

**A Matter of Degrees:**  
*Creating Community College  
Partnerships That Work*

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There has never been a time when more emphasis has been placed on the importance of a college degree. Today a college education is critical in helping facilitate entry into the job market and to enable future success. Governors, legislators, and opinion leaders across the country continually emphasize the importance of higher education.

At the same time college costs have never been higher. The simple reality is that students can no longer work summers to pay for college. The student who works less than 30 hours per week is becoming the exception rather than the rule on many campuses. In this context increasing numbers of students find themselves working to support a lifestyle where they cannot afford to move to a college campus. If they are to continue their education they must live at home if they are going to continue their education.

The continued strong growth and popularity of the community college coupled with increasing numbers of place-bound students has created an increasing market demand for the offering of bachelor degrees on community college campuses. In some states and on some campuses this has created a call for the community college baccalaureate. In many cases, a simpler, more effective, and faster response to this need can be for colleges and universities to join together as true partners in developing both bachelor and masters degree programs at community colleges.

## **The Institution**

Ferris State University (FSU) is a regional university of 12,500 students with its central campus in Big Rapids, Michigan, a town of 12,000 people. It is located in the west center of the state approximately an hour north of Grand Rapids. It offers approximately 170 degree programs, including associate degrees, bachelor degrees, professional master degrees, and first professional doctoral degrees in pharmacy and optometry. (For a listing of degree programs, see Appendix One.)

Last year Ferris awarded 920 associates degrees, which would have made it the ninth largest community college in the state. Nearly all of those degrees are in applied technology or health care fields, making FSU perhaps the third largest provider of degrees in these areas in the state. In excess of 80% of the students who earn an associate degree from Ferris continue on to work for a bachelor degree. For fall 2006, 43% of new students at the University are transfer students. These data suggest that strong and successful programs have been developed to help students with associate degrees continue toward a bachelor degree at the University.

In addition to academic programs in Big Rapids, Ferris State University now teaches at twenty other locations in Michigan and by fall 2007 this number will expand to twenty-two. While a number of models are used, by far the most common approach for these programs is to partner with community college campuses. At present Ferris provides degree programs through relationships with seventeen community colleges in Michigan. (For a complete listing of program partners, see Appendix Two.) These location-based efforts are further extended by courses and degree programs that are provided through the Internet. (For a complete site-based distance education program listing, see Appendix Three.)

This paper reflects on the experience of Ferris State University in providing bachelor degrees throughout Michigan. It provides analysis of key challenges and success factors, and suggests why successful partnerships benefit both the hosting and providing college. Beyond that it presents a variety of models which have proven effective in meeting this need in Michigan. Finally it proposes some ideas for future cooperation.

### **Why Partner?**

There are significant reasons why partnered programs may be in the best interests of both community colleges and universities. A key success factor for colleges at all levels is retention and graduation. The critical piece in retention is from the first semester to the second and from the first year to the second. It is not uncommon for some community college students to move to a four-year institution before completing the associate degree. This can lock in admission to a program and may make it more likely that courses completed will count toward programmatic degree requirements. When a community college and a university have partnered on a degree to be offered at the two-year campus, students can be dually admitted to both programs. With this arrangement the likelihood of retention for that student through graduation with the associate degree is much greater.

The ability of community colleges to provide four-year programs on their campuses can help them appeal to a new market of students, who might not otherwise have chosen a community college. For traditional age students living at home this will be significantly less expensive and the combination of community college tuition followed by university tuition will be much less expensive. Further by partnering with a four-year institution a community college can begin a process that provides potential access to a broad range of programs that are already developed and approved.

For four-year institutions, steadily increasing costs have made it less financially feasible for students to relocate to their campus. Partnering with a community college creates a new source of potential students, without significant reductions in students who attend the central campus. An easy way to track this is to look at the average age of students in on-campus and off-campus programs. For Ferris State University the average full-time on-campus student is 23 years old, off-campus the average is 32, clearly a different clientele.

There is another financial reason for universities to partner with community colleges. Each fall universities with growing enrollments face the challenge of providing enough sections of required freshman courses in English composition, basic sciences, and mathematics. Many residential campuses use limited numbers of adjuncts and keep class section size for many of these subjects quite small. There can be instances during growth periods when enough class spaces will not be available.

For the four-year institution, teaching on community college campuses can provide high quality and even specialized instructional space for reasonable cost. It provides immediate access to library and information technology resources without significant investment. Relationships can also be developed to use the skilled support resources of the college in support of the University programs.

Partnered programs are an opportunity for qualified community college faculty to teach at the upper division level. This can help a community college retain a talented, valuable faculty member, and provide the university with a high-caliber faculty member. Further the faculty member may be person the student already identifies with, and can serve as a potential recruiter for the baccalaureate program.

Beyond the obvious economic benefits, there are other advantages for students from partnered programs. Each semester many students work to register for enough credits so they will qualify as full-time students for financial aid purposes. During the final semesters of an associate degree all the courses a student needs may not be available and students will fill their schedules with courses that will not meet degree requirements for either the associate or bachelor degree. In doing so, they can exhaust financial aid eligibility before bachelor degree completion. A partnered program with a consortium financial aid agreement can allow the student to begin working on the baccalaureate level while finishing the associate degree requirements.

### **Partner Pitfalls**

Creating powerful, successful partnered programs requires commitments from both institutions. The community college must make classroom space available at valuable and crowded points in the academic day. The community college partner needs to work actively to promote the program on campus. For new or small programs where there is not full-time support from the university available on the campus, the sponsoring college must serve as the eyes and ears for the university, alerting them to potential problems and shortfalls in the program.

For the university, careful judgments must be made regarding the true need for the program. It is not unusual to hear statements of need for programs that is based on anecdotal rather than quantifiable data. Two or three requests for a program, no matter how influential the people may be who are making them, do not demonstrate need. Once a program is begun, the university has an obligation to provide the entire course sequence through completion. Marginal numbers to begin a program can quickly become financially painful numbers midway through.

The second imperative for universities is the quality of program they provide. Some questions to consider include –

- How many tenured faculty are involved in its delivery?
- What is the percentage of adjuncts used for instructional delivery?
- What is the longevity of faculty in that program?
- What mechanisms are in place for class evaluation and quality control?
- Is the program at the distance site of the same academic quality and consistency as what is offered on the central campus?

Enthusiasm for a new partnership can mask what may prove to be fatal program weaknesses. The university must consider carefully the support mechanisms in place –

- How are student recruitment, admission, and financial aid handled?
- How do students get textbooks?
- How are programmatic issues handled?
- Who is responsible for advising?
- Is the course schedule accessible on-line and is it confirmed?
- Is a transfer plan available and is it also accessible on-line?

### **Models for Cooperation**

Many academic programs will work well with a simple two plus two pattern, where the bachelor's degree is added atop the associate degree program. This arrangement requires little adjustment or accommodation on the part of either partner. In most cases the associate degree is not required to begin university classes. There can be a tendency to think of bachelor degrees at community colleges as an extension for current students only. Beyond current college students there may indeed be additional potential students in the community. Accessing this will require a larger commitment to marketing, followed by transcript evaluation and transfer advising.

It is also possible for universities to construct bachelor degrees that are a three plus one arrangement, where the university provides only the final year of instruction. For this to occur there needs to be a flexible university-wide requirement in terms of the number of required upper division credits and the required number of residency hours. A minimum of thirty credits for each of these requirements makes this approach possible.

Two examples of this approach are included in the relationship Ferris State University has with Northwest Michigan College (NMC) in Traverse City. NMC houses the Great Lakes Maritime Academy where students prepare for careers as officers or engineers for ships on the Great Lakes. Three years of instruction from NMC are partnered with a year of upper division business courses from FSU whereby students earn a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. This is especially useful career preparation in that maritime graduates may tire of the significant time spent away from home on the water, and are then prepared to transition to a shore-based business.

The second example was developed for the flight training program at NMC and is organized in a similar fashion. This is remarkable in that it was proposed in November with student enrollments the following August. With strong partners and supportive working relationships a rapid response to workforce needs is certainly possible. These examples present a different approach to providing bachelor degree work at remote sites. They are not degree programs transplanted to a different location, instead they are degrees customized to the community college student's needs, meeting a specialized purpose.

A third example of this approach is the Bachelor of Applied Science Degree Ferris provides in Industrial Technology Management (ITM). This is a specially developed transfer degree that is not offered on the central campus. The degree is designed to prepare students for advancement possibilities in supervision, planning, and project management. Because it concentrates students from a wide-range of associate degree fields into a single bachelor degree, it helps develop enough degree-seeking students to make the program sustainable even in smaller locations. Flexibly designed with configurable electives, it provides a viable career pathway for students with associate degrees in related fields.

An especially unique partnership is with the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, Washtenaw Community College (WCC), and Ferris State University. Much of the training for the United Association is coordinated through facilities at WCC, which builds upon the union's apprenticeship programs and then provides online support to the associate degree. This is coordinated with FSU's efforts in ITM and with a fully online Bachelor of Science in Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning or Refrigeration. This remarkable virtual partnership is possible because of the United Association's exemplary efforts in distance education and strong support for increased education.

The latest University effort is aimed at retraining workers displaced by the loss of an Electrolux Plant and supporting facilities in Greenville, MI, a town of 8,000 people about 70 miles southeast of Big Rapids. The job losses from Electrolux alone are in excess of 2,700 positions. Working with Montcalm Community College the University has developed three certificates, in phlebotomy, construction, and automotive service that help workers reenter the job market in a new field, and then continue work toward an associate degree and hopefully a bachelor degree. The challenges here are especially significant as many displaced workers do not have an education beyond the eighth grade and have been away from school in excess of twenty years. It is hoped that these efforts can become turnkey approaches available to communities, employers, and workers faced with the downsizing and elimination of manufacturing jobs.

Beyond bachelor degrees Ferris State University now offers masters degrees in criminal justice, business administration, and teacher education either on-line or on community college campuses. This provides one additional step in the career ladder process where a student can continue their lifelong education to meet the increased expectations of their career.

## Closing Thoughts

Not all community college and university partnerships work. On the University side these efforts should not be viewed as profit centers, but rather an extension of the University to meet the needs of citizens where they live. Approached from a purely dollars and cents viewpoint some programs would never be offered or would be abandoned before they had the opportunity to establish their credibility. In offering off-campus programs, it is especially important to remember that each location and each offering is different. While models certainly exist, the dynamics will be different and a cookie cutter approach will miss the possibilities inherent in a location.

The community college needs to think of the partnered program as its own, and take full responsibility to help support, promote, and encourage the program. Some community colleges are so committed to offering baccalaureate programs that they make campus space available without charge. This type of partnership approach increases prospects for success. As a result the possibility of future opportunities for their students will only increase. In most cases the successful launch of one program and the strong working relationships that develop, lead to a second, and a then a third offering. Here again a focus on students is the key to success.

During my first three years as president I visited twenty-five of the twenty-eight community colleges in Michigan. I have grown to both respect and admire my colleagues who lead our partner institutions. As our working and personal relationships grow, the opportunities for truly innovative work continue to grow. I recently received a remarkable idea from a community college president who suggested that we jointly share in our support position on his campus. This person for our programs would be paid by the University, but supervised by their college. In doing so it is our hope that our programs would be more tightly coordinated with their own offerings. This suggests the beginning of an entirely new collaborative relationship for our partnership.

In developing these partnerships I have come to understand that the result of our combined efforts is far greater than either of our efforts could be working alone. But most importantly we help change the lives of thousands of students, helping them continue to grow, develop, evolve, and achieve. When we cooperate and do this well it is our students that benefit. As educators we should expect and accept nothing less.

## Web Links

### Ferris State University

- Career Pathways - <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/pathways/>
- Industrial Technology and Management – [http://www.ferris.edu/ucel/programs/indust\\_technology.htm](http://www.ferris.edu/ucel/programs/indust_technology.htm)
- University Center for Extended Learning - <http://www.ferris.edu/ucel/index.htm>

### Northwest Michigan College –

- Bachelor of Business Administration, aviation track - <http://www.nmc.edu/aviation/program/bachelors.html>
- Bachelor of Business Administration, maritime track -  
deck officer - <http://www.nmc.edu/maritime/programs/deck.html>  
engineering officer - <http://www.nmc.edu/maritime/programs/engineering.html>

### United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters-

- Program Description - [http://www.uauniversity.org/degree\\_programs/fsu.php](http://www.uauniversity.org/degree_programs/fsu.php)
- University Description - [http://www.uauniversity.org/pdf/uauniversity\\_brochure\\_200506.pdf](http://www.uauniversity.org/pdf/uauniversity_brochure_200506.pdf)

# Appendix One – Degree and Certificate Programs

## Associate Degrees in Applied Science

Accountancy  
Architectural Technology  
Automotive Body  
Automotive Service Technology  
Building Construction Technology  
CAD Drafting & Tool Design Technology  
Civil Engineering Technology  
Computer Information Systems  
Dental Hygiene  
Diagnostic Medical Sonography  
Early Childhood Education  
Environmental Health & Safety Technology  
General Business  
Graphic Design  
Heavy Equipment Technology  
HVACR Technology  
Industrial Chemistry Technology  
Industrial Electronics Technology  
Legal Studies  
Manufacturing Tooling Technology  
Mechanical Engineering Technology  
Medical Laboratory Technology  
Medical Record Technology  
Nuclear Medicine Technology  
Nursing  
Ornamental Horticulture Technology  
Plastics Technology  
Printing and Digital Graphic Imaging Technology  
Radiography  
Respiratory Care  
Restaurant and Food Industry Management  
Rubber Technology  
Surveying Technology  
Welding Technology

## Associate in Arts

Applied Speech Communication  
Career Exploration  
Directed Studies  
General Studies  
Liberal Arts  
Pre-Criminal Justice  
Pre-Law  
Pre-Teaching Elementary  
Pre-Teaching Secondary  
University College Program

## Associate in Science

Pre-Engineering  
Pre-Mortuary Science  
Pre-Pharmacy  
Pre-Science

## Bachelor of Arts

Biology  
Chemistry  
Communication  
English  
History  
Mathematics  
Sociology

## Bachelor of Science

Accountancy  
Accountancy/Computer Information Systems  
Accountancy/Finance  
Advertising  
Allied Health Education  
Applied Biology

- Applied Biology Concentration
- Environmental Biology Concentration
- Forensic Biology Concentration
- Pre-Dentistry Concentration
- Pre-Medicine Concentration
- Pre-Optometry Concentration
- Pre-Physical Therapy Concentration

Applied Mathematics

- Pre-Veterinary Medicine

Applied Mathematics

- Applied Mathematics
- Actuarial Science Concentration
- Computer Science Concentration
- Operations Research Concentration
- Statistics Concentration

Applied Speech Communication  
Automotive and Heavy Equipment Management  
Automotive Engineering Technology  
Biology Education  
Biotechnology  
Business Administration

- Business Administration
- Professional Tracks
- Legal Studies

Business Education/General Business Major  
 Business Education/Marketing Major  
 Chemistry Education  
 Computer Information Systems  
 Computer Networks and Systems  
 Construction Mgmt/Commercial/Industrial Bldg. Concentration  
 Construction Mgmt/Highway/Bridge Construction  
 Criminal Justice
 

- Criminal Justice
- Corrections Concentration
- Generalist Concentration
- Law Enforcement Specialist Concentration

 Early Childhood Education  
 EHSM: Environmental Health  
 Electrical/Electronics Engineering Technology  
 Elementary Education  
 English Education  
 Facility Management  
 Finance  
 Graphic Design  
 Health Care Systems Administration  
 Heavy Equip Service Engineering Tech  
 History Education  
 Hotel Management  
 Hotel Management w/AAS in Restaurant & Food Industry Management  
 Human Resource Management  
 HVACR Engineering Technology  
 Integrative Studies  
 International Business  
 Journalism and Technical Communication

**Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)**

**Elementary Education Major**

Mathematics Major  
 Social Studies Major

**Master of Business Administration**

Business Administration  
 Information Security and Networking  
 Management Concentration  
 E-Business & Systems Integration Concentration  
 Management Tools & Techniques Concentration  
 Nursing Concentration

Management  
 Manufacturing Engineering Technology  
 Marketing  
 Mathematics Education  
 Mechanical Engineering Technology  
 Medical Record Administration  
 Medical Technology  
 Music Industry Management  
 New Media Printing and Publishing  
 Nursing  
 Operations and Supply Management  
 Plastics Engineering Technology  
 Printing Management  
 Product Design Engineering Technology  
 Professional Golf Management  
 Professional Tennis Management  
 Psychology  
 Public Administration  
 Public Relations  
 Quality Engineering Technology  
 Recreation Leadership and Management  
 Resort Management  
 Rubber Engineering Technology  
 Small Business and Entrepreneurship  
 Surveying Engineering  
 Technical and Professional Communication
 

- Automotive Writing Concentration
- Computer Information Concentration
- Multimedia Writing Concentration
- Publication Mgmt Concentration
- Scientific & Medical Writing
- Technical & Prof Communication

 Technical Education  
 Television and Digital Media Production  
 Training in Business and Industry  
 Wage Earning Home Economics Education  
 Welding Engineering Technology

Special Education Endorsement Only

## **Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction**

Administrative Concentration  
Elementary Certification Concentration  
Experiential Education Concentration  
Philanthropy Education Concentration

Reading Endorsement Concentration  
Secondary Certification Concentration  
Special Education Concentration  
Subject Area Concentration

## **Master of Science in Career and Technical Education**

Administrative Concentration  
Educational Technology Concentration  
Instructor Concentration

Postsecondary Administration Concentration  
Training & Development Concentration

## **Master of Science in CJ Administration**

## **Master of Science in Nursing**

## **Master of Science Info Systems Mgmt**

## **Doctor of Optometry**

## **Doctor of Pharmacy**

## **Certificate Programs**

Advanced Construction Management  
Advanced Studies in E-Business & Systems  
Integration  
Advanced Studies in Global Logistics  
Advanced Studies in Information Security and  
Networking Management  
Advanced Studies in Investment  
Advanced Studies in Management Tools &  
Techniques  
Advertising  
Business-to-Business Marketing  
Club Management  
Coding/Reimbursement Specialist  
Computer Networking Certificate  
Computer Science  
Construction Administration  
Culinary Management  
Customer Energy Specialist  
Direct Marketing  
E-Commerce Marketing  
Electrical Power Generation Certificate  
Elementary Endorsement to Secondary  
Provisional Certificate  
Environmental Regulations Certificate  
Facilities Management Certificate  
Festivals, Community, and Special Events  
Geographic Information Systems (GIS)  
Certificate  
Homeland Security: Digital Security and  
Forensics Certificate  
Horticulture for Golf Course Managers  
Hotel Management Certificate  
Human Resource Management  
International Business

Journalism  
Komatsu Equipment Repair  
Manufacturing Operations Management  
Marketing  
Marketing Research  
Marketing/Sales  
Medical Office Assistant  
Medical Record Clerk  
Nursing Education Certificate  
Occupational Health and Safety Certificate  
Performance Machining  
Performance Motorsports  
Philanthropic Studies Certificate  
Phlebotomy Certificate  
Public Relations  
Quality Technology  
Reading Certificate Programs  
Real Estate  
Restaurant and Food Industry Management  
Retailing  
Safety Management Certificate  
Secondary Endorsement to Elementary  
Professional Certificate  
Small Business Management  
Special Education Certificate Programs  
Specialist Certificate in Philanthropic Studies  
Program Academic Services Learning  
Sport, Spa, Entertainment Operations  
Supervision  
Technical Writing  
Total Quality Management in Education  
Certificate Program  
Unit Clerk

## Appendix Two – Community Partners

- Alpena Community College
- Bay de Noc Community College
- Bay Mills Community College
- Cadillac Area Manufacturers Association
- Delta College
- Genesys Regional Medical Center
- Gratiot Community Hospital
- Great Lakes Maritime Academy
- Henry Ford Community College
- Kirtland Community College
- Lansing Community College
- Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians
- Macomb Community College
- Macomb County Intermediate School District
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- Michigan Works! West Central
- Mid-Michigan Community College
- Mid-Michigan Medical Center
- Mott Community College
- Muskegon Community College
- National Occupational Competency Testing Institute
- North Central Michigan College
- Northwestern Michigan College
- Oakland Community College
- Red River College
- Rubber Manufacturers Association
- Schoolcraft College
- Southwestern Michigan College
- St. Clair County Community College
- United Association of Plumbers and Pipe Fitters
- University Center at Gaylord
- Washtenaw Community College
- West Shore Community College

# Appendix Three - Distance Education Programs in Michigan

## Metro Detroit Programs

### Auburn Hills - Oakland Community College

- Industrial Technology & Management BAS

### Clinton Township

- Career and Technical Education MS *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Automotive Management BS
- Criminal Justice BS
- Technical Education BS *(planned for launch in 2007)*

### Dearborn – Henry Ford Community College

- Industrial Technology & Management BAS

### Garden City – Schoolcraft Community College

- Criminal Justice BS
- Medical Record Administration BS *(planned for launch in 2007)*

### Warren – Macomb Community College

- Industrial Technology & Management BAS

## Northern Michigan Programs

### Alpena – Alpena Community College -

- Phlebotomy Certificate *(planned for launch in 2007)*

### Escanaba – Bay de Noc Community College

- Respiratory Care AAS

## **Gaylord - University Center in Gaylord**

- Medical Laboratory Technology AAS *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Respiratory Care AAS

## **Petoskey – North Central Michigan College**

- Coding/Reimbursement Specialist Certificate *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Curriculum & Instruction MEd
- Medical Record Technology AAS *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Phlebotomy Certificate *(planned for launch in 2007)*

## **Roscommon – Kirtland Community College**

- Phlebotomy Certificate *(planned for launch in 2007)*

## **Scottville – West Shore Community College**

- Business Administration - Professional Track BS
- Curriculum & Instruction MEd
- Elementary Education BS

## **Traverse City – Northwestern Michigan College**

- Accountancy BS
- Business Administration BS
  - Aviation
  - Maritime
  - Professional Track
- Career & Technical Education MS
- Computer Information Systems BS
- Curriculum & Instruction MEd
- Human Resource Management Certificate
- International Business Certificate
- Nursing RN to BSN
- Secondary Teacher Education BS
- Social Work BSW
- Special Education Teaching Endorsement

# Southeast Michigan Programs

## Flint – Mott Community College

- Business Administration BS
- Business Administration BS - Professional Track
- Career & Technical Education MS
- Criminal Justice BS
- Curriculum & Instruction MEd
- Elementary Education BS
- Human Resource Management Certificate
- Nursing RN to BSN
- Secondary Teacher Education BS
- Special Education Endorsement

## Howell

- Business Administration BS
- Business Administration BS - Professional Track
- Criminal Justice MS
- Elementary Education BS

## Lansing – Lansing Community College

- Business Administration BS *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Business Administration BS - Professional Track *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Career & Technical Education MS *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Criminal Justice BS
- Health Care Systems Administration BS *(planned for launch in 2007)*
- Industrial Technology & Management BAS
- Respiratory Care AAS
- Technical Education BS *(planned for launch in 2007)*

## Midland

- Coding Reimbursement Specialist Certificate
- Medical Record Technology AAS

## Port Huron – St. Clair County Community College

- Industrial Technology & Management BAS

## **University Center - Delta College**

- Criminal Justice BS
- Industrial Technology & Management BAS

## **Southwest Michigan Programs**

### **Dowagiac/Niles – Southwestern Michigan College**

- Accountancy BS
- Business Administration BS
- Business Administration BS - Professional Track
- Computer Information Systems BS
- Curriculum and Instruction MEd
- Early Childhood Education BS
- International Business Certificate

### **Kalamazoo**

- Nursing RN to BSN

### **Muskegon – Muskegon Community College**

- Industrial Technology & Management BAS
- Computer Information Systems BS