

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Office of the President

February 14, 2019

Representative Scott VanSingel, Chair
Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Community Colleges:

Greetings from Western Michigan University! I look forward to working with all of you in your new roles helping to lead our great state. It's my pleasure to meet you and to tell you about one of our state's best assets—WMU.

Western Michigan University enrolls more than 22,500 students, with our main campus located in Kalamazoo and with regional locations in Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Auburn Hills, Benton Harbor and other locations throughout the state. We attract students from every county in the state and our programs touch businesses, school districts, non-profits and patients across our region, state, nation and, indeed, the world. We are pleased to offer our students the rich opportunities and experiences possible at a major research university and the personal attention often found at a smaller college. That combination gives our students the edge to succeed in graduate school, in the workplace and in life.

We've long had a national reputation for preparing our graduates to be immediately productive. Within three months of graduation, **91 percent** of new alumni are employed, in military service or full-time volunteer work, or continuing their education; **86 percent** have jobs related to their degree; and **89 percent are satisfied** with their jobs and **3 out of 4 are working right here in Michigan**.

Students who invest in a WMU education come out on the other side career-ready and well-prepared for the next stage of life. I'd like to detail for you the many strengths that help lead our students to success:

Outstanding faculty

Our high-quality academic programming and the successes of our graduates are a direct result of our outstanding faculty. At WMU, students are more likely to learn from a faculty member who is at the highest professional rank than at any other Division I university in Michigan. And WMU is a place where world-class faculty partner with their students—both undergraduate and graduate—to create new knowledge through research and to benefit society with their creative activities.

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Wide range of programs

We rank second among the state's 15 public universities in the number of bachelor's programs offered. Because of our wide array of undergraduate and graduate degrees, students can explore many career pathways and be guided to ultimately find their passions.

Academic excellence

WMU's academic excellence is well known. *U.S. News and World Report* has ranked us in the top tier of national universities for more than 25 years running. The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, as well as such publications as *Military Times*, has ranked us as among the best places for veterans. The University has five programs—sales, supply chain management, food marketing, aviation and jazz—ranked near the top of their respective fields in the country. And we have another 14 programs that are ranked in the top 10 percent of programs in their fields nationally.

Let me give you a little more feel for some of the ways WMU contributes value to the state's residents through specialty programs:

Aviation education

We have **the only** comprehensive aviation program at a Michigan public university. The University's College of Aviation is ranked in the **top five** of aviation programs in the nation, offering degrees in aviation flight science, aviation technical operations and aviation management and operations. And our graduates are sought after by major companies in the industry. There is a looming shortage of both pilots and mechanics, and the college is helping to address industry shortfalls by producing the next generation of professionals. To that end, we recently partnered with Delta Air Lines in a new career pathways initiative. Students who are accepted into the program are put on an accelerated path to becoming a Delta pilot.

Additionally, a new partnership with a global provider of aviation services, **AAR Corp.**, is expected to enhance instruction for aircraft maintenance majors. Known as the AAR Eagle Career Pathway Program, it will expand our aircraft maintenance, repair and operating supply instruction and include job shadowing and mentoring experiences. The collaboration also offers an opportunity for our students to be hired upon graduation.

And thanks to state funding, this spring we will be breaking ground on a project to expand the aviation college's facilities in Battle Creek. That campus is getting a 67,000-square-foot addition and renovation that will prepare more students for the future demands of the aviation industry. We are so grateful to the state of Michigan for the financial support.

Specialized health care

Our University also is a trusted provider of health services for thousands of Michiganders, especially underserved residents. Our health care footprint includes our **Center for Disability Services**, which

offers in-home care and support services, adult day care, and community integration services to residents who need help due to age, illness or disability. The **WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine** is training up our next generation of physicians, who also provide a range of care in clinical settings. And then there is our collective of outpatient clinics known as the WMU Unified Clinics.

Through the **Unified Clinics**, the University addresses the medical needs of thousands of Michiganders. Recognized by patients as a safety net, the Clinics serve 5,400 patients during 50,000 appointments annually. This collective of 10 specialty teaching clinics provides a range of services, including autism evaluation, behavioral health services, child-trauma assessment, hearing treatment, low-vision services, occupational therapy and speech therapy. WMU student practitioners and supervising professionals provide the care and treatment.

Committed to access

WMU also is a university focused on its impact on a diverse student body and on the various communities it serves. We take pride in being a Carnegie-designated research university that has retained its commitment to educating the sons and daughters of this state—no matter their backgrounds or social strata. Our students include Medallion Scholars, chosen with grade-point averages typically in excess of a 4.0 and with credentials that rival the credentials of entering Ivy League students. Our student body also includes individuals from humble backgrounds or modest achievement and who use their WMU education to go on to do extraordinary things for themselves, their families and our society. These hard-working and gritty students, many of whom are first-generation college attenders, exemplify what it means to be a Bronco. They are individuals with potential, even if life has not always dealt them the easiest hand. Our **Seita Scholars Program** is an excellent illustration of this.

Last year, we proudly celebrated the 10-year anniversary of this program, launched in 2008 to help former foster-youth who have aged out of the foster-care system make a successful transition to and through college. Scholarships, campus coaches, mentors, support networks and a year-round campus home are the essential elements we've used to support these students. Since accepting its first class of former foster-care youth, the program has grown into the **nation's largest and most comprehensive outreach program** for young people who have aged out of foster care. More than 125 students have graduated as Seita Scholars thus far. Indeed, over half of all foster youth enrolled in college in this state go through our Seita Scholars Program.

In December, we graduated the first student who has benefitted from another program exemplifying WMU's commitment to access. Initiated in 2015, the University's **Foundation Scholars Program** supports students who have demonstrated personal resilience and outstanding academic performance despite economic and other hardships. Some of these students were homeless, others are wards of the state or participants in free- and reduced-price lunch programs. Whatever their path to WMU, we see to it

that our students become part of a community of scholars who support each other and who work toward common goals, including graduation and employment.

As those two examples illustrate, WMU is proud to attract excellent students from all walks of life. But we understand that it's not enough to bring students to our campus. We must help our students persist through to graduation, because the statistics are unequivocal—those who complete a college degree tend to do well in work and in life.

With that in mind, WMU has a number of efforts focused on **improving retention and graduation rates**. They include expansion of peer mentoring, changing gateway courses, efforts focusing on improving grit or resiliency through enhanced mental health services, and offering targeted completion grants for seniors to assist those students who are close to graduation but who are significantly at-risk of dropping out of school. The University invested about 190 completion grants in students who were near the graduation finish line. The grants averaged about \$2,000 and made a huge difference as all but a handful have either graduated or are still enrolled.

Billion-dollar economic return

While our impact on individual students, their families and the communities we serve is profound, as an economist I would be remiss if I didn't point out that WMU represents a phenomenal return on investment as it relates to our research enterprise, for our degree seekers, in serving the underserved—and even for those who will never step foot on campus. A recent report revealed WMU's incredible economic impact in Michigan. The study showed that the University's local economic impact is worth **\$1.6 billion**. And you should know that for every dollar the state invests in WMU, the University returns \$15.40 in economic vitality for the local region. This report also showed that WMU supports jobs, nearly 17,000 of them—direct or indirect. It is gratifying to witness our University's impact.

I hope it is abundantly clear why I'm so proud of Western Michigan University. Thank you for allowing me to extol the great value this public institution represents for our state. We will keep pushing for excellence.

Sincerely,



Edward Montgomery
President