

Mount Mary University: Names Isabelle Cherney 13th president

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MILWAUKEE, WI (May 5, 2022) – Isabelle Cherney, Ph.D., a respected social scientist and educator who was invited by the Obama administration on four occasions to participate in White House conferences, will become the 13th president of Mount Mary University.

Cherney will assume her duties as president on July 1, 2022, upon the retirement of the current president, Christine Pharr, Ph.D.

Cherney's academic research focuses on the effects of gender on STEM education and career pathways. She has experience in launching new programs, supporting educators and establishing early college and dual degree programs that provide high school students early exposure to college.

She was previously vice provost for graduate education at Merrimack College near Boston, Mass. Cherney has held multiple roles at the college since 2016, including dean of the Winston School of Education and Social Policy and founding director of the Merrimack Institute for New Teacher Support.

Cherney has also held positions at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., since 2000, including professor, director of the honors program, founding director of the interdisciplinary doctoral program in leadership, and the associate dean of the Graduate School and College of Professional Studies.

“Dr. Cherney’s professional accomplishments reflect her deep appreciation for educating the whole person, the importance of life-long learning, the Catholic intellectual tradition and charisms, the promotion of peace, social justice, truth, global citizenship and the common good,” said Board of Trustee President Stephanie Russell, who also oversaw the presidential search along with Mount Mary Trustee Mary Jo Layden.

Cherney’s steady leadership in higher education resulted in enrollment and revenue growth, a particularly noteworthy accomplishment during the uncertain years of COVID. Under Cherney’s direction as dean of the Winston School of Education & Social Policy, the number of students nearly doubled and the revenue increased over 30%. As vice-provost for graduate education, graduate enrollment increased over 20% during the first waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in an increase in revenue of 24%.

“I am well prepared to continue to refine, update, implement and assess Mount Mary University’s bold strategic plan and expand and build on its pillars of strengths,” Cherney said. “I am excited at the prospect of being able to shape the goals around women’s education to inspire and transform not only women, but society as a whole.”

Cherney is well familiar with the transformative power of a Mount Mary education. The family connection to Mount Mary is deep. Her husband and many of their nieces and nephews have been educated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the university’s sponsoring organization. Her sister-in-law graduated from Mount Mary with her undergraduate degree and one of her nieces earned a master’s degree from MMU. Her husband, Mike, is a Milwaukee native who grew up only one block away from campus.

A native of Switzerland, Cherney speaks four languages and is a world traveler who has spent time in 32 countries in five continents and visited 48 states in the U.S. She earned her Ph.D. in educational psychology and cultural studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and her M.A. in developmental psychology from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Creighton University.

As the founding director of the interdisciplinary leadership doctoral program at Creighton, Cherney worked with the school's nine deans to create an innovative and transformational program. She continued her mission of building leadership at Merrimack, through employee training and the establishment of a summer leadership program for women in higher education at Creighton.

Cherney possesses a highly collaborative style of leadership and expects to place high priority on growing and supporting community partnerships. She plans to broaden awareness of the university's goals and build partnerships with regional, national, governmental, religious and private organizations to promote the mission and vision.

"I am particularly excited at the prospect of collaborating with the surrounding community partners and creating ways for them and alumni to be engaged in the institution's life," she said. "I bring diverse people together to work on a common vision and goals and persuade everyone to work collaboratively."

Mount Mary University leads the Midwest for supporting and graduating students of all backgrounds. According to the 2022 Best Colleges Report by U.S. News and World Report, Mount Mary is ranked #1 in the Midwest as the top-performing school for social mobility, ensuring undergraduate women of all backgrounds succeed. The institution's focus on social justice is reflected in its more than 30 undergraduate majors for women and 10 graduate programs for women and men.