

President's Report to the Board of Trustees



December 17, 2015

This Welcome, trustees and audience members. It is good to see each of you on this mid-December day, during one of our most rewarding, most joyful times of year.

During the next two days, we will confer more than 3,000 degrees and certificates. Central Michigan University's newest alumni will celebrate all that they have learned here, in an arena full of maroon caps and gowns, as the symphony adds pomp and circumstance, and the cheers of their parents, siblings, friends and extended family add love and pride.

These alumni will go out to put their stamp on the world. They will do well using the knowledge gained in our classrooms and labs. They will leverage the leadership and experiences gained through student organizations, Alternative Breaks and internships. They will excel thanks to the wisdom gained through countless conversations with faculty, advisors and mentors.

They, and those who come after them, are the focus of every decision we make.

The work we do as trustees, administrators, faculty and staff fuels the career paths of tens of thousands of students and thereby improves the future of our state, our nation and indeed our world.

What we do and who we are at CMU — a major, national university — is significant beyond what we often realize.

Since we last met, the College of Science and Technology and its Institute for Great Lakes Research earned a second \$10 million grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. With this funding, CMU researchers will continue to lead efforts to protect and restore coastal wetlands vital to the future of the Great Lakes and its surrounding states.

The original \$10 million enabled the collection of data assessing the health of wetlands along more than 10,000 miles of Great Lakes shoreline — more than the linear shoreline of the east and west coasts of the contiguous United States combined. The new grant will fund the identification, monitoring and evaluation of restoration efforts for the next five years.

Since we last met, CMU also received a \$5 million donation from The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation for efforts to put Great Lakes Bay Region middle school students on a path toward STEM careers.

This investment, received by the College of Education and Human Services, will fund programming and educational experiences for children aged 10 to 15 and professional development for their teachers.

We are proud to spearhead this effort in science, technology, engineering and math, once again improving lives in Michigan's rural and underserved areas.

It continues the philosophy that started when we were founded in 1892 to supply well-prepared teachers for our state's schools.

It expands a philosophy seen most recently, and boldly, when we opened a College of Medicine to prepare doctors for communities where high-quality health care is desperately needed.

Since we last met, we've produced volumes of work for reaffirmation of accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission. CMU first received institutional accreditation in 1915, and for 100 years we've maintained this high standard, which attests to the quality of CMU's educational programs.

National peer reviewers will visit Central in April to conclude the accreditation process, which is spearheaded on campus by a team of 22 faculty and staff.

I thank these team members for their countless hours of dedication as they finalize the documentation for submission in advance of the HLC visit.

Since we last met, our Online Academic Program Committee, charged by this board last spring, completed its report on CMU's online course and degree offerings.

This matter is of deep interest to many. It should be.

Higher education is changing at an unprecedented pace as we deal with questions of how it is funded. How learning happens and how students prepare not just for jobs, but for careers in a global economy. And finally, there is the foundational question of how courses are delivered, how to improve student learning outcomes and above all, how to maintain and improve the quality of our programs.

At Central Michigan University, we are recognized as leaders in helping to shape the evolution. We are among a select few at the table when these questions are addressed on a national level. We are leaders in giving students, adult learners and veterans across America access to high-quality education — something we helped pioneer with off-campus locations more than 40 years ago.

This report furthers that leadership. From it, we can expect appointment of multiple task forces to continue the work that we must pursue if we are to remain a highly relevant, highly competitive, highly successful major national university.

Do I believe students will continue to want an on-campus experience here in Mount Pleasant? Absolutely. The total immersion in learning, in transitioning to adulthood or to the next steps in our careers, is irreplaceable.

At the same time, I believe the changing dynamics of our world and our economy mean that ever more students — of all ages, from around the globe, and those enrolled on campus in Mount Pleasant — will demand the flexibility of high-quality online classes.

They can enroll in classes online through CMU, or they could do it someplace else.

I thank the committee — its faculty, academic department chairs, Dean Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson and Board of Trustees Chair Bill Kanine — for their expansive efforts on this project. Your data gathering and analyses will serve students for decades to come.

Finally, I'd like to highlight one more campuswide development since we last met.

Dec. 4 was a milestone for Central Michigan University, as more than 500 students, faculty and staff gathered in Plachta Auditorium to begin a conversation about diversity and inclusion.

Civil rights in America came to much prominence more than 60 years ago. There's been progress certainly, although Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream remains elusive.

Against a backdrop of protests at universities across the nation, we started a conversation at CMU to expand our understanding and respect for those who act, or think, or look, or are born different than we are.

We cannot legislate hearts. But we *can* learn from each other, engaging in civil discourse, and prompting the type of wisdom and compassion that some say is best generated at a university.

I am proud of our students, our faculty, our staff and our area residents for joining the conversation. Our campus community showed a remarkable commitment to walking together toward the progress that Dr. King envisioned. Conversations will continue. Actions needed to make education and us better, will follow.

Chair Kanine, that concludes my report.