



News Release

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Timothy Downs to Become Northern State University President

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Timothy M. Downs, the provost and chief academic officer of New York’s Niagara University, will become the 17th president of Northern State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents announced Thursday.

Downs has provided leadership and supervision for all facets of Niagara University’s academic affairs work since 2011. Niagara is a private university with an enrollment of about 4,200 students, located in Western New York in the community of Lewiston. Downs becomes president at Northern State June 27, succeeding James M. Smith, who assumes the presidency of Eastern Michigan University July 1.

“In his academic life, Dr. Timothy Downs has worked as a faculty member and administrator across all levels of the institution. He has been at the forefront of initiatives to improve the student learning experience,” said Regent Harvey Jewett, who chaired the presidential search committee. “We were impressed with his commitment to a learning tradition that develops students as critical thinkers, lifelong learners, and socially responsible leaders. We are pleased to welcome him to South Dakota, to Northern State University, and to the community of Aberdeen.”

As provost, Downs helped redefine the first-year student assessment process at Niagara to better place students in courses for academic success. He created a robust teaching and learning center on the Niagara University campus dedicated to faculty and staff development. This faculty development center also assisted instructors in the use of learning management systems and helped them develop new online and hybrid courses.

Downs said, “I am excited to join the Northern State University learning community and am extremely honored to serve as the next president. Northern has a great reputation for providing exceptional learning opportunities and being an outstanding partner in the Aberdeen community and beyond. It is evident that the talented faculty and staff I met during the search process are the reason why Northern students love their campus and alumni are loyal supporters of the institution. In fact, everyone I met during the campus visit, including those from the university, community, and the Board of Regents, confirmed that this opportunity is very special. I look forward to engaging with students, alumni and friends of Northern to continuously improve upon

the Northern experience and learning outcomes for our students. Additionally, I am excited to engage in the continued work to strengthen our local and regional economies, recognizing that these partnerships are critical to the success of Northern, the region, and the State of South Dakota.”

Now in his 28th year in the higher education field, Downs began his career as a professor and over time evolved into the administrative ranks in his current position as provost. He also has extensive experience in the public higher education arena, with 14 years spent working in the state higher education systems of California and Kansas.

Prior to his time at Niagara University, Downs was dean of the College of Humanities, Business, and Education at Pennsylvania’s Gannon University, where he was employed for nine years. He previously was dean of graduate studies and research at Emporia State University in Kansas and assistant vice president for academic affairs at California State University, Los Angeles.

He holds a Ph.D. in organizational communication from the University of Oklahoma, a master’s degree in communication studies from West Virginia University, and a B.A. degree, also in communication studies, from California State University, Sacramento.

Dr. Downs and his wife, Mary, are excited to join the Northern State University campus and the Aberdeen communities. Tim and Mary enjoy hiking and biking, exercising their two dogs (Bob and Harvey), along with an occasional round of golf. Mary grew up in Long Beach, CA where they met while Tim was employed in the California State University system. Mary’s career has been in medical equipment and pharmaceutical sales and she presently works for the Optimum Physician Alliance in Western NY, supervising a program dedicated to developing efficiencies in health care practices with the goal of improving patient health. Tim and Mary look forward to the many opportunities to be involved on campus and in the Aberdeen community.

Since the university was established as the Northern Normal and Industrial School in 1901, progress has been a constant in curriculum and life at Northern State University. In its 115-year history, Northern faculty and staff have continued to meet the needs of students at the university level and those in K-12 education through traditional, distance delivery, and online teaching. NSU serves 3,500 students, including 450 graduate and 200 international students, on its picturesque 75-acre campus in Aberdeen. NSU is a premier residential university characterized by outstanding instruction, extraordinary community relations, and wide-ranging extracurricular opportunities. The university is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in the liberal arts and in graduate and professional education.