

Board of Trustees

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

September 18, 2025

Thank you, Chair Regis and Trustees. Welcome to everyone who is here today and those watching on the livestream.

I am also delighted to welcome the new president of the CMU Alumni Association Board of Directors who is joining us today. Erica Romac is a proud 2013 CMU graduate, and I would like to thank her for her leadership and dedication to strengthening alumni engagement with the university.

I also would like to welcome two leaders who have recently taken on crucial roles at CMU. In August, Harlan Teller began serving as CMU's Vice President of University Communications and Chief Marketing Officer. Harlan's unique experience developing strategies to engage prospective students will play an important role in our efforts to position CMU as a university of first choice. Welcome, Harlan.

In our College of Health Professions, Jennifer Simpson has joined us as dean. Jennifer brings a wealth of leadership and professional experience to the position and is committed to student success as they prepare for successful careers in the health professions. Welcome, Jennifer.

It has been an exciting and busy start to the academic year at Central Michigan University. IMPACT, Leadership Safari and Weeks of Welcome events engaged our new and returning students, preparing them for success at CMU.

Much of the work to welcome our students was done within CMU's new University Engagement and Student Affairs division, which aligns university-wide efforts to meet the changing needs of students, faculty, staff, alumni and community partners.

Reorganization began July 1, led by Vice President of University Engagement and Student Affairs Shawna Patterson-Stephens. Shawna is getting her leadership team in place and setting the structure of the division.

UESA also oversees student support areas that received a boost in the June budget approved by the Board of Trustees, including CMU Cares and the Student Food Pantry.

Already this fall, two of our athletic programs have experienced early success under new head coaches. Congratulations to volleyball head coach Arielle Wilson and football head coach Matt Drinkall, who won their very first games leading CMU Chippewa teams. I look forward to cheering on our teams as they build on this success.

I want to highlight some recently launched initiatives aimed at removing barriers to earning a college degree, ensuring greater access to an amazing hands-on education at CMU that prepares students for successful careers.

In August, the Governor John Engler Center for Charter Schools announced the “Charter to CMU Guarantee,” which guarantees admission to CMU for students attending one of the 25 CMU-authorized charter high schools who graduate with a GPA of 2.8 or higher.

We also continue to make CMU programs more accessible for current educators through the “Charter Educator Tuition Program.” Educators at the 70 CMU-authorized charter public schools in Michigan are eligible for a 50% discount on tuition for select degrees.

In exciting news, CMU recently signed an agreement with the Detroit Regional Chamber Foundation allowing our institution to participate in the Detroit Promise program. The Detroit Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that ensures all eligible Detroit residents have a tuition-free path to a bachelor’s degree. By joining this program, CMU is ensuring that students from Detroit have the support they need to thrive, graduate and positively impact their communities.

There is some encouraging news about enrollment and retention, and also new challenges to tackle.

Preliminary numbers show a total headcount of 14,135 students enrolled this semester. Domestic student enrollment has grown 117 students year over year.

Though official enrollment numbers won't be available until the end of the semester, this growth represents an encouraging trend we are fortifying through the development and implementation of a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.

While enrollment of domestic students has grown, enrollment of international students has experienced a decline. In fact, were it not for the decline in international student enrollment – which many colleges and universities nationwide are experiencing – overall enrollment at CMU would be up this year.

Unfortunately, many of our accepted international students were unable to secure visa appointments in time for fall. About 670 of them have deferred to Spring. We look forward to welcoming them in January and hope they will receive visas in time to join us.

Meanwhile, our commitment to the success of every student is evident in a significant, year-over-year increase in retention rates. Retention of first time in any college students jumped from 74.7% to about 78% in the first weeks of the fall semester. This type of retention progress is extremely difficult to achieve, and I am grateful for the dedication of all the faculty and staff who work to support student success and retention.

Students who choose CMU have numerous opportunities to participate in cutting-edge research with faculty, highlighted by our recent agreement to participate in the National Security Consortium. CMU and several of Michigan's leading universities launched the National Security Consortium, which is designed to strengthen U.S. national security through strategic research, technology development and workforce training.

In addition to research, the consortium will serve as a pipeline of technical talent for the federal workforce, equipping the next generation of engineers and scientists to tackle the nation's most pressing defense challenges.

The National Security Consortium represents a major opportunity for CMU students and faculty to contribute directly to real-world solutions. It builds the kind of applied learning environment that prepares graduates for critical roles in defense, engineering and technology.

There are many new initiatives and plans for change and innovation in the works right now. Several of these have big, bold goals and will require significant changes in the ways we work and in the risks we take.

These include development of a Strategic Enrollment Management plan on which teams are working to identify high-impact strategies to move forward on our priorities have found the need for change and re-alignment of resources.

We also are reimagining our Innovation and Online offerings, identifying ways to make online education more impactful and valuable to our students.

Additionally, our colleges are developing their own internal plans and examining ways to more effectively meet the needs of students in preparing them for success.

And of course, progress on CMU's Strategic Plan continues with many moving parts. Later in this meeting, you will be asked to approve the 2025-2026 Goals and Measures in the Strategic Plan, adapted for progress made last year and prioritizing the activities for the current year.

There are areas of overlap in each of these plans, as well as shared goals between and among them. The University Transformation Office is helping us to identify opportunities for synergy among the working groups, ensuring our efforts are not duplicative.

And, as part of our effort to effectively implement change, the University Transformation Office has assembled a university-wide, 22-person coalition of faculty and staff known as the Change Champion Network.

Some of our Change Champions are here today. Please stand so we can recognize the commitment you have made to move CMU forward Drew Taylor, Alyse Munishamaiah, Nicole Barnes, Shay Dawson, Tangela Cheatham, Luke Theis, Wade Tomson, Rob Wyman and Lori Driessnack.

Change Champions will serve as liaisons between their respective units and the UTO. Champions will help foster awareness, understanding and acceptance of institutional change by actively listening, sharing insights and building support for changes that align with CMU's mission, values, and strategic priorities.

These leaders will help campus feel more comfortable with implementing necessary change.

Again, these important, exciting plans challenge our established routines, and they will demand that we embrace a new way of thinking – one that encourages innovation and risk taking.

We know that significant change can be unsettling, and the natural inclination may be to resist it. Yet, this moment of transformation offers a unique opportunity to forge new partnerships and work together, drawing on our strengths to build a more dynamic institution.

As we move forward, insights from the Board of Trustees will be invaluable. I welcome your thoughts on how we can best navigate this transition, ensuring our efforts are focused on securing a future where Central Michigan University thrives.

Thank you, Chair Regis, this concludes my report. And as always: FIRE UP CHIPS!