

**DATE:** October 9, 2017  
**TO:** All Interested Parties  
**FROM:** Perry Zielak, Fiscal Analyst  
**RE:** Four-year Degree Offerings at Michigan Community Colleges

Community colleges in Michigan offer students the chance to complete classes that lead to a certificate in a technical field, an associate's degree, or courses that can be transferred to a four-year institution. However, there are a handful of community colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees in a few specific fields. This memo gives a brief background on the four-year degree offerings at community colleges.

The Community Colleges Act, which serves as the statutory foundation for community colleges in Michigan, originally prohibited the 28 colleges from awarding baccalaureate degrees. If a student wanted to obtain a bachelor's degree through the community college route, they eventually would have had to transfer to a four-year public or private institution to complete the degree. Prior to 2012, there had been legislative attempts to amend the Act to allow the community colleges to award baccalaureate degrees in a few specific fields, such as culinary arts, but none were successful.

Supporters of the change argued that certain business sectors had an unmet need for highly skilled employees, and community colleges would be a natural partner in addressing that need through enhanced program offerings that would culminate in a bachelor's degree. The community colleges also argued that they could provide these bachelor's degree pathways at a lower tuition cost than traditional universities. Opponents of the change, including many of the 15 public universities, expressed concern that community colleges would be exceeding their original mission and encroaching on the purpose of four-year institutions.

After much debate in 2012, the legislature enacted HB 4496 (PA 495 of 2012), which allowed community colleges to offer four-year degrees in the following four fields: cement technology, maritime technology, energy production technology, and culinary arts.

Table 1 shows the six community colleges and the bachelor's degree programs they offer.

**Table 1: Community Colleges and Degree Offerings**

<u>School</u>	<u>Degree</u>
Alpena	Electrical Systems Technology
Henry Ford	Culinary Arts
Jackson	Energy Systems Technology, Culinary Arts
Lake Michigan	Energy Production and Distribution Management
Northwestern Michigan	Marine Technology, Maritime Technology
Schoolcraft	Culinary Arts

Table 2 shows the number of bachelor degrees awarded since the 2013-14 academic school year, the first year such degrees were conferred by community colleges.

**Table 2: Bachelor's Degrees Awarded by Community Colleges and 4-Year Public Universities<sup>1</sup>**

<u>Academic Year</u>	<u>Bachelor's Degrees Awarded Community Colleges</u>	<u>Bachelor's Degrees Awarded Four-Year Public Universities</u>
2013-14	31	45,247
2014-15	34	46,082
2015-16	51	46,787

The number of degrees awarded by community colleges have grown over the first three years but are still very low compared to the total number of bachelor's degrees awarded at the 15 public universities in the state. For the 2015-16 academic year, community college bachelor's degrees represented 0.1% of all bachelor's degrees awarded by both four-year public universities and community colleges. The federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) shows that all community college bachelor's degrees over the three-year span have been conferred by only one institution, Northwestern Michigan College.

During the 2013-14 legislative session, there was an effort to expand the number of program areas for which community colleges could offer baccalaureate degrees under HB 4148. The bill would have expanded baccalaureate programs to include: nursing, ski area management, wastewater treatment technology, allied health, information technology, and manufacturing technology. That debate saw similar arguments made by both sides. Opponents did note that nursing is already a degree pathway at many of the four-year universities. The bill was not passed by either the House or Senate. A similar bill for the 2015-16 legislative session, SB 98, was reported out of committee, but also failed to be passed by either chamber.

No one has introduced a bachelor's degree expansion bill introduced in either chamber for the 2017-18 legislative session as of October 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> Community College data obtained from the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). University data obtained from the state's Higher Education Institutional Data Inventory (HEIDI).