



Office of the President

December 16, 2022

Mr. Christopher Harkins  
State Budget Director  
111 South Capitol  
P.O. Box 30026  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Director Harkins:

As the world continues to adapt to a new normal in a post COVID-19 world, businesses, nonprofit organizations and governments are looking to their leaders for a path forward. At Central Michigan University (CMU), we are preparing flexible, adaptable, service-minded leaders to participate as engaged citizens in an increasingly global society.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us many lessons, and I would like to share a few that resonate here at CMU.

The first is a deep understanding of the need to take care of one another, realizing that everyone has been impacted differently by the pandemic. For many students and families, as well as for our faculty, staff and community partners, the pandemic caused significant stress, loss and uncertainty. As we navigate our way forward, we must do so in a collaborative and compassionate way with attention to the changing needs of society.

The second lesson is accepting that many of the new or different means of communication, work, education and interaction we adopted during the pandemic will remain with us post-pandemic. This means employers and other organizations must navigate new ways of doing business, including offering flexible or remote work options and recognizing a need for greater balance in all that we do. This requires innovative management styles and strong leadership.

The third lesson is recognizing the depth of impact the pandemic has had on students from K-12 through higher education. Many were forced to learn in a virtual environment, leading to a lack of social development skills and a growing need for assistance with mental health issues.

We reflect often on these lessons as we navigate the role higher education will play in supporting students and our communities moving forward. Higher education institutions such as CMU are uniquely positioned to partner with schools, nonprofit organizations, employers and all levels of government to address these issues and many others, and to provide real world solutions that will positively impact local communities, the region, the state, the nation and society.

CMU was established 130 years ago to meet a critical need for teachers and business leaders in Michigan. Today, we continue that legacy of meeting Michigan's needs — for teachers and business leaders, health care professionals, engineers, creatives, communicators and more. What makes CMU unique is our ability to offer the resources of a large research institution, while also providing the personalized learning experience of a smaller college.

As we carry out our threefold mission of teaching and learning, research and creative activity, and service, we focus on finding solutions for the most pressing issues facing our state. Our students are leaders who pursue learning for a

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greater purpose, aiming to have a positive impact in their communities and genuinely care about the betterment of our state.

Our strong undergraduate and graduate programs emphasize learning by doing, and our students can engage in hands-on research and creative activity beginning their very first day on campus. We infuse their classroom learning experiences, as well as co-curricular and extracurricular programs, with practical application to real-world issues.

CMU primarily serves students from Michigan. We enroll students from almost every county in the state, and more than 85% of on-campus students are from Michigan. Historically, about 70% of CMU graduates choose to live and work in our state; more than 150,000 CMU alumni currently reside in Michigan and significantly contribute to the state's economy. Degree holders earn, on average, over \$25,000 more per year than individuals with only a high school degree. They also experience unemployment at nearly half the rate.

A college degree provides students a clear path to greater economic mobility and independence from state assistance, yet higher education may seem out of reach for many in Michigan, especially in times of economic uncertainty. That is why CMU's hallmark is keeping education accessible and affordable for our students and their families.

- Our undergraduate tuition is the same across all academic programs, so students do not have to worry about price increases for certain majors.
- We expanded need-based aid and increased the number and value of our merit-based scholarships.
- We offer one of the lowest undergraduate rates among Michigan's public colleges and universities while also being in the lower half of per-student appropriations.

We are doing all we can to keep education within reach for Michigan students and their families, but ***we need your support*** to continue these efforts.

We are currently increasing outreach to potential first-year students, particularly those historically underserved by other colleges and universities. We are also strengthening our relationships with community colleges, whose students may wish to transfer into a four-year program. We see a tremendous opportunity to serve nontraditional students, particularly working adults, who need to pursue additional education for career changes or promotions. We are also partnering with companies and organizations throughout the state to offer educational and professional development programs for their employees.

In all we do at CMU, we are focused on tying our educational, service, and research activities to the needs of the communities we serve. It is our legacy, and we are proud to pursue the greater good for Michigan every day.

In this document, I outline responses to your questions and discuss many of the strategic efforts we are undertaking to better support our students and the communities we serve across the state. I appreciate this opportunity to share the story of CMU with you.

Be well,



Robert O. Davies, Ph.D.

President

**1) Governor Whitmer recently signed Public Act 212 of 2022 (SB 842) establishing parameters around the new Michigan Achievement Scholarship which will award up to \$5,500 per year to an estimated 76% of public university students starting with the high school graduating class of 2023. This investment in financial aid will begin assisting students at the start of fiscal year 2024. In advance of that investment in our students, it is important to understand the support currently available to students who are currently enrolled, especially those students negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

CMU appreciates the state's request for input on how to better support our current students who experienced significant disruptions in their educational journeys due to COVID-19, both while attending high school and in their early years in higher education. This is a topic discussed daily at CMU as we address the growing need for support services for this unique group. Students who entered CMU during the pandemic are, overall, not as prepared for college-level coursework as the students who entered prior to COVID-19. This is likely due to significant reliance on virtual education during their final years of high school; although this modality provided a safe learning option, it often could not achieve the same learning outcomes as traditional face-to-face education.

Understanding the increased needs of these students, CMU maintained support for student services while reducing our budget in other areas; we reallocated funds to ensure the necessary wraparound services were available to them. This included but was not limited to programs such as the CMU Counseling Center, proactive academic advising and academic support centers for writing and mathematics. CMU experienced record levels of requests for counseling appointments and [CARES team](#) cases throughout the pandemic. Academic advisors met with students during and outside of normal business hours to ensure that proper support was provided. CMU also provided supplemental instruction services and additional academic support through our math, statistics and writing centers. All the services noted above, and other academic support services, are available to students in the current academic year.

CMU would welcome state support for this unique group of students, specifically by first reinstating and then funding the Michigan College Work Study program. This would allow students greater financial support along with flexible work options at CMU while they work diligently toward degree attainment. Work/study programs also offer the added benefit of providing students with real-world work experience, helping them build the essential professional skills Michigan employers demand.

We would also welcome additional support to expand and enhance mental health services on campus, which would greatly improve the well-being of our current students. Finally, we would encourage the state to consider including current students impacted by COVID-19 in future eligibility requirements for the Michigan Achievement Scholarship.

**2) How could the state provide additional financial support to your institution to help achieve your strategic mission and plan?**

We ask that you continue to invest in higher education at CMU with an operational funding increase. CMU continually focuses on providing broad access to higher education with an emphasis on both remaining affordable and providing significant value for the investment made by students and parents. We offer significant need-based and merit-based financial aid packages to our students, and we support them with student-centered services throughout their academic journeys. CMU will need to make budget reductions and reallocations again in the upcoming year. As we do so, we will continue to prioritize areas that are student-focused and that maximize the return on our existing resources. Your investment in CMU helps our institution invest in the programs and services that drive student success.

In addition to an operational funding increase, we ask the state to provide the remaining relief to the seven institutions who were forced to join the Michigan Public School Employees' Retirement System (MPERS). CMU appreciates steps taken in the recent year to help offset the unfunded retirement liability, which continued to grow each year. Paying off the remaining unfunded liability related to the seven MPERS institutions would reduce the debt on the state's financial statements and free up internal resources for reinvestment at institutions that largely focus on students who reside in the state.

Deferred maintenance on buildings and related infrastructure and ITEM funding (information technology, equipment and maintenance) are growing issues for CMU and other public institutions. As the state determines how to best leverage remaining federal relief funds, and as revenue consensus figures become clearer, we encourage the state to establish a deferred maintenance pool for universities. Creating a pool of funds for this purpose would free up some institutional resources in the near term, which in turn could support the goal of empowering 60% of Michiganders to earn a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030. A state funding pool for deferred maintenance would also directly benefit the state's economy by investing in infrastructure that ensures jobs for construction companies across the state.

The state could also create and fund specific programs for career readiness that support adult learners. By investing in this population of students, the state would also be directly investing in the governor's goal of having 60% of Michiganders earn a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030. A program like this would benefit all of Michigan in many ways: a more educated workforce to fill the current and future needs of employers, raising the standard of living for Michiganders, and growing the state's tax base.

CMU also recommends a higher education funding formula that remedies the disparity in state funding among like institutions. CMU has two in-state peers, and the closest peer institution currently receives \$23 million more in state funding, yet our undergraduate tuition rates are lower. Imbalanced state funding affords some institutions greater opportunities to fulfill the strategic mission and plan of their organization, leaving others with a more difficult path to achieving institutional goals.

### **3) What has your institution done to support regional and statewide workforce development?**

CMU continually assesses opportunities to enhance regional and statewide workforce development. CMU leaders participate in local, regional and statewide groups to better understand the needs of communities throughout the state. They actively communicate with major employers of our graduates to determine how well CMU students are prepared to successfully contribute to the success of their organizations.

In addition, CMU's Career Development Center has developed an Employer Spotlight Program and Employer Partnership Program to enhance awareness and facetime with students for recruitment purposes. Employers post more than 40,000 jobs a year through the university's Career Development Center. CMU also hosts several on-campus job and internship recruiting fairs each year, bringing together thousands of students and employers.

CMU actively monitors data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to determine areas for future job growth. As we explore options for new academic offerings, we concurrently develop a program feasibility report to ensure alignment with emerging trends. CMU also tracks student employment after graduation through an annual [First Destination Survey](#).

To meet the growing demand for flexible educational opportunities, CMU has expanded offerings in our online programs. CMU's Innovation and Online unit is well-positioned to serve non-traditional students seeking to enhance specific skills through badges, micro-credentials, certificate programs and professional development options. This

unit also works closely with school districts, local and state governments, and corporate partners to create timely personalized professional development opportunities for their employees. These offerings provide a real-time opportunity to assess employers' needs and deliver customized programming.

CMU continues to fill important workforce gaps throughout the state by preparing teachers to educate the children and youth of Michigan. [This workforce gap has grown due to the impact of COVID-19](#). We are addressing the critical need for teachers in high-demand areas, such as special education, with innovative new certificate and degree-attainment pathways. We also offer ongoing support for current teachers, helping them remain in the profession and in the classroom.

To meet Michigan's growing demand for health care professionals, especially in rural and underserved areas, CMU continues to expand its partnerships and affiliation agreements with hospitals and other medical providers for clinical placements and residency programs. CMU's College of Medicine is one of four Michigan-based medical schools that collaborated on the State MIDOCS program. As part of this program, created to address the physician shortage in Michigan, we seek to increase the number of residency slots, especially in primary care specialties; increase access to care by recruiting and retaining residents to practice in high-need, rural and urban underserved areas after their training; and help alleviate medical school debt for doctors practicing in Michigan's medically underserved communities.

Community development, engagement and impact are also important to CMU. CMU is proud to have a strong, historic and cooperative relationship with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. The collaborative efforts of the university and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe aim to improve and enhance the quality of life of citizens of the region. These efforts have fostered educational initiatives, cultural events and speakers, and extensive Native American educational resources for the campus and tribal communities.

CMU students are actively engaged in the CMU community, greater Mount Pleasant community, their home communities, and in many communities across the country and across the world through our [nationally ranked Alternative Breaks program](#). We offer a wide variety of service project options for students to choose from and provide the conduit for connecting students with community organizations. Our students, faculty, staff and administrators take great pride in giving back to the communities in which they work and live.

As previously mentioned, CMU largely serves students from Michigan and their success benefits the local communities and the state during and after graduation. About 70% of our graduates choose to live and work in Michigan. CMU's community impact is far-reaching across the state through the engagement of the more than 150,000 CMU alumni currently residing in Michigan, who significantly contribute to the state's economy and their local communities.

### **State Data Reporting**

Each year, the appropriations act includes new or enhanced reporting requirements for institutions in the state boilerplate. CMU believes in accountability and transparency, but each additional report requires significant time and effort from our employees. These individuals are already being asked to do more with less due to budget reductions and increased workload. CMU's largest barrier to gather data and report to the state relates to the necessary resources required to focus on these efforts. In the face of difficult financial choices, CMU preserves student-centered services to a larger degree than other areas; this limits resources and staff time to complete other projects. State reporting responsibilities are often merged into growing job descriptions of our employees without the ability to pay them competitively for the increased workload.

We ask that boilerplate reporting be reviewed so that institutions are not duplicating work. Examples include the requirement to maintain a publicly accessible budget transparency website and to also submit each of the documents (specifically section 245 subsections 2, 3, 6, and 7) in pdf form to the State Budget Office and other legislative groups. We also ask that the state look internally at current data sources, such as HEIDI and leverage federal data sources such as IPEDS, before inserting new requirements that could be redundant.

### **Strategic Planning**

CMU launched a Strategic Envisioning Process under the working title “Rigor, Relevance and Excellence” in late 2019. The process used strategic design thinking to develop larger, longer-term goals for true institutional transformation rather than focusing on short-term incremental change. We launched this effort in response to the rapidly changing landscape of higher education and in acknowledgement of mounting external pressures such as demographic shifts; increasing costs and limitations on additional public funding; new competitors entering the higher education marketplace; political and social trends; and skepticism about the value of a college degree and its return on investment.

Building on the outcomes of that strategic envisioning, we are now developing a new strategic plan to clearly differentiate CMU from other institutions across Michigan in meaningful ways. The final plan will outline a clear path to guide CMU forward using SMART goals as we anticipate student, employer and societal need over the next five-years and beyond. As part of this process, we will revise our mission and vision to ensure each are authentic to the CMU experience, now and in the future.

We anticipate our mission and vision evolving to foresee and adapt to necessary changes in higher education with a continued focus on a student-centered approach. Our student profile will adapt with demographic changes in the state and include a larger proportion of adult learners. We will be nimble to respond to the needs of our stakeholders — including students, families, employers, community partners, local and state leaders and more.

### **Moving Forward Together**

CMU is mindful of the governor’s 60-by-30 goal and the needs of employers across the state. While the number of traditional K-12 high school graduates continues to decline, the need for access, education and enhanced skills continues to grow for all Michiganders. The governor’s goal requires that institutions understand the unique needs of the state’s current and future student population. This is a key focus for CMU, specifically including access, flexibility and value.

CMU is uniquely positioned to serve all Michiganders. On our main campus in Mount Pleasant, we continually assess the best way to immerse students in a residential learning experience. This begins with extensively studying the needs of current and future students. We then take a student-centered approach throughout the university by:

- Developing and enhancing our academic offerings to ensure rigor, relevance and excellence are embedded in the academic journeys of our students. We focus on outcomes that prepare students for productive careers and meaningful lives. We pair our educational offerings with enhanced academic support, which has been critically important throughout the academic recovery from COVID-19. CMU offers supplemental instruction, tutoring and many academic support centers, such as our math and statistics center, writing center, and our Adobe Digital Lounge.
- Creating and refining purposeful experiential learning opportunities for our students. CMU offers tremendously extensive leadership programs that teach students about responsibilities to each other, their communities and their employers. We fuel leadership skills such as communication, collaboration and

critical/innovative thinking, through programs such as Leadership Safari, IMPACT, the LeaderShape Institute and the Ignite Leadership program. These efforts are further enhanced with a focus on impact on society through our Volunteer Center, which houses a large variety of co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for our students to get involved in the CMU community, greater Mount Pleasant community, their home communities, and communities across the country. Programs include local tutoring in K-12 schools, support for local foodbanks and shelters, and service learning travel through our [nationally ranked Alternative Breaks program](#).

- Focusing on holistic student services such as proactive academic advising, mentoring, success coaching, financial wellness programming and general health and wellness efforts. These efforts include our university recreation programs, counseling services, health clinics, Student Food Pantry and career development services. These services ensure students are supported from their first day on campus through their graduation day. They continue for a lifetime. Our graduates remain part of the CMU community and can access professional development, networking and social engagement programs well beyond commencement.

In addition to our main campus in Mount Pleasant, CMU learning hubs exist in six locations across the state — Grand Rapids, Houghton, Saginaw, Southfield, Traverse City and Troy. We have also invested in a dedicated outreach office in downtown Detroit. CMU is also a leader in the state with respect to online educational offerings — including providing online education for more than 20 years. Many students need greater flexibility in the modality of their educational programs; our goal is for students to have a seamless transition between modalities when life changes occur. To reach this goal, we recently equipped more than 350 classrooms on our main campus and in learning hubs around the state with enhanced technology.

Opportunities for transfer students are also critically important. 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 and actively participates in the MiTransfer Pathways Initiative. CMU's RN-to-BSN program is a very successful example of collaboration between community colleges and a four-year public institution for degree completion programs. CMU currently has 11 articulation agreements for this specific program.

CMU's educational programs and credentials provide students with significant value based on tuition price and the opportunities available for students.

- CMU's undergraduate tuition rates currently rank in the lowest third of the state's 15 public four-year institutions.
- Roughly 85% of all CMU students receive some type of institutional financial aid or scholarships. CMU also recently announced a new scholarship fund for adult learners.
- Our CMU Traditions program provides access to higher education for students with greater financial need, making a college degree a reality.
- CMU recently created the "Finish Up Chips" scholarship program to assist students who are close to graduation and at risk of dropping out for financial reasons.

CMU is continually focused on rethinking and expanding our educational offerings to partner with individuals and organizations to advance lifelong learning and career development goals. We acknowledge that not all students need a four-year degree; yet we must provide opportunities for working adults who need to increase their skill set to progress in their careers, as well as options for individuals seeking not-for-credit options simply to build their knowledge. There is a vibrant marketplace for lifelong learning, and CMU will set the leadership standard for welcoming students with many needs. We are currently expanding options including certificate and micro-credential

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programs and looking for opportunities to enhance partnerships with employers to offer professional development education.

In addition, not all students will choose to — or be able to — relocate to Mount Pleasant. We must increase the flexibility of our offerings, so we are able to meet our students where they are, geographically and otherwise. For students who live close to one of our learning hubs, CMU can offer safe spaces with high-speed internet access to allow them to participate in Mount Pleasant-based classes through HyFlex technology. Others may wish to participate through fully online modalities.

CMU recently realigned campus resources to focus specifically on reaching students where they are through its Innovation and Online unit. This unit focuses on the unique educational offerings for both traditional and non-traditional students. This includes concurrent and dual enrollment programs for current high school students. This also includes degree completion programs, upskilling opportunities through badges, micro-credentials and certificates, and providing advance degree options for adult learners seeking career advancement. We will continue to enhance technologies that give students greater choice in how they participate in learning activities, while also revisiting the ways we engage students through online-only programs and in our learning hubs around the state. CMU is committed to making higher education accessible to students across the state.

The items noted above align well with helping the state achieve the governor's goal of having 60% of Michiganders with a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030.

At CMU, we are educating and developing the leaders of tomorrow. We need your partnership **now** to continue this important work. We look forward to participating in future discussions regarding funding allocation methods to further the educational goals of our state.