



President's Report TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

December 3, 2020

Thank you, Chair Keith, and good morning, trustees, students, faculty, staff and others who are joining us for this meeting virtually today.

Today, we begin with a special message of congratulations to the graduates of the Class of 2020. Earlier this month, we held a livestream event to launch our virtual commencement celebration website, recognizing the 5,457 graduates who completed their CMU journey this year.

These graduates completed their degrees during one of the most challenging years in the history of higher education, and their grit, passion and dedication truly exemplify CMU's Fired Up spirit. Our university community is truly proud of and inspired by their achievements.

Again, this has been one of the most extraordinary years in our university's history. Together, we navigated a polarizing presidential election; engaged in the national conversation about race, equity and equality; and continued our mission of education, research and service — all while weathering a global pandemic that continues to affect us daily.

To say that it has been frustrating and even overwhelming feels like an understatement, yet we can all take pride in our community's response to each of the challenges and opportunities we have faced.

We set out to achieve a goal many thought impossible — to hold an on-campus, in-person fall semester — because we knew that face-to-face learning was the best option for many of our students. And thanks to the efforts of our entire community, we succeeded where so many other institutions did not.

Some universities welcomed students back to campus only to send students away after only a few weeks. Others were unable to resume any in-person instruction for the entire semester, and many struggled with large outbreaks. Our successes were entirely due to the hard work, determination, caring, social responsibility and Fired Up spirit of our students, faculty, staff and partners in the Mount Pleasant community.

- Our Emergency Management Team worked with university leaders to develop a detailed return-to-campus plan based on health and safety protocols recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This team meets several times a week to monitor our circumstances, review new information and guidance, modify existing plans, and suggest new options to keep CMU moving forward. For example, one suggestion was to begin the semester two weeks early so CMU could finish the year ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday.
- We implemented a robust testing strategy including on-campus testing and surveillance testing, as well as rapid testing for student-athletes, coaches and athletic support staff; and our Office of Information Technology created a special health screening app for students, faculty and staff.
- When we saw spikes in cases, we moved quickly to quarantine or isolate individuals. Residential students moved into Wheeler Hall, where they were well cared for by our Office of Residence Life, dining services and other support areas.
- Students, faculty and staff from our health professions programs worked closely with our local health department on contact tracing, helping us to quickly identify and isolate affected individuals.
- We partnered with area apartment complex and rental property owners to curb social gatherings and worked with bar and restaurant owners and retail owners to reinforce best practices.
- We continue to meet frequently with city and county leaders, law enforcement leaders, and local health leaders, often twice a week, to coordinate efforts and work as a team. Our collaborative partnership was recognized by the governor's office as a model for other communities to follow.

Thanks to these efforts, we were able to significantly limit the spread of the virus on our campus and in our community. Our positivity rates remain well below the state's rates — 7.83 percent for symptomatic and close contacts and 0.86 percent for surveillance.

And, throughout it all, we continued to offer our students extraordinary learning opportunities and support services.

- We adapted to new teaching and learning modalities, including HyFlex, and to new ways of engaging in co-curricular activities, such as internships and registered student organizations.
- We installed HyFlex capacity in 361 classrooms and saw a more than 900% increase in use of virtual platforms for meetings, events and activities.
- Students could choose a credit/no credit option for many of their classes without the worry of losing their scholarships.
- CMU's Counseling Center and CARE Teams reached out to students with tools and resources to manage stress and care for their mental health.
- Offices in our Student Affairs division developed virtual events and activities to help students build community and feel engaged, including the return of the drive-in movie!

Many are aware that football, and now basketball, have resumed practice and competition. It is important to also note the outstanding work of our performing arts. University Theatre performed three amazing productions this semester, and our School of Music hosted weekly concerts — all broadcast live — for virtual audiences.

The innovation and creativity shown by our students, faculty and staff has been nothing short of inspiring.

I had the opportunity to attend the presentation of several student reports examining CMU's response to the pandemic. In these class projects, students overwhelmingly reported appreciation for the university's support for their academic efforts through the work of our staff and faculty. Over 80% of survey respondents rated CMU's plans and response to the pandemic in a very positive light. And while the students acknowledged shortcomings of the HyFlex model, they also strongly felt this mode of instruction has enormous potential and should be continued.

In addition, last week we received the initial results of our National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This national survey found that 87% of our students felt CMU kept them safe and healthy during the pandemic; 93% felt CMU emphasized providing academic support for students; and 71% of the student respondents rated their entire educational experience as good/excellent, with an additional 24% rating their experiences fair. While there are items we need to continually improve on, such as additional study spaces on campus, continued support for technology and new pedagogical practices, we, as a university community, should be proud of our performance navigating this pandemic.

It is clear: **CMU has set the leadership standard**, and we know other institutions are watching and modeling our efforts. I want to reiterate my appreciation to our students, faculty and staff, alumni, supporters, and partners for their tireless efforts to make this semester possible.

Fired Up for Spring

We are moving forward with plans to hold on-campus and in-person learning experiences in spring, as we have done throughout the year. However, we also are making alternative plans to prepare for a possible shift back to remote-only instruction should the need arise. We will continue to monitor the guidance from our local, state and national leaders and will communicate any changes or updates as needed over the winter break.

We are launching our Fired Up for Spring website this week to provide our university community the information and resources essential for a successful start in January. I remain optimistic that we will be able to build upon our successes from this fall to make 2021 a great year for living, learning and working at CMU.

Fiscal realities

We must continue to address our fiscal realities. CMU's two largest sources of revenue are tuition and state appropriations, and both are likely to be reduced in the year ahead.

The state of Michigan suffered significant revenue losses during the pandemic and is anticipating a budget shortfall of up to a billion dollars or more. Although state support for CMU remained flat this year, we need to prepare for the possibility of reductions next year.

Enrollment, too, is declining in colleges and universities nationwide. This is due both to ongoing changes in student demographics and also as a result of COVID-19. Many students who had previously planned to attend a four-year college are now considering plans to take a gap year or enroll first in a community college or trade school. Some have even decided against pursuing higher education entirely.

While we are actively working to address both of these challenges, we must prepare now for the impact these changes will have on our budget.

Closing thoughts

While 2020 has been a difficult year, it has not been without joy and reasons for celebration.

Earlier this month, I celebrated the 100th anniversary of CMU's Student Government Association with current students as well as alumni representing several decades of leadership. It was wonderful to hear how our alumni have successfully transferred their student leadership experiences at CMU into leadership roles in their workplaces and communities.

As one 1969 graduate said, "I wanted to change my world, and I've gotten the chance to be part of that positive change."

I also had the opportunity to test my piloting skills in the high-tech flight simulator developed by faculty member Alex Redei. The Paragalactic space flight program he developed with students was showcased at the Fleischmann Planetarium in Reno, Nevada. It is a fantastic example of how hands-on learning at CMU can lead to real-world experiences for students.

Faculty in CMU's College of Education and Human Services are leading the statewide conversation on the digital learning gap highlighted by the ongoing pandemic. They are offering tools and guidance to help front-line teachers reach their students in their new virtual classrooms.

These are just three brief examples of the rigor, relevance and excellence happening at CMU community every day; there is much, much more to take pride in and to celebrate.

Chair Keith, this concludes my report.