

Good afternoon!

The Eastern Michigan University Degree Completion and Retention Plan, overseen by the office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, is an extensive, coordinated, campus-wide effort that seeks to improve student outcomes at Eastern.

The program, first implemented in 2013, reflects the University's commitment to supporting student persistence as well as successful and timely graduation. This is an area that requires focused and sustained effort to bring about lasting change, and the University community is involved in sustaining it at many levels.

It is important to note that Eastern Michigan has chosen this particular approach to improving retention and graduation rates – focusing on working with and improving results with its existing student body makeup – rather than shifting outcomes by changing admissions standards or fundamentally altering the University's mission. Reflected in the plan is our long and proud commitment to providing students of many backgrounds with affordable, high quality, educational access. It includes strategies that address members of traditionally under-represented populations, first generation, low income and non-traditional students such as veterans and single parents.

The Eastern Michigan Graduation and Retention Plan focuses on five areas of practice that research has shown to have

significant impact on degree completion and retention:

- Student preparedness
- Enrollment policies
- Financial aid policies and incentives
- Advising and student support
- Curriculum structure and delivery

The plan includes the following priorities:

- It offers more than a first-year focus, with targeted supports, activities and assistance to students over the entire course of their academic career and continuing well beyond freshman year;
- Better preparation of entering students through earlier evaluations and planning, college readiness support, summer programs and other means such as targeted, population-specific orientation programs;
- Innovative financial aid packages that help ensure academic success and timely graduation;
- Highly proactive and modern technology-based advising processes and student support; and
- Student-centered curriculum planning, scheduling and course delivery.

The improvements have been driven by changes in operations and personnel, along with technology enhancements. For example, Eastern has gone from a system of relying primarily on department and faculty-based advising to employing 29 professional advisers and career coaches housed in general and college offices. In

It is important to note that Eastern Michigan [is] focusing on working with and improving results with its existing student body makeup rather than shifting outcomes by changing admissions standards or fundamentally altering the University's mission.

addition, new advising and audit online software helps keep students on track by noting early alerts from instructors, identifying important touch points in the academic career, such as registration prompts, 60-hour academic general education reviews and the need to select a programmatic major earlier in the academic career whenever possible. At-risk students or those on probation now receive personalized success plans and coaches, along with structured support and advising. This information can be referenced online 24/7 in an electronic format.

Career plans and “beyond the classroom” learning requirements are now key components for students because we recognize that not all students learn the same way, and applied skills make for more competitive, fully prepared candidates upon graduation. Engagement of this kind fosters retention, graduation and all around success.

EMU’s completion plan is central to our mission, given that the University is recognized as one of the most culturally diverse institutions in the Midwest, with the fall 2015 entering freshman class among its most diverse ever. African American freshmen made up 23 percent of the entering class, while the number of newly enrolled Hispanic freshmen made up 6.5 percent of the entering class. The number of African Americans in the freshman class is an increase of 28 percent over last year’s entering fall 2014 class, while Hispanic students showed a 37 percent

increase. Returning veterans are also a central part of our student population.

Several recent and significant federal grants are contributing to EMU’s successful ongoing graduation and retention efforts.

- In the fall of 2014, the University received a federal grant of nearly \$2 million to strengthen its efforts in educating students in STEM disciplines, with a special emphasis on bringing women and minorities into those fields and graduating them. The five-year grant, awarded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III Program, involves broadening and institutionalizing the *Creative Scientific Inquiry Experience*, a program developed by the University and funded by the National Science Foundation. The grant builds upon Eastern’s ongoing effort to play a central role in fulfilling the State of Michigan’s need for graduates in STEM fields.
- Last summer, Eastern announced a pair of five-year grants benefiting low income, first-generation students and military veterans totaling more than \$1.8 million from the U.S. Department of Education. The Student Support Services grants amount to \$366,640 yearly to serve 80 student veterans and 140 entering students directly from high school. The programs will provide individualized assistance with advising, academic support and access to campus resources, along with help regarding financial aid and veterans benefits issues. We are recruiting our first cohort of students into these

Career plans and “beyond the classroom” learning requirements are now key components for students because we recognize that not all students learn the same way, and applied skills make for more competitive, fully-prepared candidates upon graduation.

programs beginning next week for Fall 2016.

A wide variety of Eastern offices and programs have combined to support the Degree Completion and Retention Plan. Some of those, along with recent results, include the following:

Eastern announced a pair of five-year grants benefiting low income, first-generation students and military veterans.

with the University in various ways. With the Eagle Rewards App, students earn points by scanning in at activities such as a tutoring session or success coaching appointment, attending campus lectures and more. Points accumulate and can be used to “purchase” items in a prize store or used at the end of the year to bid on major benefits such as free tuition, housing, a meal plan, a tablet device or gift cards to the campus book store.

- **The Holman Success Center:** Eastern students logged more than 40,000 hours at study tables this past fall semester in the Holman Success Center, located in the main EMU campus library. The record total of 1,730 study days was achieved by a group of more than 1,700 unique students, all in just one semester. Hours at Study Tables are one example of success behaviors that we model, support and reward so students understand what it takes to succeed in college.
- **The Science Success Center:** The center opened in January 2014 in our newly updated Science complex, and is dedicated to working with students across all levels and disciplines. It represents another effort to take advising to where the students are in terms of location, design, and modern, technology-based services. In its first semester, the center worked with a total of 359 students, a number that climbed to 589 the following semester, a 64 percent increase and it continues to climb.
- **Eagle Rewards Program:** A free phone app recently introduced at Eastern encourages students to adopt habits that help them successfully navigate college by becoming involved
- **Financial Aid Innovations:** Pilot programs are underway that allow students who experience difficulties to “earn back” institutional scholarships that they may have lost because of academic or personal difficulties that left them not meeting eligibility criteria. We are also piloting a program this year that will pay increased scholarship ‘dividends’ over time to a group of students based on their academic performance and progress toward degree.
- **Signature Work/High Impact Instructional Practices:** EMU’s programming staff has drawn extensively from the work of the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ LEAP Project Committees as a means for spurring programs to provide exciting, engaging, applied experiences that should increase not only retention and graduation levels, but increase opportunities for higher order learning. This builds on EMU’s longstanding leadership in pedagogical innovations such as undergraduate research projects, service learning, and reacting to the past simulations.

- **BrotherHOOD Initiative (Helping Others Obtain Degrees):**
BrotherHOOD is a university-wide program designed to engage, empower, retain and graduate more first-generation, low-income and culturally underrepresented male students at Eastern Michigan. Through collaborative partnerships with offices throughout the University, this program will equip them with the tools to be successful when they graduate.

Other offices and programs supporting the Degree Completion and Retention Plan include the Financial Aid Office, Office of Admissions, Registrar, University Advising and Career Development Center, Math Tutoring Lab, Academic Projects Center, Disability Resource Center, VISION Volunteer Center and the McNair Scholars Program.

It's important to note ... our extensive collaboration with community high schools, community colleges, and our high number of transfer students.

The University is also working with outside partners in the effort. This past fall, Eastern Michigan and the Louis Stokes

Midwest Center of Excellence signed a collaborative agreement to increase the number of under-represented minority students in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

With the agreement, EMU became part of a network of institutions led by Chicago State University and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Together, along with other partners, the institutions will collaborate to increase student success

and retention of under-represented groups in STEM.

Additional goals of the Stokes program include:

- Creating a repository of peer-reviewed research in the area of the STEM students' success and retention;
- Increasing grant submissions among partner institutions; and
- Providing resources for mentoring and increasing research by students.

During spring 2014, EMU was one of 20 organizations nationwide from a pool of more than 140 applicants to receive a capacity-building grant from The Institute for Black Male Achievement, a national membership network of more than 1,500 organizations and 2,400 leaders working to improve the life outcomes for black men and boys.

Because of the efforts noted above, Eastern was honored to receive an invitation to the White House where we presented key aspects of the Degree Completion and Retention Plan to other key educational leaders.

In concluding, it's important to note a final area of emphasis that figures into degree completion and retention, which is our extensive collaboration with community high schools, community colleges and our high number of transfer students. As President Lopnow indicated in his introduction, this is an area I've overseen, and watched grow extensively in recent years. Each year, EMU admits nearly 2000 transfer students. We have designed a tailored set of requirements within our General Education program to best suit these students along with a transfer

orientation day and one-stop transfer center on campus to facilitate their attendance and completion.

We have also actively welcomed the opportunity to participate in the legislature's efforts to spur better transfer systems. These include the Michigan Transfer Agreement and the just concluded 60 hour transfer study group. The transfer student population represents a valued and important part of Eastern's overall enrollment footprint. EMU has more than 100 program level articulation agreements with area community colleges, each of which serves to facilitate students' paths toward graduation with a degree in a high-demand field at a lower cost. These are important relationships for Eastern, and we continue to expand collaboration with community colleges in a variety of ways from co-enrolled Nursing programs with Washtenaw Community College to our new completion offerings at Henry Ford College.

K-12 Schools are also important partners in preparing students for successful college enrollment. This year marks the second year of EMU's College Coaching Corps program and our first year as a partner institution in the state-wide program, Advise MI, operated by the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). Both programs provide EMU graduate students and recent EMU graduates (undergraduates) to serve as post-secondary advisors/coaches in underserved and under resourced high schools. The College Coaches are housed in three Washtenaw County high schools

and funded through a partnership among: the school district, the WISD, MCAN and EMU. For Advise MI, EMU will continue to provide partial funding for these advisors and schools for a minimum of two more years. Both the College Coaching Corps and Advise MI affirm EMU's mission of being both a university of opportunity for students and a supportive partner with our local community by effectively preparing them to complete college level work.

What are the results of all of these efforts? The University is very gratified, as our plan has shown significant progress in its first two years of existence.

EMU has more than 100 program level articulation agreements with area community colleges, each of which serves to facilitate students' paths toward graduation with a degree in a high-demand field at a lower cost.

The University's retention rate – the percentage of students who remain in college from freshman to sophomore year – rose 2 percent, from 72.6 percent for the fall 2013 entering class to 74.7 percent for the fall 2014 cohort.

In addition, six-year graduation rates rose by nearly 4 percent under the new plan, from 36.5 percent for the entering Fall 2008 cohort to 40.1 percent for students entering EMU in Fall 2009.

The results are clear. The University's hard work and focus is paying off. The Degree Completion and Retention plan is succeeding. As the above details underscore, the University's commitment to the plan is clear, and we anticipate continued improvement at Eastern Michigan in terms of student persistence and graduation.

#####