

EASTERN

MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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Testimony before
Michigan House of Representatives
Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education

Thursday, March 9, 2017

Good morning!

Thank you, Chair LaSata and members of the Subcommittee, for inviting me here to tell you about the wonderful things happening at Eastern Michigan University. I'm in my ninth month as Eastern's 23rd president, and am eager to share with you a brief overview of our distinct student population, a few of our academic programs, and how they play an important role in connecting higher education with Michigan's economic recovery. I also look forward to offering a few observations about the performance funding metrics, and to answering your questions.

Students From Michigan Who Stay In Michigan

I'll begin by telling you a bit about Eastern and our students.

We are Michigan's second oldest public university, founded 168 years ago.

90 percent of Eastern's students are from Michigan.

We have 22,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

90 percent of our students are from Michigan and from almost every county in the State.

Nearly 80 percent of our students remain in Michigan after they graduate – working, starting new businesses, paying taxes, and raising their families.

And speaking of students, we learned earlier this week that *College Rank* rated our Student Center as the #1 student union in the country!

EMU: An Institution of Opportunity

EMU is an institution of opportunity for Michigan students – that is part of our Mission Statement and it drives everything we do. I'll highlight just a few key points.

About 42 percent of Eastern's students receive **Pell Grants** – one of the highest rates in the State, reflecting the high level of need of our students.

This year, over 25 percent of our first-year students, and over 27 percent of our entire undergraduate student population, identify as **first generation**. Reflecting our commitment and success in serving these students, we received a grant last year to provide important academic services to help first generation students succeed at Eastern.

One-quarter of our students are **part-time**, as many of them work one or more jobs while taking classes to pay their way through college.

We launched a **College Coaching Corps**, which places trained EMU graduate students into high schools to work directly with low-income and first generation high school students to help facilitate the college admissions and financial aid process. Programs like the College Coaching Corps are creating the next pipeline of high-performing low-income Michigan college students.

Eastern has doubled our institutional financial aid in the last seven years – these are institutional dollars separate from federal grants or loans to support high-performing students of need.

Serving Michigan Veterans

Eastern has also made it a priority to serve Michigan veterans who have served their country. We have **one of the largest veteran student populations** among four-year institutions in Michigan, both in raw numbers and as a percent of students.

GI Jobs magazine named Eastern one of the top **military friendly universities** this year– we ranked fifth in the nation.

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The Michigan Department of Veteran Affairs recently named Eastern a **"Gold Standard Veteran Friendly"** school.

Eastern received these accolades because of the academic, health, and social programs, plus the personal attention, that we offer veteran students to support every aspect of their educational experience.

To further promote that vision, the federal government awarded Eastern a grant last year to provide additional support services to veteran students.

Preparing Michigan Residents for Good-Paying Careers

In addition to being an institution of opportunity, Eastern is committed to regularly adjusting our academic programs

to meet the demands of Michigan employers and provide Michigan students with the skills they need to succeed intellectually and pursue a good-paying career.

Our **Information Assurance** program trains students in cyber-security, and has been designated by the National Security Agency as a Center of Academic Excellence. Our IA graduates are in high demand in both the public and private sector.

Our new online **RN-to-BSN** program allows nurses who have already earned their associate's degree to earn a bachelor's degree in nursing. This program is online and offers six different starting times throughout the year, thus providing flexibility for working

nurses regardless of where they live. We added nearly 400 new degree-seeking nurses through this program – it is in such high demand that we are expanding it.

Similarly, we are launching a new **Doctor of Nursing** program to prepare top-tier clinical nurses for the most challenging types of care delivery.

Our engineering technology and management programs are already highly regarded and popular; our master's program in engineering management, for example, is ranked top in the country. We are expanding our engineering offerings to include a new degree in **mechanical engineering**, and are doing so efficiently, using our existing engineering faculty and facilities. This smart

investment meets the demands of Michigan's growing high-tech economy.

Our new **neuroscience** program blends biology, psychology, and chemistry to prepare students for careers in a variety of industries.

Our new **fermentation science** degree is about more than just beer – students receive an interdisciplinary education that includes organic chemistry and microbiology to prepare for careers in pharmaceuticals and biofuels.

These types of inter-disciplinary programs are key to providing students the broad-based knowledge they need to pursue not just a job, but a career.

Eastern's Honors College has doubled in size since 2011.

Our **entrepreneurship** program continues to thrive by preparing the next generation of Michigan business owners, and Eastern was named a Top 10 school in the country for online entrepreneurship degrees.

Our **Honors College** has doubled in size since 2011, and expanded a few years ago into a larger building.

Our investments in academic programs are working: 92 percent of our recent graduates were either employed, a full-time caregiver, or in school, and 80 percent of those employed were working in Michigan – paying taxes and contributing to our local communities.

Engaging with the Community

Community engagement is also part of Eastern's mission. Every local community that is home to a university or college will tell you that higher education institutions provide a tremendous benefit to local economies and the quality of life.

Students participating in our VISION volunteer center perform over 55,000 hours of **community service** each year.

Eastern operates numerous K-12 after-school and **summer tutoring** programs. In one of those programs, student grade point averages increased dramatically after just one semester.

The Kresge Foundation has funded a comprehensive partnership between EMU and the local community to provide economic and support services in a local mixed-income housing project. The partnership was so successful that it won a national award and Kresge provided new funding to expand the project.

Reflecting on our work in the community, the Carnegie Foundation again recognized EMU for exceptional community engagement, which is a distinct honor that this subcommittee voted last year to include as a performance metric.

Partnering with Community Colleges

Eastern is also a statewide leader in ensuring seamless transitions that are nearly boundary-free and prevent loss of credits for students who transfer from community colleges or other four-year institutions.

Over 35 percent of current undergraduate students transferred to Eastern from another institution.

We have **140 articulation agreements** with 20 different community colleges – a remarkable number that places us at the top of the list in the State, increases each year, and includes ten reverse transfer agreements.

Eastern was recognized nationally for our **seamless community college transfer process**. Earlier this month, we were one of only 63 institutions nationwide named to the Phi Theta Kappa 2017 Transfer Honor Roll, which recognizes excellence in community college transfer pathways.

Updating the Performance Metrics

We appreciate your asking us for input about the performance metrics. I would like to make three brief points.

First, Eastern supports performance metrics – we believe accountability is important for our tuition-payers and Michigan taxpayers.

Second, we join many of our peers and national experts in urging the legislature to abandon the metric related to six-year graduation rates. I applaud the subcommittee for inquiring about first generation students and community college partnerships. Respectfully, however, use of the six-year graduation rate as a metric discourages universities from supporting

first-generation students and discourages universities from collaborating with community colleges.

Here's why: **No student who transfers from a community college to a four-year university is counted in the six-year graduation rate, even if the student graduates in four years.**

That's because the six-year metric only counts students who begin at a four-year institution, as a full-time student, and stay at that four-year institution throughout their college career.

Eastern has 140 articulation agreements with 20 different community colleges – a remarkable number that places us at the top of the list in the State.

- Students who transfer from a community college, or transfer between four-year universities, are not counted in the six-year graduation rate regardless of how quickly they graduate.
- Veterans who enroll at one institution, step out to deploy, and then return to another institution are not counted in the six-year graduation rate.
- Many first-generation and community college students attend school part-time at some point in their college career, to work and pay their tuition. But these students are not counted in the six-year graduation rate.

A few years ago, the State added Pell Grants to the performance metrics. That was an excellent step, and we applaud the State for recognizing that the metrics should

occasionally be updated. **It is time to update the metrics again to replace the six-year graduation rate.**

There is no right answer for what to use in lieu of that metric, but one approach is instead to use a metric that rewards – rather than penalizes – community college transfers and partnerships.

Finally, Eastern believes that, broadly speaking, the performance metrics should provide more incentive to institutions to focus on first-generation students.

I am a first generation college student – my father was a draftsman, my mother was a homemaker. I'm a testament to what can happen if first generation students have the opportunity to pursue higher education.

Other states are investing in higher education because they realize that states with higher educational attainment have higher incomes, lower unemployment, and more job growth.

And the number one challenge cited by industry is lack of talent.

To address this challenge, we need to invest in those students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend college – that's how you move the needle to grow Michigan's economy.

But here are the realities: **Graduating first generation students costs more money.** This population has fewer resources and often needs additional support services, such as academic advising. The performance metrics need to reflect that reality.

There is not a single way to accomplish this goal, and we welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with you to devise a formula that reflects our shared values of moving Michigan forward while providing opportunity to hard-working Michigan students.

It is time to update the performance metrics again to replace the six-year graduation rate.

I am reminded of a story of a young woman I met shortly after joining Eastern. She is a first generation student enrolled in our nursing program. She described for me how hard she has worked, and the

nervousness she felt about her upcoming board exams. But she was also excited because, if she can successfully complete our rigorous program and pass the boards to become a licensed nurse, she knew that she had, in her words, a ticket to a middle class life – something about which she had always dreamed.

Together, we need to focus on these students because this is where we can have the greatest impact on our economy, in specific industries that are desperate for trained professionals, and in the lives of the individual student.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to the handouts in your packet.

- A handout outlining our community college partnerships;
- An article published by our close partner, Washtenaw Community College, highlighting our nursing program partnership -- this is one of the many examples of how we work closely with our community college partners to provide seamless and cost-effective opportunities for Michigan students;
- The most recent copy of Eastern magazine; and
- Our "Points of Pride" highlighting several key initiatives and awards.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am happy to answer your questions.

Sincerely,
James M. Smith
President