Fired-Up CMU alumni. With the degrees they worked tirelessly to earn, I am proud to see them set their course in the world and am confident in their future success.

We know that earning a college degree remains extremely valuable and life changing. Research from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found individuals with a college degree will earn more than a million dollars more in their lifetime than those without a college degree.

We also know a degree makes individuals more employable. At CMU, our First Destination Survey found nearly 94% of our graduates are employed or are continuing their education within six months of graduation. Although that places CMU among the best in the state, a goal of our strategic plan is to further increase the employment rate of recent CMU graduates in the years ahead.

The end of the spring semester was once again packed with events offering our students, faculty, staff and community wonderful experiences.

This year's New Venture Challenge featured student entrepreneurs who pitched 40 ventures. They included a wide range of ideas from flexible cleats and chip dispensers to a rural healthcare nonprofit. CMU senior Lawai'a Brown took home the top high growth award and the overall award with his venture, Dominator Cleats, for a total of \$20,000 in start-up capital.

Congratulations to Lawai'a and to the many other creative innovators who won seed money to grow their ideas.

CMU's Diversity Symposium brought several regional and nationally recognized experts to campus for important and meaningful conversations around topics of inclusion and diversity. Many of our students, faculty, staff and community partners participated in these discussions, and several are already implementing what they learned in their classrooms, offices and groups.

The Diversity Gala, held that same week, was a fun way to celebrate the strength that diversity and inclusion bring to our university community. A huge thank you to Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stephens and Dr. Nikita Murry for organizing these important and enlightening events.

In May, the Gus Macker basketball tournament kicked-off its 50th year on our campus. The event was created by CMU alumnus Scott McNeal, and is truly a celebration of basketball, community and the spirit of competition.

The Gus Macker event also provides real-world experience for students in CMU's Recreation, Parks and Leisure Services Administration

program. All their hands-on work means they are highly competitive when they graduate.

Our campus came alive at the end of May with the Michigan Special Olympics State Summer Games. This year's event was special as we celebrated the 50th year the games have been held at CMU. The energy and excitement of the athletes, families and volunteers was once again a testament to the power of inclusion.

Last week, I was honored to take part in a community-wide Juneteenth celebration. Together with our partners in the Mount Pleasant community, CMU's Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion organized a series of events over three days that included a documentary film presentation and keynote speakers. It culminated with an outstanding community Juneteenth celebration in Island Park.

Events like these cement our ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion at CMU.

Not all learning takes place on our campus, and some of our students began their summer by volunteering their time and talent to help others.

The Mary Ellen Brandell Volunteer Center coordinated an Alternative Break which had CMU students volunteering in Arizona. They gathered timber at Coconino National Forest to donate to an Indigenous community for home heating. The CMU group also worked to help the park service prepare Grand Canyon National Park for the busy summer season.

These volunteers represent CMU in a very positive way while they make a real difference in the lives of others.

And we have proof that our students are more civically engaged than their peers at other institutions. The latest National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement – or N-Solve – report shows the CMU student voter participation jumped 11% in the 2022 election over 2018. Student voting rates at CMU also exceed the national average by 15%!

Our students are increasingly interested in making their voices heard through their vote. Thank you to the volunteer center staff who work hard to make this happen through initiatives like Central Votes and the Central Voter Coalition.

CMU's new student orientation staff has been busy this month welcoming our newest students and their supporters to campus and showing them what life at Central is all about. Having met with many of these groups, I am confident we are adding to our university community many enthusiastic leaders for the years ahead.

Our intense efforts in recruitment continue to result in positive enrollment trends. As we heard from vice president of student recruitment and retention, Jennifer DeHaemers, we fully expect to meet and surpass our enrollment goals.

All metrics for new, first time in any college and new transfer students are trending in a very positive direction for the fall semester. Deposits are up, orientation reservations are up, housing contracts for freshmen are up and early enrollment numbers are very encouraging. In fact, freshman deposits are in the best position in the last 10 years.

Positive enrollment trends give us reason for excitement heading into the fall semester at CMU. More new students will start their journey with us in August. And because of the dedication to students demonstrated by our administration, faculty, staff and Trustees, we know their experience with us will be a rewarding one.

As we continue our work to be defined by the success of our students, there have been several notable faculty and staff changes I would like to acknowledge today.

Dean of The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow College of Health Professions, Tom Masterson, will return to a faculty role in the college, after serving as dean for the past 8 years.

I would like to thank Tom for his leadership of health professions through several periods of growth and expansion. And I am happy to see he will continue his work alongside our students in the classroom.

I also want to thank Dr. Greg Zimmerman, who will take on the role of interim dean to continue guiding our health professions programs to success.

Long-serving director of the CMU Biological Station on Beaver Island, Don Uzarski, is stepping down after 15 remarkable years.

Dr. Uzarski's leadership has been transformative. During his tenure, he spearheaded a \$30 million research program in partnership with the

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and secured many more grants worth several million dollars.

I would like to thank Don for his dedication to research and vital hands-on learning experiences for our students.

The important work of the CMU Biological Station will continue under the capable leadership of Dr. Kevin Pangle, who will build on the station's legacy of excellence.

There is outstanding news to share regarding CMU's ability to secure grant funding for research and other projects. For perspective, prior to 2021 CMU had never been awarded grants totaling more than \$20 million in a year. In 2022 and 2023, CMU secured more than \$25 million in annual grant funding. This year, the Office of Research and Graduate Studies reports we have once again broken a record. CMU has been awarded more than \$35 million from 166 successful grant applications.

These grants support our mission to make a collective impact on the communities we serve. They fund initiatives that improve life in rural and underserved areas focused on things like helping Michigan teachers earn credentials, increasing access to behavioral health care for young children and planning for climate change resiliency.

Also supported by CMU's record grantsmanship are research and initiatives restoring the Great Lakes, improving human health, gaining a better understanding of the world around us through physics and removing barriers for women in STEM fields.

At our last meeting in April, we wished legendary CMU wrestling coach – and soon to be inductee into the CMU Athletic Hall of Fame – Tom Borrelli a happy and healthy retirement. Now, we are lucky to welcome Coach Borrelli's protégé and highly decorated former CMU wrestler Ben Bennett as our new head coach. Ben's leadership will inspire continued success for our wrestling program.

And, while we are talking about our student-athletes, CMU Athletics announced another successful semester in the classroom. Our student-athletes spring semester grade point average was 3.24, making it the 51st consecutive semester they have had a GPA of 3.0 or better.

Nearly half of CMU student-athletes earned a 3.5 GPA or higher in the last academic year. Well done!

The success of our students is always our most important priority, and our strategic plan goals reflect that emphasis. This summer, our implementation of that plan continues. We have already completed several workshop sessions to identify ways to effectively implement the plan and its priorities.

We are experiencing tremendous buy-in from those throughout the entire university.

Faculty and staff workgroups have been assigned to each of the plan's priorities. These groups are making progress on developing ways to meet SMART goals and finding creative ways to turn the plan into reality. It is exciting to see them discover many connections between our priorities that will strengthen our effort to fully implement the plan.

Like all Michigan businesses, educational institutions and organizations, CMU has been impacted by years of unprecedented inflation. While inflation has cooled somewhat, some costs, such as wages and insurance, continue to climb.

The proposed budget for consideration by this Board is a fiscally responsible one. It reflects strategic investments in our key priorities and the work of faculty, staff and administrators to realize cost savings and efficiencies wherever possible.

I want to acknowledge and thank everyone for their hard work to reach a balanced budget that prioritizes student success, academic excellence and service to our community.

The budget includes adjustments to rates for tuition, housing and food. These changes allow us to offer the highest quality education and services to our students. Even with these necessary adjustments, CMU remains a tremendous value for students and their families.

We believe the scenario presented today will ensure CMU's tuition remains competitive among Michigan's public institutions and continues to provide outstanding housing and food options.

On the subject of tuition and fees, student concerns brought to the Board of Trustees earlier this year concerning the university's \$50 withdrawal fee prompted us to further explore the issue.

I have approved a proposal to eliminate the withdrawal fee and to restructure our tuition refund policy to achieve consistency for students taking classes online and those who are studying on campus.

Effective this fall, all students who drop or withdraw from one or more courses during the second week of the semester will receive a 50% credit of tuition and fees. Previously there was no refund past the first week of classes for on-campus students. Of course, there are some exceptions to this policy, and an appeals process through the Registrar's Office remains in place.

In order to keep tuition, housing and food rates competitive, we have boosted our efforts to increase philanthropic support for CMU.

Today, I have invited Trustee Emerita Sarah Opperman, Chair of CMU's Advancement Board, to share news about the university's fundraising success in the 2023-2024 fiscal year that will end on June 30.

CMU supporters want to give to our university, and outreach and legacy giving efforts by our advancement team are breaking records. I am delighted to report that we have experienced the best fundraising year in CMU history!

As vice president for advancement Jennifer Cotter reported, the university has raised more than \$25.4 million this fiscal year. That significantly exceeds the goal of \$22.5 million.

Our university advancement and alumni relations teams are using this momentum to push forward into the next fiscal year. There is excitement surrounding the many planned engagement events ahead, and the initiation of a comprehensive campaign that will begin very soon.

Everything we do – from our academic programming to our fundraising efforts is focused – as always – on fulfilling our mission to ensure that CMU is always defined by the success of our students and alumni and our impact on the communities we serve.

Thank you, Chair Regis, this concludes my report.