Dear UCM Colleagues:

We enter this new semester and calendar year as the University of Central Missouri, a new designation which seems to fit more comfortably among our community every day. I continue to receive positive feedback regarding the new name, often from people sharing with me their sense of momentum and an eagerness to help move the university forward.

Working to achieve our new vision requires another transition, aligning the organization to best achieve our aspirations of providing a small-college learning environment coupled with large-university opportunities. A major step in this direction was taken with the realignment of the academic colleges, effective January 2. Accomplishing a change of this magnitude in one semester was no small feat. I commend faculty and staff across campus who served on academic task forces, the Strategic Planning and Resource Council, and Provost Y.T. Shah, for their leadership in making this reorganization possible. Through their collective efforts, extensive discourse was held and consensus reached in a truly collaborative style.

With the Missouri General Assembly now in session, we hear many rumors concerning increased support for higher education. Although it is unlikely the legislature will restore all the funding lost to previous state budget reductions, we are lobbying hard for enough funds to cover mandatory cost increases such as health insurance and utilities, allow salary increases and keep tuition increases down. We continue to seek funding for capital projects that include renovation of the Morrow-Garrison Complex, the W.C. Morris Science and Grinstead buildings. As we remind our legislators on a regular basis, we have not received major funds for capital projects since FY 2000.

In addition to the legislative season being underway, the calendar still says it’s winter in Missouri. To help enhance our preparedness for inclement weather, I have asked Bob Ahring, director of public safety; Dale Carder, associate vice president for advancement; and Mike Gebeke, physical plant director, to conduct a full review of our procedures for winter storm recovery. We hope to learn from our recent experiences and continue to improve our response to Missouri’s capricious climate. Meanwhile, I want to express my appreciation to the physical plant crews, many of whom worked 12-hour shifts during the recent snow and ice storms.
Faculty and staff compensation remains our top priority as we seek to recruit, retain and reward exemplary employees. The academic affairs office has been asked to revisit the merit pay proposal developed by a faculty committee for the previous administration. We’re starting the process of hiring new deans to support our new college structure.

On a related note, the national search for a vice president for university advancement is being ably led by Dr. Betty Roberts, vice president for administration and finance. I have appointed a search committee that includes students, faculty and staff members, alumni and foundation representatives. During this spring semester we will create a list of fundraising goals. Through these combined efforts, we continue to prepare internally for increased fundraising activities.

Dr. Roberts has also conducted an assessment of critical infrastructure needs and, not surprisingly, the deferred maintenance list is long. Looking forward, she has launched a master planning process to provide a road map for development. Our most recent master plan was completed in 1999 and this is an appropriate time to revisit the planning process.

New initiatives are underway in student affairs also, including discussions about the size and scope of a new wellness recreation center. As often happens with proposed building projects, the cost of what the students would like far exceeds the budget based on the fee they approved. Dr. Rich Morrell and his staff are researching options to help find the best answer to this dilemma.

With the excitement of a new semester and all the possibilities it brings, we should take time to celebrate our many recent successes. The pace of positive change continues to accelerate; your individual contributions have a direct impact on our future. We should all be proud of what we have accomplished and where we are taking this university.

President Aaron M. Podolefsky