



EASTERN  
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

## PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP PROFILE

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JUNE 2025







## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Eastern Michigan University (EMU) invites nominations, applications, and expressions of interest in its search for a bold and courageous leader to serve as its next President.**

EMU serves nearly 13,000 students across more than 300 majors, minors, and concentrations in undergraduate, graduate, specialist, doctoral, and certificate programs. Academic offerings are housed in the University's Colleges of Arts and Sciences; Business; Education; Engineering and Technology; Health and Human Services; and the Graduate School. With an emphasis on student success and workforce readiness, EMU combines academic rigor with experiential learning across all disciplines. EMU has been named 'Best of the Midwest' university by The Princeton Review for the 19th consecutive year.

Eastern Michigan's mission—to enrich lives through a distinctly supportive, intellectually dynamic, and diverse community—guides its approach to teaching, learning, and service. Faculty are committed educators and scholars who bring research and industry knowledge into the classroom while mentoring students for academic, personal, and professional growth. Signature programs, such as the annual Undergraduate Symposium, offer students the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and present original research, creative projects, and applied work across various disciplines. EMU is also recognized as a Carnegie Engaged Campus, reflecting the University's deep commitment to civic engagement and public impact.



The University's next President will be expected to crystalize, communicate, and champion EMU's identity—instilling pride in those on campus and advancing its reputation with prospective students, community partners, business and industry, and state leaders. The University created a [strategic plan](#) in 2015 that was updated in 2022, providing an opportunity for EMU's next President to work closely with the Board of Regents and University community to develop a strategic plan that will put the institution on a path for future success. This individual will need to work across the institution to shape a successful enrollment strategy, advance student success, and ensure the financial and organizational health of EMU now and into the future. This individual will play a critical role in working beyond campus to build productive relationships that benefit the University and Southeast Michigan.

The next President of Eastern Michigan University must bring significant leadership experience and demonstrate a record of collaboratively setting strategic direction, effectively communicating a vision, and ensuring accountability in the achievement of organizational goals. This individual should demonstrate an ability to create high-functioning teams that represent the University's student body. While it is preferred this individual has led in a higher education environment, the University will consider candidates who have led other complex organizations and demonstrate a passion for EMU's mission.

**For information regarding how to apply, submit nominations, or inquire about the role, please see the section “Procedure for Candidacy” at the end of this document.**







# OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

**The next President of Eastern Michigan University will be expected to advance the following priorities, among others:**

**Shape strategy and champion EMU's identity.** For 175 years, Eastern Michigan has been an institution dedicated to access, opportunity, and student engagement. EMU prides itself in its welcoming, inclusive environment that puts students first and positively impacts the lives of those within Southeast Michigan and beyond. As the University navigates dynamic times in higher education, it seeks a leader who is able to crystalize, communicate, and champion EMU's identity—instilling pride in those on campus and advancing its reputation with prospective students, community partners, business and industry, and state leaders. The University created a [strategic plan](#) in 2015 that was updated in 2022, providing an opportunity for EMU's next President to work closely with the Board of Regents and University community to develop a strategic plan that will put the institution on a path for future success. The next President must first engage EMU's many constituents—employees, students, and external partners—to understand its history, assess its needs, and build trust as the institution shapes a vision for the future. This individual must demonstrate an understanding of current and future trends in higher education, an ability to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances, and a passion for enthusiastically championing EMU's mission and the positive impact of higher education. This individual must be able to effectively set and communicate priorities, holding themselves and others accountable in pursuit of the University's goals.



**Enhance enrollment.** Through much of the 2000s, EMU averaged a total headcount of more than 20,000 students. The University dropped below 20,000 in 2018 and has seen consistent declines over the last six years, enrolling nearly 13,000 students in fall 2024. Many factors have contributed to the University’s enrollment declines—fewer high school graduates in the State of Michigan, declines in the college going rate, the growth of flagship institutions, the cost of higher education with decreasing state funding, and the state’s new [community college guarantee](#). The University is currently going through a strategic enrollment management planning process to identify strategies to reverse these trends. Opportunities exist to build on existing relationships in its immediate community (nearly 60% of students come from Washtenaw and Wayne counties), expand the University’s reach in the state and region, ensure strong partnerships with community colleges, and more effectively leverage financial aid to attract and support students. EMU’s current and prospective students emphasize the importance of tangible career outcomes after graduation, requiring a President with the ability to connect educational experiences with successful post-graduation outcomes and implement strategies that will support enrollment growth.

**Advance student success.** One of EMU’s great strengths has been the deep commitment of its faculty, lecturers, and staff to supporting student success. Students have opportunities to build close relationships with their instructors and engage in meaningful co-curricular experiences, exemplified in events like the annual [Undergraduate Symposium](#) and various academic teams such as its [Forensics team](#) (one of the best in the nation) and [Mock Trial team](#). The next President will be expected to be a visible presence with students and connect with them through mediums that will lead to engagement (e.g.: social media), promoting an environment that demonstrates care for students and seeks to provide them with transformative experiences (EMU has historically ranked high for its [impact on the social mobility](#) of its graduates). The University’s retention rates have consistently been around 70% and its six-year graduation rate has risen over the last decade from 37% to 46%. The President will be expected to work across the institution to ensure student success and demonstrate the impact of an EMU education on the lives of students, their families, and their communities.





**Ensure financial and organizational health.** Declining enrollments have placed pressure on the University's budget and have stretched all EMU employees with additional responsibilities. The next President must be able to align the University's financial and personnel resources with the goals of the University's strategic plan and explore new revenues that will advance EMU's mission and vision. Eastern Michigan has pursued several public-private partnerships for housing and parking in recent years, which have helped to provide additional revenue streams. The President will play a key role in evaluating future revenue opportunities and ensuring their success and alignment with institutional goals. The President will also need to build healthy relationships with the University's employee unions, creating productive dialog that ensures employee well-being and the long-term success of the institution. This individual must demonstrate an understanding of how all employees—tenured and tenure-track faculty, full-time and part-time lecturers, staff, and administrators—impact student and institutional success and an ability to leverage a shared governance model that involves all University constituents.

**Build a high-performing, accountable leadership team.** As Eastern Michigan University navigates a complex and rapidly evolving higher education landscape, it requires a President who can build and lead a cohesive, results-driven executive team. The next President must foster a culture of trust, transparency, collaboration, and mutual accountability at all levels of leadership. This includes implementing clear systems for goal setting, performance evaluation, and professional development to ensure leaders across campus are aligned with institutional priorities and empowered to make strategic decisions. The President must model ethical, inclusive, and decisive leadership, while holding themselves and others responsible for delivering results that support EMU's mission, financial sustainability, student success, and long-term growth. This includes making tough, data-informed decisions about right-sizing the University to ensure long-term viability and establishing mechanisms to regularly measure and report on institutional performance and progress toward strategic goals.





**Engage alumni, donors, and external partners.** While EMU's more than 184,000 alumni are spread across the country, nearly 60 percent are located in Washtenaw County and adjoining counties. The University has a long history graduating educators, healthcare professionals, community leaders, and business leaders who impact the social and economic vitality of Southeast Michigan, and the University continues to build connections throughout the region with its [Engage@EMU](#) programming. EMU's strong alumni connections result in financial support and service to the University and the next President must be able to effectively engage alumni, donors, and other partners outside of the University and continue to develop mutually beneficial relationships. EMU completed its largest ever fundraising campaign—[Give Rise](#)—in 2023, raising more than \$119 million to support student success, advance programs of distinction, and help students excel in and beyond the classroom. The next President will be expected to continue the University's fundraising success, as well as demonstrate the political savvy and communication skills to effectively advocate for the University, and higher education more broadly, at the state and federal levels.







## PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND PERSONAL QUALITIES

The next President of Eastern Michigan University must bring significant leadership experience and demonstrate a record of collaboratively setting strategic direction, effectively communicating a vision, and ensuring accountability in the achievement of organizational goals. This individual should demonstrate an ability to create high-functioning teams that represent the University's student body. While it is preferred this individual has led in a higher education environment, the University will consider candidates who have led other complex organizations and demonstrate a passion for EMU's mission. Additionally, the successful candidate should demonstrate many of the following qualities and qualifications:

- An understanding of current and future trends impacting higher education and an ability to create an environment that supports innovation, pursues necessary change, adapts to external changes, and ensures the advancement of EMU's mission.
- Exceptionally strong communication and relational skills, including a demonstrated commitment to listening to others; a record of clear, proactive communication; the ability to persuade and advocate on behalf of EMU; and an approachable, authentic demeanor that builds enduring relationships and trust with a wide range of constituents.
- A record of building high-performing teams with individuals from varied lived experiences, empowering individuals at all levels to contribute to the advancement of an organization's strategy, and celebrating the achievements of others.
- Experience cultivating a sense of belonging and inclusion within an organization comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds and a proven record of addressing gaps in student outcomes and leadership representation.
- A commitment to shared governance and the ability to build productive relationships with faculty and staff unions. Prior experience in a collective bargaining environment is preferred.



- Strong financial acumen and the ability to ensure the effective prioritization of an organization's resources in the pursuit of its strategic goals. Experience with public-private partnerships is preferred.
- Demonstrated success attracting and retaining students and the ability to shape marketing and recruiting strategies that effectively communicate an institution's value proposition and points of differentiation.
- A student-centered orientation, a record of success enhancing student outcomes, and a passion for the transformative impact of higher education on a diverse student population.
- The ability to effectively engage alumni, donors, and other partners outside of the University and develop mutually beneficial relationships that impact the University and the region, including a record of success in fundraising and the ability to advocate for the University at the state and federal levels.
- An understanding of the role of athletics in higher education and the ability to effectively navigate changes in collegiate athletics.





# ABOUT EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1849, Eastern Michigan University (EMU) is a public, doctoral-granting institution located in Ypsilanti, Michigan. EMU is the second oldest public university in the state and has a long-standing history of preparing students for success in a broad range of careers. During the 2024–2025 academic year, the University celebrated its 175th anniversary, highlighting its enduring commitment to access, opportunity, and community engagement.

Today, EMU serves nearly 13,000 students across more than 300 majors, minors, and concentrations in undergraduate, graduate, specialist, doctoral, and certificate programs. Academic offerings are housed in the University's Colleges of Arts and Sciences; Business; Education; Engineering and Technology; Health and Human Services; and the Graduate School. With an emphasis on student success and workforce readiness, EMU combines academic rigor with experiential learning across all disciplines. EMU has been named 'Best of the Midwest' university by The Princeton Review for the 19th consecutive year and the College of Business is rated among nation's best for 18th consecutive year by The Princeton Review.

The University is classified as an "R2: High Research Activity" institution by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, ranking it among the top 6% of U.S. universities in terms of externally funded research activity. EMU is also recognized as a Carnegie Engaged Campus, reflecting the University's deep commitment to civic engagement and public impact.

EMU's mission—to enrich lives through a distinctly supportive, intellectually dynamic, and diverse community—guides its approach to teaching, learning, and service. Faculty are committed educators and scholars who bring research and industry knowledge into the classroom while mentoring students for academic, personal, and professional growth. Signature

programs, such as the annual Undergraduate Symposium, offer students the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and present original research, creative projects, and applied work across various disciplines.

Eastern Michigan University continues to invest in the future through major capital improvements. More than \$170 million has been invested in recent years to renovate core academic buildings, modernize classrooms and laboratories, and enhance learning environments. The GameAbove College of Engineering and Technology, for example, has expanded its footprint with new facilities for engineering, cybersecurity, aviation, and applied sciences.

In 2021, the University launched Welcome Home 2025, a bold \$200 million initiative to reimagine on-campus housing. Since then, EMU has opened two new apartment-style residential complexes—Lakeview and Westview—and renovated all existing residence halls. These upgrades have transformed EMU's housing portfolio into one of the most modern and student-centered in the state.

EMU is located in Ypsilanti, Michigan, a historic and culturally rich city in the heart of southeastern Michigan. Ranked by Zillow as one of the top five college towns in the nation, Ypsilanti offers a mix of historic charm, artistic energy, and strong community ties. The city is just minutes from Ann Arbor and less than an hour from Detroit, providing access to two major economic, cultural, and innovation hubs. The 800-acre campus features a blend of natural beauty, walkable green spaces, and modern facilities, including Eagle Crest Golf Course—a top-rated collegiate course located along the scenic Ford Lake shoreline.

Eastern Michigan University combines a student-centered mission with strong academic offerings, deep community ties, and a strategic focus on growth and innovation. It continues to serve as an institution of opportunity for students across Michigan and beyond, with an unwavering commitment to inclusive excellence and public impact.





# PROCEDURE FOR CANDIDACY

All applications, nominations and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile and a CV or resume. WittKieffer is assisting Eastern Michigan University in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by September 5, 2025. Application materials should be submitted using [WittKieffer's candidate portal](#). Nominations and inquiries can be directed to Ryan Crawford, Lauren Bruce-Stets, and Julia Bradley at [EMUPresident@wittkieffer.com](mailto:EMUPresident@wittkieffer.com).

*Eastern Michigan University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, ancestry, disability, military status, veteran status or other non-merit reasons, in admissions, educational programs or activities and employment and complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.*



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