

President's Report to the NMU Board of Trustees
Dr. Chris Olsen
Friday, May 1, 2026

Thank you, Missie. I'm pleased to share with you several items in my President's Report. It's been a very productive and successful semester, which makes picking just a few highlights difficult.

I encourage trustees and those in attendance to regularly check NMU's news blog, *Northern Today*, at news.nmu.edu to learn more details than what I can provide in my limited time here this morning.

Let me begin with some student recognitions:

- Senior Elise Crossman is one of 65 students nationwide selected to receive a highly competitive fellowship through the Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange for Young Professionals (CBYX). After graduating tomorrow, she will spend the 2026-27 academic year in Germany studying, interning and living with hosts on a cultural immersion program. The accounting and international studies major from Charlotte, Mich., is the second NMU recipient of this award in two years. Part of Elise's NMU experience included study abroad in Bielefeld, Germany, and she is very excited about her return to that country.
- Noah Andexler is one of 20 graduate students nationwide selected to receive the Ecological Society of America's 2026 Katherine S. McCarter Graduate Student Policy Award for their demonstrated commitment to science advocacy. This prestigious program is designed to bridge the gap between rigorous ecological research and impactful environmental policy. Noah received an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. for policy, communications and career training, which was followed by meetings with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to discuss the importance of federal investments in the biological and ecological sciences. Noah is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow who is using advanced DNA analysis to study brown and black bear populations and feeding patterns in Alaska. His goal is to provide essential information to the National Park Service to guide bear management decisions.
- Speaking of research ... I had a chance to attend NMU's 30th Annual Celebration of Student Scholarship. It featured 195 posters, 20 oral presentations, more than 30 art pieces with about 250 individual students showcasing their work. I know Trustee Lindberg stopped by the event – I'm not sure about any other trustees – but I'm confident Steve would join me in saying that it was an amazing display of high-quality work throughout Jamrich and Harden Halls, and DeVos Art Museum.
- A collaborative mural has been completed in the newly-remodeled Lydia Olson Library. The artwork is by graphic design and ecology student Sydney Kuipers, and depicts a variety of animals native to the Upper Peninsula arranged in a geometric-type pattern. Campus and community members assisted in painting the mural. The project was initiated by student Vann Squier as a community service internship through the Student Leader Fellowship Program. Please check it out.
- Eight members of NMU's Eta Phi Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, recently presented their scholarly, creative and collaborative work at the Sigma Tau Delta Annual International Convention in New Orleans. Kailey Buettner won first place in creative nonfiction; Alexandria Bournonville was honorable mention in the alumni award category; and Isabel Nameth-Beck won the chapter display award. The group's advisor, Professor Kel Sassi, also chaired a roundtable presentation at the convention.

A few other faculty and student collaborations ...

- Northern's Director of Choral Activities, Erin Colwitz, was selected to serve as conductor in residence at New York City's Carnegie Hall for an April 21 Masterwork Festival Chorus performance. She took full advantage of the opportunity to bring along her own singers, creating a memorable experience for

28 students from the NMU Arts Chorale and 99 members of the Marquette Choral Society, which she also directs. The delegation sang alongside professional chamber orchestra musicians and soloists who typically perform at the Metropolitan Opera and on Broadway. What an opportunity for Erin and the singers involved

- I know most of you are familiar with the research done each spring by the NMU Biology Department studying blue-spotted salamanders. While I've been told the community has been actively involved in this project for a number of years, this year Dr. Jill Leonard and students expanded the citizen science aspect by having community members assist with measuring the amphibians, taking their photos and downloading them into to a database for additional study. I even participated one evening.
- The Michigan Association of Broadcasters recently announced its yearly award winners, including WNMU-FM Public Radio 90 host and student Anna Tousley for her *Holiday Jazz Showcase: Not Your Typical Christmas Show*, and Music Host and Producer Kurt Hauswirth in Special Interest & Cultural Programming for *Windmill Music*. Also recognized were several NMU communication and media studies students, including multimedia journalism majors Luke Knittle and Emma Marotz. The NMU student hockey broadcast team received honorable mention for "Best Live Sports Coverage" in the college audio section. Congratulations to all of our MAB honorees.

Turning to faculty and staff:

- Dr. Steve Grugin was recently honored by WLUC-TV as this year's Carl Pellonpaa Lifetime Achievement Award recipient for his positive impact to the U.P.'s arts and culture scene. Steve was the director of bands at NMU for 27 years, has led the City of Marquette band since 2012, and is a founding member of the Marquette Symphony Orchestra. We congratulate Steve on this well-deserved honor.
- Social work faculty member Vikash Kumar participated in the 64th Session of the United Nations' Commission for Social Development, held at the UN Headquarters in New York earlier this semester. During that session, Dr. Kumar helped to organize an International Consortium for Social Development event and contributed to a panel discussion. Later in the semester, he and two other NMU social work faculty, Karl Johnson and Caroline Cheng, attended the World Summit for Social Development in Qatar.
- Please help me congratulate NMU Police Lt. Jon Kovar, who was selected the Officer of the Year by the Marquette County Law Enforcement Administrators Association. Lt. Kovar has a bachelor's and master's from NMU, and is a graduate of the NMU Regional Police Academy. In his current role, he reviews all NMU cases and processes all criminal cases with the Marquette County Prosecutor's office and courts. He works closely with other county agencies, including the Michigan State Police crime lab. He is also a member of NMU's CARE Team. We thank Jon for being a valued member of NMU PD.
- And I would be remiss if I did not mention this...
Northern's facilities and grounds crew survived the storm-filled Winter of 2026, and what a winter it was for them! Marquette had its second highest snow total ever. It resulted in an NMU record of 11 university cancellations, 8 of which impacted classes. A shout out to the faculty who had to reorganize their courses multiple times, and to staff members who were involved in rescheduling – and then again rescheduling – events and meetings throughout the semester. The campus really came together during these extreme weather conditions.
- As board members, you were made aware of the recovery of Trenton Massey, but I wanted to take a moment to again express our deepest condolences to Trenton's family and friends.

I also want to recognize the amazing campus and community response both during the search and in organizing memorial events that have since taken place. I have been in contact with Trenton's family and they are very appreciative of the outpouring of support.

Let me close with a few quick athletic notes about our winter season.

- Winter Wildcats brought home these four titles:
 - Men's basketball – a share of the GLIAC regular-season crown
 - Women's Nordic ski team - the Central Collegiate Ski Association
 - Our combined men's and women's Nordic ski squads winning the NCAA Regional Championship.
 - And our Alpine men's and women's skiers for the combined win at the USCSA Regional Championships.
- NMU teams that advanced to their respective national tournaments were men's and women's basketball, men's and women's swimming & diving, men's and women's Alpine and Nordic skiing, and women's wrestling.
- Basketball standout Dylan Kuehl was named a First Team All-American – Northern's first since 1987, capping off one of the most decorated seasons and careers in men's program history. Dylan was also the D2 Midwest Region Player of the Year, becoming the first Wildcat to ever receive that honor. He swept GLIAC Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year honors this year.
- Standout swimmer Leo Nolles was selected for the GLIAC's Pat Riepma Postgraduate Scholarship, making him NMU's third-ever recipient of this award. The honor, selected by the league's faculty athletic reps, goes to one GLIAC male and female student-athlete and includes \$5,000 in aid to the graduate school of their choice. Over the past 4 years, Leo has competed for Uruguay at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, was a 21-time All-American, earned three medals at the NCAA Championships, 19 GLIAC Championship medals with eight golds. He is also an Academic All-American, received a GLIAC Commissioner's Award and was the 2025 GLIAC Swimmer of the Year.
- This spring, junior attacker Josie Lakosky has been rewriting NMU's lacrosse record book and has twice been named the National Offensive Player of the Week. The lacrosse team is at the GLIAC Championships this week, as is track and field. We wish them luck.
- There were also three NMU club teams to advance to their national championships – our dance team, women's hockey team, and just a few days ago, our softball team, for the first time ever. Congratulations to those Wildcats as well.
- Next fall, we'll introduce you to all of our new coaches, including recently hired men's basketball coach Keil Ganz, who returns to NMU after having served here previously as an associate and assistant coach.

Finally, on a personal note, I want to close my report with a sincere thank you to the Board for choosing me as NMU's president. I appreciate your confidence in me and your support in my first months on the job.

In addition to all of the on-campus activities, so far I've had the chance to learn who Heikki Lunta is, start a dog sled race, experience not one but two snow hurricanes, and spend an evening protecting salamanders as they crossed the road!

But seriously, what an honor it is for me to hold this position, and I sincerely thank you for the opportunity. That concludes my President's Report.