Good morning, I am delighted to be sharing this time with you.

(New grandbaby, snow day….)

(Introduce senior team:)

Barbara Dixon – Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Tess Barker – Chief of Staff
Jennifer Hogan – Executive Director for University Relations
David Lossing – Government Relations Director
Linda Moxam – Executive Director for Development and Alumni Relations
Mary Jo Sekelsky, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
Greg Tewksbury - Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance

My understanding is that the State of the University Address is relatively new at UM-Flint, having begun just two years ago, based on the recommendation of staff and faculty who took part in the LEAD program through Human Resources. It is important for the university community to come together in this way so that everyone is aware of the good work that has been done, and the work that lies ahead.

I have sat through my fair share of State of the University Addresses, some good, some not so good… all seemed to be way longer than necessary! I get how that happens… it is easy to get carried away describing all the amazing things going on campus. So I have spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of information might be most important to share without going overboard.

This fall: intention was to listen and meet as many people as my schedule would allow… that remains true for the spring as well. Way too much but to give you an idea

- Many of you have heard me talk about the search process/position description, I said, either very cool stuff going on or a great writer wrote the position description. Throughout the fall I have
experienced continuous examples of really great work going on. A few examples include: One of my first experiences was sitting in on the new faculty orientation. It was a series of exciting presentations by our faculty as well as an outside speaker. Among the presentations I heard that day was

- Assistant Professor Shelby Newport’s report about combing the classic with the modern. Her class was studying three types of columns, and assigned students to find examples in Downtown Flint, then using their mobile devices, sharing them on social media. It has to be one of the few examples of students turning in homework on Instagram and Pinterest! Often when I walk down Saginaw St I am looking for those columns too!

- I was on hand when Urban alternative house celebrated being awarded the prestigious Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification. This is another example of engaging with the community by turning a blighted structure into a classroom, lab, outdoor garden, and residence. Truly innovative.

- The Curiosity Academy organized by Associate Professor Jessica Tischler is a community club which helps 7th and 8th grade girls become interested in STEM. This is a partnership with UM-Flint Chemistry faculty, Longway Planetarium and Kettering University.

- The Physical Therapy and Health science faculty and students work with Flint area senior citizens to help reduce the risk of falling.

These are just a few examples of the kind of work being done.

Sampling of numerous events:

- A dinner at the home of Professor Ernest Emmenyonu (M-N-yon-new) hosting Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Chim-ma-MAHN-duh-en-GOH-zee ah-DEECH-ee(ay)—the “ay” is soft.)
- attended a foster youth forum with Congressman Kildee. In fact last night a group of students from Empowering Success, our foster youth program had dinner at my house.

- had pizza with students in the residence hall

- worked with the Faculty Council and CAC/BSP on the SP reaffirmation. I have appreciated the advice and council of both groups

- Our students coordinated a Die-In in solidarity with students across the country, working to draw attention to the fact that “Black Lives Matter”.

- US News and World report recognized UM-Flint in the Best Colleges of 2015 in three categories: Best in Midwest, Top Public Schools in the Midwest and Best Colleges for Veterans.

- Our student body president Nakshidil Saiden is a rock star, (STAND, a treat) she and her colleagues worked with MTA to expand transportation to help students shop for groceries and staples. Additionally, another cool aspect of their project is that they worked with various campus departments to create a bus shuttle app so that students know where the shuttle is at all times. It is a great solution to a real problem for students.

- On giving Blue day our campus, largely faculty and staff contributed almost 20 K in one day.

- I have repeatedly been inspired by the work of our faculty and staff in support of students and by the students I have met.

I have shopped at the Farmer’s market regularly (if you haven’t tried the brisket at Charley’s you ought to!), I about own stock in Café 501. I have met with students, donors, faculty, alums, staff, city and state leaders.
- We hosted President Schissel and the Regents in October, and then invited the community and campus to a conversation with President Schlissel in December.

- In August Bobby and Marsha Crim gave a gift of 500,000 and two weeks ago Phil and Jocelyn Hagerman of Diplomat Pharmacy made the largest non-bequest the University has received of 2 million dollars.

- With these gifts these donors and friends of the university demonstrate their confidence in the university of Michigan Flint… and this is only the beginning.

- I could go on and on about everything that went on this fall… suffice to say it has been a remarkable and inspiring fall. And I am proud to be a part of this community.

The members of the Flint community have also been amazingly welcoming and supportive of the University. Our history, that of the members of the Flint community lobbying the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor for a university in Flint demonstrates the deep connection between the university and the community, it is one of the selling points that led to my choice to join you here.

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, affectionately knows as “AASCU”, regional comprehensive universities by mission are “publically engaged”.

Public engagement means being “fully committed to direct, two-way interaction with communities…” Let me emphasize this point, this isn’t about service or research. The two-way interaction is what positions us as learners; we are not here to simply serve… the give and take with the community means we must be learner as well as teacher and for our community partners we must be seen as a resource and not necessarily the “answer” (AASCU). This is a fine, but critical balance.

Excellent scholarship, excellent research, and excellent teaching are all elements of engagement.
- UM-Flint offers the community applied research, technical assistance, service learning projects that test new models, approaches or best practices. These are just a few examples of the many exchanges between the university and the community.

- Greg Rybarcyk (Ri-BAR-check) in partnership with the CS Mott Foundation and other local institutions use GIS mapping to try to track young people in Genesee County who are unaccounted for at school and deal with the truancy issue that exists.

- The Writing Adventures Program with Flint elementary school children and our alum, award winning children's author Christopher Paul Curtis.

- The Theatre Department, and Flint Youth Theatre teamed up to produce 9XNoursihed, a production that told the story of the Farmer's Market in Flint.

- This work also allowed the University of Michigan-Flint to be named for the first time to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This distinction is given to universities who work to solve community problems and encourage students on a lifelong journey of civic engagement activities.

Getting this exchange with the community right, engaging and enhancing our community and region benefits the university, the community, our students. Increasingly communities look to universities to “more aggressively and creatively engage society’s most pressing challenges.” (AASCU).

Today as downtown Flint is making its way back to a more livable and vibrant community we are uniquely positioned as partners to more deeply engage the community in service of the learning of our students for the common good.

During the fall the campus participated in a review and reaffirmation of the university’s 2011-2016 strategic plan. This process included reviewing institutional data as well as soliciting input about priorities from campus members. As a reminder, we held two campus town
halls and used the web to gather additional feedback. A significant amount of work went into the development of the strategic plan and with just about 16 months to go in this planning period, it is critical that we clarify immediate strategic priorities. In addition to focusing the final implementation of this strategic plan, we will lay the groundwork for what will become the next round of strategic planning.

The four top strategic priorities that were identified during the fall are: (1) To increase enrollment, student retention and degree completion to achieve planned growth; (2) To foster a culture in which faculty are supported in pursuing disciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching, scholarship, and creative activity, and expand faculty professional development; (3) to fulfill our student-centered mission as we serve a growing and increasingly diverse student population; and (4) to enhance the quality and breadth of academic programs, and be a school of first choice. By the way, I can tell you that the results of the most recent CIRP report of freshmen that almost 64% of UM-Flint students report this as their first choice college, higher than our comparison groups at 57% and 52%.

As we move forward this spring we will address a number of our strategic priorities. We are in the process of conducting three critical searches; the Provost, and Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Health Professions and Studies these positions are key to academic planning and to addressing issues of quality, depth, student completion, faculty development, and research support. [invite those serving on the search committees for the provost and the deans to stand]

I would like to thank you for your service. I also want to encourage those of you who are not on a committee to be involved in the campus visits and provide your feedback to these important selections

In the meantime, the deans are working with interim Provost Barbara Dixon to make certain that faculty concerns are being addressed.

We have work to continue when it comes to creating a more inclusive and diverse campus community. This is not new; however, we must recommit ourselves to progress and change in multiple places across the campus. Diversity is at the core of great learning, we
simply must engage in a way that will move the needle. This month and into March the VCs, Deans, associate deans and directors will all participate in Cultural Competency training. It is a first step to creating a broader agenda and deeper engagement with cultural issues. At the same time all of our student government leaders will also be involved in the training. In order to coordinate and institutionalize diversity efforts across campus and provide leadership as we move forward, I will be seeking a Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion.

We’ve begun to develop a strategic enrollment management plan. While our enrollment numbers are good, they are less stable than we should be comfortable with. It is imperative we become intentional about building the buckets. In light of national and regional data about shrinking numbers of high school seniors, we need to develop a more intentional approach to growing enrollment. A critical element of this growth must be related to retention and completion, not simply filling the pipeline at the front end. It is mission critical and more cost effective. We must support increasing numbers of students to complete their degrees.

Enrollment has been growing fairly rapidly in the past few years. As we examine data together this spring we will unpack those numbers so we can begin to focus on the number of FY freshmen and transfer students we are enrolling.

The DEEP program is an important and meaningful program to the University and the region and yet, it must be supplemental to our core enrollment strength… of attracting qualified FT and transfer students. We will also reboot our Challenge program. This is a program that has admitted students who may not meet the traditional admissions requirements. The program will be renamed Promise Scholars and we will work much more intentionally in the front end of admission to matriculation to ensure the success of these students.

Our enrollment strength will come from qualified FY frosh and transfers matriculating and being retained. This is where we build and demonstrate the academic excellence of UM Flint. We will compete for students with excellent promise and potential. We will also continue to be an accessible 4-year institution in this region.
We will implement a two-pronged strategy that increases institutional aid and awards scholarships differently. First, we will look at underserved zip codes and work with schools and faith communities to identify students of promise who may be missing some element of our admissions criteria. At the same time, in those same underserved communities, we will offer scholarship funding to the top 5% of graduating classes. We will be serving the community in specific ways and strengthening our student body. We will be establishing scholarships this year to recruit Valedictorians and top 5% students.

As I talk about student success I want to be very clear that my definition of student success is high expectations and adequate support. This is not at all about lowering academic standards, it is about understanding who our students are, providing appropriate academic support, expanding our market, tracking and using the data to enhance retention and making ourselves more competitive.

I want us all to become expert in student retention. It is not uncommon for people to think enrollment means “recruitment” but it is important to understand managing enrollment calls for addressing issues of retention as much (if not more so) than recruitment. Later this spring we will host a retention summit in order to examine together institutional data that will allow us to identify targeted interventions to support increased retention of students.

I am often asked what would a good retention number be? While there is not a simple or single answer a good starting point is to look at the iPEDS comparisons through College Results. We will spend some time digging deeper into the data related to comparative and aspirational peers, but to give you an idea of where we are headed. There are 164 public, 4 year Master’s Carnegie institutions in the US that reported iPEDS data. The mean for 6-year graduation rates was 46.3% and the 75th percentile is 54.4%. Today we are at 37.5%, or about 10% below the mean. In comparison, our colleagues in Dearborn are at 53%. From my perspective, shooting to hit the mean is the first goal; and the next goals would be reaching the 75 percentile is a reasonable goal.

We are also not retaining first year transfer students in a competitive way, so we have some work to do on both fronts.
While 6 year grad rates are what we get measured by… retention for me is a much larger issue. As a regional comprehensive university, one of our charges is to transform our region, one way we will do that is through successful alumni moving into positions throughout the region. We do no one a favor by admitting students who are not ready, seeing them wash out and return to the community with debt and limited chances for readmission. This is why our partnerships, especially with Mott Community College are increasingly important. And our work with student transition and support are going to be front and center as we move forward.

A key issue to student support is faculty support. Top drawer teaching and research supports student success. As I have talked with faculty across campus I have heard you talk about needing support for faculty research and development, about high service loads, and the resulting difficult transition from associate to full professor. When President Schlissel was here the high service load topic came up. His question was also “why?”. In fact he suggested if it didn’t work for the faulty, change it.

While I cannot change the faculty governance structure I can tell you I am interested in a structure that maximizes faculty involvement in shared governance without becoming a burden that is perceived to be too weighty. The Provost will work with the deans this spring to review issues related to faculty research and development. We will also review the policy related to release time. Meaningful progress will take partnership across academic affairs to address these issues. This work is ahead of us.

I have heard a great deal about the budget model, in fact when I got here I kept hearing about the new budget model… when I finally asked how new it was someone told me it had been in place for 9 years. That does not qualify as new. I have spent the fall and will continue into spring to examine the budget model and the data, what it privileges and what gets missed. I do not know and haven’t yet seen enough data to determine if we are simply not served well by a decentralized budget model or if developing a more strategic focus on initiatives will address some of the gaps. It is clear that the budget conversation takes an amazing amount of time and oxygen and no matter how many meetings are held, the experience of inequity
remains for some group of people on campus. I will continue to work with the Provost, Deans and involved faculty committees to identify the specific steps to move forward.

We will need to look for points of leverage and how to work smarter as we move forward. We will want to access what kinds of things may be pulling away resources from our ability to support excellence in academics. The decentralization seems to allow for initiatives to be started from almost anywhere in the university, but if we are going to take the next step toward excellence we must look at what initiatives are core, strategic and put to rest the initiatives that draw resources away from the academic mission of the University. This will not be easy but it is critical.

We will roll out the formal part of our Capital Campaign this fall. Linda Moxam and her team have been laying the ground work for this for the past year and a half. Our goal is 40 million dollars and it will be utilized to support faculty and students. This spring, as we plan for the campaign, we will reboot our brand and review the way we tell our story. We are doing remarkable things on this campus and in the community, and we need to be more coordinated in how we use our resources to maximize our story telling.

I am committed to building an environment with a deeper level of transparency and trust. An environment in which there can be give and take, dialogue and questions, deliberation and consideration together… I would like to build a container for a relationship that has all of these elements. I hope that when there are inevitable differences in opinion, we can disagree respectfully as colleagues and continue working together toward the shared mission of the University of Michigan-Flint. Those of you working with me know I am a person of action, however, I long ago learned the African proverb: “If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together…” I have been shaped by team athletics, I believe we will get there better working together…

We will celebrate the university in the activities related to the inauguration this spring. These events will provide a wonderful opportunity to showcase the work of faculty and students. I look forward to your participation in those events.
Thank you for your time this morning and all that you do at the University of Michigan-Flint.

GO BLUE!