

State Reporting Burdens

As public institutions, Michigan's state universities are accountable to citizens and policymakers. Transparency is important to demonstrate the universities' efficient and judicious use of tuition and tax dollars. Part of this transparency is accomplished through state reporting to the Michigan Legislature and the Executive Branch. However, reports do not write themselves. Every report takes time to produce, and that time is spent by university employees. As more reports are required by state government, more staff time and financial resources are diverted from the primary task of supporting the core activities of teaching and learning. MASU surveyed the state universities to estimate how many resources were going toward fulfilling state reporting obligations, finding that almost 10,500 hours went into complying with reporting requirements in academic year 2017-18. Such staff time is estimated to have cost \$430,000 and is likely an underestimate of the true burden, given that the state's FY 2023 higher education budget has swelled to include 33 different required reports or datasets with hundreds of data elements to be submitted to the state. A new state reporting burden cost impact study is being conducted for the 2023 calendar year and will assuredly underscore the significant fiscal consequences placed upon Michigan's public universities.

In many cases, the information being sought through mandated state reports is already publicly available. Public universities report massive annual datasets on financial, academic, enrollment, human resources, and other areas to the U.S. Department of Education (the "IPEDS" dataset) and the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget (the "HEIDI" and "STARR" datasets). Alignment between and with the two datasets reduces duplication of efforts, and eliminating competing reports and definitions also makes it easier for all stakeholders to examine public university activities.

Policy Actions:

- Reduce unfunded state reporting activities.
- Streamline state reporting requirements to eliminate wasteful duplication of efforts.
- When state policymakers are considering new reporting requirements, universities should be involved at an early stage to ensure that the desired information is possible to collect and data elements are clearly defined.