

Dr. James M. Smith is the 23rd president of Eastern Michigan University. He began his duties on July 1, 2016.

### **Highlights**

President Smith has led an active presidency at Eastern, undertaking many positive strategic initiatives. For example, President Smith:

- launched the GiveRise comprehensive fundraising campaign to raise \$100 million;
- revised the University's Strategic Plan, with a focus on three institutional priorities: student success; high-performing academic programs and quality research; and engaging and serving the EMU and regional communities;
- established the position of Chief Diversity Officer reporting directly to the President; and
- introduced the President's Sustainability Commission, which coordinated the evaluation process to earn a bronze STARS rating for EMU from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) – a rating earned by fewer than 5% of universities.

### **Investing in EMU's Campus**

Additionally, President Smith has led a significant investment in campus facility improvements tied to the priorities outlined in the University's Strategic Plan, including:

- To promote student success: launched the \$200 million Welcome Home 2025 initiative to renovate and construct new on-campus housing; partnered with Chartwells to invest \$10 million in EMU dining facilities; renovated the Rec/IM; and constructed the new Trinity Health IHA Health Center @ EMU.
- To support high-performing academic programs and quality research: the University introduced several new academic programs in high demand areas, including Engineering, a master's degree in Africology & African American Studies, a master's degree in Public Health, and programs in Cybersecurity; and renovated Strong Hall and Sill Hall.
- To engage and serve the EMU and regional communities: expanded and upgraded campus safety systems; constructed a new cogeneration unit to reduce EMU's carbon footprint and reduce energy costs; continued the successful LiveYpsi program to provide financial assistance to EMU employees to purchase a home in the area surrounding campus; and supported free internet access for Ypsilanti school children during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **New Enrollment Initiatives**

Providing opportunities for new populations to pursue their college dreams at EMU has also been a focus for President Smith. During his presidency, he was a leading proponent of the #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign, encouraging international students to study in the United States, and executed an innovative enrollment partnership with Beibu Gulf University in China.

President Smith also led the development of EMU's Frontliners Scholarship to partner with Michigan community colleges to continue college access for students who work in front-line industries.

Under Smith's leadership, the University's Engage @ EMU also launched the Eagle Engage Corps program to encourage students who stopped-out from EMU to return and earn tuition debt forgiveness in exchange for community service.

### **President Smith's Background**

Before coming to EMU, Smith served as president of Northern State University (NSU) in Aberdeen, South Dakota, since June 2009.

Smith, 66, who grew up near Columbus, Ohio, in Washington Court House, knew early on that he wanted to be a teacher. He always admired teachers and enjoyed school. He became an elementary and middle school teacher after earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education, from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in 1979. He would go on to earn a Master of Education, Educational Administration, from Xavier University in Cincinnati and a Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Leadership, from Miami University.

Over the next 28 years, Smith served as an elementary school principal, a teaching fellow and assistant professor at Miami, director of the Experiential Program for Preparing School Principals at Butler University in Indianapolis, and director of the Educational Leadership Program and coordinator of doctoral studies at West Texas A&M University. Smith was also vice president for Economic Development at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, before heading to NSU.

Smith's wife, Dr. Connie Ruhl-Smith, has an impressive resume of her own. She has been a teacher, author and administrator, and has done extensive work in student retention and student academic support, introduction of international partnerships, and much more. As Director of Development for International Relations for the EMU Foundation, she works with alumni and others to pursue international development opportunities.