



Report of the Presidential Performance Review Committee

University of Minnesota
Board of Regents

July 8, 2020

PROCESS

As outlined in Board of Regents Policy: *Board Operations and Agenda Guidelines*, Chair Ken Powell appointed a Presidential Performance Review Committee in May 2020 for the purpose of assessing President Joan Gabel's performance during 2019-20. The committee included Regents Ken Powell, chair; Steve Sviggum; and Mary Davenport.

The Presidential Performance Review Committee first convened on May 15, 2020 to plan its work. The committee met six times to determine an evaluation approach, identify individuals to interview, gather feedback from Regents individually, and summarize its conclusions. Interviewees included Regents, senior University leaders, members of the faculty and student body, and external stakeholders. The committee also reviewed President Gabel's report of accomplishments.

The committee met with President Gabel on June 26, 2020 to deliver her performance review. The committee's conclusions are summarized below.

SUMMARY

Based on overwhelmingly positive assessments from nearly 30 people representing the University community, Joan Gabel earned a solid A in her first year as president. She has deployed a formidable combination of intelligence, experience, decisiveness and compassion to meet and exceed high expectations in her first presidential year. President Gabel's broad expertise and depth of knowledge in many aspects of higher education is evident and impressive. In particular, she deserves significant credit for strong leadership during a time of great upheaval.

The people we spoke with are inspired by President Gabel's presidency and have a high degree of optimism about the future of the University under her leadership. In particular, we highlight the following:

1. **COVID-19 Pandemic Response** – President Gabel's visible, decisive leadership in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic earned high marks from nearly everyone we interviewed. She continues to navigate an unprecedented global crisis with compassion, steadiness, and adaptability. The president and her team developed a COVID-adjusted budget, related

contingency plans, and a framework for delivering the University's academic mission in Fall 2020, and continued to ensure that service to the State of Minnesota in a time of need remained a priority. We have seen her leadership in this space work to unify the University community.

2. **Communication & Engagement** – Many individuals commented on President Gabel's visibility across the system and Minnesota, mentioning her personal warmth and unflagging energy, strong public presence, significant accessibility, and tremendous people skills. We are seeing this notable skill set translating into tremendous good will and positive new relationships with multiple groups – students, faculty, local and state policymakers, tribal governments, and business and donor communities. The committee also heard repeatedly that people appreciate the many emails and other communications used to relay decisions and stay in touch with students, faculty, staff, and others. This was especially evident during the initial response to the pandemic. Communications is an area of strength that will be important to maintain.
3. **Sense of Optimism** – Based on our interviews, President Gabel's presidency has captivated people. It's very early in her tenure to see hard evidence of specific outcomes, but the anticipation is palpable and people are excited to see what's next. It's clear to us that the University community in its broadest sense – from students and faculty to donors, business leaders and lawmakers – supports her and wants her to succeed.

The committee identified the following 2020-21 priorities for President Gabel:

- **Advance the Systemwide Strategic Plan.** The newly approved plan is compelling. Bring the plan to life by working closely with the Board to advance the plan's broad commitments and goals through tangible initiatives, specific targets, and clear metrics for tracking progress. This will signal to political leaders, parents, students, donors, and other stakeholders that the University is committed to advancing a bold vision.
- **Lay the groundwork for key decisions facing the institution** in the year ahead, and continue to engage the Board and other leaders as thought partners. Tapping the University's depth and breadth of talent will be necessary to meet the challenges confronting the institution in the years to come.
- Continue to **develop the University's senior leader team** to reflect her capacity for innovation and help advance her vision for the University. President Gabel's selection of Rachel Croson as Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs & Provost is a noteworthy example of recruiting top-notch talent to fill critical positions.

Overall, President Gabel has had a notably successful first year leading the University of Minnesota. Her forward-thinking leadership has served the University well, and we are optimistic that she has established a vibrant foundation for future success.