



Board of Trustees

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

December 5, 2024

Thank you, Chair Regis, and thank you, Trustees. Welcome to everyone joining today, either here in person or online via the livestream.

As we begin the meeting, I would like to extend a special thank you to Trustee Oliver and Trustee Sandler. You have both poured your passion into serving this institution, and CMU is a better place because of your work here. I know our time didn't overlap long, but I'm certainly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you. Thank you for your valuable contributions to CMU.

Trustee Oliver's and Trustee Sandler's final formal board meeting is my first as president. I would like to thank the entire CMU community for embracing my wife Leanne and I and making us feel like we belong here. I'm humbled to be here.

I'd like to remind us all that we have a noble calling in higher education, and that we have the opportunity to shape lives every day. I know that I am here on purpose, for a purpose. The past 34 days have confirmed my suspicion that indeed this is a very special place, and CMU is poised for even greater success.

There have been many special moments in my first month, so it is difficult to name just a few, but I'll try here:

- I read the opening lineups and dropped the opening puck for the men's and women's club hockey teams. It was a trip back to my Canadian roots for a moment.
- I placed my trust in two cheerleaders who lifted me up during our last home football game. They didn't let me down!

- My hand is still a bit sore from shaking hands and fist-bumping our football team as they came off the field after our big win over Western Michigan University.

I have taken every opportunity possible to meet students, faculty, staff, and alumni in the community in my first 34 days. In fact, my first day was quite a first day: We had a ceremony to honor the naming of the Philip Kintzele School of Accounting. We celebrated Diwali night with about 1,300 of our students. My next weekend was the CMU Media Hall of Fame induction ceremony, and just last weekend was America's Thanksgiving Parade.

Beyond those formal events, I have been informally meeting with students, faculty, staff and others around campus, including when Leanne and I dine on campus or work out in the Student Activity Center. Those have been moments I truly treasure.

Unlike many university presidents who begin new roles at their institution and lead the development of a new strategic plan, I will instead be focused on the successful implementation of our existing plan. The plan was approved by the Board of Trustees in September of 2023, and the remainder of my remarks today will focus around the four strategic priorities of that plan.

Priority one in our plan is to inspire student and scholarly success. I'd like to share with you several examples of progress towards this priority.

CMU just had a record year of research-related funding, which aligns with priority one's goal of growing our research and graduate enterprise. Prior to 2021, CMU had never been awarded grants totaling more than \$20 million in a year. In 2022 and 2023, CMU was awarded more than \$25 million in annual grant funding. This past fiscal year, CMU was awarded more than \$35 million from 166 successful grant applications. As an active researcher myself, I hope to add to that total.

In November, the Student Success Summit brought together faculty and staff leaders from across campus to learn more about efforts to ensure students persist through to commencement.

Priority two of our strategic plan is focused on engaging communities to cultivate and enrich partnerships with university stakeholders. We are making progress there as well.

One of our strategic plan working groups is currently identifying all the different groups, task forces and committees that engage CMU faculty and staff with community leaders and members, such as the Mount Pleasant Town and Gown committee.

In my first month, I fulfilled two promises I made during my finalist interview. I had lunch with our mayor, Amy Perschbacher, and attended a meeting of the City Commission to provide an update on where we are as a university. I also met with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribal Council and had lunch with Chief Davis to strengthen our ties with the Tribe, on whose ancestral lands CMU stands today.

I am working with Toby Roth, vice president for government and external relations, to establish a dialogue with state lawmakers who have the potential to be tremendous partners for CMU. Last week, I met with State Senator Roger Hauck, State Representative Jerry Neyer and State Representative Tom Kunse. The Michigan legislature recently granted \$822,000 to help CMU Innovation and Online work with Lansing Community College. There will be more announcements coming about that in the near future.

In November, CMU signed an institutional collaborative agreement with Delta College that will allow us to welcome more Delta College students and make it easier for them to complete a CMU degree.

In Traverse City, CMU Innovation and Online and the CMU Rural Health Equity Institute are working to enhance partnerships with rural and underserved communities. I met with Dr. Allison Arnold, who directs the Rural Health Equity Institute, to explore ways that I can support their efforts, given my own research program in rural health policy.

The third strategic plan priority is strengthening institutional culture. This will involve raising our national profile as a vibrant and nurturing university community. Here too, there is good news to report.

CMU launched a new pilot program for dialogic training for students and multiple dialogue workshops for faculty and staff, aligning with priority three's goal to promote programs that improve dialogue and discourse, especially around polarizing topics.

I shared the U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being with CMU's HR department and CMU's senior leadership team. Using the framework here at CMU presents an opportunity to invest in the well-being of our faculty and staff and to strengthen our institution's success by doing so.

There are five pillars to this framework:

- Pillar one: Protecting workers from harm.
- Pillar two: Fostering connections and communities.
- Pillar three: Providing work-life harmony.
- Pillar four: Instilling a sense of mattering at work.
- pillar five: Creating opportunities for career growth.

After the November general election, the CMU Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion offered listening and community building sessions. We also reinstated the CMU Staff Excellence Award program this year and recognized 17 individuals.

Our growing national profile has been made evident by several recent rankings in national publications. Among our points of pride:

- U.S. News and World Report ranked CMU for excellence in the top 10% of all four-year colleges and universities in the nation.
- Intelligent.com found that CMU offers the best self-paced online college and the best online Bachelors of Mental Health Counseling degree program in the country, not just Michigan.
- Newsweek ranked CMU as the No. 2 public university in Michigan on its list of America's top online colleges.
- Forbes named CMU to its annual list of the top 500 colleges – we were ranked in the top 200 public universities on that list.

Finally, F1 Hire – a career management company – looked at the return on investment for international students attending universities in this country. It included four measures as part of their rankings, and these rankings were published in The Chronicle of Higher Education. Harvard University did well, it ranked number nine on that list. We – CMU – beat Harvard. We ranked number five, just behind Princeton. CMU is on the same list as both Harvard and Princeton and is number five in the country.

The final priority of our strategic plan is to ensure institutional sustainability. Fiscal year 2024 was the largest-ever fundraising year in CMU history. We are poised for another successful year, because I have an update on this week's Giving Tuesday. I am pleased to report that our goal for Giving Tuesday was \$525,000, and we exceeded that goal, raising \$537,357 from 1465 donors and setting a new record. I don't know the names of all those donors, but I suspect a few of them are in this room. If you personally contributed, thank you.

I want to briefly share a few other notes about Giving Tuesday. First, the student emergency fund raised over \$40,000. And, the student food pantry, which I know is a personal cause for some of our Trustees, raised over \$70,000.

We know that enrollment is linked strongly to sustainability, the two go hand-in-hand. As you know, CMU previously experienced over a decade of enrollment declines that have challenged this university from a financial perspective, with multiple years of budget cuts. This fall, that trend was reversed modestly, with a total enrollment increase to 14,466 students.

This increase is made more impressive by the recent analysis from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center that found enrollment of 18-year-old freshmen declined 5% across the entire country this fall. A lot of that was likely due to the challenges with FAFSA.

Looking ahead to next semester, I would like to share where we stand for spring 2025. Yesterday, Vice President Jennifer DeHaemers shared that total enrollment for spring 2025 is up nearly 300 students year-over-year, which is a jump of 2.5%. We expect to have final numbers after census day in the spring.

To build upon these small increases and to aim toward larger increases in the future, we will be developing a strategic enrollment management plan. Work will start in early 2025 and will provide us with a road map to enrollment growth, as well as establish targets and strategies to achieve those targets.

While there is much work still to be done on each of those four priorities, I think we have a lot to reflect on and be proud of as a university.

Finally, I would like to share a few upcoming activities and events.

I have begun my process of visiting each college and each of my direct reports' areas of responsibility. I am spending a half day in each of those areas to listen and to learn what's going on.

My first half day was with Vice President Mary Hill's team in Finance and Administrative Services. While I was not allowed to touch the on-off button at the central power plant nor allowed to test the tasers with our police department, it was still a very informative, enjoyable tour. Next week, I'm spending half a day with Student Recruitment and Retention.

Also, First Lady Leanne and I will be doing a special activity with each athletic team. Last week, we celebrated Thanksgiving with our men's and women's cross country and track teams.

If you aren't doing so already, you can follow my listening tour on Instagram at @cmuprezmac.

On February 11, all are invited to attend a First 100 Days reflection event, which will be a presentation and fireside chat. I will share what I have learned and what I have seen over my first 100 days at CMU.

Almost two months later, on April 4, all are invited to attend the presidential investiture ceremony, where I will share my vision for CMU.

However, before all that happens, I am excited to celebrate our fall 2024 commencement, which takes place December 14. We are planning to make sure it is a student-focused ceremony. In a new addition this year, there will be a student speaker in each ceremony, and I hope that you will join me in cheering on our students as they become our alumni.

In conclusion, Chair Regis and Trustees, I am energized by the work already underway and by the work still ahead of us. I feel incredibly blessed and grateful to be here at CMU. Fire Up Chips!