

RECLAIMING THE PROMISE

Higher Education: Universities and Community Colleges

A MICHIGAN PLATFORM



Overview

Michigan's future depends on the quality of education it provides for learners of all ages.

The opportunities for quality higher education in the United States have been the envy of the world. Michigan, with its excellent public universities and community colleges, has played a major role in establishing that reputation. Michigan has traditionally supported world-class research facilities; provided students with innovative, effective instruction; served the needs of Michigan's workforce and employers in an increasingly technical and global economy; advanced the arts and cultural life of Michigan communities and residents; and prepared Michigan citizens to participate in civic discourse and decisions. Michigan's higher education institutions collectively award over 140,000 degrees and certificates each year.

This is a wide and daunting array of responsibilities, but Michigan's citizens expect and deserve no less. Research, scholarship and creative activity are essential to the success of American higher education and society. For ideas to flow between students and teachers, and reach society at large, knowledge must be continually expanded as well as transmitted. Scholarship and creative activity are the engines that enrich our culture and generate breakthroughs in commerce, medicine, science and technology. Our colleges and universities produce direct economic benefits for the state every day through innovative research, developing entrepreneurs, and retraining workers.

Studies show that as the percent of the population with college education rises, so too do employment and wages (for both the college educated and those without degrees). It is no

coincidence that the most prosperous states in the nation are those with the most educated populace. Michigan ranks 34th among the 50 states in terms of 25-35 year olds with a bachelor's degree or more. As a state, we must dramatically increase the percentage of residents prepared to succeed in Michigan's new economy.

Unfortunately, Michigan's traditional support for higher education has waned. The decline in state funding has impacted programs and driven significant tuition increases that limit access to higher education. Despite the decline in public funding for our public community colleges and universities, these institutions remain one of our strongest foundations for building a better Michigan future. To address the higher education needs and expectations of Michigan's citizens, AFT Michigan and MEA urge all stakeholders to advocate for **increased access and opportunity, effective teaching and learning, and measurable outcomes of student success** for all Michigan students.

Among our combined 175,000 members, AFT Michigan and MEA represent nearly 25,000 faculty and staff members at colleges and universities across the state. This platform draws on their knowledge, as well as thoughtful reports by Governor Snyder's Education Roundtable, Michigan Future Inc., the Cherry Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the American Federation of Teachers. Throughout, we emphasize that faculty and staff should be full participants in any discussion aimed at enhancing higher education in our state, both to include the perspectives of those closest to the issues and to secure buy-in for the implementation of resulting initiatives.

Increasing Opportunity and Access

Background Issues

All Michigan citizens have a right to a high-quality education that carries them as far as their ambitions, talents, and hard work will permit. Access to post-secondary education is a central part of this right. No Michigan citizen should be forced to give up on college for financial reasons or take on unmanageable debt to attend a public community college or university in Michigan.

Between 2000-2012, Michigan cut higher education funding by 24%--\$420 million—before considering inflation. During that same time period, resident undergraduate tuition at our universities increased about \$3,500 per student. Given that Michigan needs almost one million additional college graduates to meet workforce demands in 2025, this trend must be reversed.

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the fiscal year 2012 state appropriation for community colleges was 9%, or \$28 million, lower than 2002. With state funding in decline, tuition, fees, and local property taxes have had to carry the burden during a time period when community college student enrollment has increased. These cuts limit access for students.

Our colleges and universities have unfortunately become far more dependent on student tuition as a result of these funding cuts. Today, the state provides less than 25% of the cost of education for each student (as opposed to 75% 30 years ago). Michigan asks our students to carry a much heavier load than other states (the national average is 65% state support versus 35% tuition). Students suffer as tuition goes up in order to fill the gap in university budgets, and are forced to take on ever-increasing debt and increase their time to degree completion in order to work their way through school. This reliance on tuition dollars also increases the incentive for universities to enroll out-of-state students, further limiting access for Michigan students.

Michigan students should have access to a broad variety of choices for educational advancement after high school and throughout their lives, from technical education and apprenticeship programs to an associate or bachelor's degree, as well as graduate study and lifelong learning.

What We Need

Funding to Expand Access: Policymakers and institutions must work to increase credential and degree completion by both “traditional” students and adult residents who have already completed some post-secondary education. In order to achieve these goals and keep tuition costs under control, the state must adopt a revenue system able to provide adequate, stable and fair funding to our colleges and universities.

Adequate Financial Aid: Michigan has dropped from the middle of the pack in state financial aid per student to the bottom of the barrel. In FY 2007-08, Michigan ranked 28th among states in providing assistance to students. The House Fiscal Agency reports that in 2010-11, Michigan ranked 43rd, seventh from the bottom. We should provide adequate assistance to all deserving students according to their need and consider capping state aid at those for-profit institutions with poor placement records and high loan default rates.

Pull Students Out of Poverty: Citizens receiving public assistance should be able to utilize the maximum federal allowance to gain access to higher education and training, thus enabling their permanent transition into the workforce.

Postsecondary education is a crucial pathway out of poverty, particularly in our new economy. It is important that both transportation and childcare needs be met while these students work and go to school for the benefit of themselves and their children. Colleges and universities should coordinate their remedial education and retention programs for these most disadvantaged students in order to increase their chances of success.

PreK-16 Partnerships: In order to put Governor Snyder's call for a seamless P-20 education system into practice, state policy should encourage and support PreK-16 partnerships that align curricula, match student progression from one grade level to the next, promote student planning for the future, and coordinate testing requirements from elementary school through college. Universities that currently grant applied baccalaureate programs should continue to develop partnerships with community colleges to enhance access and the Department of Education should support a larger effort to sequence secondary and postsecondary education curricula.

One-Stop Centers for Education: We should reduce the complexity of navigating higher education in Michigan, particularly for returning or non-traditional students, including veterans, who would benefit from a single point of entry. As recommended by Governor Snyder's Education Roundtable, it may be possible to expand our existing College Access Portal to assist in this goal, but we should also create brick-and-mortar centers where potential students can discuss their full range of options with knowledgeable advisors. Regardless of venue, the key is providing students direct access to knowledgeable *people* to help guide them through the process.

Ensuring Effective Teaching and Learning

Background Issues

A growing body of research shows that personal relationships between students and faculty are critical to student success. Students need opportunities to talk to their professors, counselors, and advisors about their plans and ambitions, as well as their coursework and research. While technology is a critical resource, computers cannot replace the personal connection and institutional knowledge of dedicated staff.

Every student has a right to expect well-educated and prepared teachers, fully supported by their institutions and focused on student success. Michigan colleges and universities should provide full-time tenured positions with meaningful job security to all faculty members who meet these high standards.

Michigan colleges and universities should recognize the valuable expertise and community connections provided by part-time faculty. Part-time faculty members should be held to the same high standards as full-time instructors in terms of recruitment and evaluation. Those who wish to work full-time should be provided opportunities to do so, and those who teach part-time by choice should be compensated proportionately with their full-time colleagues.

Students must be held to high standards of achievement. Unfortunately, many students arrive at college unprepared to handle college-level work. Michigan's higher education institutions must become full partners in Pre K-12 education reform, working closely with schools to enhance high school curriculum and increase graduation and college entry standards. All programs of study must be coherent and challenging, with high grading standards, ensuring that a certificate or degree from an occupational or academic program is a mark of achievement and readiness for new challenges.

What We Need

Full Curriculum and Class Offerings: Students deserve access to a well-rounded curriculum and the classes they need to take in order to graduate. Institutions should regularly analyze their requirements and course schedules to ensure students are able to navigate academic programs in a timely manner.

Higher Education Staffing Study: Student retention and success depend in large part on strong relationships with faculty and staff. Traditionally, this was facilitated by a stable corps of tenured faculty. However, the nontenure-track faculty who now do more than half the teaching in Michigan colleges and universities face bleak working conditions that challenge their ability to provide a stable and supportive presence for students. Most nontenure-track faculty earn extremely low salaries, receive no health or retirement benefits, have no office space to meet with students, have no assurance of continuing employment beyond a given semester, and are unable to participate in campus governance or course development. As a first step in assessing appropriate faculty staffing, the state should conduct a study of the:

- Changes in allocation of resources over time between tenured and tenure-track faculty instruction, full and part-time contingent faculty instruction, instructional administration, instructional clerical support, general administration, general administration clerical support, and other support services;
- Conditions under which nontenure-track faculty teach and the impact of these conditions on student access to faculty, and our involvement in curriculum and professional development; and
- Changes in student-to-staff ratios in class sizes, student services such as counseling and advising, and other areas that impact student success.

Faculty Diversity: Our student population is becoming increasingly diverse, but faculty diversity lags behind. As educators, we know that in order for all students to succeed academically, they need role models and mentors with whom they can identify.

Students from the majority population also benefit from learning and exchanging ideas in a multicultural environment that offers a wide range of scholarship and representation of alternative perspectives. Institutions of higher education should each develop a proactive plan to recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff.

Academic Freedom: The concept of academic freedom is based on the idea that the free exchange of ideas on campus is essential to good education. Specifically, academic freedom is the right of faculty members, acting individually and collectively, to determine—without outside interference—curriculum, course content, student grades, and research.

These rights are supported by two institutional practices—shared governance and tenure. Academic freedom ensures that colleges and universities are “safe havens” for inquiry, places where students and scholars can challenge the conventional wisdom of any field—art, science, politics or others. The legislature should not infringe on academic freedom or the due process protections of tenure.

University Self-Determination: Our institutions of higher education have a long tradition of autonomy, including protections for university self-governance in Michigan’s Constitution. Given all the challenges facing our state, it is important that state policy address the major impediments to access and opportunity while avoiding undue entanglement with issues best left to trustees who have been appointed by the governor or elected by the people of Michigan.

Instructional Technology Study: To save money, Michigan is relying more on information technology to carry out counseling and instructional functions. This could decrease access for some students who lack the skills or means to navigate such technology. Technology can supplement, but not replace, trained professionals carrying out these roles. The state should analyze the costs and benefits of increasing instructional technology and management information systems on campuses to enable realistic assessments of, and appropriate investments in, proposed systems.

Effective Professional Development: Particularly because colleges and universities are relying on so many part-time faculty, who are often forced to juggle positions at multiple institutions without basic supports like office space, we must redouble efforts to ensure consistent and high quality instruction. The state, through each college and university, should support training in effective teaching strategies for new faculty and professional development opportunities to enhance skills for all faculty.

Background Issues

There is understandable concern about measuring the effectiveness of all public systems, particularly complex systems like higher education. Our colleges and universities are tasked with preparing students for the workplace, the voting booth, and citizenship in the full sense of the word. Conversations about how to measure student success should cover the full range of goals and purposes of our colleges and universities; include faculty, staff, students, administrators, policymakers, employers, and other stakeholders; and be based on the data we *need* to assess student success, rather than settling for data we happen to have (e.g. four or six-year graduation rates).

The vast majority of campus resources should be directed to activities that support student success and enhance the economic future of the state. This is not just a matter of compensating faculty and researchers and buying supplies. It is equally important to provide adequate support to the front-line staff who, among other things, see that students are registered properly, taking the right courses, and receiving financial aid; to specialists who operate college libraries, communication systems, and laboratories; and to those responsible for campus health and safety.

What We Need

Longitudinal Student Data System: Our lack of data makes tracking student success very difficult. The state should continue developing a comprehensive PreK-postsecondary data system to track student success and outcomes across institutions.

Restore Higher Education Functions to the Michigan Department of Education: Support for partnerships among school districts and higher education institutions, higher education support services and scholarships should not be diffused across state government, but re-

stored to the Michigan Department of Education consistent with the State Board of Education's constitutionally mandated role as "the general planning and coordinating body for all public education, including higher education...." Establishing a commission or department within MDE responsible for both community colleges and universities would help provide a forum for collaborative planning and partnerships.

Framework for Campus Student Success Reporting: Michigan's colleges and universities are too diverse to make a one-size-fits-all set of indicators useful. However, each program and campus should engage in systematic planning and reporting of student success. Progress and outcome measures should be chosen through benchmarking against similar institutions and discussions incorporating faculty, staff, and other stakeholders. Results should be consistently tracked, reported, and used to inform strategies.

Early Intervention and Support Services for At-Risk Students: Michigan colleges and universities can and must do better at retaining students—particularly first generation college students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Far too many students who struggle during their first semester never recover, making intensive early intervention crucial to increasing retention. Stable, high quality full-time instructional and support staff are essential to any effective retention plan.

Clear Pathways and Guidance to Help Students Meet Goals: Students report being overwhelmed by the challenges and choices presented by our higher education system. Access to high quality counseling and advising is crucial to helping students formulate academic goals and map out possible routes toward meeting them.

Tracking Measurable Outcomes of Student Success (continued)

While advice on navigating traditional majors is necessary, more and more students struggle with complex financial aid and loan packages as well as questions about transferring credits between schools. More cooperation and communication within and between institutions is necessary to make this process more user-friendly and allow students to focus on learning.

Expand Transfer Agreements Between Institutions: Michigan's higher education institutions should continue to enhance the website containing course articulation and transfer information for all Michigan institutions. In addition, they should work to expand existing transfer agreements to make the process as seamless and comprehensive as possible for students.

Avoid Rigid Performance-Based Funding Formulas: Many other states have already tried and discarded so-called "performance-based funding" because their one size fits all formulas can lead to negative consequences for students, such as diminished access, lowered standards, and narrowed curricula. Michigan should restore necessary basic funding for higher education and establish more robust data systems before rushing into such an experiment.

Conclusion

A strong network of public colleges and universities is absolutely essential to rebuilding Michigan. Investing in higher education is central to the vibrant and prosperous Michigan future we all want to achieve. At this critical moment in our state's history, we must not squander the resources built up by past generations to deal with short-term budget crises. Indeed, we should increase our commitment to higher education and ensuring access to a great college education to all Michigan students.



AFT Michigan is a union of 35,000 members working across the state in PreK-12, intermediate school districts, community colleges, and universities.

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MEA

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