



Five Ways Michigan's 15 Public Universities are Delivering Value and Impact

Michigan's public universities are more than institutions of higher education: They are economic engines, workforce partners, innovation hubs and community anchors in every region of the state. The state's investment in its 15 public universities delivers measurable returns for students, taxpayers, employers and communities. Here are five ways that investment is paying off:

1) Delivering Real Affordability for Michigan Families

Michigan's public universities are doing what it takes to keep college affordable. The institutions provide \$1.6 billion in student financial aid annually. Combined with federal and state aid, the average net price of attending a Michigan public university is 47% lower than the full cost of attendance and has declined 21% since 2009. This comes despite Michigan ranking 42nd in per capita state funding for higher education, reflecting in part a decline of \$1.3 billion in inflation-adjusted state funding since 2002.

Generous free tuition programs and targeted aid from universities ensure that students from all backgrounds can afford to earn a career- and life-changing college degree without being burdened by unmanageable debt. Nearly 60% of students who graduate with a bachelor's degree from a Michigan public university have no student loan debt.

Maintaining college affordability requires a partnership between the State of Michigan and its 15 public universities. The universities have done their part for the past 20 years by cutting costs, implementing operational efficiencies, and collaborating on strategic partnerships that enhance college access while maintaining the highest levels of academic quality. However, they can't cut their way to success. The state must do its part to ensure continued affordability of a Michigan public university education.

2) Meeting Workforce Needs and Driving Prosperity

The educational attainment of our state's residents is directly tied to our collective prosperity; Michigan ranks 39th in residents who possess a postsecondary degree or certificate and 40th in per-capita income.

Michigan's public universities enroll nearly 260,000 students and grant degrees to more than 66,000 individuals every year. This talent production is the most critical factor in retaining and attracting employers and growing the state's population. Eighty-four percent of the top 50 high-demand, high-wage occupations in Michigan through 2032 will require a four-year college degree or higher.

The economic payoff of these careers is clear. Michigan public university graduates earn higher incomes, have stronger employment outcomes, enjoy greater social mobility, and are more civically engaged. They also earn nearly twice as much as peers without a college degree, averaging \$91,073 for those aged 25–34, compared to \$46,272 for high school graduates. Over a 40-year career, the average net return on a Michigan public university degree now tops \$2 million, a figure that also accounts for the cost of attending a university.

3) Generating Billions in Annual Economic Impact

Michigan's 15 public universities generated nearly \$45 billion in net new economic activity in 2024, driven by university operations, student spending and alumni earnings. That's nearly 28 times the state's \$1.6 billion appropriation for these institutions.

Public universities supported an estimated 129,311 jobs statewide, including nearly 64,000 net new jobs that would not exist without these institutions. These institutions collectively employed nearly 27,000 faculty and 70,000 staff, the majority of whom work and live locally.

That impact continues long after graduation. The 1.6 million living alumni generated more than \$15 billion in incremental earnings attributable to their degrees. University-related economic activity generated more than \$7.1 billion in state tax revenue from personal income, sales and use, and transportation taxes paid by employees, students and alumni living in Michigan. Few state investments generate this level of measurable economic and fiscal return.

4) Fueling Innovation, Discovery and Investment

Michigan's public universities are at the center of the state's innovation economy. They connect Michigan to global research networks, fueling discovery and strengthening vital sectors like health care, mobility, advanced manufacturing, energy, agriculture, and artificial intelligence. They foster talent, academic research and economic revitalization, positively impacting every region of the state.

The federal government and industry partners invest billions annually in research conducted at Michigan's public universities, a direct reflection of the confidence and trust they place in these institutions. These investments lead to groundbreaking and life-saving innovations and discoveries that generate new jobs, company start-ups, and entire new industries, strengthening Michigan's national and global standing.

5) Collaborating to Serve the Public Interest

Michigan's public universities are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, partnering with a wide range of stakeholders to address real-world challenges, including K-12 schools, community colleges, state and local government, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, hospitals and healthcare entities, employer coalitions, and more.

The universities harness the full capabilities of their intellectual, financial and physical resources through these partnerships to meet challenges and find solutions that are felt both locally and even globally. The result is reflected in an improved human condition that spans virtually every aspect of our lives, including educational and literacy outcomes, healthcare, public safety, the environment, entrepreneurialism and small businesses.

Michigan is smarter, healthier, more capable, more prosperous and better poised to meet challenges and opportunities thanks to these publicly supported institutions in their service of the public interest.