

Legislative Testimony of CMU President George E. Ross
House Appropriations Committee
March 2, 2017

Good morning, Chair LaSata, Vice Chairs Inman and Hoadley, and members Miller, Rabhi and VerHeulen.

At Central Michigan University, we take seriously our role in contributing to Michigan's remarkable comeback and recognize the obligation we have in serving well the citizens of this great state. It is not by chance that nearly 90 percent of our freshman class members once again are residents from across the state.

This commitment is why we focus our attention on graduating students with the expertise, as well as the leadership skills and values, that Michigan's communities and businesses need. It is why, as we plan for the future, we focus on degrees that fill vital gaps in our state.

Let's consider Victoria Peterson, from Grand Haven, who will earn a Master of Science in Administration this May with an emphasis in health sciences administration.

Victoria also has an undergraduate degree from CMU. She's one of the many students who leverage a program that allows them to take 12 graduate credits simultaneous to completing their bachelor's degrees. Today, she speaks with pride of conquering graduate-level studies at a young age ... of applying graduate-class knowledge to her undergrad work ... and of helping her peers as they took their final classes for their bachelor's degrees.

She's completed a lab management internship with the North Ottawa Community Health System and is fully confident that she'll dedicate her life to the administrative side of health care.

This focus on students, with faculty and advisors who help them identify their personal paths to success, is who we are.

At CMU, we serve more than 26,000 students. This September, we will celebrate our founding 125 years ago.

Central Michigan University began in 1892, when a group of community leaders decided to do something about the fact that Michigan's schools were desperately in need of teachers ... *who had been taught how to teach.*

Since then, we have grown continuously. We added an engineering program a decade ago in response to student and employer demand. Today, it is at capacity.

Four years ago, we opened the door to our College of Medicine, borne out of that same compassion and dedication shown by our founders, in response to a burgeoning need for physicians. The physician shortage in Michigan alone, especially in rural and medically underserved communities, is expected to reach between 4,000 and 6,000 by 2020 — in just three years.

CMU alumni are highly sought physician assistants and physical therapists. They are researchers safeguarding the Great Lakes — the largest system of fresh surface water in the world.

They are neuroscientists helping to treat Huntington's, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. They are business leaders. Accountants. And policymakers. They are communications executives. Technology experts. And health care administrators.

We have a few sayings at CMU, a couple of which you've probably heard.

One is "Fire Up Chips!" You may know this as an athletics' term. We know it as a transcendent phrase that means "Congratulations, well done." And, "We've got work to do, let's rise to the occasion."

Another term is "Put Your Stamp on the World." It brings future and current students, faculty, staff and alumni together and it captures the spirit with which we aim to make the world, our communities and our workplaces far greater places.

And finally, there's an internal saying that captures what we do for our students. It is, "At the end of the day, we graduate leaders." We work consciously to instill the understanding of leadership in every student, so they know their potential and their responsibility as leaders — regardless of status, or job title, or where life takes them.

You asked about transfer and first-generation students. Both are vital to the advancement of our state.

Last fall, more than 1,400 new transfer students chose CMU to complete their degrees. We serve this population on campus, as well as online and at 14 satellite locations around the state. About 500 new transfer students, in fact, are taking advantage of these alternative delivery methods.

As an educational community, we at CMU are proud to serve those who are determined to attain degrees while balancing factors such as jobs and families.

We also have a number of agreements with community colleges, which are part of Michigan's educational equation, specifically for vocational careers and for those who need to start their studies closer to home.

CMU has 25 signed articulation agreements, most of which allow community college students direct admissions to a specific academic program at CMU.

At Delta, the agreements include electrical engineering and geographic information sciences. One agreement with Mid Michigan Community College allows emergency medical technician majors to transfer to Central for health administration.

Importantly, our advisors work closely with students before and after transferring. A CMU representative, for example, is on site at Delta once a week.

We have 12 reverse transfer agreements, which the Legislature promoted a few years ago so that transfer students are prompted when they earn enough CMU credits to go back to their community colleges and apply for their associate's degrees. Fifteen percent of our transfer students do this, compared to the state average of 9 percent.

We uphold the Michigan Transfer Agreement, which allows students to come in already filling our general education requirements and often one or more competency requirement.

A few examples of service to transfer students include:

- CMU is a member of the university centers at Macomb Community College and Northern Michigan College, giving residents opportunities to earn CMU undergraduate, graduate and even doctoral degrees locally.
- We meet with community college leaders to identify and fill regional gaps in educational opportunities. So far, these efforts have resulted in us delivering a master's degree in counseling at West Shore Community and North Central Michigan colleges.
- Our STEP program — or Student Transition Enrichment Program — is funded with a King-Chávez-Parks grant and supports Pell Grant-eligible and first-generation transfer students in their transition to CMU from a community or tribal college.
- And finally, we're excited about a partnership launching this fall with Mid Michigan Community College. Through the Chippewa Achieve Program, students who aren't quite ready academically for CMU, can come to Mount Pleasant, live in our residence halls and attend Mid Michigan for two semesters.

We'll immerse them in CMU and MMCC student success activities and involve them in student organizations. Research shows that students do better when they connect with peers, gain new educational experiences and explore careers.

This unique partnership is designed to accelerate student success through the delivery of critical resources and to eliminate barriers to education by giving students essential opportunities and support.

You also asked about first-generation students.

Our efforts on this front are inherent in our mission, vision and values. These students are near to our hearts, as they bravely move forward to claim an American freedom, without having grown up in families where college is the norm.

At times, first-generation students are breaking the cycle of poverty. At times, they enroll with little or no family support. At times, both they and their parents are terrified by something so very costly and so very out of their comfort zone.

I, myself, was one of those students — the only one of 12 siblings to graduate from high school, let alone go on to college.

Four of my eight cabinet members were first-generation as well. One grew up in the south, one in Detroit, one in Metro Detroit and one in rural St. Clair County. The latter cherishes the memory of overhearing her father, an Army veteran and a millwright with an eighth-grade education, telling a friend that he knew the people at Central Michigan University would take care of his daughter.

This past fall, 22 percent of the entering class are first generation. You won't find that percentage at all universities or in all regions of the country.

At CMU however, that 22 percent equates to nearly 800 freshmen last fall from families for whom college is an unknown, often intimidating journey.

That's nearly 800 freshmen, who by virtue of being first generation, are at a higher risk of not completing their degree.

Which means we absolutely surround them with support.

Our programming starts before classes begin, with our five-day Leadership Safari. This nationally renowned program jump-starts the first year by nurturing early friendships, focusing on campus resources, and filling days and nights with experiences that show students how to take care of each other and how to overcome challenges. It begins to instill that leadership mindset I mentioned earlier.

We have staff who coach and guide students in our Office of Student Success and in Career Services. We have online resources that give students tips on setting goals, studying, getting organized, budgeting their money, managing their time and surviving. We have advisors in our colleges, and even in the residence halls. We have advisors who are available online because, as we all know, this generation connects through its phones.

We have staff and student mentors, who voluntarily provide personal support. And CMU faculty are widely known for their investment in students ... sometimes long after graduation.

You'll find in your materials a CMU student's Facebook post from last Friday about one of her early childhood development faculty members. The student is pictured in a tightly cropped, head-touching-head selfie with Dr. Holly Hoffman. I'll read it now because it captures our culture perfectly:

And I quote:

"This woman is the reason I'm only 3 short months away from CMU graduation. She told me 3 years ago that she was going to figure out a plan for me and that I will not be allowed to give up. I'm so thankful for the friendship we have built these last few years. Thank you for always supporting me and helping me achieve my goals. And for ALWAYS wanting to pay for my dinner."

I'll also share that one of the leaders of our College of Medicine, which will graduate its first class in two months, remarked about the quality and demographics of our students. He noted how committed they are to upholding our mission of filling the vast and growing need for doctors in rural and medically underserved communities.

He's remarked that when medical students graduate, it's typical practice for parents who are physicians to hand their sons and daughters their diplomas. Often, there are many such families.

He was delighted to find that's not the case at CMU. In fact, not only are 85 percent of our first class of future doctors first-generation physicians, 20 percent are first-generation *college graduates*.

At CMU, we take great pride in supporting all students, no matter their backgrounds.

In concluding my remarks about first-generation students, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that CMU is one of 44 institutions in America selected by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to help lead a special project called "Re-Imagining the First Year."

This three-year initiative is designed ultimately to help the association's 420 state colleges and universities identify, develop and implement model programs that will help more students graduate — especially those from historically underserved populations. This includes first-generation students.

We come now to your third question. What do we at CMU think of Michigan's performance metrics?

To which I say, without reservation: hold all of Michigan's public universities accountable.

We are prepared to be judged on what we produce and deliver. Measure factors that matter to the state. Look at how many of our students are Michigan natives. Look at how many stay in state after graduation, contributing to Michigan's resurgence.

We're missing the long-term impact if we look at higher education appropriations as simply dollars and cents for universities and community colleges. Rather, the decisions you make are about investing in our youth and the future of our state.

At CMU, about 220,000 alumni are putting their stamp on the world, nearly 80 percent of them here in Michigan.

Per-student state funding ranges from \$2,800 to \$8,700 at Michigan's 15 public universities. CMU students receive \$3,900 each ... the sixth lowest. I urge you to find a way to improve the funding formula, so your appropriations follow the student. Because I believe that students who attend Central Michigan University have just as much promise, and will do just as much — or more — for our state, as those who attend other universities.

Don't you?

Please know that we are very pleased with Gov. Snyder's budget recommendation this spring.

That said, I feel it's important you know that funding is not keeping up with the cost of delivering the kind of education our students need and employers demand. We're in the midst of course-correcting for a \$14 million budget shortfall, and it's likely that will include at least some layoffs. This, of course, affects students.

If CMU were to live on state appropriations alone, we'd close our doors after 62 days. The impact on students and families, who bear the rest of the burden, is obvious.

Rest assured, we are taking concrete measures to help them. To enhance access, we will have increased financial aid by \$15 million this fall over the past four years alone. In total under my watch, CMU has increased financial aid 77 percent, and we give out \$70 million in various scholarship and financial aid awards annually.

What's more, our cumulative tuition increase has been the lowest in Michigan the last seven years. We're a total 30 percent below what the state-mandated tuition caps would have allowed. That's 30 percent lower than what we could have charged, because we take seriously our responsibility and commitment to students, their families and the state of Michigan.

Even with our current budget situation, however, I and the CMU Board of Trustees are unified in continuing to come in below the recommended cap. We believe that we cannot fix the higher education funding dilemma on the backs of students and their families.

Chair LaSata and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts. You sit on a very important committee, and your actions have tremendous impact on the families, communities and businesses in your districts. We at CMU are happy to work as your partners.

I'll be glad to answer questions.