

President Sands' Opening Statement

Cleveland State University (CSU) was founded in 1964 with the express purpose of creating a public commuter university to serve local residents. Over the past 57 years, the university quickly grew in size, research stature, mission, and diversity. Now a Research-Extensive urban-serving University of over 16,000 students, CSU is Cleveland's only public research institution and leading supplier of graduates that live and work in Northeast Ohio. Driven by its mission statement focused on "empowering students, creating knowledge, engaging communities, and shaping our world," CSU is well-positioned to become a "nationally-recognized and student-focused public research institution that provides accessible, affordable, and Engaged Learning opportunities for all."

Our collective efforts to deliver on our mission statement since our last re-accreditation visit in Fall of 2010 have been documented in the Assurance Argument we submitted for HLC review. Assembling this complex document allowed us to reflect upon our strengths and identify ways to reiterate the institutional commitment to continuous improvement. In addition to describing how our policies, processes, procedures, and structures allow us to bring to life our mission and vision, we have included examples of initiatives and developments that demonstrate alignment with HLC accreditation criteria. Concurrently, these examples emphasize how our responsive and responsible planning relies on broad-based campus participation, while constantly monitoring how CSU fulfills its commitment to serve the public good by being effective stewards of the resources bestowed upon us by the state of Ohio.

Successful academic institutions can often point to sustained, stable leadership as a driving factor. CSU President Harlan M. Sands, the university's seventh president in its 57 year history, followed two successive presidencies that spanned 9 years each, enabling the university to maintain an upward trajectory of academic quality, access, and affordability that have advanced CSU in stature, size, and impact.

In December 2018, following an extensive process of campus-wide planning and consultation, President Sands issued a "Statement of Strategic Priorities" summarizing seven strategic themes to guide the University's development over the next several years. During the two-plus years since that document was published, the entire campus community - trustees, senior administrative and faculty leadership, colleges/departments, and individual faculty, staff and students - have worked to advance these seven themes. Our results to date are encouraging; overall retention rates are improving, applications are up, and our financial health has been solidified. We are attracting new support from state and private sources. We are adding faculty when others are retrenching. Every one of our constituency groups can claim ownership over these impressive accomplishments.

CSU's current strength is especially striking when considered in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic. Last spring, suddenly and unexpectedly, we were called upon to reorient our entire program to remote teaching and learning, implement new health and safety protocols, and conduct an on-campus testing effort to contain the virus. We met all these challenges. Through an evolving variety of adaptations, we have maintained, and in many instances advanced, our

academic programs so our students could continue to work toward their degrees, with a larger number of on-campus classes than many of our peers. We have done this while maintaining one of the lowest on-campus COVID-positivity rates in the nation for urban universities, a strong signal of our CSU community's unique ability to pivot and deliver when challenges confront us.

CSU continues to play a central role in leading our community through the next phase of the pandemic, with the success of our CSU-state-federal partnership to distribute 6000 vaccines/day at CSU's Wolstein events center to Clevelanders most in need.

Last summer, we initiated a review of the December 2018 Statement of Strategic Priorities with the goal of producing a new roadmap to guide our future work. We are calling this plan "CSU 2.0," reflecting the fact that it builds on the 2018 framework and adapts to our changing environment. The CSU 2.0 planning process began with the appointment of five task forces focused on the following aspects of our work: (1) Academics; (2) Administration; (3) Diversity/Inclusion; (4) Athletics; (5) Growth/Innovation. These task forces, all of which included faculty, staff and students, were charged to examine a range of issues within their spheres of responsibility and, by late November 2020, to report their findings and recommendations to the Executive Leadership Team, composed of the President and the University's senior administrative officers. In early January 2021, the five task force reports were posted on the University's website, and between January and March 2021, the Universities' senior leadership team (VP's/Deans), worked together to develop a blueprint for CSU's future called, "[Emerging from Pandemic: A Blueprint for CSU 2.0](#)," which was shared with the campus community on March 26, 2021.

"A Blueprint for CSU 2.0" builds upon seven strategic themes included in the 2018 "Statement of Strategic Priorities." One impact of the pandemic, for example, is heightened demand that public universities like CSU drive regional job growth through new or redesigned degree programs. A second is the likelihood of increased demand for remote teaching and learning opportunities. In addition, the demographic, competitive and state funding contexts of our work have all been affected by the pandemic. Against that background, CSU 2.0 builds around the following four themes:

Theme 1: Seek Distinction as a Leading Public Urban Research University. This theme is about two things: our academic standing as a national research university and our character as a public urban university. We aspire to be best-in-class, and we frame that aspiration in terms of our special mission, which influences the character of our educational programs, our research, and our relationship to the community of which we are a part.

Theme 2: Differentiate on Student Success and Engaged Learning. This theme makes it clear that, even as we value our work and our standing as a research university, the education and success of our students is our number one priority. Engaged learning is our homegrown approach to education that draws on the latest research on high impact pedagogical practices while linking classroom experience to preparation for the workplace and life after college.

Theme 3: Strengthen Anchor Mission/Become Beacon Institution. An urban university frames its mission in terms of the needs of the metropolitan community and region it serves. Our collective impact on the Cleveland area during our history brands us as an “anchor” institution and positions us – now – to broaden our reach. As we pursue excellence in education and research, we are ready to become a “beacon” institution, enrolling talented students and recruiting gifted faculty not only from our region but nationally and internationally.

Theme 4: Build Financial Strength/Strengthen Campus Community. We must be strong both financially and organizationally if we are to achieve our other goals. We build financial strength because we know it is essential to accomplish our mission. We seek to strengthen our community because only the inspired efforts of our people--faculty and staff, collectively and individually--can accomplish our goals.

As documented in our Assurance Argument, we have also developed and implemented several successful programs that have made a direct impact on student retention and progression. The Parker Hannifin Living–Learning Community, the Lift-Up Vikes program focused on students in need, the Student Success Coaches program aimed at increasing first-year student retention, post-COVID-19 distribution of direct student aid, and the University’s leading role in the Say Yes to Education program are some exemplars we bring to your attention as illustrative of CSU’s hard work to create and offer high-quality programs and outreach initiatives that serve well-documented community needs.

As we begin to implement CSU 2.0 and enter the next decade of accreditation by HLC, we look forward to receiving feedback from the review team that can help guide us through future compliance requirements and expectations. Our proud sense of identity will allow us to grow further by working closely with all of our constituents to strengthen the dynamic, collaborative, and engaging educational environment we offer to all our students and members of the communities we have been serving for close to six decades.

On behalf of our extremely talented and committed faculty, staff, and students, we welcome you to CSU and look forward to working with you as we move “Forward Together”.

Harlan M. Sands, J.D., M.B.A.

President

Cleveland State University