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2 Years of Service

COVER

The Mid-American Conference has welcomed two schools to its schedule: UMass for all sports and now Sacramento State for football only. However, both schools have had a hefty price to pay. In fact, both schools have spent the most of anyone in the conference on their athletic departments according to the Knight Newhouse Database. Additionally, Sacramento State is paying \$23,000,000 to move up to the FBS level, as reported by *The Athletic*.

Although those teams are paying a lofty entry fee, Northern Illinois has taken steps to exit the MAC. The Huskies, who are entering the Mountain West Conference in football and the Horizon League in basketball, spent similar amounts to CMU, yet are completely leaving at the conclusion of the 2025-26 season.

Salary credit (right):

Matt Drinkall's \$415,000 salary is according to a salary study done by Central Michigan Life.

Kristin Haynie's \$265,000 base salary number comes from a 2023 report from the *Detroit News*.

Navigating the field



By Noah Henson, Bar Belian & Chance Hamilton
Assistant Sports editor and Staff reporters

Of the five Division I competitors in Michigan, Central Michigan spends the least money on athletics and stands as one of two schools in the state, along with Eastern Michigan, that have not won a national title in the last 25 years.

However, the landscape 25 years ago is far different from the outlook now. In this new era, name, image and likeness has taken center stage in athletics. Since its introduction, Central Michigan has taken new approaches and strategies to market the university and its people.

However, the degree of marketing is determined by the resources available. Fortunately for the athletics program, the capital is higher than ever, according to the CMU athletic director Amy Folan.

She wrote in a statement that CMU has raised the most money in its athletic department's history. In addition, the department has hit all-time highs in revenue, while spending is relatively in line with the Mid-American Conference.

"CMU Athletics functions as a \$45 million advertising and branding vehicle for Central Michigan University," Folan wrote. "Every game broadcast, every ESPN appearance, every logo on a national stage is exposure that no traditional marketing brand could replicate."

Overall, Folan said that CMU athletics is "in a strong position." She cited the fact that the football team was one of five MAC teams to make a bowl game. The women's basketball team was a No. 4 seed in the conference tournament, and the gymnastics team has won three of the last four conference championships.

However, the landscape is only continuing to shift in college sports with the complex additions of NIL deals and the transfer portal. Central Michigan must learn to adapt, and Folan has readied to face these challenges.

"This is not a moment to rest," Folan wrote. "The financial demands of programs like ours are growing, even though we remain committed to operating responsibly."

As a result, the athletics department has begun to work closely with the CMU Board of Trustees to tackle the new realities in college sports.

On April 22, the Board of Trustees announced the creation of an athletic affairs committee to better assess CMU's financial standing in the NCAA and monitor the changing landscape of college sports.

"We are going to be looking at our budget with other MAC universities, NIL money spent at CMU versus other MAC schools and we are going to look at how various revenue reports show the financial stability of our programs," board of trustees member Todd Regis said at the board of trustees meeting.

Folan is also establishing a Task Force on Student-Athlete Benefits, focused on bringing Central Michigan leaders and alumni together to approach the changing landscape of sports.

"This group is asking hard questions about sustainability, competitiveness and what it means to support student-athletes in an era that looks nothing like the one that came before," Folan wrote. "Their work will help shape how CMU positions itself — not just to survive this moment, but to lead through it."

Approaching NIL

It's no secret that Central Michigan, along with its MAC peers, faces a significant disadvantage in terms of financial support for its student-athletes.

"We are losing talented student-athletes to institutions who can simply pay more," Folan wrote. "That is the reality, and I'm not going to pretend otherwise."

According to the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database, the MAC budgeted nearly \$103 million for student-athlete aid. By comparison, Power Four conferences significantly eclipsed these totals, including the Big Ten spending just over \$257 million in scholarships alone.

The difference is clear.

“How do we compete? First, by being honest about what we are and what we are not,” Folan wrote. “We are not going to outbid Power Four schools. We are not going to pretend the financial playing field is level, because it is not.”

With such a vast financial disparity across the various levels of the NCAA, Folan instead seeks to construct rosters through developing relationships and building character.

This tactic may be appealing in practice, yet a significant roadblock stands in the way of longterm roster development. With the rise of the transfer portal, students-athletes now frequently find themselves in the revolving door of roster construction.

The challenge of the transfer portal

The contrast is obvious between the Power Four and the mid-majors, and the transfer portal has proven to be a double-edged sword when it comes to leveling the playing field that NIL creates.

“Roster decisions that once unfolded over months now happen in hours,” Folan wrote. “A student-athlete can enter the portal in the morning and have offers by afternoon. The volatility is real, the financial competition is real, and the gap between what the wealthiest programs can offer and what a MAC institution can offer has never been more visible.

“But here is the other side of this story, and it matters: the transfer portal has opened doors for us, too. Student-athletes who entered larger programs and found themselves buried on a depth chart, overlooked in a massive athletic department, or disconnected from their

institution are finding their way to places like CMU. And when they get here, they find something the rankings and revenue numbers do not capture.”

The athletic department has been transparent about the fact that it will be difficult to compete with Power Four opponents in recruiting, but acknowledging what CMU can and can't offer is part of the battle.

“We are not going to win every recruiting battle in this environment. But we have the right people asking the right questions, the institutional leadership engaged at the highest levels, and a foundation that has never wavered,” Folan wrote.

How does CMU stack up in the MAC?

To stay relevant in the landscape of the NCAA, Central Michigan must first strive for success at the conference level.

In the MAC, CMU's budget is on par with its peer institutions. Currently, it ranks seventh among the 13 total conference members, and Folan is encouraged by the overall production of the athletics department.

“We are doing more with less, and we're doing it well,” Folan wrote. “We want CMU Athletics to be the standard other MAC programs measure themselves against — not just in wins, but in how we operate, how we serve our student-athletes, and how we represent this university and this community.”

Despite sitting in the middle of the conference in terms of financial support, Folan said she believes that the atmosphere of the university and the passion of its supporters are among the main draws to attract and retain student-athletes.

Behind the scenes of this style of recruitment, the Task Force on Student Athlete Benefits is fighting to create an athletics system that works for CMU's current model in this new era of college sports.

Their purpose is to challenge and shape the athletics

department's financial roadmap while upholding the university's integrity and core values.

“We have also made real investments in our ability to move quickly in this environment,” Folan wrote. “More staff resources dedicated to portal monitoring, faster decision-making cycles within our coaching staffs, and financial planning flexible enough to account for roster movement we cannot always predict.”

She said she aims to uphold the resources and opportunities CMU's programs do offer, while remaining prepared for the event of sudden roster changes that can send shockwaves throughout an entire team.

This isn't just an issue for Central Michigan, however. Other MAC programs have struggled to retain talent during the early NIL era, with the conference ranking last in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) with a 41.1% returning production rate ahead of the 2025 season.

As CMU looks to stay relevant in a landscape where the odds are stacked against it, it raises the question of whether the athletics department has brighter prospects in a different conference.

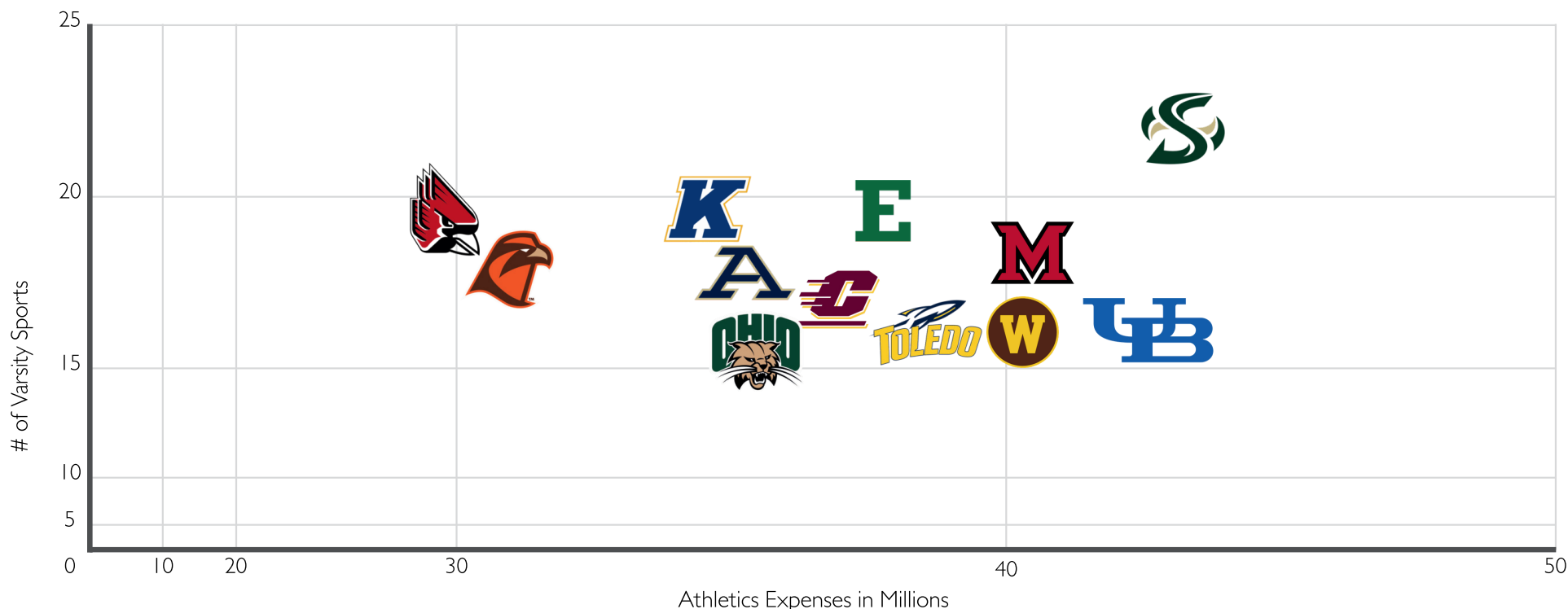
The future of CMU athletics

Because of the movement in the MAC, the question of conference realignment is a palpable issue for CMU.

“Those factors (level, geography and values) do not change because the national conversation gets loud. And make no mistake — conference realignment is loud right now. But it is not new,” she said.

“Right now, what is in the best interest of CMU is competing at the highest level in the MAC, leading within our conference, and using that platform to position ourselves well on the national stage. That is exactly what we are doing.”

CMU's athletic department is confident that it is prepared to face the challenges that await in the NIL era.



From the dugout to 'For You' page

By Sydney Neal
Sports editor

Before the followers, before the brand deals and before his name became recognizable beyond Central Michigan baseball, Bryson Webb was just another undersized high school player trying to get noticed.

"I didn't have a ton of offers," Webb said. "I was a pretty late developer ... definitely undersized. I had to bet on myself and trust that things would work out."

Now, standing at third base for CMU, Webb carries more than a glove and a bat. He carries a platform, one built on more than 84,000 TikTok followers and over 50,000 Instagram followers. He also represents a growing shift in what it means to be a college athlete in the era of Name, Image and Likeness.

Webb's journey to Division I baseball wasn't guaranteed.

After committing to a Division II program out of high school, it took a standout summer performance, hitting .400 at a tournament in Omaha and a last-minute connection for his opportunity at Central Michigan to come together.

"When I came here, none of the coaches knew who I was," Webb said. "None of the players knew who I was. It was a little awkward at first, just trying to find my place

and prove that I belonged."

That feeling of being overlooked hasn't left him. Instead, it has fueled both his development on the field and his growth online.

Finding a voice online

Webb didn't start posting with the intention of becoming an influencer.

About three years ago, he began experimenting with TikTok by documenting life as a Division I baseball player. Around the same time, NIL rules opened the door for athletes to profit from their own image.

"I just knew I wanted to work with brands," Webb said. "I figured making a name for myself on social media was the way I was going to do that. It didn't happen overnight. I just kept posting and learning as I went."

What followed was trial and error; figuring out what worked, what didn't and how to stay consistent.

"Fast forward three years, I've figured out a decent format," he said. "A way to create content that resonates with people and shows what my life is really like."

His videos have turned him into one of the more visible athletes on campus, even in a non-revenue sport, something that would have been far less likely just a few years ago.



Alivia Cranick | Staff photographer
Central Michigan University redshirt junior infielder/outfielder Bryson Webb poses on the field at Keillitz Field at Theunissen Stadium, Monday, April 20, 2026.

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As his platform has grown, so have the opportunities tied to it. Brands like Smackin' Sunflower Seeds, Uber and Under Armour have pushed him beyond.

"I'm grateful for every last one of them, but it's really just helped me grow my network," Webb said. "Not only as a player but also as a student.

"I graduated last semester with my marketing degree, and that has just really opened my eyes to what I really want to do beyond college and beyond baseball."

Playing under a different spotlight

That visibility doesn't stay online; it follows him onto the field.

"I'm always a hot topic at the plate," Webb said. "Other teams like to let me hear it. They know who I am before I even step in the box."

Opposing players and fans are aware of his presence beyond the baseball field. A different kind of pressure arises, one that didn't exist for athletes just a few years ago.

Still, Webb embraces it.

"It definitely adds pressure," he said. "But at the same time, I enjoy it. You just have to block it out and play your game."

After hitting .169 as a freshman in 2024, he raised his average to .272 in 2025 and is hitting .294 in 2026.

This season alone, he has totaled 42 hits, 42 runs scored and 23 RBIs with a .490 slugging percentage, all career highs. Across his career, Webb has appeared in 117 games, recording 85 hits, 80 runs and 48 RBIs while maintaining

a .244 batting average.

Defensively, he has also taken a step forward, posting a .965 fielding percentage in 2026 with just four errors, a significant improvement from the previous year.

Despite the added pressure, Webb's content reaches viewers directly, giving him control over how his story is told.

"I feel like I have an influence on people," he said. "I can definitely share my story that hopefully people can relate to or actually have a goal towards."

NIL meets reality

While Webb's success might seem individual, it exists within a much larger financial ecosystem.

Central Michigan's 2025-26 operating budget outlines the scale of resources tied to athletics and the broader university system. According to the 2025-2026 fiscal school year budget, the university operates on a total budget of more than \$462 million, balancing revenues and expenses across academics, services and athletics.

Within that, athletics alone accounts for more than \$29 million in expenditures, with around \$21 million in subsidies supporting the program.

While NIL allows athletes to earn independently, many programs still rely heavily on institutional support.

For athletes like Webb, NIL doesn't replace that system; it exists alongside it.

"I think being able to share these experiences has been a blessing just because I know that there is so much

possibility beyond the game itself," he said. "I think sky's the limit for this stuff."

A changing definition of student-athlete

As NIL continues to evolve, athletes are increasingly expected to balance more than just academics and competition. Branding, content creation and business decisions are now part of the equation.

For Webb, that balance comes down to consistency.

"It definitely places an extra little burden on my day," Webb said. "I hate to call it a burden because I do enjoy doing it ... but there's a lot of behind the scenes stuff that goes on. And while that does sound like it's a lot, it's something I do enjoy doing."

"Shout out to all my friends and coaches and teammates here who not only have helped me embrace the role, but they've also allowed me to have a lot of freedom doing that stuff."

For Webb, the numbers are part of the story, but not the whole thing.

What started as a way to get noticed has turned into something bigger, and he advises other collegiate athletes to stay true to themselves.

"Don't try to hide or glorify anything that may actually not be as big of a deal as it is," Webb said. "I try to just make sure every step of my day is as authentic as it can be ... I'm not trying to prove myself to anybody else anymore."

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Preparing for limited aid

By Grace Walker
News editor

Last July, President Donald Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which included several proposed changes to federal student aid. These changes will take effect July 1, 2026.

Two months before the bill is supposed to take effect, Central Michigan University Director of Scholarships and Financial Aid, Sarah Kasabian-Larson, said the Department of Education has still not made a final decision and has stated projections for changes to financial aid are subject to change.

“Since October, the Department of Education has gone through their steps of creating regulations,” Kasabian-Larson said. “So far, they’ve done the negotiated rulemaking and put out the proposed rules; some of them have ended their comment period, but none of the regulations have any final rules yet.”

“As financial aid administrators, people that have to put into place these regulations, it’s quite stressful to not have the final rules yet because ... we’re two months away from July 1.”

On April 20, the Office of Scholarships and Financial

Aid sent an email to students stating that some of the changes within the legislation include:

- Federal Parent PLUS program cap
- Elimination of the Federal Grad PLUS loan
- Federal student direct loans limit change

“It’s a big change for us as staff, as an institution, but also for students,” Kasabian-Larson said.

Federal Parent PLUS Program

Currently, parents of dependent undergraduate students are eligible to take over loans to help pay their child’s school without a limit.

By July 1, new borrowers of this loan will have a \$65,000 lifetime limit and a \$20,000 limit per academic year for each student they take out this loan for, according to the CMU website.

Federal Student Direct Loans

Students who only enroll half-time will receive an annual limit of federal direct loans based on the cost of student aid. Kasabian-Larson said these loans will be prorated, or reduced, based on how many credits a student is taking. Before, students had the ability to borrow the full amount of the loan they qualified for.

“They (Congress) want to make sure students aren’t over-borrowing beyond what they would need,” she said. “So if a student is part-time staying in their program a little bit longer, it actually extends their ability to use federal loans longer because they’re not borrowing up to that max annual limit each semester each year.”

Kasabian-Larson said since October, the Department of Education has created and proposed regulations, and is now opening up comments on the proposed rules. Despite working with university officials to understand what these regulations will look like, she said she has been frustrated throughout the process.

“The Department of Ed has been honestly not very straightforward in the regulations,” she said. “It’s very frustrating to have such inconsistency behind the information they’re giving us because we’re supposed to take that and put it into practice and notify our students and our campus so everyone’s prepared for these changes that are coming.”

On April 21, the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) said the Department of Education is providing contradictory information on whether Federal Grad PLUS loans will count toward the lifetime borrowing limit that was established by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. The



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department stated the loan would not count, but has revised its statement stating that the loan would count.

“The Department of Education’s latest reversal to include Graduate PLUS loans under the new \$257,500 lifetime borrowing limit only adds to an already confusing and rapidly shifting policy landscape,” NASFAA said in a written statement.

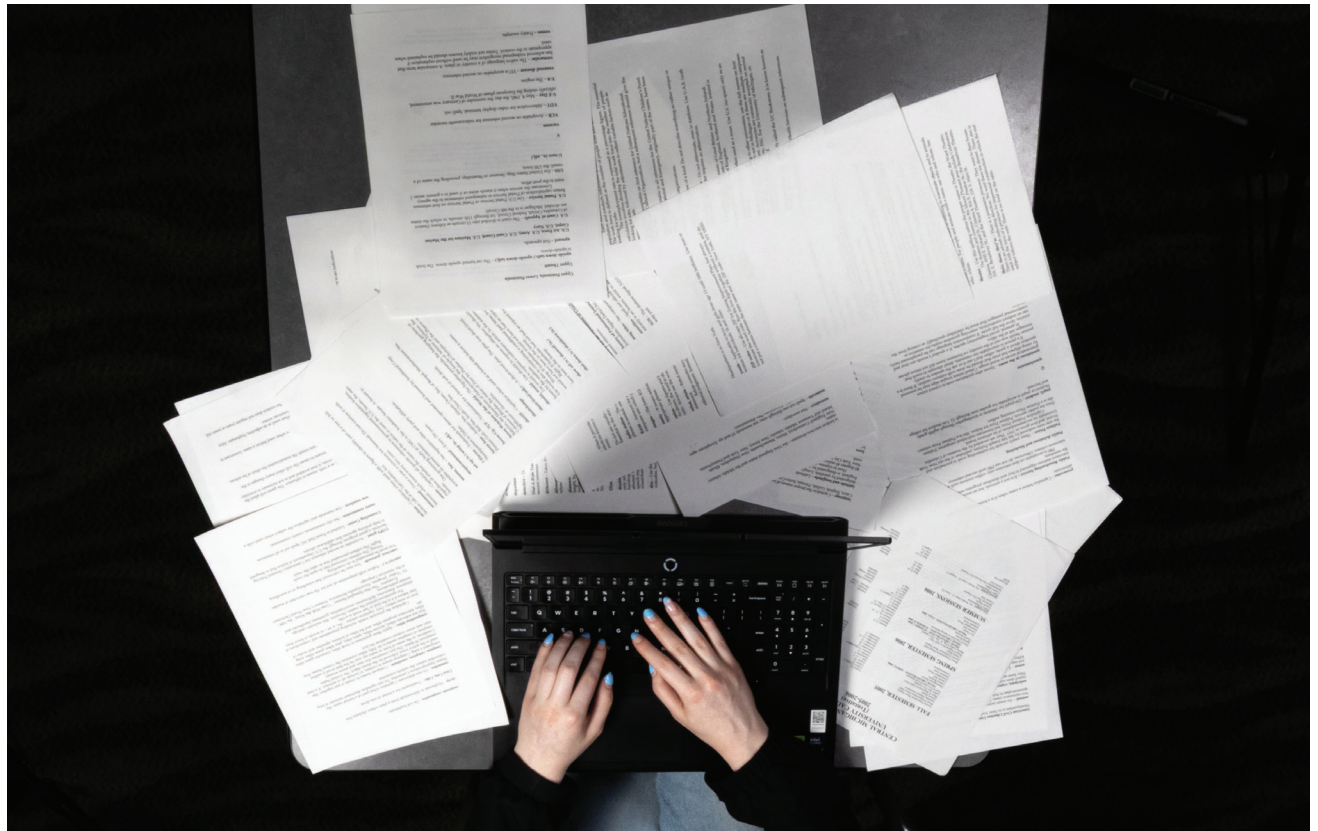
Kasabian-Larson said the Department of Education is telling university officials that a final decision will not be announced until late spring. On a typical year, any changes or negotiations are made by the beginning of November, she said.

“You have to have the final rules, like the negotiated rulemaking, proposed rules, like the whole process done by Nov. 1 with an effective date of July 1 of the next year,” she said. “That’s not happening this year because obviously we’re here in April and don’t have the final rules. Having that shortened timeline is not fair. It’s not helpful.”

While waiting for a final decision, Kasabian-Larson said the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid will continue updating students and staff on any changes through email and its website. The department is also preparing for how to deal with these changes.

Kasabian-Larson said that the changes to financial aid will not change scholarship or aid opportunities provided by the school.

“As much as we want (these changes) not to happen, it’s coming,” she said. “So we’re going to work really hard to help our students through the transition so they understand what’s coming in.”



Mark Hoover | Visuals editor | Photo Illustration

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Top photos of the academic year

Over the fall 2025 and spring 2026 semesters, *Central Michigan Life* photographers have compiled an array of beautiful imagery. From football game coverage, weather phenomena, Christmas celebrations and everything in between, these photographs are the best of the best from this academic year.



Cristin Coppess | Staff photographer

A member of Central Michigan University's custodial staff, Cole Tappen, collects previously thrown toilet paper and deposits it in recycling bins in the aftermath of CMU mens basketball's annual toilet paper toss game held in McGuirk Arena on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026.



Mary Nowosacki | Staff photographer

A little girl holds a goat during Goat Snuggles event at corner of Broadway St and Franklin St, Saturday, Sep. 6, 2025. The goats were brought by Cedar Acres Homestead.



Claire Vachon | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University junior Samantha Shannon hugs her teammate after a successful bar routine during a gymnastics meet against Illinois State University in McGuirk Arena on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026.



Mark Hoover | Visuals editor

The University of Michigan student section raises their hands in the air during a third-down play at the Central Michigan vs Michigan football game at Michigan Stadium, in Ann Arbor, MI, on Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025. Michigan held CMU to eight first downs in the game.



Zoey Morse | Assistant visuals editor

University of Ohio junior guard Bailey Tabeling jumps out of bounds to save a ball during the Mid-American Conference basketball tournament against Central Michigan University at Rocket Arena in Cleveland, Ohio on Wednesday, March 11, 2026. Tabeling scored an all time career high of 33 points during the game.



Jasmine Brookins | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University redshirt junior Jimmy Nugent yells after winning his wrestling dual against George Mason University at McGuirk Arena on Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026. Nugent won his match 7-5.



Alivia Cranick | Staff photographer

Central Michigan graduate students, Sahil Parmar, left, and Vyom Patel, right, dance during Garba Night in the SAC: MAC Gym 1, Thursday, Oct. 2, 2025. Garba Night gives students and friends a chance to come together, have fun and dance.



Trevor Sparks | Staff photographer

A severe thunderstorm erupts with lightning over Ithaca, as seen from the Central Michigan University campus on the evening of Monday, April 13, 2026.

CMU lacks student involvement

By Ava Harmon
Staff reporter

Across campus, students can be involved with registered student organizations, offices and Greek life. But a recent trend across Central Michigan University is that students are deciding to stay in their homes instead of getting involved, according to Kendall Fowler, president of Program Board.

“We’ve also seen just overall across student engagement as a whole is (that) students aren’t really leaving their dorms a lot to go to things,” Fowler said. “So, it reflects the student trends that we’ve been seeing across the board, and even nationally at other schools.”

The office for Student Activities and Involvement, SAI, coordinates events and manages the RSOs on campus.

“Joining different organizations on campus is really important,” London Hill, with SAI, said. “Finding something that aligns with your career goals is really important as well.”

Students have the option to get involved with both their professional plans and their hobbies, as options vary from Crochet Central to Aspiring Educators of Central Michigan.

Even though students have the opportunity to get involved, research from Inside Higher Ed shows that students are less involved on campus after COVID-19. Trends have slightly increased since 2020, but they are still not at the previous level before the pandemic left people stuck at home.

Program Board is finding ways around the lack of engagement by hosting low-commitment and high-engagement events.

“Meaning these are events where students are able to come and go as they please, and they are really engaged in the event,” Fowler said. “So, a lot of more crafty events, a lot of things where students are able to kind of like, not feel forced to be there.”

Providing students with an “out” at an event is helpful, as students can leave if they feel overwhelmed or tired, he said.

For the students who do feel inclined to get involved, SAI hosts Mainstage in the fall and spring semesters. This is an event that has tables of RSOs, offices, Greek life and professional organizations.

“It’s a great way to get to know all the different organizations that are available to you, and you can sign up and learn more information about those,” Malcolm Vinson, a graduate assistant with SAI, said.

Students interested in getting involved with offices on campus can get engaged by applying for committees, including the Homecoming Committee and Sibs and Kids Committee.



Danica Schmitt | Staff designer

Some offices offer students the chance to get a part-time job while they take classes.

“Just finding little opportunities and just applying, and applying is really important, and showing face as well, and being around,” Hill said. “So people know, and then they see your application, they’re like, oh, that’s that one person who always shows up.”

Engage Central, a SAI-run website, shows events happening soon on campus and all the available engagement options that students can utilize.

Students have the opportunity to see every RSO

on campus and request to join, which sends direct messages to the club’s president.

“My favorite events that I love seeing are like, philanthropy events, whether that’s other RSOs or other sororities or fraternities, their events where they’re supporting a great cause, supporting a great philanthropy, I love going to those events specifically,” Gracie Dietrich, a freshman at CMU in Tri Sigma, said.



Yeah, baby... **LOOK WHO'S GRADUATING!**

Congratulations, Class of 2026!

SADIE BOORMAN

Sadie,
Your family is SO proud of you! You did it, beautiful girl! You will be the BEST engineer! FIRE UP and party with the buffalo!

Love, Mom

ADELYNN BROWN

Addy, you did it!

Your family is so proud of you!

You are going to be an amazing teacher!

Love you, Mucho!

Mom and Family!

JADE ALEXA BURNETT

Jade,

You've grown so much at CMU. We're so proud of the adult you've grown to be. You'll be an awesome doctoral student and Audiologist.

Love
Mom, Dad, and Hunter

LINDSAY MEGAN LUCAS

Lindsay, you did it.
You're a college grad now!

We are both so proud of you and what you've accomplished!

The next journey of life begins. We know what you're up to the task.

We love you!
Mom and Dad

**JOSEPH DAVID BENO**

Class of
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Congratulations Joey!

May your strong will, integrity, and kind heart guide you in forging your wonderful future! We are so proud of you!

Love always, Dad, Mom, Katy, and Halle

MICHAEL C. GONZALEZ

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Congratulations on your graduation!

We are so very proud of you.

This is just the beginning of an exciting new chapter in your life!

Love from your family.



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KELSI ELIZABETH CROTSER

"We are so proud of all you've accomplished and can't wait to see what's next. The world is lucky to have you as a counselor soon.

We love you, always."



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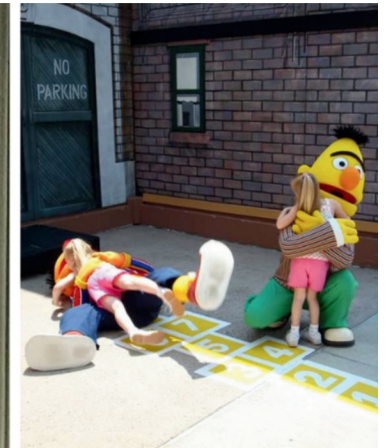
KAITLYN MARISA DEMAREST

Congratulations, KDawg!!!

You have accomplished another milestone and we are so proud of you!

Your determination and drive is inspiring. Can't wait to see what you do next.

Love Always,
Daddy and Cherry





Class of
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MICHELENE BRENNNA DAUSEY

Congrats, Mickie! You did it!

Words can't express how proud we are of you!
We've always known you would do amazing
things in life and can't wait to see where your
dreams take you next!

We love you!
Mom & Dad



MERSADIE MICHELLE NEWSOME

Congratulations, our amazing daughter!

Your outstanding achievements, academic excellence, and numerous awards—while thriving in full-time work—fill us with immense pride.

The future is yours!

Love,
Mom and Rich &
Dad and Kelly

KATELYN QUINN PETERSON

Congratulations Katie!

We are so very proud of you & always knew you could do it!! Looking forward to your bright future & all the amazing things you will do in your life!

Love you forever & a day & a day after that!

Mom, Dad & Alex

JESSICA ROSE THOMPSON

Jessica,

We love you and are so proud of you. Your determination and first generation accomplishment are inspiring and only the beginning.

We have no doubt that you will go on to do great things!

Love Mom, Dad and Jimmy.

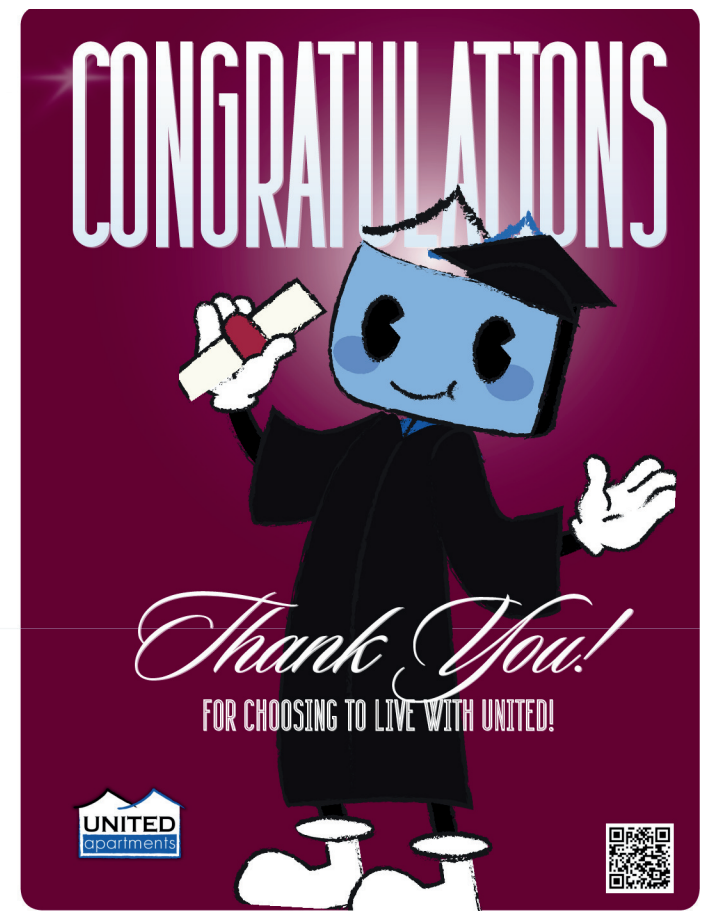
BRAEDEN L. TILLMAN

Braeden,

Watching you grow into such a strong, capable young man has been the joy of my life.

Never stop chasing your dreams!

Love, Mom and Bryce

**MAKAYLA ASHLEY JARRETT**

Class of
2026



Dearest Makayla,
We are so proud of you and all your accomplishments—Fire Up Chips! So happy and excited for you to start your future!
Love, Mom and Dad

**BRENNAN KIRCHHOFF
JORDAN KIRCHHOFF**

Class of
2026



To God be the Glory!

Brennan and Jordan, we are so incredibly proud of you! You did it!!

We pray that God will continue to bless your future endeavors. We love you both so very much!

Congratulations! Go get 'em! Fire up Chips!

Love, Mom & Scott,
Brandon, Alex, Lillian, Luke
Proverbs 3:5-6



Class of
2026

OLIVIA GRACE GARCIA

Dear Olivia,

It feels like yesterday we were moving you into your dorm. Fours years later, and you are a college grad! You've earned this moment and every future success! The North remembers your hard work, and so do we.

Love,
Dad, Mom, Mal and Gabe



ALEXANDREA KATELYNN LADISKI

CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Class of
2026



Alexandrea, Congratulations Sweet Girl, You did it!!
From playing princess dress up, to College Cap & Gown, &
graduating with Honors. We are so extremely proud of you.
We can't wait to see what the future holds for you.
Love you, Mom, Dad, Dylan, Alyse, & Jaxon

AIDAN MURPHY

CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Class of
2026

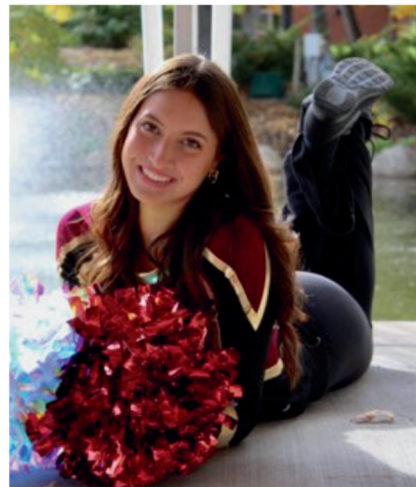


Aidan,
Congratulations! You did it! You overcame obstacles and never gave
up. We are proud of you! We know you will do great things!
Love, Mom, Dad and Ryan

MELINA MARSHALL

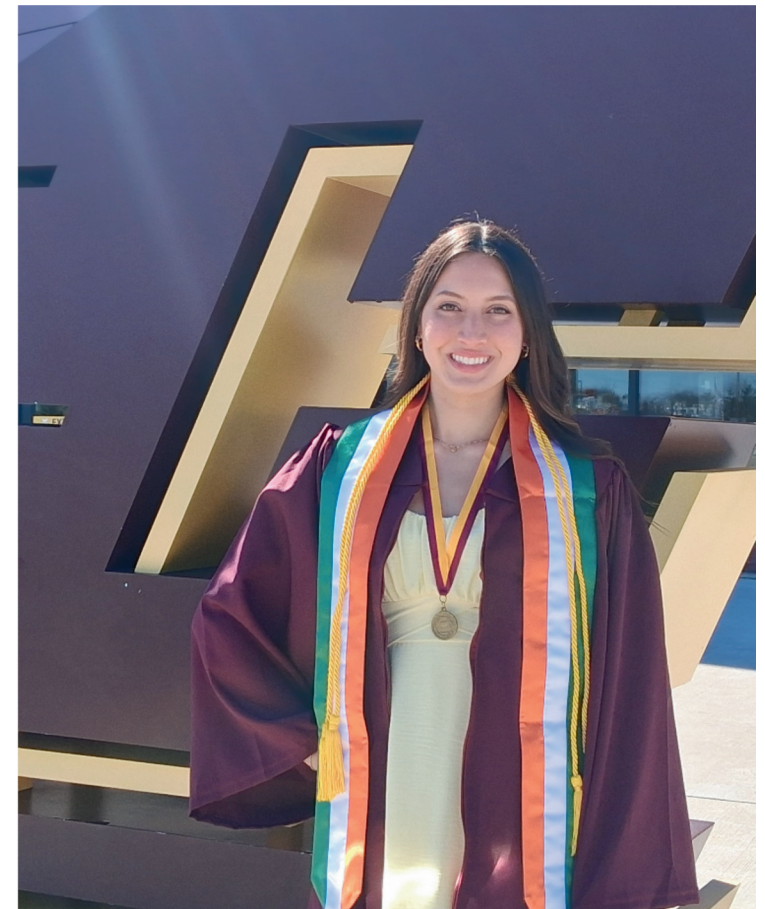
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We are so proud of you
Melina Marshall!!!

You will be an amazing
teacher!



REN CHUNLI VANDERMEY

CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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2026



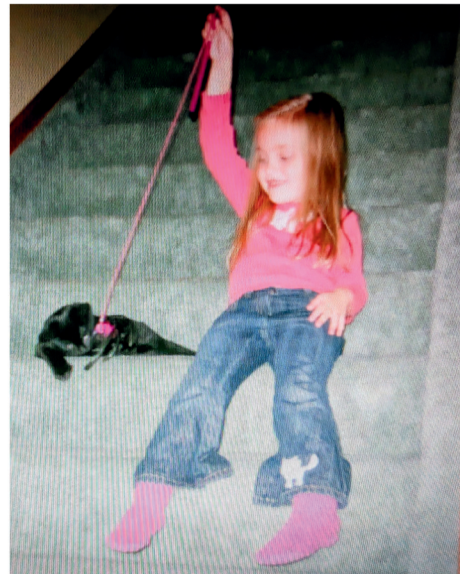
Ren, you've come a long way, from learning to use a spoon to learning to save lives. Congratulations on earning your BSN!

With love,
Your Family

JESSICA SHEILA WITKOWSKI

CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Class of
2026



Congratulations, Jessica! Only 20 years old and graduating with a bachelor's degree in Biology with Honors. I am so very proud of you. You will be an amazing veterinarian. All my love, Mom

ARYLON ELIZABETH WILKS

CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Class of
2026

YOU DID IT!!

We are SO proud of you, baby. Perfection is what we see as you Reign your shining light. Onward and Upward you will go with life's blessed Direction.

With love and pride,
Mom and Dad, Grandma and Papa





Class of
2026

CHARLIE BASHARA KAFOURY

Charlie,
You did it! Your whole family is so very proud of you!
You can do anything you put your mind to with hard
work and determination. When God pushes you to
the edge of difficulty, trust Him fully because 2 things
can happen; either He'll catch you when you fall or
He will teach you how to fly. Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not,
for I am with you says the Lord."

Love,
Mom and Dad



Feature

Who is SGA?

The Student Government Association at Central Michigan University represents student voices on campus and is “dedicated to improving its community by advocating for its constituency,” according to SGA’s website.

SGA’s structure

CMU’s website shows that SGA consists of:

- Executive Board: President, Vice President and Treasurer
- Body organization: cabinet, senate, house and judicial branch
- Committees: Academic Affairs, Diversity, Governmental Affairs, Outreach and Special Events and Sustainability.

Meet CMU’s new student body leaders



Cristin Coppess | Staff photographer

Zainab Naaz and Fatima Malik pose outside of Anspach Hall on Monday, April 20, 2026. The pair was recently elected to be president and vice president of Central Michigan University’s Student Government Association.

By Elizabeth Sadecki
Staff reporter

For the new student body president and vice president, Zainab Naaz and Fatima Malik, leading with kindness is necessary when representing students’ voices.

“At the core of me, I think being simple and kind takes you a long way,” Naaz said. “And politeness does not come easily, trust me, but it’s really important to have it within you, so that people can come up to you, and if they’re having a bad day, you can just smile and talk to them and make them feel lighter.”

Being involved in Residence Life, New Student Orientation and different Registered Student Organizations (RSO), Naaz and Malik said they’ve noticed changes that need to be made on campus. During their term, they plan to focus on improving dining halls, career fairs and starting an emergency tuition fund.

“At the end of the day, Zainab and I go to the same school as you guys, we have the same problems that you guys experience,” Malik said.

After they were elected, *Central Michigan Life* sat down with them to hear more about their goals for next year.

CM Life: What are your plans for students on campus, and how will you implement them?

Malik: Topmost thing that we talked about to death in our campaign was the fact that we wanted to start an emergency tuition fund, because I feel like sometimes life happens, and you just can’t pay the tuition, period. And we’re also planning on applying for Go Grants for that tuition fund.

(Former student body president) Akua [Acheampong] made a scholarship for everyone. We also want to continue that, because those are valuable things that actually make a difference in those students’ lives with resources and money.

Just to be able to go to school is very, very important, and a lot of people just choose Central because it’s

cheaper than other schools. And if we can help them actually go to school and have that semester for free, then why not?

Some other things that we also face, and I think are a big challenge, (are) dining halls. I feel like there is no concrete procedure around that for right now, just because it's a private entity, and they have an agreement with the school. So, they operate a certain way, and they're not under Central technically, because they're just a partner to us.

I think having more options, especially for different people that have different needs, for example, like gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian. You cannot just expect vegetarian, vegan people to just go and eat at the salad bar every single day. There has to be much more than that. Or just have roasted broccoli every single day, because that's not fair to them. They give the equal amount of tuition and room and board money as the other person, (who) is not vegetarian. So, I feel like those are the things that we would love to focus on.

How do you plan to use your connections as student leaders to improve the quality of life on campus?

Naaz: Many of the career fairs and stuff that we have on campus that happen every semester are not very helpful sometimes to all majors, I would say. And I also worked in Student Success and Advising for two and a

half years, and have really good relationships with the Career Development Center. Anna Flanders (assistant director of the Career Development Center) up there is somebody I know really well, and she generally hosts those career fairs. So, I wanted to, generally, meet with her over the summer and maybe just see the better companies we could reach out to, and maybe have them (career fairs) be accessible to all majors.

We have to cater to the student body. We are coming here to study, to graduate and to work in the future and get a job. That's the primary goal for anybody who comes to college. So, to cater to that need is very important.

This is temporary here. Our long-term goal is to get a job and build a life for ourselves, so making sure that most students feel welcome in that space and have those opportunities presented to them, regardless of the major, is also something very important.

How would you bring more people to the SGA and make more students aware of what it is?

Naaz: I feel like connecting with RSOs is how you reach a majority of the student body on campus, because RSOs are like small groups of many students, and multiple of them are around. It doesn't matter; you do not have to be a professional RSO for us to come. You can be like the Taylor Swift one. I thoroughly enjoyed going to that one. And there (are) like 50 of us

(students) that showed up to one of their events.

So, just going to those main events, talking about what SGA is, talking about SBAC (the Student Budget Allocation Committee). SBAC is a big part of SGA. We have money that we can give you so that you can go to conferences, you can host an event, you can host a professional development, whatever. Just build your career and life on campus to be better for tomorrow.

How will you both lead the next SGA cabinet and leaders?

Malik: I would like to cater to more personalized individuals in the cabinet, as opposed to saying that, 'Oh, this is how we're going to run it, and that's how it's going to be,' irrespective of who applies. Like how in families, if you have four kids, all four kids are different, and everyone has different needs, even though they grow up in the same household.

I'm a firm believer of the fact that whoever makes up your community is the one that decides how they want to run everything. So, ideally, when we start our cabinet and orientation and whatnot, I would want to know what everyone's priorities are and what they're looking for because every relationship is more so an exchange. I give something, and you give something, and we make the place better that way.

This summer, Naaz said she and Malik will focus on planning and forming their cabinet so they can put these plans into action once the academic year starts.

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MacKinnon reflects on university enrollment, identity and budget

By **Blace Carpenter**
Managing editor

This year marked the first full academic year Central Michigan University President Neil MacKinnon has spent in his role.

While the university has faced some financial hardships due to a sudden decline in international students, the president is hopeful about the future of CMU.

“Anybody who has any doubts about where CMU is should put those doubts aside,” he said. “We have incredible faculty, staff, students and alumni who care deeply about this place. Our future is incredibly bright.”

Central Michigan Life sat down with MacKinnon to reflect on this academic year and what his administration is preparing for the university’s future.

The preparation for budget cuts

The university has decreased from around 1,700 international students to less than 1,000 this academic year. During the fall semester, MacKinnon hoped that the denial of visas for students was a “one-semester glitch,” but that hasn’t been the case for the university’s enrollment.

The president is now asking college and department leaders to look at their budgets and recommend 4%, 7% and 9% budget reductions.

“Those scenarios were led by all of our divisional leaders, like the deans and vice presidents,” MacKinnon said. “We asked them to make sure they seek broad input as they were looking at making those different scenarios.”

During the interview, MacKinnon stated that 9% is the maximum he is asking departments to make, and he suggested that campus leaders take a “narrative approach” when deciding what to reduce.

“If we were to cut a position, if we were to cut a program, what would be the impact of that? Our guiding star in all this is really making sure our decisions are student-centric,” the president said. “How would this impact current students? How would this impact prospective new students coming to the university?”

As cuts loom over the budget for the 2026-2027 year, MacKinnon stated that there will be possible restructuring of departments. One example is the consolidation of the Division of University Engagement and Student Affairs.

After former Vice President of Student Affairs Stan Shingles retired, CMU combined the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the Division of Student Affairs in April of 2025.

“We created a new office, University Engagement in Student Affairs, and that allowed us to decrease the number of vice presidents by one,” MacKinnon said.

The university’s board of trustees will meet on June 25 to discuss the final budget for the next academic



Mark Hoover | Visuals editor

Central Michigan President Neil MacKinnon gives a speech at the Maroon and Gold Gala at McGuirk Arena, Monday, April 28, 2025. MacKinnon spoke about the academic achievements of CMU athletes.

year before its June 30 deadline. He said there is some uncertainty about how much revenue CMU will receive.

“We don’t have an exact number as far as what that cut will be because there are other factors that we still don’t know,” he said. “Just for example, how much funding are we going to get from the state of Michigan. We hope that the state will have its budget finalized in June.”

The need for enrollment growth

In the fall semester of 2016, 24,445 students were enrolled at CMU. The university reported 14,171 students this past fall, a 42.03% decrease over the past decade.

CMU is not the only university in the state to experience a decrease in enrollment, but it has had one of the

steepest compared to other similar-sized schools:

- Eastern Michigan University: 21,105 to 12,663 (-42.3%)
- Western Michigan University: 23,252 to 17,331 (-25.46%)
- Oakland University: 20,012 to 5,979 (-20.15%)
- Grand Valley State University: 25,460 to 22,035 (-13.4%)
- Wayne State University: 27,298 to 24,168 (-11.47%)

One of the first ideas Mackinnon proposed to CMU when he was named president was developing a “Strategic Enrollment Management Plan (SEM)”.

“We don’t have (a SEM plan),” MacKinnon said during his first Q&A interview with *CM Life* in November of 2024. “I’ve already been working with the leadership of our

enrollment team. Unfortunately, it's not something you can put together in a week. It's quite complex, and once you have it, then it's implementing it."

Around a year and a half later, MacKinnon had created and begun implementing the 34-step plan to attract more students to campus.

These steps included developing programs such as the Central Guarantee Program, partnering with local community colleges and increasing marketing to boost enrollment.

"Not all 34 strategies are fully rolled out at this time, but certainly a lot of work has certainly gone into it," MacKinnon said.

He said his administration is working to increase international enrollment, but there are challenges beyond the university's control. Currently, the university is pausing some of the plan's international enrollment initiatives and is focusing on increasing domestic enrollment.

"Of those 34 strategies, there are three that are related to international students," MacKinnon said. "We are essentially putting those strategies on pause for now, realizing that the likelihood of success is very, very low."

He said the rest of the SEM plan is focused on domestic students.

During the board of trustees meeting on April 23, MacKinnon announced that CMU is projecting its biggest increase in domestic enrollment in over 16 years. Final



Alivia Cranick | Staff photographer

Central Michigan President Neil MacKinnon gives his presidential address during the Presidential Investiture in the Plachta Auditorium of Warriner Hall, Friday, April 4, 2025. MacKinnon began his speech by saying, "I am honored today and every day to be among students who dream big."



Alivia Cranick | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University President Neil MacKinnon speaks to the audience of the Presidential Investiture Ceremony in the Plachta Auditorium of Warriner Hall, Friday, April 4, 2025. MacKinnon states we are all becoming "smarter, stronger and more capable."

numbers for the next fall semester won't be released until the beginning of September.

The identity of CMU

With turnover in senior positions and departmental restructuring, such as the creation of the University Transformation Office, MacKinnon and his team have begun to mold the university to fit their goals.

The board of trustees that helps oversee the president's actions has had its own shift in leadership, with five new board members and four new chairs in almost four years.

When asked what he believes is CMU's identity and what sets this university apart from others, MacKinnon said that the selection of programs, smaller class sizes and cost of tuition are what differentiate us from the 15 state universities in Michigan and others in the Midwest.

According to the university's admission page, CMU offers over 200 programs, half as many as Michigan State University advertises. However, MacKinnon said he believes this pairs well with smaller class sizes.

"I think the size that we are, around 14,000, really gives our opportunity for our undergraduate students, if they're interested in research, (they are) almost guaranteed they're going to be able to find a professor and get that hands-on research," he said.

The board of trustees has approved increasing tuition five years in a row, with the 2020-2021 academic year being the last year there wasn't a change in the price of CMU.

Despite a range of 1.85% to 4.47% increases, CMU remains in the top three for tuition for First Time in Any

College students (FTIAC) out-of-state universities in Michigan, with a price tag of \$15,420.

"We have the third lowest undergraduate tuition of those 15 universities, and making sure that because we serve primarily students from Michigan, that it is accessible," MacKinnon said.

A year of accomplishments and critiques

As CMU's leader, MacKinnon has developed several programs since beginning his tenure. Some of the accomplishments he listed during the interview were:

- Creating the University Transformation Office
- Starting the Go-Grant program from his budget
- Establishing the SEM plan

"It should be more, do I feel that CMU's in a better, stronger place than it was when I started?" MacKinnon said. "It's also forming a good leadership team as well and empowering them to make decisions."

When asked what his critique is, MacKinnon said he wants to remain receptive to feedback as he continues in his role as president.

"In this job, you have to be humble because people are always going to critique you," he said. "I think it's having that spirit of humility."

There are going to be times we're going to mess up, but we need to learn from that and do a better job."

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

– *The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States*

YOUR TURN

We welcome letters to the editor and guest columns. All submissions columns must include a name, address, organization university affiliation (if any) and phone number for verification. Anonymous letters will not be printed. *Central Michigan Life* reserves the right to edit all letters and columns for style, length, libel, redundancy, clarity, civility and accuracy. Letters should be no more than 450 words in length. Longer guest columns must remain under 750 words. CM Life reserves the right to print any original content as a letter or guest column. Submission does not guarantee publication.

Editorial: CMU's identity is its students



Kathy Simon | Interim Director of Student Media

The Central Michigan Life team poses outside of Moore hall after the School of Communication, Journalism and Media awards on Friday, April 24, 2026.

As the 2025-26 academic year comes to an end, Central Michigan University officials are working through financial challenges and a decade-long issue of enrollment declines. Through all of this, *Central Michigan Life* has reported on these challenges and changes.

President Neil MacKinnon announced last month that there will be more budget cuts due to declining international student enrollment.

While CMU officials work with departments to go through more budget cuts, we hope you understand how important every aspect of each program you put under a microscope is during its budget reviews.

Funding cuts, enrollment declines and departmental restructuring are a natural part of the higher education system; we understand that.

However, as students and members of the Central Michigan community, we want to caution the newly formed leadership to always take a step back before removing a program that helps further both faculty members' and students' careers.

Don't just take our word for it, faculty also share a similar view.

President of the Faculty Association, Amanda Garrison told CM Life earlier last month that she felt the university has not listened to the needs of its students or faculty.

"There have been cuts forever to the point where in this college (College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences), we are to the marrow," she said. "This (college) is a crucial piece of any liberal education in Western civilization, and we have been decimated.

"We have lost a great deal of trust...and at times it does feel like our goals and missions have not been aligned."

The 2025-26 Operating Budget showed that the Business Administration was the college that brought in the most revenue, \$45 million. The university spent over \$28 million on the College of Medicine with a revenue of about \$32 million.

Senior lecturer for Marketing and Professional Sales, Jeffrey Hoyle has been teaching at CMU for over 25 years.

Back in 2000, he said he remembered the university's strongest programs were teaching, business and engineering. That was also the time when CMU started to communicate its value, and the key that the university learned was how to tell its story, he said.

"We were (a) university not in the hot, busy city, but when people came here, they just fell in love with it," Hoyle said. "It was one of those best-kept secrets. ... I think the university finally realized, 'hey, we got to tell this to others.'"

As an editorial team, we are hopeful for the university's future, because of the programs and community that drew us here. Programs like teaching, business, journalism and more are what make our university so great.

As CMU lost so many of its students and experienced constant turnover in senior positions, we believe part of its identity was lost. To build the university, we must continue investing in programs that not only help students grow but also help us stand out among other universities.

Garcia: Choosing this, one last time

By Olivia Garcia
Advertising manager

Central Michigan Life team, before anything else, I want you to know how deeply this space, this organization and these people have meant to me. CM Life has been more than a line on my resume, but a place of challenge, laughter and belonging.

I've been with CM Life since my freshman year. Somehow, after 4 years, it still doesn't feel like enough. This place has watched me grow up, find my voice and learn about myself as a person and professional. Not only have I learned how to lead, but to listen, show up and care deeply about the people beside me.

I see so much light and potential in every single one of you, and that's what makes this goodbye so incredibly hard. It quite literally took me an entire semester to find the words I wanted to leave you with, because how do you

summarize something that didn't just take up your time, but shaped your college career?

Thank you for your support, your patience and your belief in me. I truly could not have led this team without each of you. When things weren't easy (full transparency, there were a lot of those moments), you showed up for me and each other in ways I'll never forget.

From full 9-5s in the office to countless TikToks, celebrating every win, big or small, you never stopped choosing the work. This year asked more of us than we expected. We faced setbacks, uncertainty and pressure that could have easily broken our momentum. Instead, you leaned in. You adapted. You stayed committed. Being recognized as an Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker organization wasn't an accident. It was the result of resilience, creativity and dedication that can't be taught, only chosen.

If there's one thing CM Life taught

me, it's this: When you truly love something, you continue to choose it. Even when it's hard. Even when it's messy. Even when it asks more of you than you think you have to give. Choosing this team, choosing this work, choosing each other, that's what dedication looks like. It's a choice I've been honored to make every day.

As I step away, I leave with gratitude and pride. This organization is in good hands because of the people who continue to show up with heart, grit and belief in something bigger than themselves.

So, for the last time, I'm choosing this with you. And I hope, long after I'm gone, you continue to choose each other and the growth that challenges and fulfills you. Keep pushing, creating and proving what this team is capable of. I can't wait to see where you all go next.

With so much love.



Olivia Garcia | Courtesy Photo

Dausey: Senior Goodbye

By Mickie Dausey
Assistant advertising manager

Finding the words that express how I feel about my experience here at Central Michigan University is difficult, to say the least. I moved over four hours away from home, I didn't know anyone, and I was terrified. Of course, we inevitably find the place we belong, and for me, it was the 4th floor of Moore.

I found some of my best friends here. I found my passion here. I found a home here. When I first walked into the *Central Michigan Life* office, I didn't fully realize what I was stepping into. I thought I was just getting a job or gaining some experience. What I actually found was a place that pushed me, people that challenged me and friends that helped me grow as not only a creative and professional, but into the person I am today.

CM Life gave me the space to figure things out, how to work with clients, how to collaborate with a team, how to trust my ideas and how to bounce back when things didn't go as planned. It's where I learned that creativity and business can coexist, and that I could thrive in both.

More importantly, it's where I found people who made every long night, office hour, meeting and deadline worth it. The kind of people who turn coworkers into lifelong friends.

To my friends of CM Life: Thank you for coming into the office everyday and inspiring me, challenging me, and making this experience unforgettable. You've all taught me so much. Each of you has left a mark on me that I'll carry long after I leave this office. I can't wait to see what you all accomplish and just know I'm always cheering you on from wherever I'll be.

Kathy: First of all, thank you for

always being my free therapist. I just know that couch in your office hates to see me coming. But on a real note, I can't thank you enough for everything you've taught me. You've always supported each and every one of us, and believed in us when we didn't believe in ourselves. You are the reason CM Life feels like a home.

Everything I've learned here is something I'll take with me into whatever comes next. CM Life will always be more than just a college job to me. It will always be my home away from home.

Like they always say, this is not a goodbye, it's a see you later (literally... I'll be coming back here for my Master's).

Thank you for everything.



Mickie Dausey | Courtesy Photo

Powell: This experience means everything

By David Powell
Sports reporter

When I first decided to pursue a degree in journalism, my heart was originally set on going to Northern Michigan University. That all changed after my visit to Central Michigan University, and Central Michigan Life played a huge role in swaying my decision.

Fast-forward a few years, I am nearing the end of my college adventure and about to embark on a new chapter of life. As I reflect on my time in Mount Pleasant, I realize just how big of an impact that CM Life, and the people who make it up, have had on me. This experience has meant a lot.

The on-the-job experience that CM Life has provided me is something I know will benefit me for years to come. CM Life has given me confidence. CM Life forced me to leave my comfort zone. CM Life gave me real-world practice at being a journalist. While I understand I still have a long way to go and a ton of hard work to put in, CM Life has started me on what I believe can be a successful path.

But the job experience isn't all I'm going to take from my time here. My work at

this publication has also led to some of the most incredible life experiences I have ever had.

If someone had told me four years ago that I would have the opportunity to cover a football game from the press box of the Big House at the University of Michigan, I think I would have laughed. If they followed that up by telling me I would get to do the same thing just months later, but at Ford Field in Detroit, I would have thought they were crazy.

And yet, here I am, having lived through both those experiences and so many more. But, as helpful as the job experience will be and how amazing the opportunities CM Life has given me have been, perhaps the most impactful part of my tenure with the publication are the friendships I have made, and there are a few of you I would like to specifically thank.

To Regan Foster, you gave me encouragement and guidance when I needed it the most. You, of all people, know how hard I can be on myself, and you helped me look at my work from a different angle. For that, I am thankful.

To Sydney Neal, you have made for an incredible editor and an amazing friend.

You've been a mentor for me, helping me grow in my skills and pushing me to become better.

You embody the type of leader that I hope to someday be, a person who understands the need for hard work but also the need to build relationships and have fun with your peers. Your work ethic and leadership skills are an inspiration, and I know the publication is in amazing hands with you as its next Editor-In-Chief.

To Mark Hoover, I like to think of us as one of the best one-two punches in the office, the perfect combination of journalist and photographer. The adventures you and I have been on while completing assignments for CM Life have resulted in legendary memories that will last me a lifetime. Thank you for being such a good photographer and an even better friend.

Finally, to the sports desk, you guys have made my time at CMU an absolute blast. From the March Madness watch parties to the weekly desk meeting shenanigans where it seemed like we never stopped laughing, you guys have brought more smiles to my face than I can



David Powell | Courtesy Photo

count. You didn't just feel like coworkers to me, you felt like family.

As I leave CM Life and prepare for whatever is in store for me next, I'd like to leave everyone with a message I have tried to channel throughout my entire time in college: take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. That's how you learn. That's how you grow. And that's how you stumble upon amazing people and incredible experiences that you never thought were possible, experiences that you will remember for the rest of your life.

Nowosacki: A photographer's farewell to CMU

By Mary Nowosacki
Staff photographer

I never expected that choosing Central Michigan University would lead me to be the person I am today. Four years, three majors, two clubs and more memories than I can count have shaped me in ways I couldn't have imagined.

But nothing has influenced me more than the newsroom that became my home: Central Michigan Life.

When I walked into CM Life, I was a freshman with a borrowed camera and a lot of hope. My mom deserves the first thank you. She pushed me to work hard, to stand up for what I believe in and to chase the things that scare me a little. She also let me "borrow" her camera — a loan that somehow turned into a permanent transfer.

Everything I do is for her.

To Jo Kenoshmeg and Ella Miller, my first editors: thank you for taking a chance on me. You gave me room to learn, fail, grow and eventually find my voice behind the lens. I wouldn't be the photographer I am today without your guidance.

Working for CM Life took me everywhere — sidelines, protests, fashion shows, late-night events and early-morning assignments. I learned how to tell stories that mattered, even when they were hard. I learned how to show people what they might have missed. And somewhere along the way, I learned who I was.

To my current photo editor, Mark Hoover: thank you for being the kind of teammate who makes the work better and the days easier. Your talent and dedication inspire me, and I'll always

look up to you as both a photographer and a person.

And to the professor who started it all, Jeffery Sauger: thank you for teaching me the foundations of journalism and photography, and for sticking with me through the highs, lows and everything in between. From mid-afternoon lectures to late-night class giggles, you made the learning feel like an adventure. Your patience and commitment to your students never go unnoticed.

Leaving this chapter behind is exciting, overwhelming and a little nerve-racking.

Time moves fast — faster than any of us expect.

If I've learned anything, it's to live in the moment and appreciate what's right in front of you.

Thank you, Central Michigan. Thank you, CM Life. I will forever miss this

newsroom, these people and this chapter of my life.



Mary Nowosacki | Courtesy photo

Smahliuk: A goodbye, with love

By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-chief

I wouldn't be here, and I wouldn't write this final note to *Central Michigan Life*, without the kindness of others. I didn't have the most usual path to Central Michigan University, but I met so many people who supported me, helped me, mentored me and gave me love.

Even before CMU, I was privileged to meet my host family, the Busches, with whom I shared so many happy moments, and who have always been there for me in the darkest of times. I am sending you so much love, and I am forever grateful.

At CMU, I met my husband Andrew Bootz. You are my favorite person in the world, and I love you with all my heart, forever and always.

But when I just arrived at CMU as a freshman, I was so lucky to meet Regan Foster, CM Life's former director of student media and a true mama bear. Regan made CM Life feel like home. Her unwavering support and unconditional love helped me find confidence, inspiration and courage.

I learned so much from Regan, both about journalism and leadership. She taught me to be a journalist who values accuracy and fairness, and I will always look up to her leadership skills. She truly has a heart of gold.

Regan, I love you so much, and I am so grateful for everything you did for me.

During my time at CMU, I also had the honor to work with WCMU's News

Director Rick Brewer. I grew immensely at WCMU internships, and Rick is such a talented director. His professionalism and dedication to the craft inspired me so much.

Rick, your mentorship meant more to me than I can fully express. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful. Go Hoosiers!

A shout-out to Lisa McGraw and the Michigan Press Association. Thank you so much for trusting me with the honor of being MPA's Fellow in 2023 and for all the kindness you've shown me. I am very grateful.

My time in the classrooms has been great, too. I was so lucky to learn from Jim Wojcik and Steve Coon. I always saw how much they care about students. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and knowledge.

I also knew Steve as the advisor to the Society of Professional Journalists chapter at CMU, and I am so grateful for all the support Steve gave us when we tackled investigative projects.

I also want to send my gratitude to Professors Jeff Sauger, Lori Brost, Zulfia Zaher and Jiafei Yin. I appreciate everything you taught me and the kindness you showed me.

Of course, experience at CM Life has been fundamental. Patrick Bouman, Zipporah Abarca and Aurora Abraham—thank you so much for believing in me when I joined the news desk as a freshman. I've always aspired to be like you, and it was so amazing to know you as my editors.

I also want to send so much love to my 2024-25 EIC Lauren Rice. Lauren, I miss you and your sunshine personality.

Thank you, Blace Carpenter, Grace Walker and Courtney Boyd for all your kindness and support. I learned so much from each of you, and I know that each of you will have such bright futures.

Sydney Neal, I know that CM Life is in good hands. Your empathy and bright personality truly meant a lot to me this year. Thank you so much for always being so kind to me.

It has been such a privilege to work at CM Life and such an honor to meet all the amazing and talented people. I send my gratitude and all the best wishes to every single person I met in the office.

And of course, thank you for letting me be your editor-in-chief this year. It's been an opportunity of a lifetime that I'll always cherish.

A couple more special messages for editors with whom I had the pleasure to work with this year.

Ella Miller, Jo Kenoshmeg, Mark Hoover and Zoey Morse, you are truly one of the best photographers in the country. It's been such an honor to get to know all of you. Your professionalism and talent are breathtaking.

Noah Henson, the sports desk is so lucky to have you. I am so excited to read all the stories you do next year.

Mckenzie Nowak, you grew CM Life's social presence so much. I saw how hard you worked this year, and I appreciate you.



Masha Smahliuk-Bootz | Courtesy Photo

Zoey Lawrence, the talent you and your team have is astonishing. Thank you so much for all your beautiful covers and designs this year.

Grace and Sydney, you already know how much I love you both. I am so excited to see how you transform the newspaper next year.

Blace, there's no one whom I'd rather share this leadership experience with. Thank you so much for always being there for me as a managing editor.

To all the CM Life staff—please stay welcoming and the family-like people you are. Keep an open heart and always be kind. Thank you so much for letting me be a part of this wonderful organization.

Hall: Goodbye column

By Samantha Hall
Account manager

As my college journey ends, I look back and realize how much I have grown over the past few years. During my freshman year, I was shy and nervous and didn't engage much in extracurriculars. By sophomore year, I became a little more social, joining groups such as Grand Central Magazine and Central Catholic. It was at this point

that I gained more experience in the media field and grew in my relationship with God.

In junior year, I joined *Central Michigan Life* as a copywriting intern, and now I am an account manager for CM Life. I have grown so much over the past four years, and I can't wait to see how I will apply the skills I've learned to my future career. I am grateful for CMU and CM Life for helping me to grow as an individual, expand my horizons and become skilled in a field I never thought

I would go into. CM Life pushed me out of my comfort zone, and I met so many wonderful people who made me feel welcome and supported.

My goal is to keep in touch with the friends I made and visit them during the next school year. I will cherish the memories that CMU has given me over these last four years. Fire Up Chips!



Samantha Hall | Courtesy Photo

Neal: Senior goodbye

By Sydney Neal
Sports editor

Three and a half years. That is how long I have had the privilege of working at *Central Michigan Life*. I've grown as a writer, as a woman and more importantly, as a person.

After spending two summers in the Detroit Free Press apprentice program in 2020 and 2021, I left with an understanding of what my next steps in life would be. I had the opportunity to be mentored by many amazing journalists who guided me to my path in CM Life.

Hearing non-stop about this organization is what made me come to Central Michigan. I knew I wanted to tell stories and cover sports, but what I didn't know was how much of a family I found.

My college years have been a struggle for me mentally, but CM Life was always there for me. The joy I have for this group of students goes beyond words. Here is my attempt to express to everyone how much they mean to me:

First, Masha Smahliuk. You were in my first journalism class here. It has been amazing to see us grow together throughout the years. I am so incredibly

proud of all your accomplishments and cannot wait to see all that you do at Indiana University. You inspire me as a journalist, as editor-in-chief and as a person.

Regan Foster. You saw a light in me and always pushed me to be the best journalist and person that I could be. I want you to know that I truly appreciate the impact you've had not only in my journalism career, but in my life. Thank you for always giving me my flowers.

To my sports desk. You all have no idea how proud I am of every single one of you. Everyone carries such a light in our desk, and I have loved being your editor for the last year and a half. To David Powell and Aiden Beckman, you both have grown so much throughout my time knowing you. I am so incredibly proud of everything both of you have accomplished. I cannot wait to see where you both go from here.

To Kaia Zimmerman and Ashley Birkeness, you both paved the way for me. Seeing women in leadership roles, especially ones that are considered "male-dominated", inspired me. I truly admire your work ethic and who you are as people. None of this would be possible without you. I am so happy that

I get to call you my mentors, but most importantly, I am so happy I can truly call you both friends.

To Olivia Garcia, Makayla Jarrett and Hadlee Peters, thank you for constantly supporting me and all my endeavors. You three truly changed my experience at CMU, and I am so happy to call you all my friends. You have inspired me in ways you can't imagine, and I am so happy and excited to see you all flourish.

To Kathy Simon, you truly amaze me. The year this office has had would not be possible if it weren't for you. Thank you for constantly supporting me and the rest of this office in everything we do. I am so grateful that this organization is led by someone like you.

Lastly, to the entire office staff. I am so proud of everyone. I take pride in wanting to hear about all that you are doing in and out of the office. It makes me so happy knowing that there are so many passionate and kind people working in this newsroom. I love every single one of you and thank you all for everything you do.

As I end my undergraduate time here at CMU and my position as sports editor, I am excited to begin a new chapter,



Sydney Neal | Courtesy Photo

starting my Master's in Communication and becoming the next editor-in-chief of CM Life.

Beckman: Farewell

By Aiden Beckman
Sports reporter

With my time at Central Michigan quickly coming to an end, I wanted to reflect on my experiences at the sports desk and on campus. Coming to Central Michigan University for hockey was the best decision of my life. I've made some of my best friends and some of the best people on the ice.

Even though my time on the ice has not been great, it's been about the fun on and off. From living with my teammates and seeing the growth in my own life, hockey at Central has taught me a lot about myself.

Over these three years of working, seeing the growth of the sports desk has been something to see. For me and

my writing, *Central Michigan Life* has helped me out a lot; it's more concise, and I feel like it's become easier to write different things.

A few of my favorite memories of Central Michigan were the 2026 Olympics this winter, my excitement watching the men's and women's hockey tournaments and seeing both teams capture gold medals for our country. It was one of the most exciting things I've ever watched in sports.

The best in-person game I saw was the victory that Central Michigan football captured, a win that pushed them to the threshold that gave them bowl eligibility against Buffalo in November of 2025.

Hockey has been my life for the better part of 17 years, and with the competitive side coming to an end, it

was one of the hardest things to say goodbye to.

From falling on my butt the first time I stepped on the ice to the last time I stepped off on senior night, the sport I love has given me everything and more.

My favorite goal in my career was the first goal of the season when I scored against Michigan at the famous Yost Ice Arena during my sophomore year. Hockey means a lot and hopefully I will be able to stay close to the sports I love.

Thank you, everyone. Every person who helped me with writing, everyone who helped me in sports and everyone who cared about me. Thank you to my parents and family who have loved and supported me through everything. I couldn't do this without you. You guys mean the world to me.



Aiden Beckman | Courtesy Photo

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

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FREEDOM
CLASSMATES
LAST DAY

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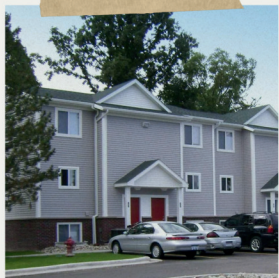
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