

2016 State of the University Address

Before we get started, I would like to take a moment to introduce the university cabinet:

- Provost Doug Knerr, whom you heard from earlier
- Barbara Avery, vice chancellor for Campus Inclusion and Student Life
- Kristin Lindsey, vice chancellor for University Advancement
- Greg Tewksbury, vice chancellor for Business and Finance
- Marjory Raymer, interim director of University Relations
- Tess Barker, chief of staff

This is my second State of the University address and this year is very different than we had anticipated.

I imagined we would be talking about next steps towards campus excellence and student success and what it takes to continue enhancing each.

I could not have imagined our city and university would be in the middle of an environmental crisis of such magnitude and impact.

The water crisis in Flint has deepened and presents challenges to all of us in this community.

Though we are experiencing a public health crisis, I can confirm that the UM Flint drinking water is safe. We have been testing and filtering for more than a year—and will continue to do so.

I begin my comments today talking about water, not only because it is on every one of our minds, every single day but also because everyday I see countless acts of humanity in the midst of this crisis and it makes me proud to be in Flint.

The public health crisis is a gut kick to a community that is working to create a positive future. The sustained investment of business people and

philanthropists reinforces the hope and efforts of many who have been laying the groundwork for Flint's economic future.

Flint is a strong and resilient community. As an anchor institution in Flint, I believe our leadership role as a University is to both address the most pressing and immediate needs that align with our mission and work shoulder to shoulder with this community and its leaders to help define what comes next for Flint.

It is difficult to find the appropriate words to acknowledge and support the feeling of deep loss while at the same time planning for the future.

I have been talking about a parallel narrative.

We cannot and must not try to "counter" the narrative related to poisoned water and yet

We cannot allow the University and the city to be defined by it. We must not minimize the impact of the crisis, but Flint is more than a water crisis.

UM-Flint is one of the community anchors, we represent nearly 10,000 people when you consider faculty, staff and students. This is home for us and we will work with our community toward a strong future.

Robert Kennedy said, "All of us might wish at times that we lived in a more tranquil world, but we don't. And if our times are difficult and perplexing, so are they challenging and filled with opportunity."

As a regional comprehensive university, UM Flint is a place of public purpose—we are "stewards of place". We contribute over 80 million dollars annually to this economy, but we are also community scholars, applying research to enhance the quality of life. Working with the community to identify how we move forward together.

Our mission is simple and elegant—to ensure regional access to quality academic degrees and to enhance the communities in which we live.

The 2015 winter issue of Diversity and Democracy is devoted to publically engaged teaching, learning and scholarship and the ways in which the practices and language are shifting "from the discourses of service and

outreach *to and for* people as customers or clients, toward discourses of engagement with people working as agents toward our highest ideals and aspirations (Boyte 2015).

By design we have the opportunity to be at the “cutting-edge” of academic innovation and the creation of community knowledge.

I will repeat points I have made in other settings: our faculty is deeply committed to academic excellence and engaged learning. Through education and public service our faculty and staff create a learning environment that allows students to develop critical thinking skills, become excellent in their disciplines, learn problem solving through hands-on research and public service, and address issues that impact our region.

Fully embracing our role as a regional comprehensive means that we will not always align with the traditional higher education norms “that confer prestige on research institutions”.

The work of public engagement is a different, powerful, transformative kind of work and absolutely at the core of this university.

We have the opportunity to work with our community to produce research that makes a difference in lives and communities.

UM-Flint has a history of public engagement and we will continue to strengthen that commitment with resources organized to enhance the connection between community and university.

In a crisis we are tempted to move fully to service. Our obligation as an educational institution is that our public engagement is grounded in education.

This does set us apart from the non-profit community service agencies around us committed wholly to service.

The part of our mission that is about academic degrees, calls for access, retention, success and degree achievement. It is not enough to admit students, we have to stay with them in a way they see what they are capable of and able to achieve.

Student completion continues to be a primary focus of our attention. My commitment to increasing student success is about high expectations and effective support, about policies and practices that enhance learning, about providing a coherent curriculum and pathways for progress to degrees in ways that increase retention and completion.

It includes providing support for faculty research and recruiting students with expectations of their achievement and success.

Our current retention rates indicate that we are not yet successfully supporting students to degree completion. This does not mean we are not doing good stuff but it means we have to examine our environment with an eye toward enhancing success.

For almost 15 years I have worked at regional comprehensive universities. I have watched as higher ed. added field trips, community service and urban semesters or urban rotations.

Why?

More isolated campuses understood a long time ago that their students needed more diverse experiences for their education to be more whole. Many of our students at UM-Flint bring with them the kinds of experiences other campuses send their students to get somewhere outside of their campus. This is an asset of an urban environment that our students bring with them... our students live, work and learn in this urban environment.

I was recently in a meeting in DC where a colleague began to describe campus struggles around race, class and other issues... and what students needed to learn.

I said that it really depended on what kind of campus students were on. My experience of students on urban campuses, even if they are predominately white campuses are sometimes better at working and learning across difference than faculty and administrators are. At times it is *us* they take issue with more than each other.

We must do the work it takes to create classrooms that are inclusive and open to the experiences of all our students.

Being a regional comprehensive defines us as an institution. It informs our direction and helps us to set priorities.

This is the only slide I have today — but it is an important one. These are the priorities this community reaffirmed last year. They are not new. They are, in fact, the same priorities that I talked to you about in my first state of the University address, the priorities that we outlined as part of the budget process.

We must enhance academic excellence by focusing on faculty research *and* supporting student achievement.

We must improve affordability and degree completion for our students.

We must enhance community engagement.

We must build an increasingly diverse and inclusive academic community.

And we must increase UM-Flint's statewide and regional reputation as a leading regional university.

This spring we will begin our next round of strategic planning.

We know we face challenges in the next 12-18 months. Our enrollment was down in the fall and again this spring, consequently this budget year will be tighter than the last couple of years.

However we have very little debt and remain in better fiscal shape than many of our peer universities.

To be the best UM-F we must work together with grace and civility. As the writer Henry James once said, "Three things in human life are important: The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind, and the third is to be kind."

Crises and challenges are a test of our personal and organizational mettle. In the midst of our challenges I know that UM-F will persevere and prosper with the best of our heads and our hearts leading our institution and our community.

And, we are Michigan!

Whenever we gather as a community I believe it is important to share some of the remarkable research and practice happening at the University.

Our nursing department has provided global health services in Peru, Kenya, and the Dominican Republic as well as partnering with the Genesee County Health Department to provide lead testing for our city's children.

The GIS Center received a grant from the C.S. Mott Foundation for a community mapping project — which has become critically important because of the water crisis but already was in progress months before all the national media also came knocking at Dr. Kaufman's door.

The Physical Therapy Department has established residency programs in pediatric and neurologic physical therapy in addition to the previously established orthopedic residency.

We launched the new master's in Applied Communication Program, a new major in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management, and will launch a new major, a Bachelors of Business Administration, Operations and Supply Chain Management this year.

We hosted a grand re-opening for Murchie Science Building and renovation continues. This \$23 million project enhances our students' learning experiences, provides a state-of-the-art facility for faculty and specialty research labs — and it includes a cadaver lab.

SOM opened its 9th exchange partnership—this one in Belgium and this year it will offer a summer study tour in Taiwan and China.

We experienced our 10th year of growth in Graduate Programs, up 73 percent in the last decade to more than 1,600 students this fall.

Faculty led students on community mural projects, offered a summer workshop on the Holocaust and Rwanda Genocide, hosted the Curiosity Academy to spark interest in STEM fields

Social work interns worked side by side in the courtroom to advocate for parents and their children in Genesee Family Court.

The Center for Educator Preparation was cited for its “best practices” in improving program quality, enhancing teacher education, and creating preparation workshops.

In addition to many examples of progress and engagement, we are laying the ground work for the future.

This fall we launched the \$40 million Victors for Michigan campaign. Critical for us, this campaign is dedicated to exceptional student support, engaged learning, and big, bold ideas.

As part of that effort we again participated in Giving Blue day — during which more than 200 donors raised \$23,000 for scholarships and programing. Thank you for giving. You are our biggest ambassadors and we need your support.

The Riverfront Residence Hall and Convention Center, is one of the largest donations ever received by the University. This gives our campus its second residence hall as well as Genesee County’s largest banquet center. And it is home to our School of Management. The donation demonstrates a great confidence in the University.

Later this month, we expect to close on the FirstMerit/Huntington Bank building. This purchase marks the first addition of academic and administrative space since 2002 when the William S. White Building opened.

Together, these buildings add 500,000 square feet to our campus — increasing our campus footprint by more than 25 percent and providing much needed relief to the space limitations the campus has lived with for some time.

This unprecedented addition to UM-Flint provides growth opportunities and demonstrates confidence in the Universities’ future.

The Deans have been working with their colleges and each VC is working with their staff to identify space priorities. (As you can imagine, we have many space decisions ahead of us.)

Our students continue to provide inspiration and leadership. Amged (oam-GEHD) Eidelsafy (idell-saaf-EE), our student body president has provided strong and compassionate leadership this year. I have watched him champion for issues related to mental health, sexual assault awareness, and a more inclusive campus... I have seen him volunteering, meeting with students... he has set an example as an excellent leader.

Our students serve as role models for all of us. Throughout the semester they have gathered in support of each other and their peers throughout the world. They have held vigils and difficult dialogues, laughed, cried, and talked of their fears and their hopes. Many of our students worked together to champion the collective good, to understand and to be understood, and to make the world a better, more accepting place.

One of our recent graduates, Marla (MAR-la) Sievers (CEE-vurs), began studying the Flint water crisis as part of her work toward her Master's of Public Health degree, which she earned in December. Her studies along with work by key faculty helped to develop the Flint Water Crisis Course.

Marla is one of many students, faculty and staff that have stepped up to help in any way and in every way with this public health crisis. Thank you to those who helped us host the community's first water filter distribution, handing out about 3,000 filters in a single day.

Thank you to the Nursing Department for performing blood tests for the community. Thank you to Outreach for coordinating volunteers.

Thank you to those who joined other researchers from all three University of Michigan campuses to identify the various kinds expertise they have to bring to the crisis.

And, thank you to all of you who conducted testing, installed filters, and continue to ensure the campus has safe drinking water.

This year we will celebrate the University of Michigan-Flint's 60th year. We will also begin to celebrate the University of Michigan's bicentennial.

We most certainly will spend some time looking backwards at all that we have been — but we will also spend some time looking at what we can be and what we will be in the years and decades to come.

We know the future of the city of Flint is inherently important to the University of Michigan-Flint. In fact, our futures are mutually dependent upon the other.

As any of you who attended the Dr. Martin Luther King Day Celebrations just a few weeks ago may remember one of my favorite quotes of is from “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” ...

“I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.
You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be”

And, so, let me say this: Until the City of Flint is all it ought to be, we at the University of Michigan-Flint cannot be all that we ought to be.

Flint is a community of grit and resilience, a community that has never given up. And in spite of the landscape today, we are a community partner that will help define the future.

And, so, with that, I can confidently tell you: UM Flint is strong and I am honored and proud to work with you as your chancellor. Thank you for all you do to make us “leaders and best”.

Go Blue!