



Northwestern
Michigan
College

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May 10, 2023

The Honorable Representative Natalie Price,
Chair
Joint Capital Outlay Subcommittee
S-589 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

The Honorable Senator Kristen McDonald Rivet
Vice Chair
Joint Capital Outlay Subcommittee
Michigan Senate Binsfield Office Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

The Honorable Representative Greg
Alexander
Joint Capital Outlay Subcommittee
House of Representatives
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Chair Price, Vice Chair McDonald Rivet, and Minority Vice Chair Alexander:

Chair Price, Vice Chair McDonald Rivet, Minority Vice Chair Alexander and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation and opportunity to appear before you this afternoon.

My name is Dr. Nick Nissley and I have the honor of serving as President of Northwestern Michigan College. Today I am joined by Mahli Braak, a student at NMC and together we are excited to provide some greater detail about an exciting state investment that NMC is seeking for an integrated student services hub.

But before we do that, let me give you a little background about NMC as well as some context around why this project is so important.

For those of you who are not familiar with NMC, we are located in Traverse City and were established as one of the first community colleges in the state. We are proud that we are not just a community college, but we are known as the community's college.

What this means is that all that we do at NMC is guided by the communities we serve, and we strive to ensure that we listen and act on what we hear. Programs like our Great Lakes Maritime Academy, Great Lakes Culinary Institute, Aviation and Uncrewed Systems programs and collaboration on the Freshwater Innovation Center are all examples of how NMC has worked hard to ensure that we are responding and meeting the needs of the communities we serve.

We also worked collaboratively with the Legislature to build our last capital outlay project, the Timothy J. Nelson Innovation Center which opened in 2020. We are greatly appreciative to the legislators who assisted with this project including Senator Booher, Schmidt and then-Senator VanderWall.

So, what is next for NMC? As we look to the future and how we maintain and grow our student body, it is critical, now more than ever, that we are investing in our student's experience throughout the entire learning continuum.

The proposal before you today- the Integrated Student Services Hub will do just that.

Its purpose is to address three important needs for our community and learners.

First, the Hub will enhance and reuse an existing asset, a building that is over 60 years old located in the heart of our central campus.

As it currently stands, the Osterlin Building does not support functional use of any type. There are multiple entrances where prospective and new students alike must navigate unclear and mis-aligned entrances. Many students even report that they think the building is permanently closed because of the lack of activity and accessibility. Some portions of the building are only accessible by an outside entrance and the unusual, raised center section makes navigation difficult for those students with disabilities due to ramp designs and counter heights.

As we know the aesthetics of learning spaces impact brain function and influence how students feel. It is also important to ensure that our facilities are accessible to all and are easily navigable. Therefore, as a result of completing the Hub project, we will be extending the life of the building while creating a functional, centralized hub for key student services while also creating a welcoming and inviting space for new and existing students.

Secondly, the project will make important energy efficiency upgrades and improvements that will help reduce the carbon footprint of the building and increase sustainability on campus. As NMC seeks to address our carbon footprint and build climate resilience, addressing energy efficiency upgrades is critically important and will be an investment with a long term economic and societal return.

Third and the most important purpose that this project addresses is improving our student's sense of belonging and chances for success through the services we offer them.

We serve a rural and socio-economic diverse population. Over 40% of our aid applicants are the first of their family to attend college and 44% receive a Pell Grant. Quite frankly, many of our students arrive on campus not sure that they are truly meant to go to college.

NMC has been working to transform and integrate all its student services to create a comprehensive support hub for our students. Our recent efforts have been focused on helping students overcome the challenges that prevent them from staying in college and completing a degree.

This has included the establishment of an emergency assistance fund, a food pantry, expanded student housing and on-site mental health counselors. However, our current building is an impediment to fully realizing this plan for our students.

Our existing facility presents accessibility challenges for students and cannot, as currently designed, accommodate all our student services in one building. This can leave students hunting for services in multiple locations on campus and hindering their ability to receive help.

Combining our extensive services in a single hub will also allow for a better delivery of essential student services such as success coaching, admissions, financial aid, cashiers, advising, counseling, international outreach, health, and veteran services. In fact, it will feature a dedicated veterans space, all learner testing center, and a talent development services area, spaces that do not exist in a functional way today.

And as we know, consolidating student functions into one area will ensure greater access and holistic customer service experience. This is reinforced by research including a 2021 Brookings Center study that found that comprehensive student service programs improve outcomes for community college students and reinforced the importance of dedicated space for advisors, mentors, and coaches to ensure student success.

Not only does this project address these three important purposes, but it also aligns with the second strategy of our NMC Next plan which directs us to develop and deliver comprehensive support services, robust engagement opportunities and a vibrant collegiate experience to foster learner success, goal completion and employability.

Given the importance of this project for our learners, I would like to now re-introduce Mahli Braak, a student in the Associates in Applied Science degree program who can help to provide some additional context and perspective about the value of completing this project.

Thank you, President Nissley, Members of the Committee. It is an honor and privilege to be here today on behalf of an institution that I am proud to be a student at.

What brought me to Northwestern Michigan College had nothing to do with some of the more well-known programs the college has to offer, I could get a General Business degree anywhere in Michigan.

Instead, I decided to choose a school that is 3 hours away from home. I remember touring NMC and instantly falling in love with the campus. The nature that surrounded the buildings gave it a sense of simplicity while offering a sense of serenity for the students as they went from building to building.

I have already seen the value of a central location for learning with the Timothy J. Nelson Innovation Center, the college's last capital outlay project, completed in 2020. This building was specially designed for learning and brings together many features that make it a central gathering place for students on campus. Finding a study spot in this building with big windows that overlooked the pines tended to help myself and other students feel more relaxed when feeling stressed for finals.

And now the legislature has another opportunity to make an equally important investment in our central campus with the completion of the integrated student services hub.

Knowing the importance of convenient, accessible space, completing the Hub project will offer students, faculty, and staff the space needed to engage in important work and the delivery of critical student services. The Hub will also offer spaces where student groups can collaborate with their group advisors.

What I like the most at NMC is how invested the professors and staff members are in our success. I don't think I've ever been in a class at NMC where a professor didn't care to get to know me and my program and offer advice.

Every employee I have met, especially the Student Success Coaches and the Advising center have never failed to make me and other students a priority. They truly offer someone like me who is farther from home, a caring and compassionate community. The opportunities that have been offered to me at NMC are endless and I hope every student finds similar options.

Completing The Hub project on our central campus will be a critical asset to ensuring students now and into the future have a central, unified location for all their support service needs.

My goal at NMC is to finish my Associates in Applied Science degree focused on Business Administration. Once I finish that I hope to attend the University Center to finish out a bachelor's degree in General Business Administration with a concentration in communications.

Aside from academic goals I hope to help students feel the same sense of compassion and community that I have experienced at NMC.

Thank you for your consideration of this important project. Approving our capital outlay request will ensure an improved customer service experience and better learning outcomes for our approximately 4,000 students like myself.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present this project to you today and we would welcome any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,



Nick Nissley, Ed.D
President