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A note from the editor-in-chief



By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-chief

From contributions women left in history to how the governmental changes affect us, impact is the theme of this edition.

Some of the stories you'll find in this edition are the work of the Society of Professional Journalists chapter at Central Michigan University. This year, SPJ is working on

its investigative project on how government policies impact us all as students.

For example, SPJ learned about the experiences of international student athletes and researched CMU's stance on artificial intelligence.

In addition, *Central Michigan Life* brings to you stories that highlight the contributions women made to the university's campus and beyond.

The story that opens this edition is about an American woman who saved thousands of lives in China during a massacre. She is known as the "American Goddess of Mercy" and is buried in Shepherd.

In our sports section, you'll find a story about

a CMU alumna who led the gymnastics program to become one of the most successful athletic programs at CMU.

The editorial celebrates women in leadership at CM Life and looks back at CMU's history of female leaders.

Lastly, I hope you remember that when we work on these stories and more at CM Life, we always think of you, our reader.

We hope our work informs you of new things, raises awareness about important issues, offers solutions and has a positive impact.

Masha Smahliuk-Bootz is 2025-26 Central Michigan Life's editor-in-chief.

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Masha Smahliuk-Bootz

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NEWS EDITOR

Grace Walker

SPORTS EDITOR

Sydney Neal

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Mckenzie Nowak

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Central Michigan Life, the independent voice of Central Michigan University, is edited and published by students of Central Michigan University the first Thursday of the month during the fall and spring semesters. The newspaper's online edition, cm-life.com, contains all of the material published in print, and is updated on an as-needed basis.

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NEWS

Women's History Month Events

March 19

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12:30 p.m.

CSID, Bovee UC 108

Becoming an Ally in Technology

hosted by CMU Women in
Technology

6 p.m.
EHS 213

March 24

The Price of Beauty: Cultural

Pressure and Women's Wellbeing

hosted by Sigma Lambda Gamma
6:30 p.m.

CSID, Bovee UC 108

March 25

Women in Athletic: Student Panel

6 p.m.
EHS 232

'The Goddess of Mercy'

*The life, struggles and legacy of
Minnie Vautrin*



Wilhelmina "Minnie" Vautrin's gravestone in Shepherd, Michigan.

Blace Carpenter | Managing editor

By Blace Carpenter
Managing editor

Salt River Cemetery is the final resting place for over 5,000 people and is located just outside the village of Shepherd. In this small, quiet cemetery lies Wilhelmina "Minnie" Vautrin, an educator and American missionary.

Born in 1886, Minnie acquired several titles before her death in 1941. Many called her their teacher or professor, but to the thousands of women she protected at Ginling College in China during the 1937 massacre in Nanjing (formerly Nanking), she is known as the "Goddess of Mercy."

The Midwest native spent a major part of her life educating students in China. At the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Minnie kept diaries of her experiences overseas, as Japan invaded the country.

Her records would later help historians understand

what some call the "Rape of Nanking." A massacre that took the lives of around 300,000 people and the assault of 20,000 women.

The road to China

According to Hualing Hu's book "American Goddess at the Rape of Nanking: The Courage of Minnie Vautrin," Minnie was raised in the village of Secor, Illinois, alongside her younger brother. Her father worked as a blacksmith in the village and primarily raised her.

Amongst dealing with the death of her mother at the age of 7 and going through the foster care system until she was 10, Minnie found a passion for teaching and learning.

One of her teachers stated in Secor's Centennial book that "she could excel in most anything she tried, and was a genuinely Christian girl."

After graduating from high school in 1903, she enrolled at the two-year college, Illinois Normal University (now Illinois State University). Her time at the university was

often marked by delays as she worked to pay her tuition.

After receiving her degree in June of 1907, Minnie began teaching at a high school in LeRoy, Illinois. But only a few years later, she returned to college and enrolled at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

Minnie was part of the university's Athenian Literary Society and the Kappa Delta Pi chapter, both the junior and senior basketball teams, a cabinet member of UIUC's Young Women's Christian Association and president of Bethany's Circle, a women's church group on campus.

Her involvement and academic success would eventually lead her to learn about the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, which was trying to establish more schools in China.

In June of 1912, 26-year-old Minnie graduated as the salutatorian of her class and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in education.

That fall, she arrived in China to study Chinese and later began her position as principal and teacher at an all-girls' school in Hefei, China, according to Hu.

China's first baccalaureate university for women

First opening its campus to students in September of 1915, Ginling College was the first institution in China to offer a bachelor's degree for women.

Author and professor of Libraries at the University of Nebraska, Suping Lu, edited the 2008 republishing of Minnie's diaries from 1937 to 1938. In his introduction, he stated that the Ginling College class of 1919 was the first group of women to earn bachelor's degrees in China.

One of the five graduates, Yifang Wu, later earned a doctorate in entomology from the University of Michigan and would go on to serve as president of Ginling in 1928.

The same year Ginling graduated its first class, the college offered Minnie the opportunity to serve as acting president during the 1919-20 academic year. She received her master's degree at Columbia University that June and departed for China in September, according to Lu.

"Miss Vautrin began her work under the difficulty of coming as a stranger to Ginling and having to take the heavy responsibility of being Acting President," wrote Ginling's first president, Matilda Thurston, in her book "Ginling College."

Minnie arrived months after the May Fourth Movement, which was a college student-led movement in response to Germany's decision to grant Japan authority over parts of China following the end of World War I, according to Great Britain's National Archives.

As unrest grew, Minnie helped the college search for a permanent home.

"Miss Vautrin has had the heaviest end of the burden in this work, since 1919, leaving to me the more straightforward dealings; with the architects and contractors," Thurston wrote.

Minnie had received multiple degrees, was the president of a foreign college and negotiated land deals on behalf of the college, all before women's right to vote (the 19th Amendment) was ratified by the U.S. Congress in 1920.

The looming of war

In Lu's introduction, he wrote that China in the 1920s was a "turbulent decade, with repeated incidents adding fuel to the rising patriotism that had been awakened by the May Fourth Movement."

In 1927, the president of the University of Nanking, American John Williams, was killed by a Chinese nationalist soldier. This led foreign staff at Ginling to return home, and Wu was named president after her time at the U of M.

Central Michigan University Professor of East Asian History Jennifer Liu said the unrest following WWI created the Chinese Communist Party and eventually ignited a civil war against the Nationalist Party.

"The May Fourth Movement led to the founding of the Chinese Communist Party," Liu said. "It was a very influential movement in China that touched upon intellectuals."

Minnie was at the University of Chicago during this time, taking graduate courses. When she returned to China in 1932, she found that war was on its way as Japan began occupying northern China.

"When they went to villages, they wanted to make it unforgettably terrifying to people, but that also made the Chinese resist them more," Liu said. "That prolonged the war."

A year before her return, the Japanese began destroying railroad tracks in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province. They eventually took over a nearby barracks and occupied Shenyang.

Most of Northern China was under Japanese control by 1936, according to Britannica.

The official start of the Second Sino-Japanese War began in July 1937, when shots were taken by the Japanese and the newly united Chinese party at the Marco Polo Bridge, or Lugou Bridge in modern-day Beijing.

"Following that sort of skirmish, it became something greater," Liu said. "The Japanese took over Beijing, and then Chiang Kai-shek, who was the leader of the Republic of China during that time.

"There was a lot of bloody fighting for three months, and then that was lost to the Japanese as well. So, the people poured into Nanking."

A college for some, a sanctuary for thousands

After a decade of unrest, Japan began occupying most of Northern China and advancing into the Yangtze Valley.

According to The New York Times, bombs were first dropped on Nanking in August of 1937, destroying buildings like the American embassy. Air raids would continue to destroy the city over time.

Minnie was at one of her colleagues' weddings in September of 1937 when the sound of sirens warned the air of incoming bombings.

"The urgent warning sounded just as the ceremony was finished, and we began to hear the low hum of bombers," wrote Minnie on Sept. 20, 1937. "Never have I said the Lord's Prayer so fast in Chinese before."

Throughout the fall, cities within the Yangtze Valley, such as Shanghai and Suzhou, were occupied by Japan.



Minnie Vautrin on Gling campus, late 1920s

Courtesy of Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee.

As violence ensued, Minnie (51-years-old at the time) mobilized the faculty at Ginling to prepare the college to serve as a sanctuary.

"Cold and cloudy today," she wrote on Nov. 22, 1937. "One cannot forget the terrible plight of refugees and wounded soldiers."

The college became part of the "Nanking Safety Zone."

In her 1997 book "The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II," author Iris Chang stated that the zone was established after Shanghai was occupied in November and was maintained by the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone.

VAUTRIN |

CONTINUED FROM 4-5

This committee was made up of 22 Western officials, including Minnie, and was led by John Rabe, a German businessman and member of the Nazi Party.

After the massacre, Rabe returned to Germany and tried to inform people about what the Japanese did to Nanking. He would later be arrested by the Gestapo, Germany's secret police agency, and was forbidden to talk about the massacre, according to an NPR report about Rabe in 2010.

Minnie thought that if she could have one person for every 16 square feet, she could house 2,750 refugees in Ginling College's eight-building campus, according to Lu. At the height of the six-week massacre, she would accommodate more than 10,000 women and girls.

"When we had our peak load, we think we must have had at least 9,000 or 10,000 people," she wrote in a letter to Thurston and Wu on Jan. 6, 1938.

In her diary, Minnie wrote about the flood of refugees that poured into the college after she opened Ginling's campus on Dec. 15, 1937.

"This morning until 6 this evening, excepting for the noon meal, I have stood at the front gate while the refugees poured in," she wrote. "There is terror in the face of many of the women—last night was a terrible night in the city and many young women were taken from their homes by the Japanese soldiers."

Despite proclamations from the American embassy, granting Minnie and Ginling protection, Japanese military soldiers would enter the campus repeatedly during the massacre. On Dec. 17, soldiers sneaked into the campus while Minnie was speaking with Japanese officials.

They escaped with 12 women.

"We heard screams and cries and saw people going out at the side gate," she wrote. "We later realized their trick—to keep responsible people at front gate with three or four of their soldiers carrying on this mock trial and search for Chinese soldiers while the rest of the men were in the buildings selecting women."

Day by day, Minnie documented the latest news of the war, interactions with Japanese soldiers, the quality of life at the campus and the horrors of the massacre.

"Tonight a truck passed, in which there were 8 or 10 girls, and as it passed they called out 'Giu ming' 'Giu ming'—save our lives," she wrote. "The occasional shots that we hear out on the hills, or on the street, make us realize the sad fate of some man—very probably not a soldier."

As word of the attack in Nanking spread at the beginning of 1938, violence from Japan decreased.

Ginling officially closed its shelter on May 31, 1938. Minnie would remain in China until 1940, teaching classes for women, according to Lu.

Despite saving the lives of thousands, Minnie felt that she had failed, and her mental health declined. In May 1941, she died by suicide.



Blace Carpenter | Manging Editor

Minnie Vautrin's relatives Shannon Vautrin Browne and Cindy Vautrin hold memorabilia of their great-grand aunt, Minnie Vautrin.

Remembering Minnie and the Massacre

Isabella County residents Shannon Vautrin Browne and her mom, Cindy Vautrin, didn't know much about their Great-Grand aunt Minnie growing up. Around 2001, Cindy and Shannon began learning more about their aunt's story when they were approached by an author working on a book about the Nanking Massacre.

"We used to play in my great-grandparents' attic, and we found this trunk with a bunch of Chinese stuff in it, and they would just say, 'Oh, that was your great aunt Minnie's possessions from when she was in China,'" Cindy said. "That was really about all they said about it."

In 2002, Cindy travelled to the University of Shanghai to teach a system analysis and design class during her time as a faculty member at CMU. During her trip, Shannon visited, and the two travelled to Nanjing for the first time.

"We got to see all the buildings," Cindy said. "Then we were able to go through their national archives, where they have a number of memorials."

Shannon is the current director of administration and governance for CMU's College of Medicine and Cindy left CMU in 2004. Both involved in higher education, the two said they have a lot of pride and respect for their Aunt Minnie.

"She was never talked about in our family, which is unfortunate because there was a lot that she accomplished and a lot that the family could have been proud of and should have been," said Shannon.

Every Sept. 19, air raid sirens are played throughout cities in China to commemorate the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. CMU Professor of Journalism Jiafei Yin grew up in Nanjing and said the city comes to a complete halt in remembrance.

"If you're driving, you stop. If you're a pedestrian, you stop," said Yin. "The whole city stops for one minute in memory of those who were killed."

Sirens are also played in Nanjing every Dec. 13 in remembrance of those affected by the massacre.

The Second Sino-Japanese War and events such as the 1937 Nanking Massacre continued to affect relations between Japan and China, according to the BBC. Over the years, there have been attempts to say the massacre was fake, but records such as Minnie's diary contradict those claims.

"It will take years of good behavior and genuine friendship to change the present distrust and fear," Minnie wrote on March 19, 1938.

Think dollars are the ultimate measure of success? Think again

By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-chief

With over 200 academic programs, Central Michigan University officials said they are always looking at the curriculum and adapting the programs to be as effective as possible. At the same time, they said there is no single definition of success.

Revenue, however, is not a measurement of success, said Dave Patton, the senior vice provost of academic affairs. That's because CMU is a public university, which means it's a nonprofit.

"We don't have to make a profit," Patton said. "What we have to do is ... manage all of these programs and all of the revenues and expenses so that it breaks even in the end. ... We don't have to judge a program as harshly as maybe a for-profit might.

"We often have our judging programs and the offerings we make through the lens of service to the population of the state of Michigan."

An example of a program at CMU that serves the state is nursing. In 2025, students at CMU took 378 credit hours in nursing, compared to the 21,143 credit hours that teacher and special education offered, according to the data from CMU. First class of nursing students began in Fall of 2025, after CMU launched the program in 2024.

"We can only admit so many students for accreditation reasons because we also have to have the ability to place them in clinical settings in which they can practice," Provost Paula Lancaster said.

In addition, Ray Christie, senior vice provost of Academic Administration and Resources, said even though a program might not have many students, it could offer courses required for other majors.

"People would say, 'Well, gee, it's a small program. We could save money,'" Christie said. "Well, many of the courses required for that small program have to be offered to fulfill other programs. ... We would literally not be saving money, because ... many of the courses still have to be offered to meet other program requirements."

Besides the public service, Patton said some other factors of a successful academic program are student demand and placement rate for alumni.

According to the data provided by CMU, the top programs based on the credit hours taken by students in 2025 are:

- Teacher and Special Education: 21,143
- Interdisciplinary – College of Business Administration: 18,613

- Business Information Systems: 17,244
- School of Communication, Journalism and Media: 16,282
- English Language and Literature: 15,689



Zoey Lawrence | Senior designer

The programs with the highest number of graduates from 2024-2025 are:

- Master's in Information Systems: 449
- Bachelor's in Psychology: 148
- Doctor of Medicine: 96
- Bachelor's in Biology: 74
- Bachelor's in Communication Development: 70

Changes to academic programs

To respond to the market demand or student interest, there's a process to add new programs at CMU, Patton said.

"The norm is (the idea) comes from the faculty in the

colleges, and they propose new curriculum," he said. "They may be responding to student demands. ... Once we ... go down that path of a decision, we have to answer a bunch of other questions.

"If we do this, is there market demand for the students once they get our degrees? ... Do we have all of the necessary resources to offer a high-quality program? And that involves faculty, the equipment space and, in the case of something like nursing, external partnerships."

Once CMU decides to start a new program, it puts a regular review in place.

"(Programs) have to do an annual assessment,"

Patton said. "But then at the end of the seven years, they do a broader review, and we even bring in external people from other universities and from industry to come in and evaluate how is our program going.

And they do look at things like ... enrollment, they'll look at success rates, if there are external exams, for example, that the students have to how well are we doing."

An academic program can also be cut for different reasons, such as external factors. For example, Patton said in 2020, the state of Michigan changed certification bands for pre-K through 12 schools.

"That meant we literally had to create all new education programs and delete all of the old education programs," he said.

The cost of academic programs

Currently, CMU offers over 200 programs across seven colleges, but their revenues and expenses differ.

According to the 2025 Operating Budget, the Business Administration college brings the most revenue for the university— over \$45 million. Its expenses are over \$20 million.

The college with the lowest expenses is Arts and Media—over \$14 million. Its revenue is over \$19 million.

The highest expenses belong to the College of Medicine, with—over \$28 million. Its revenue is over \$31 million.

Christie said different disciplines have different costs of instruction. CMU charges one tuition price, but some majors require more expensive equipment, labs and modes of instruction.

Professor salaries are a part of the colleges' expenses. For example, in total, the College of Science and Engineering spends the most on its faculty salaries, which is over \$17 million. The College of Arts and Media spend the least, over \$8 million.

SUCCESS |

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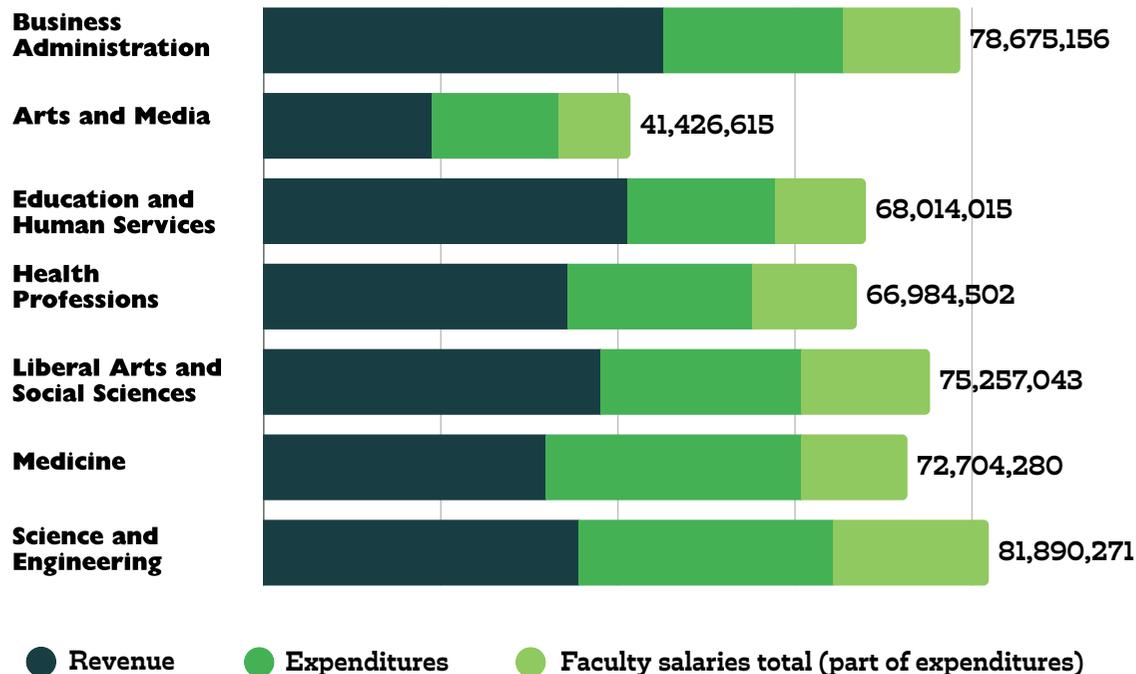
The biology program, which is a part of Science and Engineering, has one of the largest numbers of tenured professors, at 24. History, World Languages and Cultures has 24 tenured professors as well, while English Language and Literature comes third, with 23 tenured professors.

Professors become tenured by being successful and demonstrating their expertise in the field, Christie said.

“Different programs have different needs,” Lancaster said. “A program in which we have our students out in the field doing clinical work or experiential work ... often does require or need more fixed-term faculty or even part-time adjuncts, because they are typically closer to the work of the profession, the work out in the field and can provide that support.

“Biology is one of those majors that is also used as a launching point or launching place for all sorts of graduate degrees. ... So those faculty having tenure ... who are participating in research and will invite students into their labs to do research alongside them, is really important for student success.”

Academic Centers Budgets: 2025-2026



Zoey Lawrence | Senior designer

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Uncertain job market is no match for graduates, CMU officials say

By **Cristin Coppess**
Staff reporter

Despite the uncertain nature of the current United States job market, Central Michigan University officials said they're confident CMU students will succeed in their search for jobs post-graduation.

Erica O'Toole, director of CMU's Career Development Center, said data collected by CMU's most recent First Destination Survey points to alumni success.

"As of this past first destination survey, which is a survey we give to graduates, we have a 94.3% placement rate," O'Toole said. "So yes, the current job market is competitive, and it's hard, but our CMU students are definitely rising up to the challenge."

She said there's 26% higher earnings for CMU students two years after graduation, compared to the national mean.

In August, The Bureau of Labor and Statistics projected an increase of 5.2 million jobs from 2024 to 2034. Industries related to healthcare, artificial intelligence, data processing and energy-related technologies are expected to experience the most growth.

But those numbers do not necessarily indicate a fruitful job market. According to the Stanford University Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR), the current economy is resting in a low-hire, low-fire equilibrium. The labor market is performing well for those who already have jobs, but not as well for those who don't.

CMU students succeed

Considering these trends, CMU officials said they believe students are performing well. The university has implemented the Central Career Guarantee Initiative, which would pay students who opt-in \$2,000 if they are still unemployed or not accepted to graduate school six months after graduation.

According to results for the 2023-24 First Destination Survey, 85% of the 272 responding graduates indicated they had been employed either full or part time, or enrolled in continuing education six months after graduation. Only 12% of respondents were unemployed despite searching for jobs, and 3% indicated plans to enroll in continuing education but hadn't at the time of the survey.

In 2025, The Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, an organization that categorizes

universities across the U.S., named CMU as a leading "opportunity university."

O'Toole said the university's Carnegie designation and being ranked #1 in the state for student success and graduate earnings are large contributors to student success on the job market.

"That's why employers are wanting to hire our CMU students," she said. "We host career fairs, and most of those employers are always saying how much they love to hire our students because they're professional and they're ready with those skills that they can use in the job force."

Marcie Otteman, CMU's deputy chief of alumni relations and constituent engagement, agreed, adding that mid-career alums look for CMU graduates when hiring.

"Our grads do have great hands-on experience from their time at CMU that gives them an advantage in the job market," Otteman said in a statement to *Central Michigan Life*. "Time and again, I am told by our mid-career alumni, they hire CMU students and grads for internships and positions."

O'Toole said the job market "isn't that bad," and pointed to statistics presented by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), where employers within the organization rate the job market for upcoming 2026 graduates across the country. NACE reported in November that the market was flat, rather than volatile for graduating students.

For 2025-26 graduates, 45% of NACE employers rated the job market as "fair," while 37% rated the current market as "good," and 12% rated it as "very good."

Major's impact

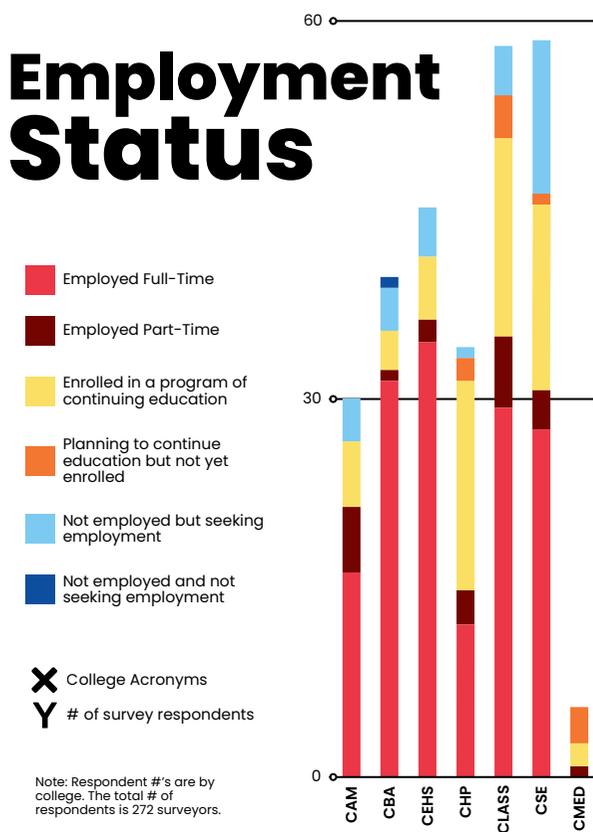
Data provided by CMU shows that the most popular programs by credit hours taken are Teacher and Special Education, Interdisciplinary Business, Information Systems, Communication, Journalism/Media and English (Literature and Language).

The programs that graduate the most students are related to healthcare, technology, communication development and biology, keeping in trend with the BLS' job growth predictions.

But, O'Toole said students who study areas outside of those shouldn't be worried.

"These stats are taken for the job market as a whole, but when we look at those individual majors, we're seeing that same kind of success," O'Toole said

Employment Status



Ben Westerhof | Staff designer

Preparing for the future

CMU students have access to different resources in the Career Development Center, which is located in Ronan Hall.

These resources are available for students and alumni throughout their lifetime, and include:

- Career coaching
- Resume assistance
- Career exploration
- Networking opportunities
- Job search assistance
- Help with graduate school applications

"Career development isn't something you come in your senior year, last semester for," O'Toole said. "I really encourage students to come in their first semester. Obviously, if a junior is reading this, come in as soon as you can as well. It's never too late.

"I think setting yourself up for success really looks like starting a career development journey."

Opinion: Legacy of women leaders

By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-chief

As you walk past the buildings on Central Michigan University's campus, you'll notice names like Herrig, Sloan, Saxe. These, and many others, were named for women who left a significant impact on CMU's history.

As a woman in an educational system and in a leadership role at *Central Michigan Life*, seeing this legacy and those of current women in leadership tell me that one day I can be one of them.

Similarly, Anne Hornak, a professor of higher education at CMU, said it's affirming when people see someone with their identity in leadership positions.

"So much of higher education was built for wealthy white men," Hornak said. "I think women struggle in a 10-year process that was built for people who didn't give birth or have children."

CMU has an interesting-but-complicated history with women in leadership. For

example, in the 130-year existence of the university, it had only one woman who served as president.

Kathy Wilbur was the interim president from 2009 to 2010. She had a degree in journalism, worked in politics and served as the vice president of government relations and public affairs at CMU before becoming the president.

"It was, if you look in the history, a bit controversial, because at the time that she was interim president, (she) only had a bachelor's degree," Hornak said. "That was very controversial at a university, even though there were many universities that had presidents who were men with only a bachelor's degree. So I think it was a bit because she was a woman."

However, female leadership has been strong in positions of provost and in athletics, Hornak said.

CMU's history of women in sports dates back to 1899, when student Myrra Hepburn was the first woman to compete in intercollegiate sports at CMU, according to the Clarke Historical Library archive.

In 1972, Title IX was enacted, securing equitable access to sports for women and men. For example, CMU started to provide hotel accommodations, meals and scholarships to women athletes in addition to the men, the archive read.

In 2022, six women coaches and administrators were named as the Homecoming Grand Marshals, celebrating their impact on CMU's sports and the Title IX legacy.

While athletics blossomed at Central, and academics were led by a woman professional, CM Life didn't sit still either. Throughout the years, CM Life has been covering all aspects of life and changes at CMU, from sports to administration.

Today, I am proud to say that our team is led by a majority of women.

Sydney Neal is our sports editor, who has led her team magnificently. She is fearless and passionate when it comes to journalism and is one of the best emerging sports writers you'll ever find.

Grace Walker leads the news team and knows everything about government and

politics. Her ideas are brilliant, and her writing inspires all of us.

Zoey Morse joined the leadership team this semester as an assistant photo editor and has already made her team shine. She treats every photo with such care and puts so much hard work into her role as editor.

Zoey Lawrence is CM Life's brilliant design lead. Her artwork is breathtaking, and she is able to create anything, from infographics to cartoons to animations.

Mckenzie Nowak began her work as the multimedia editor last semester. She elevated CM Life's presence on social media, and her team is producing incredible video content.

Olivia Garcia leads the advertising team. She is creative and talented both in her ads and in team management.

But we all didn't do this alone. We had so many amazing women who walked this path before us, and who mentored and helped us grow. Today, we are so proud to continue their legacy.

Masha Smahliuk-Bootz is 2025-26 Central Michigan Life's editor-in-chief.

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BEST OF 2025

WELCOME TO THE BEST OF CENTRAL MICHIGAN!

With the help of our readers, *Central Michigan Life*, is pleased to announce the 25th annual Best of Central Michigan Readers' Choice Awards. On behalf of our staff and our local businesses, we would like to thank you for taking the time to submit ballots for your favorite people, places and things in the Mount Pleasant area. It's an honor to have you help us identify the best bites, sites and likes across Isabella County.

We hope you will use this special edition as a guide for future purchases, visits and memberships to these local businesses and organizations. By turning the pages today, you will learn about our readers' selections and what makes the winners stand out in our community.

Whether it is the best place to drink a beer or get your back cracked, CM Life has your favorites featured here. Congratulations to all the businesses selected as winners or runner ups. We are happy to have you in our community, providing our town with the amenities, goods and services one would expect to find in a much larger city!

THANK YOU AGAIN TO OUR READERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO TOOK THE TIME TO VOTE DURING DECEMBER 2025!



FOOD AND DINING

BEST STEAK PLACE

Texas Roadhouse

2177 S. Mission St. (989) 775-7427

Texas Roadhouse is recognized once more by the people of Mt. Pleasant. Enjoy a nice, savory, juicy steak at Texas Roadhouse for dinner tonight. Try their Hand-Cut Sirloin or their Bone-In Ribeye, or any other of the steaks from their menu. You'll have a variety to choose from for that hearty steak dinner.

BEST PLACE FOR LUNCH

Max and Emily's

125 E. Broadway St. (989) 772-7460

Long-time local favorite Max and Emily's specializes in serving classic and custom sandwiches all made from locally sourced ingredients. Who knows, they may even name one after you.

BEST ASIAN RESTAURANT

Great Wall Buffet

1025 S. Mission St. (989) 775-8039

Fresh, hot Asian cuisine waits for you at Great Wall Buffet, with customer favorites such as Coconut Chicken, Crab Rangoon and Chicken/Pork Lo Mein. Other services include take-out, vegetarian options and private parking. Looking for a venue for the next social gathering? Great Wall Buffet is an optimal place for big groups.

BEST FAST FOOD RESTAURANT

Dog Central

111 E. Michigan St. (989) 317-3076

From signature to classic dogs, Dog Central has a hot dog meal for everyone. Made from hardwood-smoked pork provided by Dearborn Sausage, the dogs at Dog Central are known throughout Mount Pleasant. Like a competition? Dog Central has multiple food challenges, such as the DC challenge, where one must finish three footlong dogs, fries, a stack of onion rings and a 20-oz drink. Eat at Dog Central today.

BEST SWEET TREATS

Doozie's Ice Cream Place

1310 E. Pickard St. (989) 772-2332

Doozie's, open from April to September, serves over 90 flavors of Arctic Swirl and 20 types of hand-dipped ice cream, as well as sundaes, milkshakes, malts and floats!

BEST PIZZA PLACE

Pisanello's

110 N. Main Street (989) 773-9906

Pisanello's has a large menu, from family-sized pizza meals to small single pizzas. They also sell subs, pasta and salads. Pisanello's has something for everyone and is perfect for a family meal or a dinner with friends. Enjoy savory, delicious pizza with a variety of toppings and sizes at Pisanello's today.

BEST RESTAURANT

Texas Roadhouse

2177 S. Mission St. (989) 775-7427

Texas Roadhouse offers a wide range of made-from-scratch dishes. Whether it's their Hand-Cut Steaks or their Fresh Baked Bread, you'll find a hearty meal at Texas Roadhouse. With an engaging and friendly staff, delicious food and a lively Texas atmosphere, this restaurant is a town favorite.

BEST LOCAL BREWERY & WINERY

Mountain Town Brewing Company

3068 Jen's Way (989) 400-4666

Mountain Town Brewing Co. continues to grow its menu concept, wine inventory and beer recipes, as well as offer events to help patrons enjoy both their drinks and their visit.

BEST MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Los Aztecas

4445 E. Blue Grass Road (989) 775-8594

Repeat winner Los Aztecas is best known for its sizzling Jalisco Mexican cuisine, its cold, blended beverages and its warm, colorful atmosphere.

BEST BAR

The Bird Bar and Grill

223 S. Main St. (989) 772-2493

Popular downtown watering hole, The Bird features a laid-back environment in which to play some pool and enjoy a round – or two – with friends.

BEST COFFEE SHOP

Ponder Coffee

(989)-317-0808 Multiple locations in Mt. Pleasant

Locally owned, fan-favorite Ponder offers lattes and espresso, non-coffee drinks, breakfast and lunch. Four unique locations on campus and throughout the city keep readers fired up.

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Bubba Q

1511 Manor Lane (989) 506 – 4688

Also known as Twin Turbo BBQ, Bubba Q offers savory barbecue, from walking tacos to pulled pork sandwiches. This mobile caterer is a favorite among the Mount Pleasant community and is perfect for community events. Bubba Q has multiple trucks and multiple locations. Maybe you will spot them at the next football game!

BEST HAMBURGERS

Freddie's Tavern

705 S. Adams St. (989) 773-2180

With burger options that range from jalapenos to mushrooms, Freddie's Tavern is a community staple. Stop in for the food but stay for the atmosphere.

BEST LATE/NIGHT EATERY

Dog Central

111 E. Michigan St. (989) 317-3076

Things like applewood smoked bacon, mac 'n' cheese, shredded pickle, chili, crushed Fritos and peanut butter make Dog Central a fan favorite for fast food.

BEST SANDWICH SHOP

Max and Emily's

125 E. Broadway St. (989) 772-7460

Long-time local favorite Max and Emily's specializes in serving classic and custom sandwiches all made from locally sourced ingredients. Who knows, they may even name one after you.

BEST UNIQUE FOOD

Twisted Fork

1418 S Mission St. (989) 317-0367

Have you ever tried a Kimchi Burger? Or a Big "Daddy" Mac burrito? Twisted Fork has been recognized for the unique foods on its menu. They put their own unique twists on dishes from around the world. Twisted Fork is a great place to try new foods with your family and friends.

BEST BREAKFAST PLACE

Omelettes and More

1705 S. Mission St. (989) 317-3387

With friendly staff, a variety of omelet choices, great coffee and even dinner and dessert, Omelettes and More is a favorite among Mount Pleasant citizens. Come down to this casual and cozy dine-in restaurant and experience a savory and satisfying meal... and did we mention their coffee?

SERVICES

BEST APARTMENT

United Apartments

4175 E. Bluegrass Rd. (989) 772-2222

Whether you're looking for houses or apartments, United Apartments has multiple locations, which means a wider range of choices for students looking for off-campus housing. Different amenities across locations include shuttle services to campus, pet-friendly policies, laundry centers and free wireless internet.

BEST AUTO SERVICE & REPAIR

Dagwood's

1001 N Fancher St. (989) 772-9500

Finding a reliable auto care center is important, as you are entrusting your personal transportation to someone else. Dagwoods Auto Repair takes these concerns seriously and provides a wide range of services, such as tire repair, routine maintenance and emergency repairs. With a high regard for transparency and customer care, Dagwoods is the place to get reliable and extensive service.

BEST SALON/SPA

Salon Blu

121 University Ave. (989) 772-8898

If you want a small touch-up or a full-blown makeover, Salon Blu is the place for you. Its services include haircuts, hair coloring, pedicures and manicures. Along with these many services, it, also does haircuts for men and kids. Set up a spa day with your friends or treat yourself after a busy week with Salon Blu.

ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE

BEST PLACE TO HEAR LIVE MUSIC

Soaring Eagle Casino Resort

Soaring Eagle Blvd. (989) 775-5777

The Soaring Eagle Casino Resort is yet again Central Michigan's favorite place to hear live music. The resort attracts celebrated artists of all genres and generations year-round.

BEST STUDENT MEDIA PODCAST

CM Life Crime Time

Moore Hall, CMU (989) 774-5433

CM Life Crime Time delves into the intriguing stories and real-life riddles of genuine crime. Makayla Herrick, the host, narrates the tension, intrigue and insight into the criminal mentality.

BEST VINTAGE/THRIFT/ANTIQUE SHOP

Goodwill Industries

4529 E. Blue Grass Road (989) 773-4884

Goodwill has you covered whether you're looking to shop, donate, or find a job.

BEST PLACE TO KARAOKE

The Cabin

930 West Broomfield St. (989) 779-9167

A CMU tradition, The Cabin is this year's pick for the best place to get pizza. Try a custom-made pie or the notorious cabin sticks.

BEST GYM/HEALTH CLUB

Planet Fitness

2135 S Mission St. (989) 317-3615

With a variety of user-friendly machines, specialized trainers to guide you and 24/7 hours, Planet Fitness places an emphasis on support. Planet Fitness has something for everyone, from treadmills and ellipticals to personal workout spaces and muscle-building stations. Its memberships are affordable, and its environment is clean and friendly. Start your fitness journey with Planet Fitness.

BEST GOLF COURSE

Buck's Run Golf

1559 S. Chippewa Rd. (989) 773-6830

From a starter hole with enough space for beginners, to a hole that is protected by grass and sand for those who want a challenge, Buck's Run Golf Course is a place to test your accuracy. There is something for everyone at the golf course, from 9-hole rounds, 18-hole rounds, and even Junior rounds for those 15 years and under. Play a game of family golf or compete with your friends at Buck's Run Golf Course.

BEST TATTOO/PIERCING

Mission Street Tattoo

126 S Main St. (989) 317-0601

Mission Street Tattoo is known for having the widest range of "Get What You Get" tattoo machines. From themed designs such as Barbie and Anime to mini, simple designs such as CMU tattoos, you have multiple options to help you express yourself. Walk in or schedule an appointment on their website and get a tattoo done from one of its talented artists.

BEST JEWELRY STORE

Ace of Diamonds

406 S. Mission St. (989) 779-9919

Ace of Diamonds sells a variety of unique jewelry at an affordable price. You can purchase custom-made jewelry, engagement rings or wedding bands, pearls, diamonds and themed jewelry. It provides jewelry repair services and engraving services. You can trade in old jewelry for cash as well. Choose your jewelry service today at Ace of Diamonds.

BEST CHIROPRACTOR

Mt. Pleasant Chiropractic

405 S Mission St. (989) 773-2000

Health starts with physical wellness, and that's where Mt. Pleasant Chiropractic & Massage comes in. With a wellness program tailored to your needs, you will receive chiropractic care to make the right adjustments your body needs.

BEST PARTY STORE

Old Mission Party Store

5030 S. Mission Rd. (989) 773-3001

For your next party with friends, stop by the Old Mission Party Store. Out of everything, customers are very pleased with the wide selection of liquor, beer and wine available. It is also complimented for its friendly and knowledgeable staff. Enjoy its selection and friendliness today.

BEST CANNABIS BUSINESS

JARS Cannabis

1207 E. Pickard St. (989) 572-0400

JARS Cannabis is a medical and recreational dispensary that offers over 100 strains across a variety of products and price points.

BEST PLACE TO DANCE

Wayside/O'Kelly's

2000 S. Mission St (989) 772-2391

Wayside/O'Kelly's is once again our readers' pick for the best spot to boogie. This perennial favorite is one of the largest nightclubs in Central Michigan.

BEST GROCERY STORE

Meijer

1015 E. Pickard St. (989) 772-4700

Perennial favorite Meijer once again took the crown for the community's top grocer, although it features much more, including groceries, electronics, clothing and household essentials.

BEST NEW/USED CAR DEALER

Krapohl Ford & Lincoln

1415 E. Pickard St. (800) 772-5974

Krapohl Ford & Lincoln is the community's top spot for a new or used vehicle. It offers car, truck and RV sales and the Quick Lane Tire & Auto Center to keep clients safely on the road.

BEST ATTORNEY

Barberi Law Firm

2305 Hawthorne Drive, Suite C (989) 773-3423

Barberi Law firm in the Mount Pleasant area with numerous areas of practice, including criminal defense, personal injury, family law, estate planning, workers' compensation and more.

BEST VETERINARIAN

Pol Veterinary Services

3959 W. Jordan Rd., Weidman, MI (989) 644-5044

Prioritizing the health of our furry friends, Pol Veterinarian Services is the place to go when your pet needs a checkup. With 24-hour online veterinarian access, wholesome and nutritious products to feed your pets and experience with both pets and farm animals, this is the place to keep your pets healthy.

BEST UNIQUE BUSINESS

Karma Kat Café

612 E. Broadway (989) 773-2399

Sip a hot cup of coffee while enjoying the company of cats in a casual environment. Karma Kat values the donations and volunteers of its customers, as this contributes to the rescue, treatment and care of these adorable cats. Do you want to hear something even better? You can adopt a cat from Karma Kat Café by picking up a paper application during its business hours!

BEST HAPPY HOUR

Applebee's Grill and Bar

4929 E. Pickard St. (989) 779-2766

Applebee's Grill and Bar remains Central Michigan's top happy hour destination. Whether you're relaxing after work or getting ready for the night, the drink specials heighten the experience.

BEST PLACE FOR COCKTAILS &

APPETIZERS

Applebee's Grill and Bar

4929 E. Pickard St. (989) 779-2766

From classic mozzarella sticks to chicken quesadillas and all the way to its classic combo, Applebee's has been recognized for its delicious appetizers. It even has a new appetizer, the Ultimate Trio. You choose three appetizers and three dipping sauces. Get your fill of appetizers at Applebee's.

BEST PLACE TO BUY VINYL

B's Music

613 N Mission St. (989) 773-0777

B's Music, an independently owned instrument and record store, offers new and used vinyl, effects pedals, books, instruments and comprehensive lesson programs.



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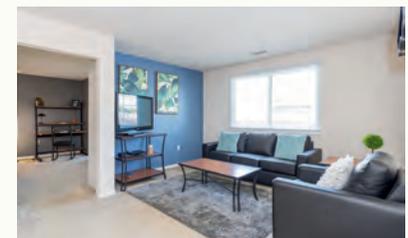
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SPORTS

"She is such a passionate leader, and she inspires us to believe in ourselves and to work hard for our dreams."

- Luciana Alvarado-Reid



Cristin Coppess | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University senior Luciana Alvarado-Reid beams with joy after competing a high-scoring balance beam routine during a gymnastics meet against Kent State University in McQuirk Arena, Friday, Feb. 13, 2026. Alvarado-Reid took home wins on both floor and beam, scoring a 9.900 in both events.

"She's helped me grow in confidence, self-awareness and accountability."

- Avah Bootz



Cristin Coppess | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University graduate student Avah Bootz competes on balance beam during a gymnastics meet against Kent State University in McQuirk Arena, Friday, Feb. 13, 2026. Bootz went on to score a career high in her floor routine.

From maroon and gold leotard to coach's chair CMU gymnastics alumna has been coaching the Chippewas for 32 years

By Ava Regitz
Sports reporter

As Women's History Month honors the impact of women shaping their fields, Central Michigan gymnastics head coach Christine MacDonald stands as the leader of one of the most successful athletics programs in Central Michigan University's history.

Once a CMU student-athlete, MacDonald has been coaching the Chippewas for 32 years, the last seven of which she spent as head coach.

"It feels like home," MacDonald said. "I think for me, the personal connections, whether it was from the administrators, the professors, the community, you just felt like you were a part of something and you weren't just a number."

"You don't start somewhere and think, 'Oh, I'm going to be there for that long.' The answer to why I've been here (is that) I've been able to elevate and continue to grow each year."

After trying out a few different jobs post-graduation in 1992, MacDonald said she did not quite have the same passion for the workforce as she had for gymnastics.

"It's an amazing sport to be a part of," MacDonald said. "I really just love that connection and competitiveness of it."

MacDonald said she always had the aspiration to be a head coach and hoped that the opportunity at CMU would one day present itself. It did in May 2019.

"To be able to have that opportunity, and obviously to do it at a place that has been so heavily a part of my past, really meant a lot to me," MacDonald said.

Under MacDonald, CMU gymnastics has thrived, winning back-to-back Mid-American Conference championship titles in 2022 and 2023, with another most recently in 2025. The Chippewas have accumulated a 72-32 overall record and a 41-14 conference record under her.

MacDonald has also guided several talented gymnasts to individual championships at the MAC and National Collegiate Athletic Association levels. During her tenure, CMU has produced 79 individual conference champions and 26 NCAA regional individual qualifiers.

Despite all of the success, numbers tell only part of the story.

"It's not about me, it's about them," MacDonald said.

For graduate student Avah Bootz, MacDonald's impact extends far beyond the mat.

"She pushes me to hold myself to a high standard, challenges me to step outside of my comfort zone and

take ownership of my goals, which has shaped the way I approach (to) not just training, but life," Bootz said.

Bootz said MacDonald has helped her handle adversity and to trust the process.

"She pays attention to the small details, whether it's how we're feeling on a tough day or something going on outside the gym," Bootz said. "She invests in relationships, not just results."

Senior Luciana Alvarado-Reid, one of MacDonald's gymnasts who has competed at the NCAA Regional Championships, echoed the same sentiments.

"Christine has impacted me as a person because she has taught me how to be the best version of myself," Alvarado-Reid said.

Alvarado-Reid also described MacDonald as the person she would call to help with anything.

"She will always be there for the ones she loves," Alvarado-Reid said.

Bootz and Alvarado-Reid both named MacDonald as a role model. They pointed to the culture of CMU gymnastics as a defining feature of the program.

"The standards are high, but so is the support," Bootz said. "It's a program where everyone is genuinely invested in each other's success, and that creates a competitive environment built on trust and shared purpose."

MacDonald named discipline, commitment and being good people as the main values of her program.

"We're very passionate about what we do, but I think when it comes to the value set that we have, it's who we are as people because that's what we're going to take forward in life," MacDonald said.

For MacDonald, growth is not just an opportunity for her student-athletes.

"The more we invest in them, the more they invest in you," MacDonald said.

She has learned to continually have an open ear with her student-athletes and work with them to find two-way communication.

MacDonald also said she is not planning on being done with gymnastics any time soon, but she reflected on the legacy she wants to leave at CMU.

"I really hope they see that I was somebody who dedicated everything I had to the process, and was dedicated and committed, and worked tirelessly to make it better each year," she said. "Hopefully that experience also for my student athletes, that they left here loving their experience, and they left here a little better version of themselves and know that they can always come back and call Mount Pleasant home and call me home if they want to."

'It's an incredible experience'

A glimpse into the journey of international student-athletes

By David Powell
Sports reporter

For Central Michigan freshman field hockey player Pleun Van Gent, obtaining a visa to come and play her sport in the United States wasn't easy.

Van Gent was unable to schedule a visa interview in her home country of the Netherlands. Instead, she was forced to travel into a different country to obtain one.

There are currently 22 international student-athletes at Central Michigan University representing nine sports and eight countries. Those countries include England, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Austria, Argentina, Canada, India and Spain.

The process of getting a visa is just one of the many things international student-athletes face when coming over to America to go to school and play their sports. Athletes also have to deal with the language barrier and cultural differences, all while being far away from home.

The visa process

CMU works with two different types of visas for international students. According to the Director of International Student and Scholar Services Kim Morrison, the most common type of visa used at CMU is the F-1. Morrison said the F-1 visas are used by students who are looking to complete their degree.

The other visa CMU accepts is the J-1. Morrison said the biggest difference between the two visas is that the J-1 is more of a short term option.

"It's just a little different whether it depends on the period of time they stay, whether they are seeking for their degree or not," Morrison said.

For international students seeking an F-1 visa, there are two main steps that have to be completed before they are allowed entry into the United States.

First, the student must get accepted into a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school in the states. Once a student does that, they need to receive a Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status.

The Form I-20 is simply a paper copy of the student's information that is included in the U.S. government's database for students and exchange visitors. This form proves that the student has been admitted into a school in the U. S. and is eligible to apply for an F-1 visa.

To get the visa, the international students can apply for it at a U.S. embassy or consulate. Morrison said that scheduling a visa interview is the most difficult part of the process for international students because interview slots are limited.

"We have process(ed) many application(s), we have

issued many I-20s, but the spot... where they got stuck is they can't even schedule for their visa interview," Morrison said. "It depends on the country, but I see it's getting more difficult to get the slot."

Morrison said that if the visa gets approved, the student is ready to come to the U. S.

While Van Gent had a difficult time getting a visa, other athletes, like fellow field hockey players Amelia Lane and Lola Pardo, got through the process much easier. Lane, a senior from the United Kingdom, said she didn't have to go to an in-person appointment.

"They didn't ask me to go, which was helpful because it was far from where I lived," Lane said. "It worked out easy for me. I just filled some stuff out and they sent me what I needed."

Likewise, Pardo, a freshman from Argentina, didn't have a problem getting through the steps.

"It was easy for me," Pardo said. "It was fast, it was effective, as I was expecting."

Why America?

For some international athletes, coming to America gives them a better opportunity to play their sports while completing their studies.

For junior track athlete Andrea Merin, who came to CMU this school year, participating in her sport while also going to college in America is much easier than in her home country of Spain.

"I run when I was in Spain, but it's much more difficult because universities don't understand that you want to run," Merin said. "They only understand that you have to study, and you don't have any support. It's completely different from here because here your professors help you. You can change your exams, and your schedule is in order of when are your practices. But in Spain, it's different. If you do a sport, they don't like you."

Lane echoed with a similar statement.

"Back home, university has the sport, but it's very, very focused on academics," Lane said. "Here, I feel like I've been able to balance both perfectly, how I'd like them to balance rather than having to focus solely on one. ... I think America does it very well."

Lane also said that the support system given to student-athletes in America is better than what she has experienced back home in the United Kingdom.

"Back home, it's practice and games," Lane said. "I feel like here, there is more practice, more nutrition, more lifts, more behind the scenes. ... Everything behind the scenes is much bigger here, I believe."



Zoey Lawrence | Photo Illustration of Amelia Lane

The athletic training in America is one of those behind-the-scenes systems that has stood out to Lane, who tore her ACL in her sophomore year at CMU.

“Athletic training is so good here,” Lane said. “Through my knee and everything, I couldn’t have done it without the athletic training staff here. You don’t get that back home. It’s not on the same level. It’s good. I’m not saying it’s bad, but it’s not on the same level.”

Van Gent said she decided to come to America to fulfill a curiosity driven by her and her family’s past experiences in the country. One of those experiences was a family vacation.

“I was really curious about the United States, and we also (had) been to New York in 2023 on vacation, and I really liked it,” Van Gent said. “It’s so much different, but it’s also so nice. So when I saw this opportunity, I was like, maybe I should just give it a chance. You can always quit. ... So I knew there was a way home and I just gave it a chance and I just, I love it here.”

The recruiting process

For track and field associate head coach Nathan Probst, connecting with international student-athletes has happened two different ways. “Anybody that I’ve ever

recruited that was international has either had a recruiting service reach out to us and say, here’s five people that we think might be a good fit for you, or we’ve gotten just like a direct email from the athlete themselves,” Probst said.

Pardo worked with a recruiting agency that assisted her with the process of advertising her skills and connected her with coaches in the states.

“They basically connect with coaches here and show them your profile, your highlights video and stuff,” Pardo said. “If that coach is interested in you, they just talk to you straight.”

One notable difference between domestic and international recruiting is that international student-athletes don’t always get to visit a school before they choose to come.

“I think I’ve had maybe, in my like 15 years of coaching, I’ve had only a handful of international athletes visit,” Probst said. “When we get kids on campus and they get to meet the team and spend time with the staff, that really goes a long way in getting to know their character. So it’s a little bit harder to determine that with just phone calls. So, maybe from a time perspective, it just takes a little bit more to know that that’s somebody that we wanna commit to.”

Because Van Gent didn’t get a chance to actually visit Central Michigan in-person, she had to resort to other ways of scoping out the school.

“I never visited, so it was hard for me to decide... from the other side of the world for university, but I saw pictures and I did research and I liked it,” Van Gent said.

Adjusting to a new country

For student-athletes coming to America, one of the problems they may run into is adjusting to the language barrier. Despite taking English classes in high school, Merin said she came to CMU having not studied the language during her two years at university in Spain.

“At first, (it) was difficult,” Merin said. “But now I think that I can understand very much and I am trying to learn very much speaking and writing. That is the hardest thing.”

Van Gent also struggled at first with the language barrier. For one, she faced difficulties in the academic realm.

“When classes started, I felt pretty scared because I obviously had class in English before, but not like this, this was every class,” Van Gent said. “And also, it’s hard to read and ask questions in English.

So that was pretty hard for me the first couple week(s) of classes to understand what they’re saying. Also, they talk really fast, so it was hard to

understand, but you adjust to it pretty easily.”

Van Gent said she also had to adjust to the terms used by her field hockey team.

“I didn’t have a single clue what my coach was saying at first, so I was pretty confused during practices,” Van Gent said. “And also during scrimmages and games, I didn’t know what was going on.”

International student-athletes also have to adjust to different cultural changes, including changing the times they eat.

“The time to eat also is very difficult because you have lunch like at 11 (a.m.), and it’s a small lunch, but in Spain it’s the big meal,” Merin said. “It’s huge, and it’s like at two or three, and then we have dinner at 9:30 or 10. And here, the cafeteria closes at 7:30. So at first, I didn’t have dinner because I wasn’t hungry at 6 (p.m.) to have a huge dinner.”

The time difference between America and these international student-athletes’ home countries can also pose a hardship.

“The time difference is six hours from the Netherlands,” Van Gent said. “So when I wanted to call my parents or my family or my friends, they were all asleep. ... It wasn’t that I really, really wanted to go home, but I just wanted to talk to them when I had the time, but I couldn’t ‘cause it’s the time difference that makes it hard.”

“That is probably the biggest difficulty when you talk about missing home or trying to connect with home,” Lane said. “The time difference isn’t ideal. But I think again, it’s something I’ve learned to live with.”

‘Do it’

Despite the challenges they faced and the adjustments they had to make, the message from these four athletes to other international student-athletes is clear.

“Do it,” Lane said. “Absolutely do it. ... If there’s a small part of you that wants to do it, even if you’re nervous, do it, because I’ve never looked back and regretted it.”

“Just do it,” Van Gent said. “Go for it. Take your chance. I know it sounds scary. ... It sounds so weird, but just do it and you won’t regret it.”

Similarly, Merin said language gets easier in three or four months and everyone is open to help. Pardo echoed the same sentiment.

“It’s an incredible experience, and if you end up not liking it, there’s always a flight back,” Pardo said. “Maybe

the process sometimes gets a little rough and there’s gonna be things that get in the way, but you can handle everything. Go with it. Go for it, and achieve it if you really like it.”



Zoey Lawrence | Photo Illustration of Pleun Van Gent

To AI or not AI: CMU says 'we do'

By Ava Harmon & Bar Belian
Staff reporters

Artificial intelligence has been a polarizing topic since its inception, and institutions have been debating whether to embrace or ditch it. Central Michigan University seems to be doing the former.

CMU is learning more about the world of AI and how it can be better used on campus by students, faculty and staff.

University Provost Paula Lancaster said the University is examining ways to help faculty use AI tools, to enhance teaching and learning. She said as well as ways to equip students to become proficient, ethical users of the technology.

"As a university, we are exploring all the opportunities we have to leverage AI while also mitigating risks that come along with the adoption of new technology," Lancaster wrote in an email statement.

She also said that CMU faculty and staff have been experimenting with AI for several years, and included the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Support.

One of the seeds of AI that CMU planted was the addition of its first special advisor for Artificial Intelligence, Ben Andera to its workforce.

"The purpose of establishing this role was to provide the bandwidth for a senior leader to focus on strategic exploration, governance and university-wide integration of artificial intelligence," said Jim Bujaki, vice president of the Office of

Information Technology at CMU, said in a statement. The position was announced on Feb. 2 by Central Michigan

University President Neil MacKinnon and other leaders across campus. Andera said his position will move CMU forward in the field of artificial intelligence.

"We've been talking a lot about it at a leadership level of just how this impacts CMU," Andera said. "Just really excited to work with leaders all across campus to find ways to be more successful, to utilize it in good ways and to be doing it in a safe and thoughtful way."

His role is to learn the challenges students, faculty and staff are facing regarding AI. Andera will guide a coordinated approach to AI adoption. This means he is focused on getting the most out of AI and how it can benefit the campus.

"We already are embracing AI. Each one of the colleges (across campus) has different groups that are meeting, and faculty are trying to understand it," Andera said. "We have different RSOs that students are pushing AI on."

He said CMU has agreements with Firefly by Adobe and Copilot by Microsoft. CMU is also testing its own AI.

"We're actually building an environment, our own technology and our data center that can run, so we can bring down open-source models and run them," Andera said. "The data never leaves our data center."

The university has a 2023-2028 Strategic Plan to guide the university. Andera's new position will develop an AI-focused strategic roadmap for this plan.

He said as of right now, the roadmap could be a webpage or hub that students can connect to for AI.

He said the university currently



needs to update its policies, bring clarity, raise awareness of AI and focus on training efforts.

“We really need to continue to expand on the infrastructure capabilities that we have,” Andera said. “There are faculty that really want to do exciting things with restricted data.”

He said there have been listening sessions to hear feedback on AI from faculty, staff and students.

Everyone’s got an opinion of it, good or bad, and it’s very interesting. We’re trying to meet the needs of everyone.

– Ben Andera

He said the main feedback he received was that students were interested in more clarity about whether they could utilize AI in their academics.

Andera also said they don’t want to “impede on faculties’ autonomy” when making decisions about AI in the classroom.

“They know best of how their students and their classes should work,” he said. “Faculty get to decide what

tools get used or don’t use.

“They get to decide whether it’s an open-book or closed-book test, right?”

AI regulation

Despite administrators embracing AI, many course syllabi still include a section on limiting usage in the classroom. Professors are given a sample statement that many include in their syllabi.

The statement said work students submit must be the product of their own efforts, and submitting AI-generated products as your own original work is prohibited.

It states behaviors that constitute academic dishonesty are noted in the CMU Bulletin or in the university’s Academic Integrity Policy.

However, the policy doesn’t state what will happen if students use AI for their coursework, and it doesn’t mention AI.

“The inclusion of AI usage when it comes to academic integrity is ultimately up to the faculty member,” Douglas Kendrick, assistant director of student conduct, wrote in an email statement. “Typically, the faculty member will note in their syllabi if the use (of) AI is permitted or not in their course.”

Stephen Juris is the director of Institutional Assessment and Curriculum and the Chair of the University’s Academic Senate. He said if a student

is not allowed to use AI in the classroom, but does, they are subject to disciplinary action by the Code of Student Conduct.

“The problem associated with it, it’s a lot harder to detect AI use, right?” Juris said. “There are faculty members who want an AI-detection tool and say, ‘I need this to my advantage to be able to know if a student is using it unethically, if they’re using it improperly.’”

He said if a student is accused of using AI for their coursework by a faculty member, the member would need to have substantial evidence to factually support the decision.

In general, Andera said there have been rules in place to protect students’ private data and faculty’s private data.

“There’s really two policies that we’ve had for decades that tried to keep people from taking a bunch of data, exfiltrating it and putting it into a Google Drive, or giving that data away,” he said.

The policies are the Responsible Use of Computing Policy, Andera said. The policy requires students and faculty to maintain regularly used technologies and networks while preserving the privacy and integrity of those resources.

Juris said, in regard to decisions on the future regulation of AI in academia, the Academic Senate would need to make the decision.

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Getting mental health care on campus

By Elizabeth Sadecki
Staff reporter

In the last 10 years, Central Michigan University Cares has seen significant growth in the use of its Care referrals, Director Andrea Jean said.

Cares received 126 referrals in the 2014-2015 school year. There were 1,547 of them in 2024-2025.

Jean said on average, Cares experiences an increase in referrals every year. Its largest increase happened between the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years and has continued to grow since. Cares also had an increase in students submitting reports for themselves to reach out for help and guidance.

A rise in students searching for mental health assistance isn't limited to CMU. Nationally, 65% of college students in 2023-2024 indicated needing help for emotional or mental problems, according to the American Council on Education.

Executive Director of the Counseling Center Melissa Hutchinson said students shouldn't hesitate to reach out to the Counseling Center, the Compass program, the crisis response team or CMU Cares for help.

"The most rewarding thing for us as counselors and support staff here is when we're able to help a student through a difficult situation and see them come out on the other side, thriving," Jean said.

CMU Cares

CMU Cares connects students with the appropriate resources on campus to meet their needs. Jean said they primarily reach out to students from care referrals: a form on its website that can be filled out by anyone on behalf of a student or staff member.

"Our philosophy is really that somebody cared enough about you to ask us to reach out," she said.

If the referral doesn't indicate possible safety concerns for a student or the community, CMU Cares reaches out through email, notifying students that they received the referral. From there, students are invited to talk with the Cares team and pinpoint the best resources for them.

Students are not required to accept the team's help. Anyone submitting a referral should specify in the form if they want to do it confidentially.

Jean encourages anyone considering submitting a referral to address their concerns with the student first. If people feel uncomfortable doing that, Jean said Cares is then happy to reach out to the student.

"A lot of times, students might not realize that their stressors are recognizable by others," Jean said. "But oftentimes other people around us notice subtle changes before we notice the impact on ourselves."



Jasmine Brookins | Photo Illustration

Jean said that while Cares receives a lot of typical mental health concerns like anxiety and depression, the program also directs students towards financial and academic help.

"Our goal really is to help identify students who may benefit from some additional support or may not realize all of the resources and support to help students be successful here on campus," Jean said.

Compass program

The Counseling Center's new peer education program, Compass, consists of students committed to mental health and well-being across campus. It started during the 2025 fall semester, using a Go Grant that the center received.

Hutchinson said it provides students with an opportunity to come together and share how to work on their goals or find their place at CMU. It does not offer therapy or counseling.

Students can attend its bi-weekly meetings called Peer Community Network from 5 to 6 p.m. on Thursdays in room 413 of the Education and Human Services building.

"Sometimes students just need connection," Hutchinson said. "One of the things that we're doing is trying to build a continuum of support so that students can choose what they think is going to be most helpful for them."

Counseling Center

Hutchinson said the Counseling Center's mission is to help students be successful in lives that are meaningful to them. It provides individual therapy and group services to students for no cost.

The Center offers groups for the following:

- Grief and loss
- Survivor support
- Executive function strategies for time management
- Managing anxiety

Students can call the center or submit an appointment request on its website to get in touch. Hutchinson said they'll be invited in for an initial consultation to assess what support they need and what they want to accomplish.

On average, she said the center sees 7-8% of the student body each year. The top five reasons CMU students seek counseling are:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Relationship concerns
- Academic concerns

The center doesn't directly diagnose students because it isn't required to for insurance companies, Hutchinson said. Students need to see practitioners as part of Behavioral Health Services who specialize in mental health care to be prescribed medication.

"Sometimes, counseling alone isn't enough to help students address their concerns," Hutchinson said. "Medication therapy can be another form of therapy to help students manage their concerns."

She said the center doesn't limit the number of sessions students can have. It may direct students to forms of help outside of campus, depending on the circumstances.

Crisis resources

Urgent appointments for students in crisis are available at the Counseling Center every day.

For days when the university is closed, Hutchinson said the center partners with a company that provides

after-hours crisis support. During that time, students who call the center will be connected to them.

After the call, the Counseling Center will receive a report so it can reach out to the student and help them further.

Jean said that in situations where CMU Cares becomes aware of safety concerns for a student, students are required to come in and meet.

"My biggest advice is, don't ever hesitate to reach out," she said.

Healthy habits

Hutchinson said she can't stress enough the importance of students taking care of themselves.

Along with prioritizing the basics—sleep, movement and healthy food—she encourages students to evaluate their values and goals in life and make choices consistent with them.

"We tend to feel depressed and anxious when we're making choices that are inconsistent with the things that we value most and want out of life," she said.

Individually, or with the help of the Counseling Center, students can work to identify these things in their lives and learn how to prioritize them to improve their mental health.

"You are modeling for others and for yourself how important you are," Hutchinson said. "You're worth it."

Mental Health Tips



Nourish body with healthy food



Make choices that align with goals/values



Prioritize sleep



Incorporate regular movement

Paige Jaczowski | Staff designer

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F	L	I	P	F	L	O	P	S	A	M	S	A	D
C	R	C	I	N	C	I	P	C	T	A	L	R	R
D	O	T	I	U	S	M	I	W	S	E	A	E	O
M	A	S	Y	E	L	P	E	U	G	R	N	L	T
H	D	S	N	N	O	S	N	A	C	D	A	O	
B	T	X	X	R	I	G	I	C	N	E	I	X	C
E	R	A	T	D	L	P	N	R	A	C	O	A	E
A	I	E	A	A	M	B	O	N	F	I	R	E	A
C	P	R	S	A	N	D	C	A	S	T	L	E	N
H	A	S	C	A	D	V	E	N	T	U	R	E	M
P	E	F	C	O	D	R	A	O	B	F	R	U	S
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GOLD ROUTE

SAC/Indian Trails	:13	:43	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Stadium Mall			UPON REQUEST
TJMaxx			UPON REQUEST
Walmart			UPON REQUEST
Copper Beech	:26	:56	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
The Reserve	:28	:58	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Jamestown Apts.	:30	:00	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Broomfield Mall			UPON REQUEST
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR

MAROON ROUTE

Village@Bluegrass	:21	:51	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
University Meadows	:25	:55	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Union Square	:29	:59	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Target			UPON REQUEST
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Washington/Ojibway	:44	:14	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Anspach/Pearce	:45	:15	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Ronan/Grawn	:47	:17	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Main St./Gaylord	:48	:18	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
MMC/Doan Center			UPON REQUEST
Washington/Clayton	:05	:35	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Larzalere	:06	:36	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Wightman	:07	:37	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Park Library	:08	:38	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Music Building Lot #33	:12	:42	EVERY 1/2 HOUR

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Towers	:15	:45	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Deming/Edgewood	:16	:46	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Westpoint Village	:18	:48	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Lexington Ridge	:25	:55	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Theunissen Lot#70	:27	:57	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
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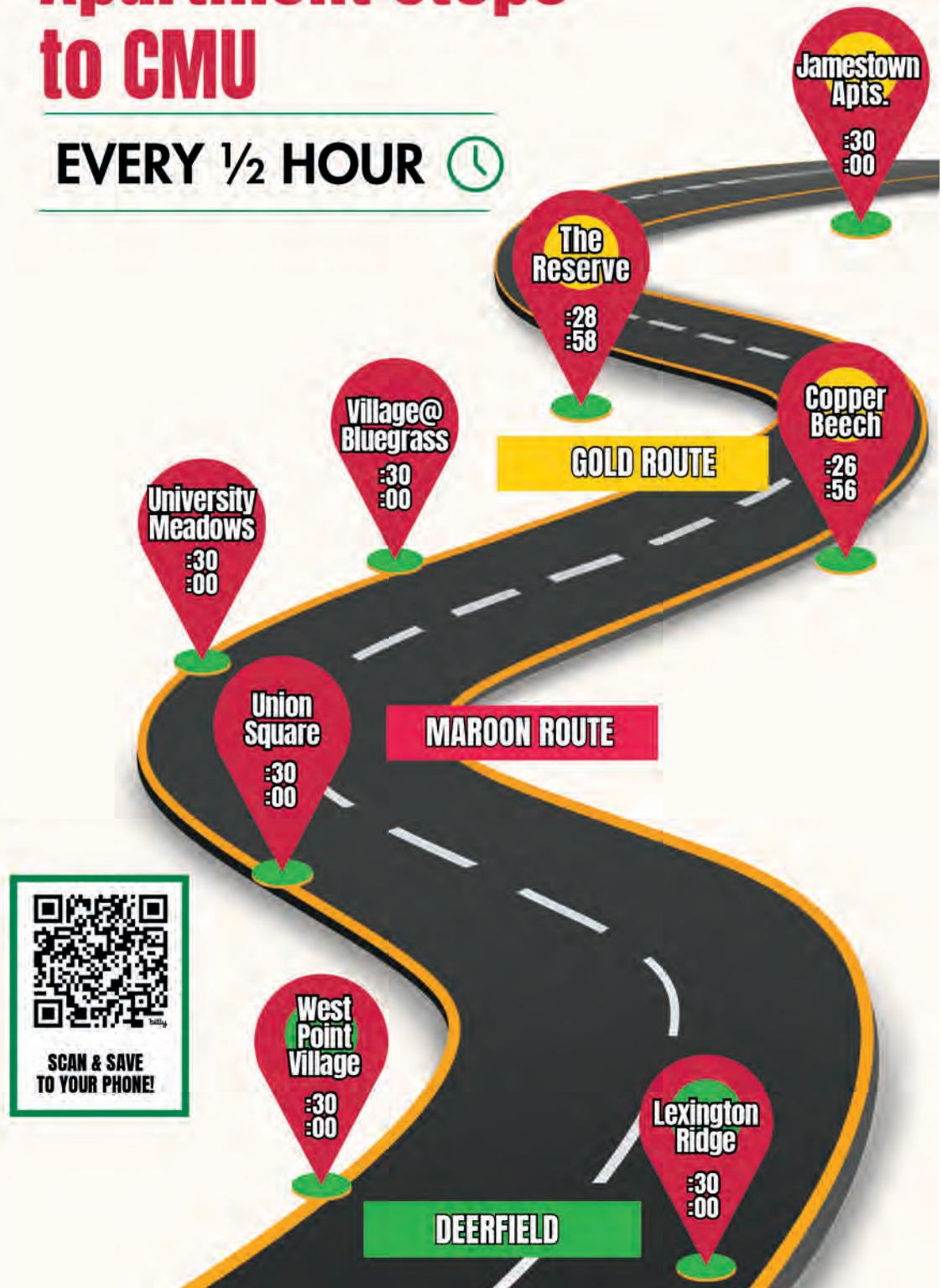
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