



Michigan Legislature

House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Higher Education and Community Colleges

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Testimony Presented By:

Domenico Grasso
Chancellor

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Good morning Chairman Markkanen and members of the subcommittee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to provide an overview of the University of Michigan-Dearborn, share information about students, alumni, faculty and staff, and talk about the impact we are making throughout Michigan and the world.

I am Domenico Grasso and I have the honor of serving as the sixth Chancellor at University of Michigan-Dearborn. As many of you know, the University of Michigan-Dearborn was founded in 1959 with a gift of land and money from the Ford Motor Company. The purpose was to provide talent and innovation to support the Michigan economy.

Today the chief operating officer of Ford is Kumar Galhotra, a proud UM-Dearborn engineering graduate.

I'd say we've given Ford an incredible return on their investment.

Since our founding, we have helped shape southeastern Michigan's businesses, communities, government and industry. We are a STEM-focused, comprehensive university offering more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees, focused on hands-on, practice-based learning within our four colleges.

We have been recognized by US News and World Report as a best regional public university in the state and number three in the Midwest. UM-Dearborn is a campus of opportunity, committed to making a Michigan degree accessible and affordable to students from a range of economic backgrounds; strengthening our research enterprise, and aligning curriculum with industry and community needs.

I would now like to share information about our most important strength – our students. You will find this information and other important facts and figures about UM-Dearborn in your folder.

We continue to experience consistent growth since the pandemic despite a declining high school population in the state. We have seen growth in first-year and graduate students for the past two years. Numbers look strong for this fall.

This year, 94 percent of our undergraduate students are Michigan residents, coming to us from 45 counties in the state. Of the total student body, including master's and doctoral students, 43% of our students transfer to us from a community college or other university.

I would like to highlight 3 successful alumni who encapsulate the UM-Dearborn story.

Dr. James Downing, a first-gen college student who entered UM-Dearborn to study engineering but, inspired by a biology class, left determined to become a doctor. Jim not only changed his own future, but the future of hundreds of thousands of children around the world. You see, Jim is president and CEO of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a world-renowned leader in treating childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. When he started as CEO in 2014, his goal was to have the work of St. Jude touch 30% of the world's children by 2030. I spoke with him last week and he told me he has already reached this ambitious goal five years ahead of schedule.

This major accomplishment started on our UM-Dearborn campus!

Today, UM-Dearborn students also have a 69% acceptance rate to medical school. The national average stands in the mid 40s.

Mariam Bazzi, one of our political science graduates, was just last week appointed by Governor Whitmer to sit on the Michigan Court of Appeals. She is the first Arab American woman in Michigan's history to be appointed to that bench.

And finally. Brent Ott, who worked as a busboy at the Eagle Tavern at Greenfield Village in high school and on through his time at UM-Dearborn. Today, he's still on The Henry Ford payroll but in a slightly different role: Chief Operating Officer for the entire enterprise.

I like to tell Brent's story, in particular, because it is so emblematic of who our students are: most are working, often full-time, in addition to their studies. They are parents and caregivers.. They are involved in their communities.

UM-Dearborn's highly qualified undergraduate students come from varying backgrounds:

- 41 percent of our students are the first in their families to attend college

- 50 percent are PELL eligible
- More than half of our student population are STEM majors
- As I mentioned earlier, most are working while earning their degree

We continually strive to improve student success initiatives and last year launched a new, real-time peer-to-peer tutoring program, through which students can send out a request for help and get the assistance they need quickly and efficiently 24 hours a day/7 days a week. So after our tutoring office closes and most of us are in bed, fellow students help each other late into the night and into the early hours of the morning. Since the introduction of this program, tutoring sessions have increased nearly 300%.

In 2021, UM-Dearborn established a STEM Scholars Program to increase the number of high talent students from lower-income families entering STEM fields like chemistry and engineering. The cohorts have achieved a 100% retention rate, between year one and year two, while all the students are getting 90% or higher pass rates in core STEM classes.

Last year we conferred well over 2000 degrees and surveyed our newest alums regarding post-graduate plans. Nearly 96% of our graduates are either employed or attending graduate school. Of those students who indicated they are employed, 95% stated they are working in the state of Michigan – an outstanding return on investment by the state. As outlined above with my alumni examples, they are changing their industry, society and in some cases our world.

While the success of our students is critically important, so too is ensuring access to an affordable college education. UM-Dearborn recognizes the financial challenges the majority of our students face. Our average family household median income is \$44,000.

The Michigan Achievement Scholarship (MAS) has had a positive impact on college affordability for Dearborn students. In the first two years alone, there have been over 1,900 awards of the MAS at UM-Dearborn. This program holds great promise for encouraging more Michigan students to attend Michigan colleges and universities and I urge the legislature to continue supporting this excellent program.

Last year, the Go Blue Guarantee was expanded across all three University of Michigan campuses. The university's tuition-free promise now extends to Michigan families with incomes up to \$125,000.

Last Fall, half of our new first-year in-state students did not pay tuition. We expect this to increase with the expanded Go Blue Guarantee.

I would like to dive a little deeper and share a few examples of what makes UM-Dearborn a critical partner to the region and our state.

UM-Dearborn provides a pathway for students, from families of varying means, to obtain the American Dream. I believe this is the uniqueness and power of our campus. We are a campus of opportunity.

A few years ago we launched Learn4ward to a Michigan degree with our neighbor, Henry Ford College (HFC). The program is simple - students begin their education and career journey at HFC. With a 2.75 GPA they will receive guaranteed admission to UM-Dearborn. The roadmap is crystal clear. While at HFC, students can take advantage of UM-Dearborn services such as academic advising, library resources, career services and special events. To date, more than 300 HFC students transfer to us each year based on program offerings and transfer-friendly policies.

Further expanding the pipeline, we offer dual enrollment programs in partnership with Detroit and Grosse Ile public schools, and are developing additional partnerships with Ferndale and others.

UM-Dearborn was born out of a request and gift from industry; it should not be a surprise that we continue to have extremely close relationships with our industry partners. Through these partnerships, we are able to adapt to industry's needs quickly. I would like to note, UM-Dearborn provides a degree or pathway to more than 40 of the state's hot 50 identified jobs and careers.

One method Dearborn uses to prepare students for their careers is practice-based learning (PBL). The core idea behind PBL is that education has a different texture when you're actively solving a challenge that connects to the world outside the classroom and doesn't have a preordained path to the finish line. Half of our classes are designated as PBL, meaning the curriculum requires hands-on work to address a real-life problem or situation.

For example, in the College of Business, future CPAs learn to evaluate the types of risk arising from IT-based systems and consider their impact on a client's business. More than 40 local companies and nonprofits have received millions of dollars in free IT consulting and auditing from our students.

Another example is our partnership with the Monroe County Sheriff's Department, through which our Criminology and Criminal Justice students are helping to solve decades old cold cases. Graduates have gone on to work in the legal field, the US Secret Service, the FBI and the State Police.

Combining practice-based learning , with opportunity and access to the American Dream, propels our students' life trajectory. This powerful, life changing purpose gave rise to our inspiring tagline - Dreams in Practice.

Recently, UM-Dearborn was recognized as a "Research 2 (R2)" institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education. We are one of only five schools in Michigan with the R2 designation. With external research expenditures almost tripling since 2018 , our world-class faculty have increased opportunities to bring their research findings to the classroom for all students, undergrad to doctoral, for enhanced instruction and hands-on experience.

This year, the nearly \$32 million appropriation received from the state comprises 18% of UM-Dearborn's operating budget, almost all of it used for financial aid. Tuition at UM-Dearborn is directly linked to the amount of funding we receive from the state. State

support is critical to our budget as it directly impacts our ability to attract and educate students with limited financial means.

Regular maintenance of campus facilities is a costly and ongoing process. Roof maintenance, HVAC replacement, classroom and lab upgrades, sidewalk repairs and other projects add up quickly and are often deferred until something breaks, which means repairs become even more costly and can disrupt services.

In FY 2023-24, the Legislature included funds for Infrastructure, Technology, Equipment, Maintenance, and Safety (ITEMS) for the first time in decades. I would encourage the Legislature to continue investing in ITEMS funding to help keep these vital state assets well maintained and up to date for the sake of students.

I am proud of our students, our efforts to make a Michigan degree affordable and obtainable to students of varying means, and the partnership we have established with the state of Michigan.

I thank you for the opportunity to address the subcommittee and I welcome any questions you may have.

Go Blue - Go Dearborn!

