

Board of Governors names interim chancellor; ensures forward momentum as State System prepares for future

Clarion University President Karen M. Whitney to assume role Sept. 12

Harrisburg – The Board of Governors of Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education today selected Clarion University of Pennsylvania President Karen M. Whitney to serve as interim chancellor beginning Sept. 12.

Whitney, who began her tenure as president of Clarion University in July 2010, will serve as interim chancellor following Chancellor Frank T. Brogan’s retirement from the System next month.

“Karen Whitney has provided strong, steady leadership as president of Clarion University for the past seven years,” said Board of Governors Chair Cynthia D. Shapira. “She is smart, strategic and pragmatic. Because she has strong relationships across the System and beyond—and is keenly aware of the challenges and opportunities ahead—she will be able to hit the ground running so we can continue our forward momentum.

“The State System’s mission has never been more clear—to provide student-centered, high-quality, affordable higher education for our students in every region across the state. When students arrive at our 14 universities later this month—and as students and parents consider their higher education choices in the future—they can know for certain that the Board and this system are laser-focused on that mission and are prepared to do everything necessary to advance it. We are grateful that Karen has agreed to serve in this vital role at this important time, and we know that she will help us continue the evolution of our system to be of highest impact.”

Whitney will assume the role of interim chancellor at a time when the Board of Governors is preparing an inclusive process to develop an implementation plan as the next phase in the strategic system review, which Chancellor Brogan and the Board of Governors commissioned last year. The review resulted in a series of recommendations, including—among other things—organizing the universities and the System to focus on student success, updating the governance structure and creating opportunities for greater collaboration across the System.

“Our purpose is to ensure we have a 21st century public higher education system that optimally serves the people of the Commonwealth, and is second to none,” said Shapira.

“I applaud Chancellor Brogan and the Board for having the courage to tackle issues that have developed over time in this system,” said Whitney. “Because of the foundation they have laid, we are prepared to take bold steps toward increasing educational opportunities for students, modernizing how we do business and ensuring a successful transition to the next permanent chancellor. That’s my focus, and that is what I’m committed to.”

Whitney earlier this year announced her intent to retire as Clarion’s president in

June 2018. Instead, she will leave that position in September to assume the role of interim chancellor.

“I’m honored and humbled by the opportunity to serve the students, faculty, staff, alumni and the citizens of this Commonwealth,” said Whitney. “Let me be clear, the reason I accepted the Board’s invitation to serve in this role is because I completely—one hundred percent—believe in this system and that every university in it is vital for this Commonwealth to be successful.”

Whitney recently completed a three-year term as chair of the presidents’ council for the 14 State System universities and is the longest currently serving president in the System.

“Every student succeeds when Pennsylvania has strong public universities that are part of a strong system,” she said. “I look forward to working with our students, faculty, staff and all stakeholders as we advance the distinctive mission of all 14 State System universities.

“This is a heightened time of change and opportunity for our system. I call upon each of us to seize the moment and work together to continue the positive transformation of our system, to focus our efforts on how we can help our students and our communities succeed and to make this system everything it can be.

“Our united commitment to this cause should be a loud and clear signal to every student and parent that our universities are serious about providing real access to opportunity, and we look forward to welcoming more than 100,000 to campus in just a few weeks.”

Chancellor Brogan announced in mid-July his intent to retire Sept. 1. A national search will begin in the fall for his successor. Executive Vice Chancellor Peter H. Garland will serve as acting chancellor from Sept. 2 until Whitney’s arrival on Sept. 12. “I look forward to working with Dr. Garland and the team in the chancellor’s office,” said Whitney.

As president of Clarion University, Whitney recently announced the university’s greater focus on providing professional degree programs that meet the needs of students and the changing economy. Clarion University currently has the highest number of accredited professional programs in the System.

“Over the years, we’ve carefully tracked what our students hope to achieve with a degree from our university, and have made strategic decisions to ensure we are aligning with their needs, and the needs of our region,” said Whitney. “That is the same conversation that is taking place all over the System—a conversation that is focused on students.”

Whitney previously was vice chancellor for student life and diversity and dean of students at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and assistant and associate vice president for student life and director of resident life at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

She earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in public

administration, both from the University of Houston, and a Ph.D. in higher educational administration from the University of Texas at Austin.

Whitney held numerous positions in the area of residence life at the University of Houston. She also served as an adjunct assistant professor and instructor in the School of Education at Indiana University and taught various courses at both the University of Texas at San Antonio and the University of Houston.

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, enrolling more than 100,000 degree-seeking students and thousands more in certificate and other career-development programs. Collectively, the 14 universities that comprise the State System offer more than 2,300 degree and certificate programs in more than 530 academic areas. Nearly 520,000 State System university alumni live in Pennsylvania.

The State System universities are Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania. The universities also operate branch campuses in Oil City (Clarion), Freeport and Punxsutawney (IUP), and Clearfield (Lock Haven), and offer classes and programs at several regional centers, including the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg and in Center City in Philadelphia.