

April 27, 2023

Announcement: New Leadership Alignment

Dear NMU Campus Community:

It has been a year filled with a number of challenges and a far greater number of wonderful moments for our university. There is much to reflect upon and I look forward to celebrating with you all next week at Commencement. Today, I am writing with some significant updates related to the alignment of our leadership structure at NMU.

Two Big Takeaways:

- We are aligning our leadership structure around five pillars. Three of those pillars are brand new and represent our focus on maximizing our investment in, and support of, the students and employees of Northern.
- We will launch two national searches at the end of the summer. The search for a lead diversity officer will start first. Our search for a permanent provost will get underway just a bit later.

A Deeper Dive:

It has been a privilege to get to know our campus and our community during my first three months as president. I knew NMU was a special place when I accepted this job, but as I learn more about our students, staff, and faculty I grow more excited, inspired, and humbled by all of the hard work, talent, and innovation that make NMU the special place it is. Thanks to you all, we are in a very strong position.

Indeed, excellence takes many different forms on our campus, but it always comes back to our people. We don't need any magic wands or secret formulas in order to move forward in big ways. Above anything else, I see our greatest opportunity through further investment in, support of, and care for the students and employees who are the heart and soul of Northern Michigan University. Focusing on our people is the *right thing to do*, plain and simple. It also happens to be the *smart thing to do* when it comes to recruiting and retaining our students and employees, and ultimately improving the bottom-line enrollment, budget, student success, and employee success metrics that define the overall health of the university we love.

We will realize this opportunity through action, but as a first step we need to align our leadership structures in order to elevate the right voices, align the right resources, and pursue the right strategies. Toward that end, I am organizing our leadership structure around five pillars.

Two of those pillars - **Finance & Administration and Academic Affairs** - are already well-established and very well-led. Vice President Gavin Leach will continue to lead Finance & Administration, while Dr. Dale Kapla will continue to serve as our Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs through the next Academic Year. As many of you know, the

search for a permanent Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs was paused some time ago. This fall we will resume that national search with Dean Carol Johnson as chair, and a goal start date of July 1, 2024 for the successful candidate.

The three new pillars will be formed by relocating selected units from Academic Affairs and Finance & Administration. Each of the three pillars will have an explicit focus on advancing the quality of the learning and working environment for our students and employees. As they always have, the units of the President's Division (Athletics, Campus Police & Safety, Communications, Government & Board Relations, and Marketing) and the NMU Foundation will support success across every area of the university, including the three new pillars:

People, Culture, & Wellbeing integrates and elevates our efforts to make NMU an even more diverse, supportive, and healthy place to learn and work. This pillar will align our efforts to develop greater Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) on campus, expand professional development opportunities for employees, and find new ways of promoting wellbeing through better physical and mental health for all. Rhea Dever will lead this pillar as a Vice President, directly supported by Abigail Wyche as an Assistant Vice President of Wellbeing, and a new Assistant Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. The D+I position will be filled through a national search that will commence during the late summer and be co-chaired by Dr. Amy Hamilton and Jill Compton. All three of these leadership positions will have a seat on Executive Council.

Student Affairs and Success will lead the way when it comes to strategically deploying our various academic advising resources, career development services and programming, and student services units in order to substantially improve our retention, persistence and completion rates across all academic disciplines. This pillar will also include units specifically dedicated to narrowing equity gaps across all student success measures. Dr. Chris Greer will lead this pillar as an Associate Vice President with a seat on Executive Council and a direct reporting line to the president.

The Northern Student Experience represents our bold commitment to further enhance the campus life experience that we provide for our students. From the moment a potential student gets their first recruitment hello from admissions to their time in campus housing; from their involvement in student activities to their joyful graduation, the "Northern Student Experience" will be supported through a strategic alignment of offices, activities, and resources that will collectively foster greater positivity, enrichment, and belonging on our campus. This pillar will be led by Jeff Korpi as an Associate Vice President with a seat on Executive Council and a direct reporting line to the president.

At this point, leaders of departments across these new pillars have been informed of these changes. Some changes will go into effect in the near term, some will become effective on July 1, 2023, and some will occur upon the successful completion of position searches. I have included below a visual depiction of the five new pillars, and the cross-pillar support provided

by the President’s Division and the NMU Foundation. I will look forward to presenting all the details of this alignment plan as part of our Fall Convocation.



Three Points in Conclusion:

First, this new alignment and the two searches are not about adding – or reducing - FTE. Other than the transition of one temporary position to a permanent one (Assistant Vice President for Wellbeing), the changes reflect new titles and new reporting, but not additional FTE.

Second, I reiterate that this new alignment does not achieve anything in itself. But it does create action channels that will lead to real change. As a first step, we will work this summer to design ambitious, high-impact “Priority Projects” for each pillar. These projects will support many of the strategies outlined in the strategic focus areas of our Interim Strategic Plan, and will be designed to generate significant, measurable outcomes within 15 months.

Third, none of these changes – the new pillars, the new searches, the new priority projects – are meant to sideline other transformational work and leadership partners on this campus. The new alignment does not impact the structure or size of our academic departments, which will continue to be at the heart of our success; our work on translating the Interim Strategic Plan into a new Mission, Vision, and “next generation” strategic plan will continue; and, without a doubt, our important university committees, shared governance bodies, and faculty and staff unions will continue to be essential partners as we move forward.

Again, thank you for building NMU into an institution that has so much to celebrate, and so much to look forward to. I am grateful to be your partner as we write our next chapter together.

Brock Tessman
NMU President