

2019 State of the University Address

President Robert O. Davies

Thank you, Trustee Studley, for the kind introduction.

Good afternoon, and welcome. In honor and recognition that we are gathered here today on the historic lands of the [Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe](#), I say: Boozhoo. Chi-miigwech.

I am honored to be here with you today to deliver my first State of the University address at Central Michigan University. I am privileged to be joined today by representatives from our Board of Trustees and from our Academic Senate. I also would like to thank the students, faculty, staff, alumni and community partners who have joined us today in historic Warriner Hall and also through our livestream.

I am grateful to be surrounded today by so many passionate, dedicated Central Michigan University Chippewas. It is an honor to serve as your president.

We have been together for one year – it's hard to believe. One full year. Three semesters. That's six meetings with the Board of Trustees and 17 with CMU's Academic Senate. Nearly 4,000 handshakes during eight commencement ceremonies. 28 tenure letters delivered to outstanding faculty.

I have visited and talked with hundreds of CMU Chippewa alumni making a difference around the country and around the globe. And I've enjoyed *countless* campus walkabouts, visits with student organizations, lunches in our residential restaurants, and hours applauding student performers and cheering on our student-athletes.

We have packed a lot into this short time we've had together, and I have learned so much from it, and from you.

In our time together today, I will tell you about some of the amazing things I have learned. But I want to begin by telling you the **most** important thing I learned.

I learned that Central Michigan University is *invaluable*. This university — our university — is **invaluable** to the students who enroll in our classes and to the faculty who teach them.

We are invaluable to our community. Our students and faculty have given more than 50,000 hours of volunteer service and have participated in hundreds of fundraising efforts for numerous nonprofit organizations.

CMU is an invaluable partner to employers. Our university is educating and preparing the best young professionals to fill careers in industries that are growing and changing rapidly.

We are *invaluable* to students looking for an inclusive and welcoming place to pursue their dreams and passions. And we are invaluable to adult learners who choose Central Michigan University to propel them forward in their careers.

We positively impact not only our students, but also their families and friends. An education from Central Michigan University can change people— it can change whole communities — all for the better.

I say this to you not only as the president of this university, but as a parent, a very *proud* parent, of a current student who chose CMU above others.

When I speak of the value Central Michigan University offers our students, our alumni and our community, I want you to know this is *personal* for me. This isn't just my job — this is my daughter's future. It is my commitment to her, to every CMU student, and to each and every one of you.

Let me be clear about what I have learned over this past year: We are Central Michigan University, a leading research university with a national and international reach. We are a university *with a soul*. We are resilient. We are strong. We are a *community*.

We have much to celebrate and much to be proud of. At the same time, let me be clear: We face significant challenges. Today, we will talk about them openly and honestly. More importantly, we will talk about what we are doing to overcome them.

Be assured: We *will* overcome them.

The challenges CMU faces are both internal weaknesses and external threats. Each require us to think and act differently. These challenges come in many forms: our enrollment trends; demographic changes, including the declining population of traditionally aged college students; and shifts in the public perception of the value and purpose of higher education.

We have seen increased competition among universities and new competitors from outside the sector. We will continue to deal with the decline of public funding for colleges and universities and the growing importance of affordability. Growing student debt levels directly impact our students, and they may deter future students who wonder if they can afford to attend *any* university, including CMU.

Advancements in technology and delivery of education present both new obstacles and opportunities, and we must be nimble, flexible and innovative to reap their benefits.

To me, each of these challenges are like the rivers that I used to navigate in the wilderness of Idaho.

The river begins calmly, with gentle currents that carry your raft along. As smaller streams enter the flow, the river picks up speed. The landscape changes. Rocks appear and force you to consider new paths. Rapids form. Once peaceful waters become treacherous and harder to navigate.

These changes — some subtle, others more pronounced — are like the challenges we face today in higher education. They require us to be more focused on our actions. They demand us to sit up and pay close attention, reacting and responding quickly to remain afloat and on course to meet our goals.

Most of all, they alert us to plan not only for the rapids directly in front of us, but for those further ahead. We must continually predict, evaluate, plan and, above all, execute. We must be proactive and ready to react quickly. We must position ourselves for success so we are not caught off-guard by unexpected change.

That is what we are going to do here at Central Michigan University. I firmly believe that the ways we address our challenges together today — the paths we choose to pursue — will define us.

I am optimistic about our future and our ability to navigate the challenges before us. And I can tell you why: Central Michigan University is already offering incredible value to the world.

I'd like to share a few highlights from the past year. Some may surprise you, and all certainly demonstrate the difference CMU makes for our students and our community.

In my first year as president, I have learned how CMU is leading the way on protecting and [preserving our Great Lakes](#), the nation's largest freshwater resource.

The recently released documentary, "Linking Land and Lakes," produced by CMU Public Media, features the important work of faculty from CMU's [Institute for Great Lakes Research](#). These efforts have important implications for our region and the nation, and I am immensely proud of how their work showcases excellence at Central Michigan University.

We have **earned** our reputation as a national research university, receiving more than \$17 million dollars for research and scholarly activity this past academic year.

Psychology faculty members Sara Domoff and Larissa Neic received a significant grant from the National Institutes of Health to [help parents and children cope](#) with unhealthy use of digital devices and other challenging behaviors.

Sue Wroblewski in our Center for Merchandising and Design Technology uses cutting-edge tools to [research apparel and textiles](#) that impact everything from sportswear to baby blankets.

Katie Strong, from communication sciences and disorders, received the inaugural Tavistock Trust for Aphasia [Distinguished Scholar Award](#) for her work with patients with brain injury.

We've also received millions of dollars to target diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and cancer.

Earlier this year, Stave Kohtz from our College of Medicine and Xantha Karp from the College of Science and Engineering teamed up on research that could lead to the [prevention of breast cancer recurrence](#).

At CMU, our faculty are not only leaders in their field of research, they are talented, passionate educators. Please join me in recognizing our outstanding faculty.

In all that we do, we seek to improve the lives of people and communities. For example, the College of Medicine is increasing access to health care in the Great Lakes Bay Region and beyond. Just months ago, we signed a historic [25-year partnership with Covenant HealthCare](#). This will increase opportunities for collaborations in medical education and training, and in clinical research to address pressing public health issues.

At the same time, CMU continues to build on its strengths in other health professions. Construction is nearly complete on our expanded Health Professions Building, which will house the [Center for Integrated Health Studies](#). Teaching and training students to work on interprofessional teams is not only a national best practice, it also prepares them to achieve the best possible outcomes for their patients.

In all we do, we reach beyond the physical boundaries of our campus to benefit others. Consider the partnership between Sara Surface-Evans, her students and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. Their collaboration at the [Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School](#) resulted in a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Their work will preserve the site's cultural importance for generations to come.

We opened our doors in 1892 to train future teachers. Today we prepare students in more than 20 majors across five CMU colleges to become elementary and secondary school teachers. And our [support for teachers continues](#) once they enter the profession, with ongoing opportunities for professional development.

CMU's great legacy is our ***commitment to meet needs***: those of our state, of our country and of our students. It is a legacy that I am — that we are — proud to continue.

We also have a legacy of graduating leaders — in fact, it is the hallmark of our institution. Central Michigan offers the most [comprehensive leadership development](#) programming in our state. Every single student has opportunities to attend workshops and classes focused on building their own approach to ethical leadership.

During last month's homecoming festivities, I had the honor of recognizing Sydney Reed, this year's Gold Ambassador. Sydney was the conference chair for this year's [Multicultural Student Leadership Conference](#) and the [program chair for IMPACT](#). She has been a coordinator for the Leader Shape Institute, a facilitator for the SPARK Leadership Conference and a communications assistant for the Office of Enrollment and Student Services.

Sydney is a [Multicultural Advancement Scholar](#) pursuing a degree in integrative public relations and will graduate in May. She embodies all we believe CMU Chippewas can be: powerful, ethical leaders who are committed to making a positive difference in the lives of others. Thank you, Sydney.

Central also has a legacy of educating military leaders. Today, we are proud to serve hundreds of active-duty and veteran service members and their families. We are once again ranked as a top choice school for veterans, and CMU is present on 15 military installations in North America. We provide support through our [Veterans Resource Center](#), and we offer flexible degree attainment options through our satellite locations and online.

We are committed to supporting those who serve and who have served.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize one service member in particular: U.S. Army Specialist Shayn Lindquist.

Shayn, who will graduate next month, was selected as the 2019 Military Times [Soldier of the Year](#) in recognition of his service to the community and his country even as he battled brain cancer. He is an outstanding example of what is possible when we approach problems with passion and purpose.

Please join me in congratulating Spc. Lindquist and in honoring all our active-duty and veteran service members.

At CMU, we are focused on leadership, service, and the creation and application of new knowledge. Central Michigan University offers students unique opportunities to participate in research and scholarly activities, even at the undergraduate level.

Just ask Sydney Harless. This summer, Sydney and her faculty mentor, Mark Potts, traveled to Italy, where she [presented her research](#) at the Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Knowledge Academy conference. She also won the best paper award for her submission to the International Journal of Emerging Markets. Congratulations on this outstanding achievement, Sydney, and thank you, Mark.

Hundreds of students like Sydney have the chance to present their research at conferences on campus and around the world each year. These projects showcase our students' ability to think creatively and to engage in new kinds of learning and discovery. Central Michigan University students are changing the future for themselves and for this university. Their stories are

powerful, and they succeed because of the support they receive from our talented faculty and our dedicated staff.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge our staff.

We all enjoy this beautiful campus we call home. Every day, hundreds of staff are working behind the scenes to make this the best possible place to live, learn and work. Whether they are offering guidance in our residence halls, answering questions about financial aid, or keeping our sidewalks clear of ice and snow, their work makes everything we do at CMU possible. Students, alumni and friends, please join me in thanking our CMU staff.

Our students, and our mission, also benefit from the [support of our alumni and donors](#).

In June, we ended our Fired Up for Excellence campaign three years ahead of schedule and over our goal. The \$115 million dollars we raised will create new scholarships, provide support for faculty-led research and creative endeavors, and strengthen our academic programs. We continue to build on this momentum.

Heidi Tracy recently joined CMU as our new vice president of advancement. She will guide efforts to grow philanthropic support for CMU through alumni engagement and fundraising. Please welcome Heidi to CMU.

Nearly 70,000 donors invest in CMU because they believe in our mission and because they **know** good things are happening around our campus every day. But let's not be satisfied with good. The state of our university is good — it is indeed very good — but it **could** be **great**.

To become great, we must acknowledge and address the issues we face. This means discussing and finding solutions for our significant challenges in both the enrollment and retention of students.

This year, we set an enrollment goal of 2,500 new students in our freshman class. We met that goal, but we still aren't achieving the numbers we would like to see, and NEED to see, going forward. Our [preliminary enrollment numbers](#) for the current academic year are nearly 11% lower than last year. This continues a decades-long trend for CMU that impacts every facet of our operation.

We are not alone in our struggles: Enrollment is a pervasive problem around the country — and it is more pronounced in nonurban universities like CMU. Higher education enrollment in the U.S. is in its eighth year of decline, and more than half the states with the largest drops are here in the Midwest. Michigan is once again one of the states hit hardest by these declines.

Yet, even within our state, we are losing market share to our competitors. This signifies that we must do more to attract future students.

Equally alarming is the drop in our student retention rates. Where we once retained 78% of our students from their first year into the second, this year we only retained 74%. Many factors contribute to the dropout rate, including the rising cost of degree attainment. It's no secret that earning a degree — at any institution — costs more today than it did 10 years ago. It means, for some families, that a college education feels out of financial reach.

This must change.

Over the past 10 years, CMU has increased funding for scholarships by nearly 80%, but we must all do more to address this affordability crisis. Later this month, we will complete our intensive review of our need-based financial aid models. We will make significant changes to the way we help students pay for college. This will not just be a repackaging of old initiatives; it will be a new effort focused on truly meeting the needs of students and their families.

We **must** remove obstacles that prevent students from obtaining their degree.

We are working with our alumni and donors to increase private support through scholarships. We are looking for ways to keep our operations lean and efficient. We are looking at our business model for ways to help students find flexible and affordable options.

We also need **your** help. Talk to your community leaders and legislators. Talk to future students and families about the value of CMU. Engage with current students and offer guidance and, most importantly, encouragement. Be an advocate for the transformational power of education, especially here at CMU.

Today a degree isn't just something that is **nice** to have — it is becoming increasingly necessary to compete for and secure employment in this rapidly changing economy. More than **half** of the fastest-growing jobs in the nation now require a bachelor's degree or higher. Ninety percent of new jobs created in the last year have gone to people with degrees.

Education opens the door to great careers, and there is no better place to obtain an affordable, flexible, **excellent** education than here at Central Michigan University.

More than 92% of our graduates are employed or enrolled in graduate programs within six months of commencement. More than 235,000 CMU Chippewas are living and working in successful careers around the globe. That's a powerful story of return on investment — of **value** — to share with our future students.

When I meet with employers who hire our graduates, I often hear them talk about the CMU work ethic. They tell me CMU Chippewas come in prepared to work collaboratively, to think creatively, to solve problems. They tell me that CMU graduates eagerly accept challenges and have exceptional communication skills.

A vice president from Ford told me: "They roll up their sleeves and get the job done."

This is what we teach our students, and it is precisely what we're going to do together in the years ahead.

We're going to be more strategic about the way we recruit all of our students. We're setting ambitious goals for next year to increase our enrollment numbers. These goals include enrolling 2,850 new first-year students in fall of 2020, an increase of nearly 14% over this year. We will add 1,100 transfer students, an increase of 20%. And we will retain 78% of this year's freshman class.

We're already making great strides in our efforts to recruit new students.

Recent marketing campaigns and newly implemented admission strategies, including intensified outreach to high schools, have already given us a significant increase in applications for next year. Furthermore, we have modified our tuition model to be more competitive and restructured our scholarship model. We are adding admissions staff in key regions and improving our use of technology in outreach to future students. In addition, we are expanding our offerings online and at our satellite locations.

We are going to become the most transfer-friendly university in the state.

While we have strong relationships with many of the community colleges in Michigan, a recent report shows we rank poorly compared with our peers among transfer students. This is a weakness we can, we must and we *will* address.

We must change the policies and procedures that make it unnecessarily difficult for capable and prepared students to transfer to CMU. We must offer competitive transfer student scholarships. In short, we need to make it easy for transfer students to choose CMU.

Whether they come from community colleges or other four-year institutions, or are returning to college after a break, transfer students are the largest and fastest-growing segment of potential students. Let's become their first — and best — choice to continue their education.

While we're at it, let's become the top choice for graduate students as well. We offer more than 70 graduate degree programs at the master's, specialist and doctoral levels, all led by expert faculty. We must develop new strategies to effectively reach and recruit more graduate students to join our community of scholars.

We also will open our university to more international students. We are currently home to 594 international students representing 62 countries, and we have opportunities to recruit and serve many more.

Ling Zhang, our new director of international outreach and recruitment, will lead efforts to expand CMU's reach around the globe. Over the next several years, as we implement new

strategies and enhance our reputation, I am confident that we can more than double our international student enrollment and have over 100 countries represented on our campus.

As we step up our efforts in recruitment and enrollment, we also are increasing services to support and retain students to keep them on the path to graduation.

Central Michigan is **known** for being student-centered. It is who we are. We must expand upon this and become known as the university that ensures its students are challenged academically while being supported emotionally and mentally.

For example, we learned that as many as 3,000 CMU students were struggling with food insecurity. Those students are 15 times more likely to fail a class. Fewer than 20% will complete their degree in five years or less.

In response, we opened our [Student Food Pantry](#) last year and have distributed thousands of pounds of food to hundreds of CMU Chippewas. In addition, in the last five years, our [Student Emergency Fund](#) has given out more than \$600,000 in emergency aid funds to help students meet their most basic needs.

Our students today face challenges very different than those of a decade ago. A recent national report shows that more than 60% of college students experience severe anxiety.

Our [Counseling Center](#) has increased its services in response, offering new tools such as Therapy Assistance Online and doing more proactive outreach. They are bringing activities such as group art, drumming circles and therapy dogs to students across campus.

Academic advising is another powerful tool for student success and retention. Our new proactive advising model requires all first-year students to have at least two appointments with their academic advisor each year and offers students more opportunities to receive guidance.

This is significant: We are meeting students where they are and guiding them along their path to graduation. Our students and their families make an investment to attend CMU. **We** are invested in keeping them here and seeing them through to graduation.

We continue our important work of [maintaining a welcoming place](#) for students from many backgrounds.

Faculty, staff and current students set the tone for [our culture of inclusion](#). I am pleased to share that more than [60 new initiatives](#) to promote diversity, equity and inclusion universitywide were launched this year. For example, performance evaluations for staff and tenure and promotion requirements for faculty now include measures for training and development in diversity and inclusion. We also have modified hiring practices to create deeper and richer pools of candidates. For our students, we have added new required classes in racial and social discrimination.

These are difficult topics to address, and I am proud of our students' ability to have challenging conversations. They hold each other — and CMU — accountable for growth in this area.

I'd like to recognize [senior Australyah Coleman](#) for her role in these efforts. In addition to her great work here at CMU, Australyah has done important work in our local community with the Mount Pleasant Area Diversity Group. This summer, she was named NAACP's Organizer of the Year for our district. It is a well-deserved honor. Please join me in congratulating and thanking Australyah.

During this past year, I've been in *many* discussions on the issues we face, including enrollment and how we present ourselves to external communities. To that end, this fall I announced changes to our leadership structure, replacing old positions with new roles that will enable us to meet our strategic goals.

We will hire a new vice president of [student recruitment and retention](#) who will lead collaborative efforts with admissions and other areas to develop strategies to find and keep future CMU students.

We recently concluded a nationwide search for a new vice president of [university communications and chief marketing officer](#). This individual will guide the way we share our story of rigor, relevance and excellence with all audiences, especially future students. We will announce the successful conclusion of this search early next week.

We are also conducting research to examine our position in the marketplace and to define what distinguishes us from our peer institutions. We will develop a new brand platform that showcases our strengths.

And we are going to make it easier for future students to learn more about educational opportunities at Central. We will [develop a new website](#) that will make it easy for digital visitors to find the information they need and to see themselves here at CMU.

Another important topic of discussion this year was the need to increase our presence in key markets, [beginning with metro Detroit](#). We have created an ambitious strategy for our Detroit office and have already shifted several staff positions there from areas such as alumni, admissions and business development.

I'd like to welcome Rhonda Welsh, our new executive director of Detroit outreach. Rhonda will lead our downtown Detroit office and make it the hub of many exciting activities to advance our efforts in student recruiting, internships, business and corporate engagement, alumni relations, fundraising and much more. Welcome, Rhonda!

In my first year with Central Michigan University, I asked you to embrace transformational change. We operate differently today than we did at this time last year, and **we're not done changing**. Not even close.

Earlier this semester, I announced a [strategic envisioning process](#) that will ask each of us to look forward to 2030.

Based on the changes we see in our landscape, we will focus both on the challenges and opportunities immediately before us, and those that lie ahead. We will identify areas of concern or trouble and pinpoint opportunities for growth and prosperity. And then we will chart our course for **action**.

Let me emphasize this: This is a strategic envisioning **process**. The intent is not to develop and issue a new strategic plan that binds our thinking. Rather, the goal is to create a framework to guide strategic decision-making, allowing us to anticipate changes and act intentionally and deliberately. This process is about being responsive and able to adapt. It is about making appropriate changes to meet the new and challenging environment.

As John Maynard Keynes stated, "The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from the old ones."

To guide us toward transformational change, we will focus on five strategic pathways.

First, we will commit to enhancing and highlighting our overall academic quality and value. We will commit to ensuring our academic and cocurricular programs present an overall environment of rigor, relevance and excellence.

Earlier this year, [Dr. Mary C. Schutten](#) joined the university community as our new provost, bringing 30 years of higher education leadership to CMU. She will work closely with our deans, department chairs and faculty around the university to pursue excellence in all we do. Thank you to everyone who has given her a warm welcome to CMU.

In the coming years, we must spotlight both our academic excellence and the ways we prepare students not only for their careers, but also to be civically engaged, to be leaders and lifelong learners.

Last year, employers conducted nearly 1,000 on-campus interviews, and hundreds more attended career fairs and networking events. Many of our students have jobs lined up before they even shake my hand at commencement.

We must also prepare students for careers in sectors that do not even exist yet. They must be ready to succeed in jobs that will be transformed by advances in biomedicine and the health sciences, technology and communications, globalization, and sustainability.

To do so, we must focus on solutions-based, active, hands-on learning. We must develop intersections between and among academic disciplines.

Last month, we announced a request for proposals for the new [President's and Provost's Fund for Program Innovation and Excellence](#). This competitive \$3 million fund will reward innovation in teaching, research, interdisciplinary partnerships and more. This furthers our commitment to rigor, relevance and excellence.

We created this fund for two reasons.

First, because I believe **everyone** in this room has had an idea that could positively impact our university. Too often, however, we keep those ideas to ourselves. Great ideas without action accomplish **nothing**. Great ideas **with** action have the power to make wonderful changes.

This grant is to encourage the sharing of those great ideas. I want you to work together with colleagues from new areas to challenge the status quo, take risks and try new things.

And, second, we established this fund to relaunch our culture of innovation. To navigate our future, we need to encourage and reward creativity and collaboration.

This leads to our second strategic pathway, which will position Central Michigan University as an inclusive and equitable marketplace of ideas and action.

As a university, we need to be a cauldron of ideas — a place where people can express thoughts, raise issues and offer suggestions to address them. A place where research and collaboration yield powerful solutions to complex problems.

We need to have healthy, **civil** debates that examine ideas through the lenses of critical and logical processes.

We must be a place where ideas, not people, are challenged. Where individuals come together from all backgrounds and ideologies to build agreement by examining differences and finding commonalities.

We have the opportunity **to be that place**.

The [Critical Engagements](#) series and the [Conversations that Matter](#) program are excellent examples of how we engage students, faculty, staff and community members currently. And as we commit to understanding and protecting our differences, we can become the place to challenge ideas, create dialogue and seek solutions for our world's most pressing problems.

The third strategic pathway is working with partners around the state to foster an ecosystem of innovation, economic growth, cultural enrichment and civic engagement.

CMU has played an important role in Michigan's economic comeback following the Great Recession, but there is a lot of work still to be done. Let's ask what CMU can do to help. Let's position ourselves to lead the way, especially in our region and throughout the underserved areas in our state.

Entrepreneurship is a tremendous growth area for our state. We are preparing students to realize their dreams of business ownership through the [New Venture Competition](#) and our partnership with the [Central Michigan University Research Corp.](#)

We're also adding programs we know will meet the needs of employers, such as our new environmental engineering program and our recently accredited program in public health. How else can we support Michigan's growing economy?

We are a bedrock of cultural activities, including the annual [Celebrating Life Pow wow](#), hosted by students and staff from our [Native American Programs](#) office. What more can we contribute to the cultural richness of our community?

CMU has a long legacy of volunteer and civic service to address broad societal issues. We are a national leader in programs such as [Alternative Breaks](#), and many of our students and faculty are deeply engaged in public service and leadership. How can we promote and grow this important activity?

Let's look for new ways to leverage the powerful resources of our university to benefit people and communities around our state.

Higher education has become an incredibly competitive. It is a buyer's market, and we must aggressively compete for every student we wish to enroll.

Therefore, our fourth strategic pathway is to understand and proactively address the needs of our current and future students.

This is **not** just a marketing issue. This is something we must address from every area of our operation, from the types of programs and services we offer to the ways they are delivered and much more.

The pool of first-time-in-any-college students is shrinking while demand is increasing among transfers, working adults and nontraditional students. We must recruit them all.

More than 10% of our undergraduates are 25 years or older, many returning to college to complete their degrees. We must offer programs and services to meet **their** needs, just as we meet the needs of every student at CMU.

Furthermore, we must once again become leaders in distance education. Since 2017, we have nearly doubled the number of online programs we offer and seen an increase of more than

120% in students enrolling in online classes. Nearly a quarter of students on our main campus also enroll in an online course. This is clearly an area of potential growth for CMU, and we must continue to pursue our online and distance-learning offerings through our [Global Campus](#).

And, finally, we will redefine and expand our business model.

We must ask ourselves: Are we solely in the business of granting degrees and counting credit hours? That is what drives our business model today. However, if we broaden our mindset and say our business is the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge, we will see many more opportunities.

This includes, for example, serving individuals who are truly lifelong learners.

Working adults increasingly need opportunities to grow their skills, either for job changes or promotions. Not all will need to complete a degree to do so. We can position ourselves to meet **their** needs as well.

We can partner with corporations and organizations to offer degree and certificate programs to their employees **in their places of work**.

And we can also think about the ongoing educational needs of one of our largest pools of existing supporters: our alumni.

We have many opportunities to change our financial business model, and we must if we are to be fully sustainable in 2030.

These are our five strategic pathways. They will provide us with a framework for thinking, making decisions, adapting to changes in our environment, and most importantly, guiding our actions and direction.

This is not about strategic planning – this is about strategic **action**.

We will soon convene work groups to create the appropriate narrative for each pathway. These groups will assist in setting overarching strategies to be deployed over the next 10 years, with short-term benchmarks to gauge our progress.

Together, we will navigate the challenges and opportunities before us. Together, we will creatively seek ways to serve our future students, embrace lifelong learners and set ourselves apart from our peer institutions.

We are strong in **so many** areas, but we have to find our niche. We cannot be everything to everyone – but we can be the right things for the right students.

Because, for them, Central Michigan University *is where they belong*. This university — our university — will be *invaluable* to them. This is where they will thrive. It is where they will discover their passions. It is where the trajectory of their lives will be set.

Students will choose CMU if we show them *why* we are the best place for them. **We** have to tell that story. We must believe — and share — the message that we are not just a good university, we are a GREAT university.

Let's work together to be GREAT: this year, next year, into 2030 and beyond.

As the son of a historian, I understand the value of reflecting on and learning from our past. But my father made clear that history was also a tool for envisioning the future.

When I was seven years old, my dad took me to the National Archives in Washington, D.C. He pointed to an inscription on a monument outside the building — a monument aptly named "Future."

The inscription read: "What is past is prologue."

He told me that we must understand our history, not to criticize or glamorize the past, but to let it guide us and give context to our current of state affairs and our future ambitions. The past is the foundation that enables us to turn our focus forward.

CMU has a rich history. We can celebrate it without becoming stuck in it. We must look forward to how great things can be — and will be — in our future.

Our past is prologue. Our focus is forward.

I began today talking about the convergence of challenges that create rapids of change. The field of higher education is like whitewater rapids. The institutions that will survive and thrive will be those that plan ahead, anticipate coming changes and respond quickly.

What kind of institution will *we* be?

We could choose to let the rapids determine our path, which is easier but puts us in peril. We could choose to slide into an eddy, where waters are calm. It feels safe, but enables every other university to pass by us, making us irrelevant. The *only* successful path forward requires us to be deliberate and focused, navigating our course for the best possible outcomes for our students and our community.

As I mentioned earlier, I wear two hats at CMU: president and parent.

A few weeks ago, I asked my daughter a question. It's a question I like to ask most students I meet. I asked: "Are you glad you are here at CMU?"

And she, like so many of our students, responded with a clear, enthusiastic **YES**.

She talked about her professors and classes and the new possibilities they have laid before her. She talked about conversations with her fellow classmates and the new perspectives they share. She even talked positively about **group projects**! She is learning not only about the subject materials but also about interpersonal working relationships.

When I talk to students, my daughter included, I hear about the immense power of CMU. Through their eyes — through HER eyes — I see the **invaluable** experiences we make possible. These glimpses of life at Central give me an immense passion to build on our successes and strengths; to build upon our ability to serve students as individuals; to blend our role as a teaching institution and a research university; to bring together the professional programs and the power of the liberal arts; and to grow our enrollments to sustainable levels and **not** sacrifice academic quality and standards.

Yes, we **can do this together**. We are establishing and charting our path. We are making a plan to move forward.

We are very **good**, and we are going to be great. Because we are **fired up** and focused, there is nothing that we cannot achieve.

I thank you all for the work you have done and continue to do for Central Michigan University. I look forward to navigating these transformational changes alongside you in the years to come.

Fire Up Chips!