



Office of the President

December 2, 2024

Ms. Jen Flood  
State Budget Director  
111 South Capitol  
P.O. Box 30026  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Director Flood:

When Central Michigan University was established in 1892, our mission was to meet Michigan's needs for teachers and business leaders. In the 132 years since our founding, we remain true to our focus on meeting Michigan's needs, which now include numerous professional fields and, above all, leadership.

More than 80 percent of Michigan's high demand careers now require a bachelor's degree or higher, including those in fields such as health care, education, engineering, cybersecurity and technology, business operations and more. At CMU, we are focused on preparing students for a lifetime of career opportunities and lifelong learning. We focus on hands-on learning experiences with real-world impact, engaging students in ways that develop their technical and transferable (or soft) skills.

Our employer partners regularly tell us that they prefer to hire CMU graduates because our students come into the workforce with outstanding knowledge, skills and a "Fired Up Attitude." It's no wonder that CMU's Career Outcomes rate shows that nearly 95% of students are employed, completing military service or continuing their education within six months of graduation. A CMU degree offers an outstanding return on investment for our students and their families.

Every student has opportunities to develop communication, teamwork, leadership and problem-solving skills through our Sarah R. Opperman Leadership Institute, and those professional skills are echoed in curriculum university-wide. Our faculty emphasize learning-by-doing in the classroom and in the fields or labs where they engage students in research. Our staff are dedicated to helping students find and develop their interests and passions, so they graduate ready to make a difference in their communities.

We are committed to ensuring that a CMU high-quality education remains accessible and affordable for all students.

We have made access a priority, reaching into historically underserved rural and urban communities to engage high school students who may be overlooked by other institutions. We have strengthened our partnerships with many Michigan community colleges, increasing outreach and transfer agreements to provide greater access and smoother transitions for community college students wishing to pursue a four-year degree. And we are developing new relationships with Michigan employers to provide talent development and educational offerings to their employees.

For more than a decade, we have kept tuition increases at CMU low, resulting in one of the lowest overall undergraduate tuition rates among Michigan's fifteen public universities. At the same time, we have increased or maintained our investment in scholarships and financial aid, ensuring that earning a CMU degree remains within financial reach for more Michigan families. We have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to ensure that all students — including traditional, non-traditional, adult and even non-degree-seeking students — have pathways to professional development and career readiness programs.

Our mission statement reads: CMU will be defined by the success of our students and alumni, and by our collective impact with the communities we serve. This is a powerful commitment to always doing what is right for our students, their families and the communities in which they live and work. Meeting this mission has become increasingly complicated due to many external factors impacting higher education today, including:

- Demographic shifts, such as the decline in the number of high school graduates
- Increased costs of operation due to years of high inflation
- Changes in public funding
- Shifts in public perception about the value of higher education

To address these and other issues, CMU has implemented a five-year strategic plan that focuses on student career success, impactful research, engagement with Michigan communities, and institutional sustainability.

We also are aligned with our MASU peers in requesting greater support for higher education in Michigan through increased appropriations for operations, investment in infrastructure, support for capital projects and, finally, continued strengthening of the Michigan Achievement Scholarship. These initiatives offer each of Michigan's public universities opportunities to strengthen our academic offerings and student support services and provide greater access and affordability to life-changing higher education opportunities.

In the attached document, we outline our responses to your questions and offer insights into the efforts underway to ensure that CMU is offering the highest quality education, research and service to our students and communities throughout the state.

Again and again, research shows the many benefits of higher education attainment. College degree holders enjoy significantly higher lifetime earnings, improved health outcomes, lower rates of unemployment, and increased career satisfaction, among other benefits, and they are more likely to be engaged in their communities as volunteers and philanthropists. We appreciate the state's efforts to increase access to these and other benefits for all Michigan students, and we look forward to being a good partner to our students, our communities, and our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neil MacKinnon", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Neil MacKinnon, Ph.D.  
President

### **State Funding Considerations**

- 1) What suggestions do you have to best target state funding in a way that emphasizes performance and incentivizes each institution equitably while also recognizing the unique mission of each institution?**
  - **Outline any changes you would propose to the structure of operations funding for universities in Michigan. How can the state create flexible and sustainable funding streams through operations and other supports for your institution?**

CMU appreciates the state's investment in higher education. Now, more than ever, we need your support during uncertain times. CMU has continually focused on providing great value for learners. This occurs in many ways. Our lower-level tuition rate for first-year students is among the lowest of the 15 public institutions across the state, and the lowest among research intensive institutions. CMU also provides significant institutional aid to students through merit scholarships and need-based aid. CMU is committed to keeping higher education affordable, and it does so while also providing excellent academic programs, student-centered support services, and many unique immersive experiences that better prepare students for meaningful careers, leadership roles, and instill the importance of service to their communities.

One way this can continue in the near-term is by the State of Michigan providing ongoing operational funding at predictable levels so we can plan over a broader time horizon, and in amounts above the consumer price index to greater support student services post-pandemic. Also, CMU's new strategic plan has many exciting and ambitious goals that focus on positively impacting students and their families, the communities we serve, employers, and the state. To achieve the goals of this plan, we are requesting an operational increase for the next budget cycle equal to 4.8% as outlined in the MASU budget recommendation. Additionally, we urge the State Budget Office and the Governor's Office to find unique ways to provide greater support to regional public institutions such as CMU. We continue to feel the impact of the disparity in funding for institutions across the state. As an example, the in-state peer institution most like CMU, in terms of size and program offerings, receives \$25 million more in state funding, yet CMU offers lower undergraduate tuition rates, and greater institutional aid. Significant disparities in state funding between similar institutions provide an advantage to those institutions that fared well under historical state funding agreements while negatively impacting students who choose to attend other institutions.

CMU, and other similar regional public institutions play a vital role in shaping the well-being and development of their communities. Beyond traditional educational opportunities, regional public institutions are central to fostering local economic growth through partnerships with businesses, innovation, workforce development, and generating good job opportunities for Michiganders. At CMU, we also place enhanced emphasis on healthcare and social services, cultural and social enrichment, and sustainability. We recommend the State expand funding opportunities that reward this work.

The cost of goods and services has increased tremendously over the past decade, and CMU utilizes operational appropriations to benefit students as much as possible, while also weighing other cost pressures. One way the State of Michigan could support CMU is by including \$100 million in ITEMS funding in the Executive Budget Recommendation, as is requested in the MASU budget recommendation letter. ITEMS funding allows operational appropriations to focus on the mission of the institution and relieves some of the broader pressures felt by universities, especially with respect to deferred maintenance on our infrastructure. The previous ITEMS funding was greatly appreciated, and helped amplify the efforts CMU was already undertaking. An example is our continued focus on campus safety. CMU invested significant funding over the past decade to enhance our ability to monitor our campus through a robust camera system, improved lighting across campus, and installing access

controls on all residence halls as well as many other academic and administrative buildings. Specifically, the recent ITEMS funding afforded us the ability to achieve greater buying power at the time so more building access controls could be completed over the past year. Our end goal is for all buildings to have this technology, and your continued support would help us tremendously in these efforts.

CMU recommends that the state explore a more appropriate allocation factor moving forward for determining ITEMS funding allocations than full-time equated student. Much of the deferred maintenance on college campuses is due to older buildings and infrastructure, which are unrelated to the number of students in attendance. The state should explore incorporating the average age of buildings into the funding equation. This would provide funds for the infrastructure that is most needed. This information is available in capital outlay five-year plans that are completed by all public institutions.

Regarding other state support, in addition to ITEMS funding, CMU would welcome the reinstatement and funding of the Michigan College Work Study program. This would provide students with greater financial support, along with flexible work options at CMU, while they diligently pursue degree attainment. Work study programs improve student retention, offer the added benefit of real-world work experience, and help students build the essential professional skills Michigan employers need.

### **Student Enrollment and Supports**

- 2. The Michigan Achievement Scholarship, established in 2023, awards an estimated 76% of public university students up to \$5,500 per year towards cost of attendance. In fiscal year 2024 the Michigan Achievement Scholarship awarded over \$84 million to the first cohort of students attending public 4-year institutions.**
  - **What trends, if any, have you seen in first-time enrollment from academic years 2023, 2024, 2025?**
  - **How do you see the Michigan Achievement Scholarship impacting students on campus? What supports has your institution put in place to ensure Michigan Achievement Scholarship recipients successfully complete their degrees and what more could the State do to enhance these supports?**

CMU appreciates the continued support of the Michigan Achievement Scholarship. This initiative has improved overall access to higher education, and positively impacted Michigan residents and their families by making college more affordable. CMU has experienced growth in the number of incoming first-year students in 2023 and 2024. We currently anticipate continued growth in the fall of 2025.

The Michigan Achievement Scholarship is benefiting many students with both the cost of tuition and fees as well as housing and food costs. Nearly 90 percent of our incoming first-year students are Michigan residents, and nearly 2,200 first and second-year students at CMU are benefiting from the Michigan Achievement Scholarship. This scholarship program allows students to focus on their studies with less financial stress, which helps them stay in school and stay on a path to graduation. Post pandemic, CMU has identified that more robust academic and support services are needed to ensure students are better prepared for their coursework, and life in general. This fall, CMU administered the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE). This survey asked incoming students about their study habits in high school and what their expectations were relating to college coursework. The results will allow us to do predictive modeling using data from students entering college to understand where they might struggle as they progress through their college journey.

CMU has implemented many academic support systems for our students. CMU has purposeful academic advising that engages students from orientation to graduation. This unit also actively reaches out to students that are at risk of academic probation. We have recently implemented student success seminars for this population to help them be better prepared for college, and to strengthen their study habits. In addition, we have invested additional funds in supplemental instruction and tutoring.

Many students take courses online as well. CMU's online student service (OSS) representatives triage all students enrolled in online classes who have not logged in within three days from the start of every class. Every admitted online student is assigned an OSS representative who serves as a point person to the university to navigate the administrative nuances of being a student. Online students who are admitted to CMU but do not register for the next semester receive customized communication and OSS outreach to align appropriate support services for successful rematriculation.

Many additional student services help keep students on the path to graduation. CMU offers mentoring and support programs for all students, while also identifying specific subsets of our student population that may need additional support. Our First Gen Central program helps first generation college students with academic and non-academic issues on a regular basis as they often do not have traditional support systems to help them navigate college and living away from home for the first time. We also offer residential colleges which allow students to be in a living/learning environment with others studying similar subjects and programs throughout their academic journeys. This allows for greater opportunities for group studying and creating accountability partners.

CMU promotes mental health, physical health, and wellbeing for all students. On campus, CMU has a myriad of services to support students, including counseling services, group therapy offerings, health services (including psychiatry), and the CMU Cares program. Our Counseling Center implemented after-hours services so students can get assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The University Recreation department has many programs to support staying healthy and active while in college. In addition, the CMCREW program is an independent resource for students whose drug and/or alcohol usage are creating health, interpersonal and financial problems or whose academic performance and overall success are being negatively affected.

Wellbeing also includes feelings of inclusion, safety, and security. We enhanced safety across our campus through access controls and additional security cameras. CMU has a unique student volunteer organization that offers confidential peer-to-peer advocacy services for survivors of sexual aggression. Our student food pantry provides food and personal items for students. We have noticed greater usage of the food pantry each year since its inception and pay close attention to food insecurity issues.

To assist with financial wellbeing and security, CMU provides financial training programs through the Financial Wellness Collaborative. We also have financial resources for students having financial hardships in paying for college and/or housing through our student emergency fund and our Finish Up Chips award, which assists students who are within 25 credits of graduation and at risk of dropping out due to financial reasons.

These services are having a positive impact on the lives of our students. The state could assist us in maintaining and potentially growing many of these programs by changing the criteria for the Michigan Achievement Scholarship to be a first dollar award, rather than a portion being first dollar and a portion being last dollar. This would provide institutions with greater ability and flexibility in being responsive to the changing needs of students.

Our university president recently moved to Michigan from Georgia, where the state funds the [Hope and Zell scholarships](#) for graduates of Georgia high schools who perform well academically. For FY25, these scholarships cover 100 percent of the cost of in-state tuition at any public university in the state, up to 120 credit hours. According to President MacKinnon, this has been a game changer for the state, helping to keep Georgia students in the state. He can personally speak to the value of this in helping to boost enrollment numbers at his previous institution and, as a father, the benefit to his three daughters who currently receive these scholarships.

- 3. In fiscal year 2025, the State expanded the Michigan Achievement Scholarship to include a Community College Guarantee, which provides in-district tuition coverage for all incoming community college students.**
  - **How can the State ensure that this investment into 2-year associate degree pathways extends into higher levels of 4-year degree attainment?**
  - **How is your institution working with community colleges to ensure credits received at the 2-year level are fully recognized at your institution? Are there any policies the state should implement to improve these processes?**

CMU is actively engaged and has fostered strong relationships with community colleges throughout the state and it works closely with the Michigan College Access Network. Our staff travel regularly to community college campuses and meet with prospective students interested in continuing to complete their undergraduate degrees. CMU revised its transfer policies to allow for a more seamless transition to CMU, an effort recognized for its innovation by the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. CMU has many articulation agreements with community colleges, a robust catalog of transfer guides that provide clarity on courses that fulfill our academic requirements, fully participates in the Michigan Transfer Network, and actively participates in the MiTransfer Pathways Initiative. In these relationships, CMU believes there is a greater need to understand the unique missions and roles that community colleges and four-year institutions play in supporting students through their educational journeys.

CMU actively works with community colleges on transfer opportunities for their students both on our campus in Mount Pleasant as well as through CMU's Innovation and Online unit for students that would like to complete their four-year degree but cannot relocate to Mount Pleasant due to other commitments. Through these efforts, we discuss the importance of understanding their students' educational goals as early as possible to offer proactive academic advising that sets students up for success if they plan to pursue a four-year degree. CMU has experienced numerous situations where community college students did not have their courses mapped toward their end goal, which caused students to, at times, take many courses that would not be relevant to their end goal. Along the way, if those students were taking out federal loans, this could lead to limitations in borrowing as they pursue a four-year degree. CMU believes the state could assist community college students by encouraging community college advising to be in alignment with the end goal of their students. Similarly, more guidance is needed early on with community college students, so they fully understand financial aid eligibility limitations for undergraduate degrees (including their time at the community college and a four-year institution).

CMU believes that *requiring* universities to accept more credits from community colleges may not be in the best interest of students for many reasons. First, specific courses are critical in student development. At four-year institutions, some courses are designed as writing-intensive or have a quantitative reasoning (QR) designation. These courses have specific learning objectives that will better prepare students for their careers after college. Next, many courses taken at a community college (through either dual enrollment programs, Early/Middle College programs or direct enrollment at a community college) result in fewer courses being taken in a university's general education (Gen Ed) program. Gen Ed programs are designed to prepare students with the transferable skills needed by employers today, and in the future. Lastly, funding generated through student tuition in Gen Ed programs supports that program as well as the quality of academic majors at four-year institutions.

CMU is excited about many recent initiatives that will benefit current and future generations of students:

- CMU's Innovation and Online unit secured an Innovation Investment Award grant through the Michigan Center for Adult College Success to establish 'Central Bound,' an initiative for students to seamlessly matriculate between community colleges and CMU. Lansing Community College (LCC) is serving as the inaugural partner institution for this initiative which will include financial aid consortium agreements and dual admission opportunities for students. Central Bound works with high school students through LCC's Early/Middle College programs, traditional college students who chose to transfer to CMU, and post-traditional adult students who pursue CMU degree programs online due to being place bound to a geographic region.
- As part of the Detroit Drives Degrees initiative, CMU is participating in the Detroit credit mobility coalition. The coalition brings together community colleges and universities to better understand potential credit transfer opportunities including prior learning credit transfer between institutions.
- CMU's Fire Up! *Forward* dual enrollment initiative allows high school students, with a 2.8 cumulative GPA (or higher), to enroll in CMU courses online, or on-campus, applying credit for both their high school diploma and as college credit. The Fire Up! *Forward* initiative looks to complement dual enrollment coursework offered by community colleges. Instead of offering entry level general education courses as dual enrollment options, Fire Up! *Forward* provides high school students with an opportunity to engage in coursework that introduces them to a discipline not offered through community colleges. Introductory courses in disciplines like nutrition and dietetics, athletic training, fashion design, and many others are part of the Fire Up! *Forward* initiative. Dual enrollment students enrolled in Fire Up! *Forward* courses are charged a tuition rate that matches the per-pupil funding allowance allocated to the district from MDE according to the funding calculator. This keeps the students from having to pay any out-of-pocket expenses for Fire Up! *Forward* courses.
- We are in the early stages of working with community colleges (including LCC) on a dual admission program – they would receive admission to both schools and could take classes at both institutions and use their financial aid at both as well.

Overall, CMU is well-positioned to support community college transfer students and looks forward to continued opportunities and partnerships with community colleges to help students achieve their educational goals, and meaningful careers.

**Statewide Reporting**

- 4. The State Budget Office is working to streamline and improve transparency in annual reporting requirements and data submissions to the State. Please offer suggestions on ways the state may ease administrative activities related to reporting requirements. Also, how might the State better align reporting requirements to track and showcase statewide trends and success outcomes?**

CMU recognizes and appreciates efforts to streamline annual reporting requirements wherever possible. There are many situations where items are required to be placed on the institution's budget transparency site and also require separate reporting to various state offices. We recommend streamlining all state reporting that is not completed through a state system (e.g., HEIDI and Capital Outlay) by establishing an internal clearinghouse/office within the state for all state reporting. This would lessen the burden on institutions by having a single direct point of contact for all submissions. Additionally, coordinating a complete published list of state boilerplate requirements, including those contained in statute which may not show up annually in the budget bill, would mitigate issues when turnover occurs and lessen the likelihood of reporting being late.

One last opportunity to improve reporting would be to align data definitions to match federal guidelines (IPEDS reporting). By utilizing data submitted to IPEDS, broader comparisons on trends and successes could be identified not only across Michigan institutions, but also across other states.