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Request for Tuition Stabilization Funds

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Out of all of Michigan's 15 public universities, just one can claim complete commitment to the highest levels of student access, affordability and academic achievement. With nearly 25,000 students and a history of affordable excellence, WMU has carved out a spot as Michigan's premier partner in preparing the next generation of well-educated and flexible employees who will be able to adapt to the state's changing economy.

The vast majority—90 percent—of WMU students are Michigan residents. Many of them want to remain in the state following graduation. WMU alumni who have remained in Michigan now exceed 114,000 in number, and they can be found in every county of the state.

It is WMU's intent to make an investment in student financial aid with Tuition Stabilization Funds received from the state of Michigan. The investment of such funds will mean WMU students can continue to reap the benefits of the University's focus on affordability and its commitment to making sure qualified students have access to higher education and the tools that will make them successful citizens. Access and affordability are WMU's hallmarks.

**Access**

Keeping a college education affordable, as WMU does, is one vital element to ensuring that students have access to higher education and can take full advantage of the opportunities that come with a college degree. But providing access also means providing the support students need throughout their academic careers to be
successful and to maximize the use of their tuition dollars. Once students are enrolled, Western Michigan University goes to great lengths to make sure they have the chance to move quickly toward their goal--graduation.

• **The Western Edge** is the name given to one of the University's primary programs aimed at student success and timely graduation. The program, now in its third year, includes a four-year freeze in the cost of campus room and board, a $500 retention scholarship for students who complete 30 credits with a 3.0 GPA during their first year at WMU, and a graduation compact that guarantees class availability to ensure quick degree completion. The intent of the Western Edge is to help students earn a degree as quickly as possible so they and their families save the additional tuition and living expenses that come with extra time spent pursuing a degree. In addition, degree completion in a shorter time frame means students can immediately move into the work force or graduate school and begin the next phase of their lives as productive citizens.

• **Community college partnerships** represent an additional way WMU is reaching out to help students and their families realize efficiencies and move smoothly between an associate and bachelor's degree. The University has articulation agreements with community colleges statewide. New agreements take collaboration a step further. Two new dual enrollment programs have been launched this year with Kellogg Community College in Battle Creek, allowing students headed for degrees in engineering and aviation to have the resources of both KCC and WMU from their first days as college students. They can take advantage of both schools' advising, library resources and academic facilities to make their transition from one school to the other seamless. The close collaboration and advising provided by both schools prevents credit transfer problems and guarantees and efficient use of student time
and family resources. The KCC partnerships make up a model WMU intends to use in other disciplines and with other schools.

- **Access for special populations** is a WMU specialty. Western Michigan University has long been recognized as a university that serves students who come to college already firmly established as high achievers. But it is also a University that is committed to providing access to students for whom the road to college has been more difficult. These students often struggle without the benefit of a solid network of supporters to help them chart their course in college. For many years, for instance, WMU has been the college of choice for students who are the first generation in their families to attend college.

In more recent years, WMU has carved out a reputation for serving student populations that have not been well served by other colleges and universities in the state and nation. They include:

**Veterans**. Western Michigan University has more students who are veterans than any other four-year school in Michigan. More than 430 veterans have become WMU students and are taking advantage of the University's mini-GI bill, its advocacy office for veterans and a number of other support groups and services specifically designed to meet the needs of former service members. (Mention Veteran Friendly Award recognition)

**Youth who have aged out of foster care**. Now in its second year, WMU's Seita Scholars program is providing the support network and structure that will help former foster care youth succeed. The WMU program offers a full-tuition scholarship and a support network to address the special needs of these
young people. Every year in Michigan, about 500 young people age out of foster care. Until now, only about 13 of that number would ever earn a degree from any college or university. Now, more than 70 former foster care youth are enrolled at WMU, and 27 have successfully made it into their second year. When WMU began its program, experts in the field said a 25 percent retention rate would be good. WMU's Seita Scholars have achieved a 50 percent retention rate.

An increase in the percentage of students in these groups who earn degrees will bring an enormous payoff to the state. Some 90 percent of WMU students are Michigan residents, and the vast majority hopes to stay in the state to build their careers and establish their families here.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, Western Michigan University has moved aggressively to respond to its families' needs during the current economic downturn by refining and boosting some longtime student assistance efforts. These include:

- Providing an opportunity to spread tuition payments out over each semester, and
- Quickly responding to the changing financial status and resulting financial aid needs of student families.
- Increasing the amount of both merit- and need-based student awards.

**Affordability**

Affordability and value have been and remain the qualities that have made Western Michigan University a standout among its sister institutions in the state. Of Michigan's five Carnegie-designated research universities, only WMU has kept its cost to attend in the lower half for all of Michigan's public universities. This year, for
instance, WMU ranks 10th among Michigan's 15 public universities in annual attendance costs. Annual tuition and fees at WMU remain about $3,000 per year below that charged by two of the state's other four research universities and $1,000 per year below that of institutions that are more limited in nature and offer students far fewer opportunities and resources.

Affordable tuition is product of cost-cutting initiatives that predate the state's current economic straits. Longtime WMU efforts include lean staffing in administrative employee ranks, a massive energy conservation initiative that preserves resources, and cost avoidance in areas like salary increases and health care costs. Such strenuous cost cutting has been difficult to accomplish, but has resulted in the low level of tuition that has made WMU the state's best value.

• **Lean staffing.** Between the 2003-04 and 2007-08 academic years, administrative/professional staffing levels at WMU--already the second leanest of any Michigan public university--declined slightly and remain second lowest among Michigan's public universities.

Of Michigan's five research universities, only Western Michigan University has continued to serve the state and its students with a staffing level that equates to one professional/administrative staff member for every 56 students. Administrative staffing levels at Michigan's other four research universities range from one staff member for every 12 students at the University of Michigan, to one for every 25 students at Wayne State. (Data from 2007-08 HEIDI annual report.) Indeed, the state average for all 15 public universities is one staff member per 25 students. Less complex institutions offering fewer opportunities and services to students are operating with staffing levels that are sometimes double that of WMU's.
In addition to extremely low administrative staffing levels, WMU had kept salary increases for those nonbargaining unit staff members at a minimum. For two years--2005-06 and 2006-07--WMU's highly productive administrative and professional employees did not see any increase to their rate of pay. For the three years since then, their pay increase has been 2 percent each year--below the annual rate of inflation.

**Energy conservation** at WMU has resulted in savings that allows the University to focus more of its resources on its core mission--education. Over the past 13 years, Western Michigan University has avoided $82.5 million in costs that would have been incurred without such an aggressive energy conservation. In fact, while energy costs have soared nationwide, WMU's award-winning energy conservation efforts have allowed the University to expand its physical plant size by 19 percent and still reduce its energy consumption by 17 percent. Today, the WMU campus is visited by public- and private-sector organizations from around the nation who are eager to learn about and adopt the tools used by WMU to save money and direct more resources to its core business.

**Cost avoidance and budget cutbacks** have become standard tools that WMU has used to manage years of the state's reduction in higher education support. With only two sources of revenue--state support and tuition--WMU has worked hard to avoid passing the loss of state funds directly on to students. From 2002 to present, Western Michigan University has implemented internal budget reductions totaling nearly $60 million. Those cuts are the way the University has chosen to manage the fact that its annual state appropriation is now lower in real dollars than the annual appropriation received a decade ago.
In the past two academic years, WMU has taken campuswide budget reductions of ($5 million for this year plus and additional $3 million in 2008-09).

Besides operating with a lean staff, a significant part of the University's compensation strategy has been to control fringe benefit costs. More than $4 million dollars in annual base health care costs have been saved by aggressively moving to a PPO system and increasing employee co-pays and deductibles. In addition, most employees' retirement is covered by a defined contribution plan which has allowed the University to control pension costs.