

TESTIMONY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-FLINT

Presented by
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Before the
State of Michigan
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Higher Education

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Today, more than ever in the history of our state, our elected leaders and those of us who have been selected to steward higher education, face a crucial choice. Do we do everything in our power to strengthen higher education, building upon what those before us did to create one of the best higher education systems in the nation? Or do we through attrition and resource constriction force public higher education to wither into mediocrity?

The questions that you asked of the presidents and chancellors of the Michigan public universities demonstrate that you understand keenly the challenges before you. Your questions show that you appreciate the crucial need to substantially expand access to higher education to citizens of our state, that you recognize the value of a public college and university system that enables institutions to serve unique missions, and that you understand that partnerships and innovative approaches are crucial in finding solutions to the challenges facing us. I have provided a written response to the six questions you requested we answer. In my oral remarks I will



focus on three themes: 1) Access, 2) Mission, and 3) Partnerships for future success.

The University of Michigan-Flint is one of the youngest Michigan public universities, serving the City of Flint, Genesee County, and the State of Michigan for fifty years. Although we are a regional campus of the University of Michigan, we are a separately accredited university by the Higher Learning Commission North Central Association. The University of Michigan-Flint is Genesee County's eleventh largest employer, placing over \$27 million into the economy of the region through payroll and procurement. Our campus encompasses 73 acres along the river in downtown Flint, serving 5,600 undergraduate and 927 graduate students through our College of Arts and Sciences and our three professional schools, the School of Education and Human Services, the School of Health Professions and Studies, and the School of Management.

The University of Michigan-Flint has since its inception promoted access to higher education. Although statistics will tell you that the average age of our students is twenty-seven, that only sixty percent of our students' financial need is met through grants, loans, and campus employment, and over two-thirds of our students come from Genesee County, there is no typical University of Michigan-Flint student. The University of Michigan-Flint is

" the 40-year-old corrections officer who experienced a career-ending accident, came to our campus, was graduated with honors, and began his new career in human services;
" the war veteran, one of two survivors of a helicopter crash, who came to our campus, pursued certification in teaching, and is now serving the children of Genesee County as a teacher;

" the laid-off General Motors employee pursuing a business degree with the dream of starting his own business;

" the mother of two small children who had a bad experience at a large residential college, came to our campus, designed her own program with the help of dedicated faculty, and was graduated as a Maize and Blue scholar, the highest academic honor afforded our students.



The success of these students comes from their hard work, mentoring by caring faculty, and a campus that understands the unique needs of each student. This understanding will help us achieve the goals outlined in the final report of the Lieutenant Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth. Led by Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, a University of Michigan-Flint graduate, this report established the need "to double the number of Michigan residents with degrees and other postsecondary credentials . . ." The University of Michigan-Flint, located in a county undergoing economic transformation in which only 16.2 percent of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, is expanding access. We have set as a strategic goal moving from 6,400 to 8,000 students, a goal that will be accomplished through a combination of strategies, including student housing, a revitalized downtown Flint, programs that provide early college experiences to high school students, return to learn opportunities for adults, and expanded programs in critical need fields such as health care, science, and education. Recognizing the important needs of our state, we are reaching out to younger students in our county to expand their interest and capability in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

A major reason for the strong higher educational system in Michigan is the autonomy afforded institutions in developing missions that are community based. The mission of the University of Michigan-Flint, grounded in the challenges and opportunities facing the City of Flint and Genesee County, is quite different from the mission of the state's research universities, and also different from many of our non-research universities and community colleges. As the legislature considers such questions as accountability, it is crucial that institutional mission be given strong consideration. The large number of transfer students and part-time students our campus serves makes such criteria as graduation rates meaningless. The mission of the University of Michigan-Flint rests on three pillars: excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship; student-centeredness; and engaged citizenship.

Faculty at the University of Michigan-Flint are committed to teaching excellence and student-centeredness. Students at all levels, from those in basic courses, to students in our graduate programs, are taught by experienced and dedicated faculty in classes that are sized to promote effective learning. All our students have the opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with faculty, whether in the science laboratory, performance hall, or writing workshop. Our faculty are experts in their respective fields. One of our faculty members is engaged in an exciting research project on enzymes at the molecular level that may be used to design drugs that target members of an enzyme family that lead to the development of cancer, Alzheimer's, and infectious disease. Another faculty member is studying the effects of aerobic exercise on erythrocyte levels during radiation treatment for breast cancer.

Urban universities like the University of Michigan-Flint are special entities. We work closely with our community, not viewing the community as a laboratory or classroom but as a partner to find real solutions to the challenges facing our urban communities. One example of our community engagement is a nurse practice/physical therapy clinic at our Urban Health and Wellness Center. The clinic enhances the quality of life in our region by focusing on health promotion, wellness, and disease prevention through teaching, learning, research, and service activities. The Center provides primary health care and physical therapy services to members of the Genesee Health Plan.



Another example is the unique partnership between our School of Education and Human Services and the Westwood Heights School District, now in its third year. This partnership allows for collaboration between the university and K-12 teachers and administrators. Through the partnership, our faculty works closely with the entire Westwood Heights learning community. One marker of the success of this partnership is the increased MEAP scores of children in the district.

Examples of cooperation among the educational institutions in Flint and in our region abound. The University of Michigan-Flint enjoys strong cooperation with Mott Community College, Kettering University, and Baker College of Flint. Recently a joint business and engineering program between Kettering and our campus was launched. The University of Michigan-Flint is a founding partner of the new University Center at Lansing Community College, expanding opportunities for nursing students. We recently completed an agreement with the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor College of Engineering that allows students to take their first two years on the Flint campus and then have guaranteed admission to the engineering program on the Ann Arbor campus where they will complete their degree.

Effective partnerships such as these are key to a world-class educational system. This past October, the Regents of the University of Michigan approved student housing for the Flint campus. In an editorial shortly after that unanimous vote, The Flint Journal proclaimed, "As the university is unfettered to move ahead and reach out to students beyond driving distance, so will Flint's downtown gain new vitality from residential student life-and all business and socializing that will attract." Under the leadership of Chancellor Mestas, we quickly established a housing committee with workgroups including faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community members that are addressing issues such as marketing, food services, and living and learning communities. The groups are engaged, involved, and working to find solutions that will benefit students. The advent of student housing has not simply brought together the campus and community, but it has inspired collaborations and partnerships that will make student housing a great success. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is generously supporting this endeavor with a lead gift. We meet regularly with community leaders as they work to attract businesses to downtown that will enhance the on-campus experience. The positive momentum of student housing is not just important to the future of the University of Michigan-Flint. It is absolutely essential in the transformation of the Flint economy. With great educational institutions anchoring the city, we are steadfast in our belief that one day Flint will be considered one of the country's great college towns.

Housing is not the only transformative collaboration involving the University of Michigan-Flint. This September, in partnership with the Genesee Intermediate School District, we expect to open

an Early College Program focusing on preparing students for academic and professional careers in the health professions and life sciences. Early College Programs are five-year "hybrid" schools combining the best elements of high school and college. Students in grades 9-13 begin with an accelerated course of study at the high school level; then, after demonstrating proficiency in a given content area, "dually enroll" in courses at the university for high school and college credit. Upon graduation, students receive their high school diploma and up to sixty transferable credits towards their undergraduate degree. With the help of a planning grant from the Michigan Department of Education, we are taking an important step in bridging the gap between K-12 and higher education, one that will provide young people in Genesee County with a fully integrated state-of-the-art educational experience that will prepare them for careers in high-need, understaffed health professions pathways. This program has the support of each of the higher education institutions in the area, all twenty-one K-12 school districts, and every major health care provider in Genesee County. It is precisely the type of collaboration that must occur on a broader level, bringing together the Governor, the Legislature, the educational system, and the people of the State of Michigan in partnership.

The faculty, students, and staff of the University of Michigan-Flint would certainly be appreciative of legislation that provides a budget increase. Even with an increase of two-and-one-half percent the University of Michigan-Flint budget would be over \$2 million below our 2002 appropriation. We would be most appreciative of a solution that recognizes what so many other states have recognized and acted upon, that a strong and vibrant educational system is the most important ingredient in achieving economic prosperity. Across the country states are investing in education. The current Chronicle of Higher Education (March 2, 2007), reports "in the last year, governors from both political parties have put forth creative strategies to tap new sources of revenue for higher education . . ." The crucial choice is before us. I hope we choose to prosper.