

President Mary Sue Coleman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education
Feb. 19, 2008

As Presidents Simon and Reid have outlined, the URC is deeply committed to the state and our success as a knowledge center. We are quite competitive with other leading universities when it comes to attracting research dollars and working to create and draw new businesses.

This level of competition also extends to recruiting and retaining the best students, from incoming freshmen to Ph.D. candidates and post-doctoral fellows. Providing our graduates with the critical thinking skills they need for the future benefits all of us as a state, because today's students are tomorrow's CEOs, scientists and doctors, teachers and engineers, and elected officials.

Just last week, Michigan Future Inc. reported that if we are to prosper as a state in the 21st century – and success is defined as concentrations of high-paid individuals in our major cities – more of our young adults must possess a college degree. To quote the report: “Unless we substantially increase the proportion of college-educated adults – particularly in our biggest metropolitan areas – Michigan will continue to trend downwards in the per capita income rankings.”

As universities and as a state, we can remedy this. President Reid just told us how the URC is partnering with the state to develop new businesses. And we are producing the highly skilled graduates these firms demand, particularly in such critical fields as the biosciences, medicine, engineering and technology.

Ensuring and broadening student access to our universities is critical to this activity. For the state, access comes with adequate levels of appropriations, and Governor Granholm's proposed increase of 3 percent for higher education is a strong first step. Still, our state remains dead last nationally with regard to increases in higher education spending over the last five years.

As universities, we are ensuring student access through robust financial aid packages, strong partnerships with community colleges, and pipeline programs with our K-12 system.

Let me bring the importance of access and affordability down to the level of a single student.

His name is Mohammad Dar and he is a senior. He has watched each of his four older brothers go to jail, and is the first in his family to attend a four-year university. He is majoring in cellular and molecular biology, and plans to become a doctor.

Paying tuition has been a struggle for Mohammad and his family, and he has relied upon loans, grants, and scholarship support. Mohammad's father changed jobs to earn more

money; he also elected to forego health insurance and instead direct the extra dollars toward his son's education.

This choice became the ultimate sacrifice for a parent committed to his son's welfare. He developed cancer when Mohammad was a sophomore, and within a year passed away.

This is an awful burden to place on a young man trying to better himself, and it'd be perfectly understandable if Mohammad wanted to disappear into his studies, or simply move on.

But Mohammad Dar is a remarkable person. He is president of the Michigan Student Assembly, our student government. He devotes up to 40 hours a week to helping other students with their struggles and concerns.

Last fall, he organized a rally of 400 students at the state capitol to advocate more public investment in higher education, not less, so that families like his do not have to make such extreme choices when supporting a young person's future.

When my colleagues and I talk about the need for, and the value of, financial aid for our students, I think of Mohammad and everything he brings to our university and our state. I would hate to lose him, or any other student, because the cost of an education was out of reach.

Our three universities provide nearly \$750 million in financial aid each year. We take diverse approaches to supporting our students and their families with their college costs. For example:

- At Wayne State, 27 cents of every tuition dollar is directed to financial aid.
- Michigan State offers the Spartan Advantage, which provides students from low-income families with grants and work study to meet their college costs.
- At U-M, nearly three-quarters of our students receive financial aid – including more than 60 percent who are the recipients of need-based aid.

It's important to note the support our universities receive from alumni and donors with regard to financial aid.

Last fall, MSU successfully completed a campaign that in part raised more than \$205 million for student support. Wayne State is in the midst of its "Wayne First" campaign, and looks to raise \$166 million for students. And at Michigan, we are in the final year of our campaign, and to date have raised more than \$440 million for student support. In particular, we made a special challenge to our donors for need-based undergraduate aid; they have responded with \$36 million, which the university is matching for a total of \$72 million in new support.

All of this aid will change the lives of thousands of students on our campuses.

Our benefactors could put their money anywhere – in their churches or synagogues, in the Red Cross or Humane Society – but by choosing to commit their dollars to our students, they see the return on investment.

The majority of our collective alumni live here in Michigan and, like us, know that supporting our students leads to creative, talented graduates – graduates who contribute to our state's economic progress.

President Simon ...