

# **05-15-2025 - Office of the President**

## **Regional Public Universities Crucial to Michigan's Future**

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### **Meeting workforce needs bolsters competitiveness, proven stimulus for economic growth**

In looking ahead to the “2025 Mackinac Policy Conference,” business, civic, and government leaders will discuss how best to invest in the tools, technologies, and infrastructure that facilitate economic competitiveness, growth and prosperity.

Higher education must be at the core of the leadership conversation, especially addressing the intrinsic role regional public universities (RPUs) play in fostering economic development, attracting private investment and contributing to the quality of life in Michigan.

The numbers are impressive, and the impact cannot be denied.

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), 70 percent of all American undergraduates attend RPUs, where two-thirds of all bachelor's degrees are awarded. In Michigan, the 12 RPUs are meeting workforce needs, and offering timely programs along with bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees as part of elevating the skills of the state's employment pool.

Amid the intense national criticism of colleges and universities, RPUs are making college affordable, accessible and equitable. Compared to non-RPUs, regional public universities enroll a proportionately higher number of low-income and first-generation students. In addition, students from RPUs have lower debt than those from flagship and private colleges and universities.

While colleges and universities are under pressure to justify their place at the center of a healthy, civil and thriving democratic society, RPUs can point to an impressive rate of return on a college education for graduates and the communities where they work and live.

RPUs from metro Detroit to the upper peninsula can point to the impact of operational activities as vital to their respective region's economy. Across the board, a university's economic stimulus is reflected in job creation, as a catalyst for increasing state tax revenue, and serving as a “steward of place,” which is a strategic engagement to enhance educational and cultural assets key to a region's identity, vitality and quality of life.

An economic impact study commissioned by Oakland University and released earlier this month from Lansing-based Anderson Economic Group documents a \$1.9 billion net economic impact on the state from the university's activities (27 times the state's appropriation). Other highlights include:

- \$316.4 million generated in state tax revenue (more than four times the State's appropriation)
- \$326 million in operations created 6,417 jobs

- \$76 million in research-based economic impact created 137 jobs

The graduates of most of Michigan's RPUs come from Michigan and remain in the state after they graduate contributing their skills, talents and spending to the local economy. Indeed, according to the Anderson report, Oakland's alumni have a \$5.9 billion 2024 economic impact on the state.

Simply put: Thriving regional public universities are essential contributors for economic stability and growth. And promoting degree completion serves the common interest of Michigan's businesses and residents.

Oakland, along with the other state public universities, ardently supports Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's goal of increasing postsecondary education and skills training in Michigan with the goal of 60 percent of residents earning a degree or certificate by 2030.

In addition, Oakland is a leading partner with Oakland County in "Oakland80," which aims to transform the regional workforce into the most educated in the country. The goal by 2030 is for 80 percent of adults to have a post-high school degree, professional certificate or other credential.

When governmental and business leaders gather to discuss the state's future at the "Mackinac Policy Conference," let's make it a high priority to renew our commitment to the primary role of higher education in building a thriving economy and better Michigan.

*Ora Hirsch Pescovitz is president of Oakland University, and chair-elect of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) based in Washington, D.C.*

*Editor's Note: Michigan's regional public universities include Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Lake Superior State University, Michigan Tech University, Northern Michigan University, Oakland University, Saginaw Valley State University, University of Michigan-Dearborn, University of Michigan-Flint, and Western Michigan University.*