**Fall 2021 State of the University  
Central Washington University**

**October 20, 2021**

**Greg Lyman, CWU Faculty Senate Chair**

Welcome to the 2021 State of the University address. I am Greg Lyman, chair of the Faculty Senate for this academic year.

I have the privilege this year of introducing our new president, Jim Wohlpart. During the past few months, I have had the pleasure of working with President Wohlpart, who already has proven himself to be an engaged and enthusiastic leader for our university.

I have appreciated his willingness to listen, to hear divergent opinions, to ask questions, and to challenge the status quo in ways that encourage new thinking and innovation while also respecting our rich history and traditions.

His commitment to developing a culture of shared leadership and shared responsibility are already apparent in his actions, which have included the creation of the COVID-19 Fall 2021 Planning Committee and Taskforce, and the Steering Committee developing a new Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan for the university. With each of those groups, he made a deliberate choice to include representatives from a wide range of university constituencies. It is only through such frameworks that we can gather around shared values and a common vision.

We have many challenges and opportunities facing us in the coming months and years. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to hinder our efforts to return to a more normal, pre-pandemic way of living and learning, and has had an impact on our enrollment that will continue to be felt for years to come. We will need President Wohlpart’s leadership and direction as we move forward.

President Wohlpart comes to us from Northern Iowa University, where he served as Interim President for nearly a year, and as Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs for more than five years. He led more than 450 full-time faculty as well as 150 part-time faculty and 300 staff members.

At Northern Iowa, and before that at Florida Gulf Coast University, President Wohlpart championed collaboration and teamwork. He built strong leadership teams that had remarkable success in areas including sustainability, enrollment, strategic marketing, and retention and persistence. He helped to build pipelines, particularly for people of color, to achieve greater equity and inclusion.

With more than 25 years of experience in higher education leadership, President Wohlpart has served as a department chair, an associate dean, a dean, a provost, and a president.

Throughout his career, he has demonstrated a belief in the transformative power of higher education, especially through applied learning experiences, service learning, and community engagement.

I am excited about what lies ahead. The transition from one leader to another offers opportunity for renewal, reflection, and re-engagement.

I’m looking forward to working with Dr. Wohlpart as we refresh the vision and direction for our university.

Now, please join me in welcoming the 15th president of Central Washington University, Jim Wohlpart for his first State of the University address.

**Jim Wohlpart, CWU President**

Thank you, Faculty Chair Lyman. I appreciate that very kind introduction.

And thank you, to all of you who have gathered this morning in the Concert Hall, and all of you who are watching this presentation as it’s being live streamed.

Thank you, Faculty Chair Lyman. I appreciate that kind introduction.

And thank you to those of you who have gathered this morning in the Concert Hall for this presentation. This includes leadership from all employee groups, faculty senate, union leadership, student leadership, deans and department heads, athletics, residence hall advisors.

We have community members in the Hall. Thank you to our two county commissioners, Laura Osiadacz and Cory Wright. They’ve come to also represent the community, which is such an important part of our vision and mission moving forward. I’ll talk more about that.

Along with the Executive Leadership Team and their leadership teams, we do have a Trustee in the house, Trustee Gladys Gillis is with us today too. So, thank you for coming.

We have also invited the three various Steering Committees guiding important work on our campus, which I will talk about (V/M/SP, Fall 2021 COVID, Equity Scorecard). I cannot wait until we can welcome the entire community back for these types of gatherings so we can celebrate.

We should take a moment to acknowledge the land on which Central Washington University resides. It is the historic home of the Yakama people. The federally recognized Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation is made up of Klikitat, Palus, Wallawalla, Wanapam, Wenatchi, Wishram, and Yakama people.

The Yakama people remain committed stewards of this land, cherishing it and protecting it, as instructed by elders through generations. We are honored and grateful to be here today on their traditional lands. We give thanks to the legacy of the original people, their lives, and their descendants.

I read this statement as a reminder that the land is not owned. It is, rather, a gift that is inherited. In taking responsibility for that gift, we must think of the seven generations—of how we will pass this gift forward and create a legacy worthy of our inheritance.

Christina Torres Garcia, Director of El Centro, reminds us that reading this statement should disrupt our usual ways of thinking and being in the world – our epistemology and ontology – to help us think beyond ourselves to something bigger. This new way of thinking and being will be a theme of my talk, and indeed of my work as president.

I’d like to start, and end, with a personal story about my father which will frame my comments.

My father had a very profound effect on my life and on my values, on my role as a faculty and as an administrator. So, this is a shout out to my father, and to all fathers, including my Father-in-law Dennis Lendstrom, who is watching today.

One of the few benefits that we’ve gain after what we injured what we injured over the last 20 months is the ability to connect through the Internet. So, I also want to give a shoutout to Mother Pam Wohlpart—who is also watching along with hopefully my siblings, we’ll find out which one of them tuned in—and to all mothers, including my Mother-in-law Linda Linsin, and Step-mother-in-law Amy Linsin. I must say, I am blessed with remarkable women who guide my life, and that includes my partner Sasha Linsin Wohlpart, who is with us today.

As some of you know, my father passed away from cancer just a little over a year ago, after a long and valiant battle. About four years ago, I made the trek from Iowa to Tennessee to visit my father and spend time with him. When I arrived at his home in Oak Ridge, he told me he had made reservations at the Snowbird Mountain Lodge, one of his favorite spots in the Smoky Mountains.

On the day of our reservations, he asked me to drive, which was very unusual, but I could tell that his cancer had progressed and he didn’t have the energy or focus to be behind the wheel. We drove the Cherohala Skyway across the Tennessee mountains into North Carolina to the lodge.

Along the way, scenic pullouts were marked with brown signs sporting an image of a camera. As we passed each pullout, my father said, quizzically, “I wonder why they sell cameras up here?” At the next one: “Look at that, cameras for sale!” At one pullout that also offered picnicking, he declared, “Picnic tables for sale too!”

No, my father was not experiencing dementia. His dry sense of humor was his *modus operandi* all his life.

About two-thirds of the way up the Cherohala Skyway we passed what looked like two telephone poles opposite each other on either side of the road. At the top of each pole, five-foot long planks extended out over the road, leaving about a twenty-foot gap in between. I wondered out loud what the poles were for.

“Flying squirrels,” he explained.

Within my family, two methods of responding to my father emerged over time. My four siblings and I either ignored my father or we played along. My mother, on the other hand, took every word seriously. She would argue with him to try to get him to see the error of his comment. So when my father stated, simply, “Flying squirrels,” I responded: “Right, flying squirrels.” And then drove on.

My father and I always talked about my work. He had been a professor and department head of biology at Kenyon College, so he took a keen interest in my professional life. At one point, he had been offered a presidency at a liberal arts college in Washington, but turned it down because of the disruption it would cause the family. He would be so proud of where I have landed, and especially of the work all of you do and the impact that you make on so many lives.

Over the last four months that I have been at Central Washington University, and the six months before that during my transition, I’ve done a lot of listening. To faculty, staff, and students. To our administrative team. To alumni and donors. To individuals in the Ellensburg community and beyond.

I keep hearing the same thing over and over: Central Washington University is a special place because it provides a transformative life experience for our students.

The faculty and staff both inside and outside the classroom care deeply for students, getting to know them and assisting them on their journey. In the classroom, the self-exploration necessary for this transformative experience occurs through classes that provide the knowledge and skills necessary for professional preparation, civic agency, and a life of curiosity and wonder. Outside the classroom this learning is then deepened through solving real world problems in real world settings—service learning, internships, undergraduate research, community engagement and other high impact practices.

Because of our focus on access, we offer this transformative experience to a wide array of students, from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, racial and ethnic groups, students from rural and urban settings. And this emphasis on access and diversity makes us special and distinct. We are the most diverse four-year public university in the state of Washington.

As a result, we have great opportunity before us as an institution of higher education. But we also have a great responsibility to take our work to the next level. Given the impact of what you do, we must consider ways in which we can broaden our reach and deepen our commitment.

I want to take the rest of this talk to share my thoughts on the state of Central Washington University and the efforts we will make together to transition from a truly good institution of higher education to a great institution that takes up the responsibilities before us.

First: To Elevate Shared Governance and Shared Leadership.

As I consider the work we have before us to deepen our ability to work together in governing the university, I consider three key elements:

* We must act in ways that are both collaborative and inclusive – which is a challenge. It is easy to be collaborative with a small, like-minded group, or to be inclusive with a large group but not really allow that inclusiveness to drive decision-making. To balance these two, to be both collaborative and inclusive, is the work of democracy. It is messy and hard and takes practice.
* Second, we must find meaningful ways to share information that is relevant and allows for participation in decision-making; that is, to be transparent in ways that inform members of our university so that they can participate in governance. This may mean shifting our current arrangements, where every meeting is livestreamed to the world and no one says anything, to holding meetings where we can be much more open and honest and truly deliberate—where we can challenge each other and disrupt the status quo.
* And, third, to be data-informed – but not data-driven. We must remember that behind every data point is a human being, an important program or project, with some context and history that must be honored. Data should inform, but not drive our decisions. I do recognize that developing good data systems that are accurate and reliable, that have integrity, is the first step in this process. We will be working to enhance our Office of Institutional Effectiveness in order to provide the university community the data we need to inform decisions going forward.

As we elevate shared governance together, we must recognize the responsibility we have to share our voice and our perspective while balancing that responsibility with what I call “institutional thinking” – remembering that our decisions must be grounded in doing what is best for the university as a whole.

As you know, one example of this new shared governance model was used in the Fall 2021 Committee and Task Force, which included membership from all employee groups (faculty, classified staff, exempt staff, administrators) and students. I asked each member to bring perspectives from their area to meetings and to listen to other perspectives. This is the truly hard work of shared governance, and of democracy, to balance representing your area, the voices from your constituents, your ideas with authentic listening to the voices and ideas of other areas.

I asked this group to operate through a consensus model, recognizing that in this model not everyone will agree with the final result, but the conversation leads to a general view shared by most. I truly appreciate the hard work that this group did and Dean Gregg Heinselman and Associate Provost Gail Mackin’s leadership.

As we think about taking this work to the next level, I will ask: can we expand this type of collaborative interaction with the Ellensburg community and the Kittitas Valley? Can we weave our work together, as one entity, making decisions that will improve the lives of everyone living in this area? Recognizing that we will have different perspectives and points of view? Can we find a common thread that will knit us together as we work to take our community to the next level?

Second, to be guided by a clear and inspirational Vision and Mission, and well thought out Strategic Plan.

As you know, we are using a similar shared governance model to develop a new vision, mission, and strategic plan. The Steering Committee has defined what they consider to be a vision and a mission to guide our work:

* A vision statement is an aspirational, memorable, future-oriented statement that is big and bold enough to propel the university forward. It should inspire the members of the institution to strive for their dream and constituencies outside the institution to support that dream.
* A mission statement captures the university’s core purpose and inspires the consistent, high quality, and intentional actions by which the vision will be achieved. It guides strategic planning and decision making.

I want to thank members of the Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan Steering Committee for their deep commitment to thinking institutionally and lifting up the voices of the university community and of our local community and supporters. Please remember that they are facilitators of your voices, so your participation is critical to this process.

The strategic plan that we develop as a community will provide a blueprint for how we will achieve our vision. The strategic plan will be used to guide all decision-making—budget allocations and reallocations, new program development, personnel—and must have as a central focus student engagement and student success.

Indeed, several initiatives are already underway as we invest in student success to ensure our future: creating a seamless and integrated effort for recruitment, retention, persistence and graduation of both new first year students and transfer students; elevating our marketing connected to recruitment, which will include an overhaul of our website; developing a stronger brand presence in the state; and creating a culture of philanthropy and elevating our fundraising efforts. These are investments we will make in the near term that will allow us to thrive in the long term.

As we position ourselves for long term success, we must consider how we are distinct as an institution of higher education. In the listening I have done, two elements have surfaced time and again. This feedback is very much in line with research on the future of higher education and especially the preparation of students for the world of work and of civic agency over the next ten to twenty years.

First, I have heard strong support for becoming an equity-focused institution. Recognizing that over 40% of our student population comes from groups representing diverse races, ethnicities, identities and backgrounds, we have the opportunity to create a culture of belonging as a foundation for welcoming these students to our community, both on our various campuses and in the local community. We can work to develop what Django Paris calls “culturally sustaining” programs, projects, and initiatives so that we recognize, honor, and indeed sustain the histories, literacies, languages, communities, and cultures of the diverse individuals who make up our community.

As you know, we have launched a self-reflective process to analyze our work using the University of Southern California’s Equity Scorecard. This process will provide us an honest and authentic accounting of where we are with the support and success of our traditionally underrepresented students, faculty, and staff—and then to create action to build on our strengths and address our shortcomings. I want to thank the committee that has come together to guide this work and the co-leaders, John Vasquez, Associate Dean for Access and Equity and Sigrid Davison, Associate Director of Diversity and Inclusivity.

Second, I have heard about, and studies demonstrate the importance of, High Impact Practices at Central, including especially engaged learning experiences. To take this work to the next level, we might heed surveys of employers from recent years which more strongly emphasize the need for institutions of higher education to focus on intercultural literacy, the ability to communicate and collaborate with individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives in engaging and solving real world problems. This might be a niche for Central Washington University, a place where we could become a model in the Pacific Northwest, and perhaps the nation: to create engaged learning experiences with a special focus on bringing individuals with diverse backgrounds together.

And if we could do this work of developing High Impact Practices in intentional and developmental ways, we could truly stand out from what other institutions do. Rather than having pockets of these types of experiences that students may encounter, we could thoughtfully and intentionally create experiences, connected to the curriculum, that they must move through in their time with us.

And can we connect this work to the local community? We must always be asking ourselves, how do we, as a university, serve the community in which we are embedded? Can we develop a Service Learning Institute to integrate community engagement in specific courses, partnering with non-profits on meeting their needs? Can we work with the business community to develop a professional readiness program that prepares our students for internships so that when they join a local business they are ready to add value on day one? And then to stay in Ellensburg when they graduate?

I remember, during my visit with my father in the Smoky Mountains, that we talked about the role of the faculty and the curriculum in students’ lives, the way in which an intentional and developmental series of learning experiences could open possibilities for students – and even change the trajectory of their lives. I reminded him of a former student of his that I ran into in Maine at a workshop I was leading many years earlier. When the individual heard my last name, he approached me.

“Now Wohlpart, that’s an unusual name. Any relation to Al Wohlpart from Kenyon College?”

I explained that I was his son. He told me that he had taken a class from my dad 30 years earlier that greatly influenced his life. I asked him if he would like to speak with my father. I pulled out my cell phone, reached my dad, and told him I had a former student of his who wanted to chat. After I handed over the phone, he went to an alcove and they had a thirty-minute conversation, deeply reflective and philosophical but periodically punctuated with uproarious laughter.

When he returned the phone to me, I could tell that the conversation had moved him. He explained that he had taken a class with my father called “Man and Nature,” part of an interdisciplinary experience in the foundational curriculum intended to broaden students’ understanding of the world, expand their ethics beyond the anthropocentric, and initiate an awareness of interconnections and interrelationships, at once building their capacity for humility and their capability for leading change.

The curriculum had been designed in response to the growing awareness in the 1970’s of the human impact on the world, the birth of Earth Day, the advent of the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, and the beginning of an ecological mindset. My father’s former student explained that he was not a science major, that he did not take another course with my father, but that this one course offered texture to his entire life.

How do we take up the professional responsibility before us, I asked my father, and I ask you, to create curricular and co-curricular experiences that respond to our time, that allow this generation of students to engage the big questions of their era in ways that make explicit the purpose behind the courses they take? That indeed offer a sense of coherence and meaning such that students complete their education wanting more, not less? That prepare them not only for professional careers but also for active citizenship, able and willing to engage diverse perspectives so that we are more innovative and creative but also so that we weave the tattered cloth of our democracy back together? And, finally, that create a foundation for curiosity and wonder and life-long learning?

Third, to embody an ethos of Deep Care.

Like shared governance, deep care is a challenge because it involves a paradox, but paradoxes are, as Parker Palmer tells us, the place where meaningful and purposeful lives are lived.

Can we learn to care deeply for individuals, for the people who they are and the people who they are becoming, recognizing that we are all on a journey, and at the same time balance this care of individuals with care for the community as a whole? This is the challenge: at the same time that we show care and concern for individuals, we must think institutionally – to think beyond our programs, departments, colleges, divisions – to what is best for the university as a whole.

And beyond even that: to broaden our thinking out to incorporate the Ellensburg community and Kittitas Valley. Central Washington University cannot be successful without building partnerships and collaborations with our local community and with the state.

Deep Care is not a pass. It does not say that everyone gets to do as they want. As part of Deep Care we not only ask everyone to think beyond themselves, we also expect the highest level of quality and excellence in all we do. True care is not about keeping the bar low so that it takes no effort to leap over the bar; it is about raising the bar and then providing support and professional development so that individuals can flourish.

And, fourth, to remember the Deep Purpose of our work.

At Central Washington University, we are centrally about transforming the lives of students, their families, and their communities. As faculty and staff, you touch the lives of students each and every day, providing a foundation for their journey and shaping the contours of the path ahead of them.

This is a remarkable opportunity, but it is also an important responsibility. We must provide every student who comes to Central Washington University the opportunity to know who they are, to find confidence in that person who they are becoming, and to find a pathway forward into the future that allows them to thrive.

Our work must focus on student engagement and student success for this transformation to happen, through meaningful academic programs, curriculum, and pedagogy; through intentional and developmental co-curricular programs, including High Impact Practices and engaged learning; and through extra-curricular programs that develop the social-emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of our students’ lives. They are whole people, and we must educate them as whole persons.

The deeper purpose of higher education remembers that we are about more than preparing our students for careers. So much more. We are about preparing them for life – for living full and rich lives imbued with meaning, full of passion for this present moment knowing that it is the only moment we are ever given—and in that full and complete presence we live into our purpose, understanding our gifts and talents and how to offer those gifts and talents to meet the world’s needs.

And those needs are great at this time. My conversations with my father impressed upon me deeply that the role of higher education is to assist each and every one of us in engaging the pressing issues of our present time. We have three before us that we must take on if the teaching and learning experience is truly relevant. They are:

* Climate change that is rocking our planet, creating extreme heat waves, drought, and fire;
* Racial injustice that has led to demonstrations across the country and on many university campuses over the last few years; and
* The polarization of our democracy, the inability of individuals with different political views to have a civil exchange, listen to other perspectives, and work towards a constructive solution to the problems we face.

How can we become a model for working together, across our differences, to engage these challenges, not just at the university but out into the community? This work will take open minds and open hearts; it will take building relationships and crossing bridges.

And everyone will have a role to play as our work moves to this next level. We cannot do this work in silos. We must come together as a community, to learn to be hosts and facilitate diverse perspectives, to be leaders-in-place.

If we can remember that we are centrally about educating the whole person—the intellectual, the social-emotional, the psychological, the spiritual—we must also remember that we are one institution and one community made up of rich and diverse perspectives and that creativity and innovation come from honoring our diversity even while we remember our wholeness.

When my father and I left the Snowbird lodge we drove to Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. Within this ecosystem stands the largest number of trees—tulip poplars in this particular case—over 130’ high and fifteen feet in diameter than anywhere else in the eastern United States. We were alone in the forest as we slowly walked up the path, my father’s laborious breathing a remnant of a recent radiation treatment. At each of the poplars close by the path, we paused and together leaned into the trees, feeling their cool bark, soothed by their ancient spirits.

We passed a nurse log, an ancient tree that had fallen to the ground, dead but sprouting new life. He stood by the log and wondered in awe at the way in which the old beget the new, how life passes on to life, how we live in a great circle. In that moment, as we stood together in Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, alone but embraced by something much bigger, much grander than our own lives, I felt the way in which my father’s deep sadness at his own mortality was imbued with an awareness that his life was whole.

On the drive back down the Cherohala Skyway, I asked my father, again, about the odd telephone poles. “Flying squirrels,” he said. When we stopped for a short hike up to a bald, I googled “Cherohala Skyway” and “Flying Squirrels.” I learned that the parkway had intersected an endangered population of northern flying squirrels who could not cross the roadway. The ingenuous design of the flying squirrel posts had allowed for a greater integration of the gene pool, and hopefully the survival of this population.

At that time, my father was eighty years old and full of life, his mind and his heart as sharp as they had ever been. He had found some magical way to know that his life was attached to something bigger. Something so grand that it grounded his daily existence in deep and rich meaning. His impact on students and his work supporting faculty and staff have been a model for me about how to offer my life as a gift to others.

Since the onset of his cancer, my father and I engaged in deep conversations about the end of life and what lay beyond—about the transition from this earthly existence to what comes next. He wanted to know, to be prepared, and to have some sense of where he was going. On our trip to the Smoky Mountains that fall, he no longer had any of those questions. He only talked of his children and grandchildren and the gifts they offer the world. Of his former students and faculty and staff whose lives he embraced as if they were family. Of ancient poplars, so tall and so majestic. And nurse logs that beget life. And flying squirrels.

Thank you for coming today. Thank you for the great work that you do caring so deeply for our students and for each other.

And thank you for believing.