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PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



Commentary by Michigan public university presidents and chancellors on important issues affecting Michigan.

Michigan's Metropolitan Universities: Conduits for Regional Advancement

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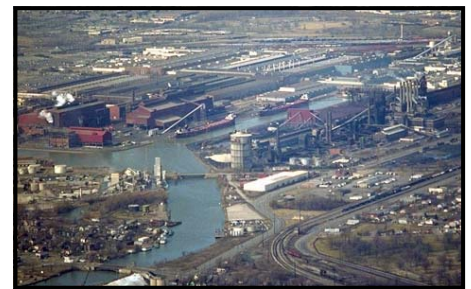
Michigan's 15 publicly supported state universities are championed for the contributions they make to workforce development and economic growth, and for good reason. Training Michigan's next generation of skilled workers and professionals for the knowledge economy and commercializing research borne out of campus laboratories are core to our universities' missions.

Governor Jennifer Granholm has stated that Michigan's higher education system is the jet fuel that propels the state's economy. This much is true. But also true is the fact that our universities serve as engines that drive the social and cultural development of the state's most populated cities.

All of Michigan's public universities serve as a powerful force for change and growth in their respective communities. Synergistic cooperation between campus and community is evident throughout Michigan. Cities such as Houghton, Marquette and Sault Ste. Marie in the Upper Peninsula benefit in a myriad of ways thanks to the outreach afforded by the three state universities that call these cities home. Indeed, every one of our public universities has programs and initiatives specifically designed to reach out to their communities as problem-solving partners. For universities located in urban and suburban areas — two-thirds of our state universities — the challenges are particularly demanding, given the multiple and complex needs of these communities and the central role that the campuses play in their development and well-being.

Our metropolitan universities ardently strive to address the economic, educational, civic, and environmental challenges that confront the urban areas in which they reside through the strategic use of their teaching, research and outreach capabilities. They are well positioned to cultivate regional partnerships that result in the delivery of programs and services that serve the needs of a variety of stakeholders — traditional undergraduate students, working professionals, corporations, non-profit organizations, public school systems, racial and ethnic groups and organizations, urban environmental causes, and a whole host of other constituencies.

Universities located in our urban and suburban centers are consistently called upon to address the tough, resistant problems associated with real-world challenges using the best available knowledge and experts associated with business, engineering, the natural sciences, behavioral and social sciences, mathematics, and the arts and humanities. From innovations in manufacturing technologies and materials that will help sustain competitive American industries, to innovations in the organization of schools and school systems that will help break through the persistent challenges of existing



The University of Michigan-Dearborn's leadership role in the Rouge River Gateway Partnership, a comprehensive effort to restore the Rouge River watershed, is just one example of our metropolitan universities' contributions to regional advancement.

Putting it in Perspective

The state's public universities located in our metropolitan areas serve a vital role in efforts to improve the educational, cultural, economic, environmental and social conditions of the communities they serve.

Word Count: 819

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

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urban school systems, to the innovations in business organization and practice that can help facilitate entrepreneurship and the successful transition from discovery to product, our universities continuously seek to instigate positive economic and social advancement in their communities.

Our universities exercise their citizenship responsibility in many ways: through the design and delivery of tailored curricula, through community-based research, through service-learning activities, through outreach efforts, through partnerships with civic and cultural organizations, and through individual acts of neighborliness — in short, by engaging in active citizenship.

Just a few examples serve to illustrate how this citizenship is carried out by our metropolitan universities as they link public resources to the pressing problems, needs and concerns that exist in their communities.

- Working with more than 40 municipalities and a host of private and non-profit entities, the University of Michigan–Dearborn has served as a lead collaborator in the Rouge River Gateway Partnership, which is implementing a remarkable environmental redevelopment initiative within the Lower Rouge Corridor. The university has harnessed resources and talent in seeking solutions to restore the vibrancy of the area's natural landscape while preserving the legacy of the automobile manufacturing industry.
- The transformational research on diversity and immigration patterns conducted by Wayne State University's Metropolitan Information Center informs the decisions of policy-makers in addressing shifting population needs in the Detroit area.
- The collaborative interventions of the Social Work Department at the University of Michigan-Flint in tandem with the Office of University Outreach at Washington Elementary School have brought together parents, instructors, administrators and community groups in a concerted effort to improve the educational performance of students.
- Oakland University has a rich tradition of opening the doors of Meadowbrook Theatre to thousands of Michigan residents, from grade-school students to senior citizens, elevating their appreciation for the performing arts.
- The vital support services provided to emerging enterprises by Grand Valley State University's Small Business and Technology Development Center contribute significantly to fostering entrepreneurial activity and economic development in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Our public universities carry out missions that reach well beyond fostering the career aspirations of young adults and generating new knowledge that results in new products, services, jobs and business start-ups. They are wholehearted participants in the efforts to improve the educational, cultural, economic, environmental and social conditions of the communities they serve. These economic and civic contributions by the state's universities are critical to the future prosperity and health of the state of Michigan. We hope that our elected officials will recognize the importance of these investments to the state's future as they wrestle with this year's budget.

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Daniel Little is the chancellor of the University of Michigan-Dearborn and is a member of the board of directors of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan.

