

TOWARD A SHARED VISION

A CAMPUS CONVERSATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-FLINT

Part 1: The Issues We Face

“We have some serious talking ahead of us. And we must sit at the table—a figurative kitchen table, perhaps, since that is where the best family conversations take place—to converse as family members with equal dignity, without pretenses, without suspicions, with respect and consideration for each other and for each other’s ideas.”

—Chancellor Juan E. Mestas, Inaugural Address

The University of Michigan–Flint is at a critical juncture in its evolution, as both a campus and a community. We have much to celebrate: new buildings, new facilities, a new library, strong academic programs, and dedicated faculty and staff who care about their equally motivated students. But we also face a host of challenges. Our campus is setting that prompts bold dreams and good ideas, and we must work to turn that inspiration into action. We have grown over the last two decades, and now have opportunities to link our development with that of the surrounding region. We are increasingly becoming a diverse community, and can now take steps to strengthen the ties that draw us together across campus and across our own experiences.

These same challenges—and many more—have been debated on campus for years. As a university, that is our nature: to continually inquire, discuss, and analyze. As an institution, however, in order to make progress we must first achieve a shared understanding of the University’s purpose and potential. Then we can construct a *shared vision* of our future—not simply express similar dreams or hopes, but define a real and tangible set of imperatives, as well as strategies for achieving them. That shared vision should be broad enough to encompass the various pursuits of a comprehensive university but strategically focused to draw on our institution’s strengths, address its challenges, and contend with the context in which it operates.

How will more talk yield action? This conversation is not in one direction, not a declaration of readymade resolutions. It is meant to be inclusive and, at times, even difficult. It is a sincere invitation to the entire UM-Flint extended family—students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and the surrounding community—to assume responsibility in shaping a shared vision for the future of an institution poised for progress.

The Process

Chancellor Mestas first initiated this conversation during his inaugural address, when he outlined the views, principles, and values he believes constitute a responsible public institution.

He also expressed his commitment to responsible leadership—to drawing on the intelligence, experience, wisdom, and good will of the entire UM-Flint community to help guide the pursuit of those values:

“We will not reach unanimous agreement on every issue—families seldom do—and I cannot promise that my decisions will please everybody. . . . But I can promise that every voice will be heard, every idea will be considered, and every decision will be made with only one purpose in mind: to do what is best for the University, what helps this institution fulfill its mission, now and in the immediate future.”

The conversation now continues with a broader set of discussions on the imperatives the University should pursue, the strategies it can use to achieve those goals, and the challenges it faces in doing so. The process includes the following steps:

1. Conducting a roundtable with participants from across the campus to identify the issues we face;
2. Collecting campus- and community-wide commentary on the issues identified in the roundtable;
3. Conducting a second roundtable that incorporates campus feedback in the identification of imperatives and development of strategies;
4. Collecting a second round of campus- and community-wide commentary on the full set of imperatives and strategies; and
5. Producing a final document that reflects a shared understanding and vision for the University’s future.

This document captures the themes and issues identified at the first roundtable discussion. Please explore and reflect on the results of this first step, adding your voices to the conversation. You can provide commentary where you see fit, particularly in ways that enrich the discussion reflected in this text.

The Context

We begin our discussion by acknowledging certain “facts of life” for UM-Flint:

- **Enrollment Declines.** UM-Flint has experienced decreases in enrollment for two years, which translates into fewer resources for the University in the form of tuition and fees, as well as state allotments based on the number of matriculating students. While the campus remains financially stable and well-managed, continued enrollment declines do threaten the availability of resources in the long-term.
- **Increased Institutional Competition.** Students in the region do have choices to attend postsecondary institutions other than UM-Flint, and those campuses—Saginaw

Valley State University, Oakland University, and Michigan State University, among others—are actively recruiting students who would otherwise enroll here. In the coming years, as the population in the City of Flint declines but grows in the surrounding region, the ability of UM-Flint to become an “institution of choice” to prospective students is essential for securing our campus’s future.

- **Increased Student Demands for Technology.** More than any other generation, students now bring with them expectations about access to technological resources, including the integration of computers into the learning environment. That demand is manifested in a range of ways—from distance learning opportunities, to virtual classrooms, to electronic tools that facilitate access to administrative procedures.
- **A Call for Better Assessment and Outcomes Measures.** As states continue to scrutinize educational outcomes—while at the same time diminishing the resources available to educational institutions—the ability of a campus to gauge progress on student learning and other measures has become paramount.
- **Increased Vocationalization in Higher Education.** While UM-Flint maintains a strong liberal arts foundation in its academic programs, students who seek bachelor’s and graduate degrees are increasingly selecting fields of study that are professional in nature with direct application in the labor market. UM-Flint students themselves have identified computer science, engineering, and health care as the professions that will be most important in the future.
- **Concern about the Economic Viability of the Surrounding Region.** UM-Flint’s future is tied to the economic conditions in our surrounding communities—both the City of Flint and our neighboring counties.

While this context presents a host of challenges to UM-Flint, the health of our institution prepares us well to thrive in a difficult environment. Our academic programs, faculty, students, and staff have achieved a level of quality and excellence that has promoted a sense of confidence across campus. Our task now is to focus attention and energy on meeting the concerns raised and pursuing promising directions.

The Issues

With this context in mind, roundtable participants grappled with ten sets of tough questions, focused on:

1. Overall strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement;
2. Academic programs and strategies;
3. Improved student support;
4. Administrative changes to create a more agile institution;
5. Recruitment and enrollment strategies;
6. Building diversity and campus community;
7. Housing and student life;
8. Community engagement;
9. Collaboration with K-12 and postsecondary education institutions; and
10. Potential for new streams of revenue.

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Overall Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Improvement

What are the most significant strengths of the University of Michigan-Flint? What makes it attractive to students, faculty, and staff? What are the potential strengths of the University waiting to be developed? What areas require particular attention for improvement? What are the major challenges we face, internally and externally?

As a campus, we share many strengths, challenges, and opportunities, all of which have an impact on our path to further progress. We must keep in mind that any given characteristic of our institution can serve as both a strength and a challenge, as well as an opportune area for strategic improvement.

For example, many students, faculty, and staff see our campus as small, attractive, and safe haven for students. On the other hand, there is a growing need to expand our collaboration with the City of Flint. There is also a need to strengthen the sense of community on campus and create the incentives, reward structures, and climates necessary for collaboration across UM-Flint's departments and among its faculty members.

Our students have ready access to dedicated and talented faculty members as well as a number of learning resources and distributed learning opportunities. However, that flexibility could be extended, in particular to transfer students who often have difficulty obtaining transfer credits for prior coursework. UM-Flint also should take full advantage of one of its competitive assets—the WFUM TV28 television station. Not only could this resource be utilized for distributed learning, it could also serve as a venue for cultural events, building campus community, collaborating with the City of Flint and other institutions, and increasing our

Cited Strengths:

- Affordability
- Proximity to home
- Safe, attractive campus
- Affiliation with the UM System
- Access to faculty and resources
- Dedicated, caring faculty
- Strong academic programs
- Key professional and preprofessional programs

visibility.

What types of strategies could capitalize on our strengths, address challenges, and help us reach our potential along a number of dimensions simultaneously?

- **Engaging the community**, including bringing K-12 students—particularly from Flint-area schools—to our campus to expose them to new educational opportunities; working to supply UM-Flint-certified teachers to City of Flint schools; providing cultural events that include the interests of the community; collaborating with the City to promote economic development; and conducting applied research that provides answers to regional questions.
 - **Providing more flexible and integrated academic options**, by linking our various technological resources such as Web-based learning and the television station and by creating incentives in the faculty reward system to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration.
 - **Expanding and improving our existing partnerships with neighboring institutions**, such as Kettering University, and launching new partnerships and articulation agreements with community colleges to grow our enrollment base and improve the transfer experience—as well as build those partnerships around student life, not just in academic areas. The willingness that exists on campus to expand these partnerships could be transformed into action if bureaucratic procedures are revised to support their implementation.
 - **Making institutional decision-making more flexible**, drawing on the faculty governance system to enable the launching of interdisciplinary programs and to expand or improve preprofessional programs that serve specific niches in the local economy, as well as amending the budget model to provide greater flexibility and incentives.
- Cited Challenges:
- Increase revenues, grants, and contracts
 - Reverse declining enrollment trends
 - Increase our institutional competitiveness
 - Invest in aging physical plant
 - Update and improve institutional infrastructure
 - Make course scheduling more flexible
 - Address high turnover and low salaries among staff
 - Refine the budget model and faculty reward structures
 - Develop better marketing strategies for prospective students
 - Increase the diversity and involvement of minority students and faculty

Academic Programs and Strategies

Based on educational and professional market trends, on what fields of study should the University focus its strategic plans? How would these decisions affect the undergraduate/graduate ratio? How would these decisions affect the interaction between the College of Arts and Sciences and the professional schools? How do we continue to maintain excellence in a competitive environment, and how do we maintain institutional competitiveness without compromising excellence?

Many on campus believe that, before we can address academic planning itself, it is important for UM-Flint to step back and pursue a more fundamental question—one that has been asked many times but never definitively answered: Who are we as an institution? As one roundtable participant asked, “Are we an Albion on the Flint River or a community-based institution?” For at least two decades, UM-Flint has tried to be both. Must it choose one of these two options? Are those choices mutually exclusive? The ultimate answer depends not only on whether UM-Flint should emphasize its strong arts and sciences programs but also on how the term “community” is defined. Are we an urban campus? A metropolitan campus? A regionally based institution? The problem is exacerbated by the perception that UM-Flint needs to narrow its priorities and directions by pursuing common, strategic, defining imperatives.

In many ways, these questions relate to UM-Flint’s ability to compete in the higher education market. With increased competition from other campuses, we wondered: What sets our institution apart? A recent survey indicated that most of our students choose UM-Flint to get a good education and a good job. Does that attribute provide sufficient advantage over other institutions, when many can make the same claim?

Demand seems to be growing for professional programs that benefit from our strength in the arts and sciences but include a focus on preparing students for a career. Our School of Health Professions and Studies, School of Education and Human Services, and School of Management do help to prepare students to meet the labor market needs of the surrounding region in the areas of education, health professions, social services, business, and technology. They also hold the greatest promise for increasing enrollment. To ensure that our professional programs, general education curriculum, and arts and sciences programs remain strong, new partnerships between the College of Arts and Sciences and the professional schools could be forged. Determining the relative emphasis we should pursue in professional and general education also raises the question of whether UM-Flint seeks to position itself primarily as an undergraduate or graduate institution.

Scattered Priorities:

- Urban, metropolitan, or regional focus?
- Professional or collegiate educational focus?
- Graduate or undergraduate education?
- Traditional or nontraditional student needs?
- Traditional or flexible scheduling?
- Residential or commuter campus?
- Labor market preparation or general education?

A strategic approach to help focus the University’s efforts could be to identify what region—or regions—we want to serve, to discern what needs we are positioned to meet, and then allocate resources to those program areas that promise growth.

Improved Student Support

What scheduling programmatic and service adjustments should we make to address the access and support needs of our students, both traditional and nontraditional? What role should online, evening, and weekend courses play in this regard? What does it mean to support women and men with challenging family and caregiving responsibilities?

UM-Flint has always paid close attention to students in the classroom, but many believe there is room for improvement in how the University addresses the full range of their concerns. A clear strategy would be to determine students' needs by developing an ongoing mechanism for collecting feedback on their experiences—in essence, a concerted student satisfaction assessment effort. In addition to gathering data that identifies and benchmarks current perspectives, as well as gauges campus progress in addressing concerns, a regular survey would help admissions staff and the administration project potential areas for enrollment growth in both traditional and nontraditional matriculants. These data could join with other information to inform institutional planning on a number of dimensions:

- Identifying potential markets;
- Developing better recruitment and communications strategies;
- Increasing the number of applicants and improving the ratio of applicants to admitted students;
- Easing the transfer process and increasing the number of transfer students;
- Developing better retention strategies for traditional, nontraditional, and transfer students;
- Improving student life; and
- Tailoring course scheduling, instructional delivery, and programming to meet student needs and improve access.

Finally, while there are many points of intersection in the needs of traditional and nontraditional students, we need to meet the specific needs and expectations of each group.

For example, the clear mandate in addressing the needs of traditional students relates to improving student recruitment efforts to draw more students to our campus, as well as increasing retention and graduation rates to keep students connected to the institution once they arrive. The issues are threefold:

1. To develop better communications, outreach, and marketing strategies for secondary students, as well as improve their transitions to college;
2. To expand student activities, increase a sense of community on campus, and promote student engagement—regardless of the decision to institute residential housing; and
3. To improve Internet connectivity in the classroom.

Cited Traditional Student Needs and Expectations:

- Residential housing
- Campus life and community-building activities
- Job placement services
- Improved retention plan
- Improved communications and recruitment efforts

The overarching needs of nontraditional students—whether adult, transfer, or intermittent learners—center more on convenience and access:

1. To offer daycare services, possibly subsidized or discounted, at a convenient location on campus;
2. To determine which degree programs are in greatest demand by nontraditional students;
3. To help nontraditional students with job preparation and placement needs; and
4. To configure classes and degree programs in ways that facilitate program completion, as well as offer instruction in a flexible manner and at flexible times.

Cited Nontraditional Student Needs and Expectations:

- Childcare services
- Weekend and evening classes
- Flexible degree and course configurations
- Varied modes of instruction—in person, online, via television
- Job placement services

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Changes to the Administrative Infrastructure

What internal structures, policies, procedures, and practices do we need to establish or revise in order to make this institution more effective, more agile, more receptive to the needs of its constituents, and better prepared to thrive in a highly competitive environment for students, faculty, and staff?

We know that issues around retention on our campus are not related to academic problems but to a need to improve support services for students. Although faculty care about students' academic performance, some students find that UM-Flint could be more student-friendly, user-friendly, and focused on student needs beyond the classroom.

Participants suggested that the primary goal of any infrastructure change should be to improve the student experience. Faculty members can play an important role in encouraging such change and in enabling more flexible institutional decision-making to implement new or overhauled services and programs. In particular, improvement could occur in three general areas: communications, governance, and budgeting.

Areas for Improvement:

- Communications
- Governance
- Budgeting system

Communications. Almost as a matter of survival, the University's approach to communicating with students and the infrastructure needed to support that interaction must be updated to increase awareness of what is happening both on and beyond campus. All students should have and maintain University e-mail accounts, so that administrators can send regular updates to the campus through mass e-mailings and faculty members are readily accessible to students. The University's website also requires retooling. Many users complain that they are unable to find important or essential information on UM-Flint's site. Changing the way that electronic communication is utilized is essential, given student expectations for information technology; in many cases, their facility with the Internet far outstrips the capacity of what the University currently provides, as well as faculty members' ability to apply its use in the

classroom.

Mechanisms for establishing better communication with students can be easily accomplished electronically—but when is personal contact also important? Just as the private sector is beginning to recognize that the most successful e-commerce sites have real-world counterparts and storefronts, UM-Flint should understand that Web-based vehicles for communication should also have an office and people behind them. In addition to accessing information on the Web, students also want to communicate with human beings, not just with voice mail or an e-mail account.

To address this need, UM-Flint could strengthen its Web-based student information services. Students would make the Web their first stop when seeking answers to a campus question, but would also speak to a staff member (online or in person) for more specific information and guidance. This website could also host orientation services for students, particularly since there is a need to strengthen the University's more traditional orientation workshops. Part of that orientation experience could include mandatory computer literacy classes, not only because computer competency is generally important but also to ensure that students can access the information that the University provides.

Governance. Does the UM-Flint governance structure need to be reconceived? It may be that its structure could be more conducive to promoting nimble and decisive decision-making. Procedures for approving new programs are lengthy and can stall implementation or even halt development in its tracks. As one participant put it, “The development of academic programs is often hamstrung by long waits for approval and no funds for support.” Overall, there is a need to increase faculty participation across the University in the governance system. More voices translate into more informed deliberations.

Budgeting. It is clear to many members of the campus community that the University's budgeting process could be less cumbersome—a particular complaint among those who use it. In one participant's words, “The budgeting system is impossibly complex.” UM-Flint needs a budgeting process that is more reflective and supportive of both institutional needs and external realities. Allocations should reflect needs, and budget information should be reconfigured to reach units in a more useful, sensible, and timely way.

Recruitment and Enrollment Strategies

How can we improve the effectiveness of our outreach efforts? What would be the characteristics of the students we want to enroll? What regions, types of school, academic levels, age groups, etc. should we target for outreach and recruitment? To what extent should we try to increase our international student enrollment? How much capacity do we have for enrollment growth?

Without improving its outreach and recruitment efforts, UM-Flint will not yield the gains in enrollment and student retention it needs to maintain sufficient revenues. Moreover, a recruitment strategy along only one dimension will not work—there will be no “big bang” that propels the University’s growth, particularly since our campus serves all types of students in programs with different emphases. These varied approaches, however, should share certain characteristics: outreach should be early, continuous, and personal to help compete for desired students in an increasingly competitive higher education market.

In keeping with these stipulations, a number of strategies come to mind:

- **Interact in substantive, formal ways with our relevant constituencies.** Engaging our constituencies—local and regional schools, employers, public institutions, and surrounding communities—through partnerships and programs of mutual benefit would help to increase our exposure to and visibility in the market for enrollments. In particular, improving our relationships with local schools benefits prospective students by better acquainting them with what the University both provides and expects, as well as expands horizons for students who may not have considered pursuing postsecondary education.
- **Reconsider our recruitment radius.** Another strategy would be to take another long look at the geographic markets that currently feed enrollment at UM-Flint and possibly expand the areas in which we actively recruit students. However, if that radius is expanded significantly, then issues such as providing residential housing and creating a more engaging presence online come to the fore.
- **Explore our “brand” value.** Is UM-Flint’s name a magnet or a deterrent—or a combination of both? Why? How does our affiliation with the UM system carry our reputation beyond campus? Are the economic challenges in the region making our campus a “less attractive” option for prospective students?
- **Make our marketing and outreach strategies more consistent.** UM-Flint should work to make the messages it sends to prospective students more clear and coordinated, and we should work to improve the consistency and quality of these

Potential Recruitment/Enrollment Strategies:

- Interact substantively with constituencies
- Reach out to Flint-area schools, both urban and suburban
- Reconsider target enrollment area
- Explore our brand value
- Make outreach messages more consistent
- Increase outreach to transfer students
- Promote articulation agreements
- Focus on retention as well as recruitment and enrollment

messages across all mechanisms of contact. This imperative raises a key question: Should marketing be centralized or decentralized within the University? If it is decentralized, how can we ensure that messages remain cohesive?

- **Increase direct outreach to transfer students and promote articulation agreements with two-year institutions.** UM-Flint can benefit from the motivation many associate-level transfer students have to pursue the bachelor's degree. By engaging in more formal articulation agreements with two-year institutions in the area—in particular, establishing a real presence on Mott Community College's campus—we can work not only to attract these students but also to facilitate their transition to UM-Flint. Such a dual strategy would also help to improve retention for transfer students.
- **Understand that “in-reach” is as important as outreach.** Improving recruitment strategies and enrollment numbers will do little if students do not remain on campus to complete their degrees. Retention initiatives are just as important—if not more important—for maintaining or increasing the size of UM-Flint's student body.

The next set of issues centers on what story UM-Flint should tell about itself in its outreach efforts: Which programs, institutional characteristics, and promises should we market? The answers depend on a number of decisions made in other areas: what academic programs promise the greatest potential for growth and represent our greatest capacity to grow; what decisions we make regarding residential housing; and how campus life and student activities on and off campus are improved. However, the broader consideration is what types of students we most actively seek to pursue: Nontraditional students seeking job training and career credentials? Younger students seeking a more traditional college experience? International students? Graduate versus undergraduate students? High-performing students?

Building Diversity and Campus Community

What measures should we take to create a campus community—students, faculty, and staff—more reflective in its diversity of the community at large? How do we help create a campus climate that welcomes and encourages diversity in its many manifestations, e.g., ethnicity, gender, geography, age groups, and life experience?

Achieving campus diversity not only requires making UM-Flint accessible—actively recruiting students, faculty, and staff who represent a range of backgrounds and experiences—but also ensuring it remains a hospitable, comfortable, and tolerant environment where differences are respected and diversity is viewed as a strength, not a “challenge.” We could pursue this imperative in a range of ways:

- **Develop relationships with other diverse higher education institutions.** UM-Flint could partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and women’s universities, as well as international universities with study abroad programs. In particular, UM-Flint could help to fill the diversity gaps in higher education by pursuing potential graduate students who are from traditionally underrepresented minority groups.
- **Become a leader in addressing issues of difference and diversity.** As an educational institution situated in a diverse region facing numerous economic and social challenges, UM-Flint could serve as an ideal convenor of open forums on new directions for increasing diversity and promoting respect in diverse environments.
- **Promote diversity through partnerships within and outside the University.** Faculty and staff could network across our departments and schools to review potential candidates for positions and admissions and recruit faculty, students, and staff who not only represent diverse experiences but also fit with strategic priorities—actively recruiting interdisciplinary majors, for example. Outside of the University, UM-Flint could partner with community organizations, public agencies, and other institutions of higher education to recruit a more diverse staff.
- **Create a “Quality of Campus Life” index.** UM-Flint could develop a measurable index to benchmark and then regularly gauge its progress along a number of indicators, including some that address diversity issues: the extent to which the campus and campus life reflect the cultural diversity of students, faculty, and staff; the levels of safety and tolerance on campus; the degree to which the University, its programs, and its activities are accessible to a wide range of campus community members; and the tenor of student-faculty relations. Such an index could also provide incentives and recognition for increasing diversity on campus.

Strategies for Promoting Diversity:

- Relationships with other diverse institutions
- Leadership in addressing diversity issues
- Partnerships that promote diversity
- Measures of campus quality of life
- Recruiting students from Flint-area schools

- **More actively recruit applicants from Flint-area schools.** Given the diversity of students in the City of Flint and its surrounding suburbs, we could work more closely with schools and students in the area to achieve a more diverse UM-Flint student body. However, we also have a responsibility to provide the comprehensive support structures they need to succeed academically at the University.

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Housing and Student Life

What would be the impact of student housing in our enrollment, campus life, and access to University programs, services, and facilities? What considerations should we keep in mind when deciding whether to build student housing? What downtown conditions would be necessary to create a healthy quality of life for residential students? How can we facilitate the emergence of those conditions?

The topic of instituting on-campus residential housing has been vigorously debated at UM-Flint. With an abundance of grist for our mill, it was no coincidence that this issue generated a rich discussion of potential impacts, mitigating considerations, needs for development in the City of Flint, and possible strategies.

Areas of Impact. Although the impact of residential housing will no doubt be substantial, it is still unclear what form that impact will take. Potential effects include:

- **Improved student life and sense of community on campus.** Students may become more active on campus and more engaged in forging a campus community. In addition, the University’s cultural and arts activities may be better utilized.
- **Increased demand for student services—but increased operational costs.** Residential housing requires a host of supports and ancillary services such as counseling, health, policing, food, and other facilities. Because demand for programs, activities, resources, and services would increase, so would operating costs, as well as the resources needed by the Office of Student Life to coordinate them. There would also be an increased demand for Academic Affairs services, such as keeping computer labs and the library opened for longer hours.

Facts on Housing:

- 87% of alumni and 89% of faculty agree that housing is a benefit.
- 40% of prospective students would be more likely to consider UM-Flint if housing were available.
- 79% of faculty and 84% of staff believe housing will increase enrollment.
- 52% of faculty and 48% of alumni believe housing would increase the academic quality of incoming students.
- 87% of faculty, staff, and alumni believe that housing will help build a sense of campus community.
- 75% of faculty, staff, and alumni agree that housing will help revitalize downtown Flint.

Source: Enrollment Market Analysis, Carnegie Communications,

- **Change in campus culture.** A potential change in the student mix (full-time, residential versus commuting students) could significantly transform UM-Flint’s campus culture. In addition to changing the atmosphere on campus, new activities spurred by the initiative of residential students could begin to emerge.

Housing’s Areas of Impact:

- **Shifts in enrollment.** The anticipated directions of those shifts are still an open question. However, enrollment could climb if students from outside our immediate region become interested in attending UM-Flint. On the other hand, if student support services are reconfigured to cater to traditional students, UM-Flint may become less hospitable to adult and part-time commuting students. However, housing could be designed to accommodate the needs of adult and nontraditional students to make residential housing more attractive and convenient for them—i.e., building family apartments rather than traditional dormitories.
- **Increased retention rates.** While the jury is still out on the impact of housing on enrollment, it is safe to assume that on-campus living will help to increase retention for those students who are residential.
- **Increased diversity.** By providing housing, UM-Flint could potentially attract students from international settings, from different regions in the country, from surrounding states, and from more distant locations in Michigan. Residences also bring diverse groups of students together and teach them important lessons about respecting and celebrating difference.
- **Increased competitive advantage.** Students who seek a “collegiate atmosphere” may begin to choose UM-Flint over other campuses in our service area, particularly those that have been aggressively recruiting UM-Flint students and applicants. Providing them with the living options they want so close to home could tilt the scales in our favor.
- **Increased opportunities to strengthen learning and recruit high-performing students.** By establishing residential learning communities, students in honors programs could both live and learn together. These high-performing students may find the increased support and attention they would receive an added benefit to enrolling at UM-Flint.
- **Increased potential for developing the surrounding community.** Housing can do more than improve the quality of life on UM-Flint’s campus. By increasing the number of residents in the City, it also increases a demand for businesses and other services to support those residents.

- Student life
- Campus community
- Student services
- Campus culture
- Enrollment
- Retention
- Diversity
- Competition
- Learning communities
- Development of the surrounding region

Considerations. A number of considerations mitigate these potentially positive outcomes:

- **Financial rewards versus risks.** Residential housing would require a significant investment of resources on the part of the University. And students report a threshold of room and board fees that, if surpassed, renders on-campus living unattractive. Even if the cost of financing housing is borne by another entity—a developer, a foundation, a regional partnership—the University will incur increased expenses for student services. Another question is whether housing has the potential to leverage an increase in state funding, by placing UM-Flint in a new institutional tier.
- **Image problems.** Can residential housing succeed when Flint is considered by many to be an unsafe environment that lacks many basic necessities and infrastructural supports? On the other hand, residential housing could provide a positive impetus for change that helps to transform conditions in the City as well as improve the attractiveness of our campus to prospective students. Mitigating Considerations:
- **Conflicts with other institutional priorities and commitments.** Is residential housing the project that promises the greatest yield for our investment? Demands and costs could be greater than the revenues or enrollments gained. With the finite resources that the University has to invest in new programs, does this option make the most sense? Could it compete or interfere with the pursuit of other strategic imperatives? On the other hand, could it possibly complement those priorities?
 - Rewards versus risks
 - Image versus demand
 - Finite resources for numerous institutional commitments

Conditions in the City of Flint. Residential housing would also challenge the City of Flint to promote an attractive and convenient living environment to support on-campus students. While it is mutually beneficial for the City and the University to work together on improving services, commerce, and the safety and attractiveness of City streets, engaging in development on the scale required represents a substantial undertaking for both parties. Areas for improvement include:

- Infrastructure and services;
- Clean, safe, attractive environment and lighted, well-maintained streets;
- Shops providing basic necessities, such as laundromats, grocery stores, and gas stations; and
- Recreation, entertainment, and cultural events.

Potential Steps and Strategies. To move the discussion forward, our debate should be based on fact, not on perception and projection. The first step may be to conduct a feasibility study to assess the details: costs, potential revenues, and longer-term profitability versus risk; demand for services; housing type (dorms vs. apartments); impact on enrollment; potential conflict with other campus initiatives, potential collaborations with foundations, other campuses, and the City; and projected occupancy rates. With this information in hand, the University could pursue a number of strategies to make residential housing a long-term, affordable, and even profitable venture:

- **Enhance existing collaborative partnerships** on improving living conditions in

Flint and promoting economic and cultural development in the region.

- **Develop a strategic plan to create a cultural and educational “region”** in the City whose boundaries would coincide with UM-Flint, Mott Community College, Kettering University, and the Flint Cultural Center. The University could sponsor low-cost events such as “Sundays in the Park,” at the riverfront, attracting students and residents to outdoor performances, exhibition spaces, local arts and crafts stands, and food vendors.

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Community Engagement

What are the responsibilities of the University and the members of the campus community toward the neighboring community? What is the responsibility of the neighboring community toward the University?

As a public institution, UM-Flint has a responsibility to serve its surrounding community. But a first-order question is how that community is defined. Is it the City of Flint alone? Genesee County? Counties in the surrounding region? Across the state? Moreover, is there a single notion of who comprises that “community”—the residents of a geographic region? Or does UM-Flint have an obligation to serve a broader range of constituents, such as businesses, health care providers, other postsecondary campuses, other public institutions? As participants mentioned in other discussions, it is important for the University to define which communities it serves as part of its civic mission.

UM-Flint’s
Responsibilities:

In all cases, however, a set of standard responsibilities applies:

- **Listening** to what our constituent communities say they need;
 - **Communicating** more clearly to our communities what UM-Flint is and does, as well as what kinds of programs and resources it has—or can develop—to meet expressed needs; and
 - **Cultivating better relationships** with organizations in the community through partnerships that help us create a shared vision that reaches beyond campus boundaries.
- Listening
 - Communicating
 - Cultivating

In turn, what can our constituencies do to work better with UM-Flint?

- Develop and articulate realistic expectations about what we can—and cannot—do.
- Partner with UM-Flint to explore ways of improving the quality of life in the City, as well as working with us to implement those strategies.

Engaging our communities more directly and in a purposeful way requires significant cultural change on campus. One strategy for promoting our institution’s capacity to listen to and promote partnerships with our neighbors is to change the reward structure for faculty and staff.

How could “service to the community” become a more significant part of our merit and tenure reviews? Potential measures could include formally evaluating community service activity and granting a community service award to faculty and staff who have exemplary records in this area.

9
Collaboration
with K-12 and Postsecondary Institutions

What initiatives should we take to strengthen the collaboration between UM-Flint and other educational institutions, e.g., high schools, community colleges, and other colleges and universities? What opportunities are there for such collaborations? What benefits? What challenges?

Collaboration with other educational institutions should be mutually beneficial. UM-Flint has taken first steps toward establishing working partnerships with a few campuses in our region, but much could be done to improve on and expand opportunities for both students and the institutions they attend:

- **Decrease the red-tape that can stall initiatives and find ways to keep the costs low.** These collaborations require seed money and incentives to work. Some promising programs may be cost- and time-prohibitive—requiring intensive staff time and significant resources. In these cases, making collaborations work requires both imagination and difficult choices about resource allocation.
- **Build incentives into the reward system and make the budgeting system more conducive to partnership.** Faculty members, in particular, should become more aware of matters of enrollment and budgeting, particularly if faculty members are key to promoting retention and new programs. Changing the reward system to reflect these goals, as well as changing the budgeting system to promote responsibility within individual schools and units, will help to generate that climate on campus.
- **Increase campus engagement in local K-12 programs.** UM-Flint’s current activities in Flint-area schools include math competitions, computer competitions, and music camp. Expanding these kinds of academic collaboration increases opportunities for young students to experience UM-Flint and expand their own educational horizons. To help involve UM-Flint students in this effort, we could reward those students who visit their high schools to speak about their college experiences.
- **Work directly with other campuses in the UM system.** We stand as a relatively independent campus within the UM system, but could strengthen the ties that link us to the Ann Arbor and Dearborn campuses of the University of Michigan. We could

Opportunities for
Collaboration:

- Streamline approval and budgeting processes
- Create incentives
- Increase K-12 engagement
- Work with other campuses in the UM system
- Work with 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions

expand existing partnerships—such as the collaboration between our School of Health Professions and Studies and School of Social Work with their counterparts at Ann Arbor—and establish new ones that create joint programming or provide opportunities for research.

- **Work directly with other postsecondary campuses in the region.** For example, UM-Flint could create a win-win collaboration with Mott Community College to better prepare students for enrollment at UM-Flint. An immediate step may be to complete and enact the outstanding articulation agreements that do exist, as well as consider whether to audit the articulation process itself.

10

Potential for New Streams of Revenue

What initiatives should we take to increase the inflow of revenues from sources other than state allocations and tuition/fees? What challenges and opportunities lie ahead?

Brainstorming about the future of UM-Flint is a creative and strategic exercise, but the fundamental reality of resources can take the proverbial wind from our campus sails. Tying the initiatives that support our shared vision to fundraising—and prioritizing those initiatives across the University—is one of the few ways UM-Flint can address strategic imperatives. Three areas are of critical importance: grant and research dollars, corporate and community giving, and alumni relations.

Grant and Research Dollars. In this area, UM-Flint can take advantage of its relationship with the UM system to partner with faculty from Ann Arbor on research projects, particularly applied studies that are tied to our communities' needs. To enable the pursuit of substantial revenue from grants and contracts, we must explore how to provide better support for proposal development, flexibility to enable faculty effort reassignment, and the creation of incentives for units by increasing the percentage they retain from a grant after indirect costs are subtracted.

Corporate and Community Giving. Through sponsorships, partnerships, and advertising, UM-Flint could seek out relationships with for-profit businesses and non-profit public agencies and organizations. It is more than appropriate to ask those who do business with the University to demonstrate their commitment through donations and sponsorships.

Alumni Relations. As a relatively young institution, UM-Flint could do more to improve its relationship with alumni and therefore its levels of alumni donations:

- **Continuity of Communications.** Inconsistent messages are counterproductive, particularly in fundraising efforts. Tying a new campus-wide communications plan to a shared vision of the University not only would help to recruit students but also to focus the messages we send to the world beyond our campus. Part of that plan should include newsletters and other communications mechanisms with messages that articulate and promote a shared vision of UM-Flint for prospective donors and alumni.
- **Building Relationships.** If communications strategies are the

Revenue Opportunities:

- Grants and sponsored research
- Corporate giving
- Alumni and current students

vehicles for sending messages to prospective donors, development efforts are fundamentally about building relationships—letting people know what our institutional priorities are, as well as demonstrating to them how donations are helping to achieve those imperatives over time. These relationships are about more than dollars—they are about identifying mutual priorities. Donors need to know where the campus is headed and how their contributions not only fit with institutional goals but also their own interests or causes. Relationships also require contact over time, moving beyond making initial connections with donors to building trust through long-term relationships. A sustained relationship between faculty and alumni is one clear way that UM-Flint could maintain engaged and substantive interaction. UM-Flint could also work to build connections by linking current students with alumni, as well as alumni with future students.

- **Fundraising and Current Students.** Development and alumni relations can benefit from recognizing that relationships with donors begin before students ever enroll in their first class on campus. These functions should also consider that current students can play an important role in fundraising. While students are in attendance, it is important to make them aware of the true cost of their education—what portion of the institutional dollars spent per student derive from tuition, fees, and state appropriations. If students understand the need to draw unrestricted dollars to campus, they may be willing to volunteer in fundraising efforts. Student organizations already perform volunteer work for the University and could be asked to direct some of their energies toward alumni communications.

The University could engage in a campus-wide development effort that allowed each unit to pursue its own strategies—keeping in mind that the messages sent to students, alumni, and other interested donors in the community need to be consistent and coordinated. However, to ensure that effort is consistent across the institution, alumni relations and fundraising itself would also need to be coordinated across the institution. The approaches taken should be systematic, and each unit should be held accountable for its efforts.

Final Thoughts

This document reflects the collective voices of participants in the first roundtable of the Campus Conversation on the Future of the University of Michigan-Flint. The issues, imperatives, and—in some cases—potential strategies they offered are intended to spur a discussion across campus of avenues for growth and improvement. They are not set in stone; instead, your comments will help to shape the concrete strategies that emerge from the next roundtable to address the challenges and opportunities raised here. In a month or so, we will ask you once again to contribute your ideas and thoughts by reviewing the results of our discussion. Thank you for taking the time to demonstrate your commitment to the University by participating in this conversation.