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Ypsilanti Township leaders raise concerns, seek answers on U-M, Los Alamos data center

AnnaBelle Favre &
Lilly Kujawski
Managing Editors

Ypsilanti Township officials and residents are raising concerns about the proposed University of Michigan and Los Alamos National Laboratory data center project for the area.

On Jan. 12, 2026, the Ypsilanti Township Board hosted a community meeting to discuss the project.

This meeting required pre-registration, and seats filled up within 12 hours. By the time of the meeting, over 300 people were on the waiting list. Because of the extensive number of requests, the meeting was professionally recorded and later posted online. The Ypsilanti Township Board plans on holding a second meeting for those who were unable to attend Jan. 12.

"The common denominator across all township boards is to do what is in the best interest of town residents ... The purpose of tonight's meeting, number one, is to speak truthfully and clearly as to what this board has gone through and this township has done to prevent the National Laboratory building and constructing two data centers in Ypsilanti," Attorney Doug Winters said during the meeting. "Second purpose: this meeting is also to set the record straight. By that, I mean the township has been going through this effort to get information [from U-M] for the last seven or eight months."

Project background

U-M has described the project as a high-performance computing facility

meant for scientific research and innovation. The university's posted webpage about the project reported that the facility will be used to aid advances in medicine, climate science, energy and national security. U-M clarified on its website that the project is not for commercial use.

The project will include two facilities at the same site, a federal facility for classified research, and a smaller academic facility for unclassified research conducted by U-M faculty, staff and students.

Some have raised concerns about Los Alamos National Laboratory's involvement in the project. LANL is one of 16 research and development laboratories of the United States Energy Department. It is responsible for the creation of the first atomic bomb.

The U-M webpage said the federal facility will not be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.

"The federal facility is for research and high-performance computing. It will focus on scientific computation to address various national challenges, including cybersecurity, nuclear and other emerging threats, biohazards, and clean energy solutions," the webpage said.

Location concerns

U-M is assessing the north side of Textile Road in Ypsilanti Township to build the facility.

"This area is zoned for light industrial and commercial use, and is characterized by wide roads, minimal residential density, and existing utility infrastructure," information published on a U-M webpage said about the project. "The surrounding corridor's



The Ypsilanti Township Board, along with attorney Doug Winters, Rep. Jimmie Wilson Jr. and Rep. Jim DeSana held an informational meeting for Ypsilanti citizens concerned about the planned data center from U-M and Los Alamos. AnnaBelle Favre / The Eastern Echo

manufacturing operations, distribution centers and open buffer zones make it well-suited for a research and technology facility."

Ypsilanti Township Board members have brought up concerns about this location. In a previous interview with *The Eastern Echo*, Township Supervisor Brenda Stumbo said that in the first Zoom meeting she was included in about the project, held November 2024, she was told that the data center project would be on 20 acres of land, create 200 jobs on site and pay \$200,000 salaries.

In June 2025, U-M regents announced their intention to purchase an additional 124.68 acres of land next to the original Textile plot. The federal facility will be 220,000 to 240,000 square feet, according to the U-M webpage. The adjacent academic facility will be about 50,000 square feet.

Stumbo said she found out from Michael Rein, director of community relations for U-M's government relations department, that the university intended to purchase more land and that the original 20 acres would be used for a substation.

Stumbo said she was concerned about the use of land for a substation and said the township planning director did not think it was appropriate for zoning. U-M is exempt from local zoning laws.

Stumbo said she went to Ohio to visit a data center site.

"When I saw the data center, it became clear that it was heavy industrial use, and that is not the appropriate location," she said.

At the township meeting, Winters explained that the American Center for Mobility, or ACM, is on a large piece of property that used to be a hydroelectric plant owned by General Motors.

The ACM currently uses less than half of the large property it sits on, Winters said. This property is zoned ideally for a data center, would have fewer environmental impacts, and would be farther away from residents, he said.

Ypsilanti offered U-M and Los Alamos this property as an alternative solution, but to no avail, Winters said.

In December 2025, *The Eastern Echo* sent a request for an interview to U-M's Public Affairs office, and the request was declined.

"Thank you for your interest in the collaboration between the University of Michigan and the Los Alamos National Laboratory," Jody Berger, a public relations representative for U-M, said in an email. "We are passing on interviews at this time."

SEE DATA CENTER, PAGE 4

1 current, 2 former EMU men's basketball players federally indicted on sports bribery charges



#2 Carlos Hart, an EMU Men's Basketball player, dribbling the ball through IU Indy players on Nov. 14, 2025 at George Gervin GameAbove Center. Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo

Lilly Kujawski
Managing Editor - News

One current and two former Eastern Michigan University men's basketball players were named as defendants in a federal indictment alleging game manipulation and point shaving.

Carlos Hart, a current EMU student-athlete and Eagles basketball player,

basketball student-athletes who left the university last year, as well as one current student-athlete," said Greg Steiner in a written statement to *The Eastern Echo*. Steiner is the senior associate athletics director for external affairs at EMU. "The alleged conduct attributed to the current student-athlete in the indictment occurred prior to his enrollment at Eastern Michigan University, while he was attending another institution. Eastern was not aware of any allegations of this nature during the recruitment process."

The current student athlete has been immediately suspended from all team activities at EMU pending the outcome of the case, Steiner said. The university has also launched its own student conduct process, too, he said.

"The conduct described in the indictment stands in direct opposition to the values and expectations of Eastern Michigan University Athletics," Steiner said.

26 people, including 20 college basketball players and six alleged fixers, were charged by federal prosecutors. The indictment alleges a transnational sports bribing conspiracy that spanned three years and involved NCAA Division I men's basketball and professional Chinese Basketball Association games, said David Metcalf,

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, at a press conference in Philadelphia, Jan. 15, 2026.

The alleged scheme originated in China in 2022 and involved Shane Hennen and Marves Fairley, two men previously indicted in October 2025 for charges involving an NBA gambling scheme, as well as former Chicago Bulls NBA player Antonio Blakeney, who previously played basketball for Louisiana State University, Metcalf said.

Prosecutors say these men brought the alleged scheme to the US, where they enlisted college alumni, sports recruiters and other leaders. Prosecutors allege that these individuals recruited college basketball players on NCAA Division I teams to fix games by bribing players \$10,000-30,000 per game to underperform when a team was favored to lose by a certain number of points, Metcalf said.

Prosecutors say involved players would attempt to lose a game by a greater number of points than expected, to fix sports betting, Metcalf said. Metcalf called it a massive sports betting scheme, with fixers allegedly wagering millions of dollars on manipulated games.

Prosecutors say the alleged scheme involved more than 39 players on at least 17 Division I teams. The indictment alleges 29 games were

fixed or attempted to be fixed during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 seasons, including two 2024 games involving EMU.

Terry, ranked No. 2 in the Mid-American Conference while playing for the Eagles, and Nelson, ranked No. 4 in the MAC while at EMU, were accused of fixing two EMU basketball games, including a Nov. 21, 2024, game played against Oakland University and a Dec. 21, 2024, game played against Wright State University, said the indictment.

Terry and Nelson are also accused of fixing games while playing for DePaul University, showed the indictment.

Hart, a redshirt senior ranked No. 2 in player statistics at EMU, arrived at the university during the 2025-26 academic year as an incoming transfer student. At EMU, Hart has started 18 games, shooting 40.8% from the field and averaging 13.1 points and 5.3 rebounds per game. Hart is accused of point-shaving a March 11, 2024, game while playing for the University of New Orleans. He is not alleged to have been involved in game fixing while playing for EMU.

"At this stage, these are just allegations," Metcalf said at the press conference. "Every defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt."

The Eastern Echo

The Eastern Echo serves the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities as an independent student-operated newspaper. Founded in 1881 as *The Normal News*, *The Eastern Echo* distributes weekly print editions on campus and throughout the surrounding Ypsilanti community during the fall and winter academic semesters. *The Eastern Echo* also publishes online year-round. Published content is subject to copyright and may not be reproduced without prior written consent of the newspaper.

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THE ECHO MISSION

The Eastern Echo informs the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities by highlighting newsworthy content in a fair, accurate and timely manner.

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CORRECTIONS

On page five of the Jan. 13, 2026 edition of *The Eastern Echo*, the name of Bradan Copeland, *Echo* photographer, was misspelled.

Where to find the newest volume of *Cellar Roots*, EMU's Fine Arts and Literary Magazine:

**Where to find *The Eastern Echo*:****Off Campus:**

- Biggby Coffee, 1510 Washtenaw Ave.
- Bridge Community Cafe, 217 W. Michigan Ave.

On Campus:

- Ford Hall
- Halle Library
- King Hall

Where to find our links:**WEATHER FORECAST**

Tuesday, Jan. 20

High: 16 | Low: 6
Mostly cloudy / Mostly cloudy*



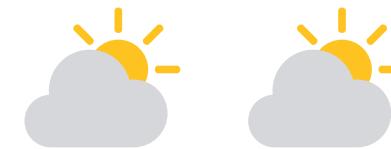
Wednesday, Jan. 21

High: 32 | Low: 15
Mostly cloudy* / Mostly cloudy



Thursday, Jan. 22

High: 20 | Low: 6
Mostly cloudy* / Mostly cloudy



Friday, Jan. 23

High: 19 | Low: 3
Mostly cloudy / Mostly cloudy



Saturday, Jan. 24

High: 13 | Low: N/A
Partly sunny



Chance of precipitation *



Source:
The National Weather Service

CALENDAR

**JAN
20**

MLK Basketball Game, Toledo Rockets vs. EMU Eagles

6:30-9:30 p.m.

George Gervin GameAbove Center

**JAN
21**

New Year, New You Yoga

6-6:45 p.m.

Rec/IM Building — Fifth floor

**JAN
22**

Walk-in Flu Shot Clinic

1:30-3:30 p.m.

Student Center Ballroom

**JAN
23**

The Beloved Ypsilanti Community Networking Event

9:30-11 a.m.

Student Center — First floor

**JAN
24**

Annual Faculty and Guest Artist Dance Concert

7-9 p.m.

Judy Sturgis Hill Building — Legacy Theater

**JAN
25**

IsshoCon 2026: The Year of Yokai

10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest — 1275 South Huron St., Ypsilanti

**JAN
26**

Drop-in Volleyball

7-10 p.m.

Rec/IM building — Third floor courts

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- King Hall

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Pierce Hall to house EMU College of Business

AnnaBelle Favre

News Reporter

This semester, Pierce Hall will undergo renovations to house Eastern Michigan University's College of Business.

"The ultimate goal is to establish Pierce Hall as a centralized, modern home for Eastern Michigan University's College of Business, bringing the college back to the heart of campus," Brittany Mobley, a senior media relations specialist at the EMU Division of Communications, told The Eastern Echo in an email. "The renovation is designed to blend Pierce Hall's historic legacy with contemporary, high-impact learning spaces that support collaboration, professional development, student success, and greater visibility for the College of Business. Long-term, the project also aims to strengthen campus integration and encourage philanthropic investment in this iconic building."

"Pierce Hall is one of EMU's most historic buildings, constructed in 1948 and named after John D. Pierce, Michigan's first superintendent of public instruction. The renovation preserves this legacy while positioning the space for future growth," Mobley said.

"Pierce Hall will be the new home for the College of Business," said Walter Kraft, EMU vice president of communications, in an article on EMUToday. "The main floor of the building will be renovated to include two computer labs, executive training center, student gathering and organization spaces, and administrative offices."

Design work for this first phase of the renovation began October 2025, and construction is scheduled to begin in January 2026. The renovated facility is expected to be completed by the start



Pierce Hall is surrounded by green fences Jan. 8, 2026, as construction on the building takes place inside to create space for Eastern Michigan University's College of Business. Lee Hammock / The Eastern Echo

of the fall 2027 semester.

Mobley explained that those renovations are considered phase one of this project, and phase two, including renovations to the upper floors and a new atrium, will follow as timing and funding allow.

College of Business

The College of Business will continue to operate in Hill Hall until phase one construction is finished, Mobley said.

"University leaders hope the project will increase excitement, visibility, and donor support for the college," Mobley said.

These new renovations will benefit business students in many ways, Mobley said, including the following:

- A centralized, easily accessible College of Business on the main

campus

- New business-specific classrooms as well as study and coworking spaces
- Enhanced academic and career advising
- Increased opportunities for collaboration, networking and professional preparation
- Elimination of the need for transportation to off-campus business facilities

"Overall, the renovation is expected to significantly enhance the student experience and sense of belonging for business students," Mobley said.

Swoop's Pantry

Swoop's Pantry, EMU's campus food pantry, is housed in Pierce Hall. Colton Ray, a graduate assistant, works at Swoop's Pantry.

"We don't know too much about the project plans, but we do not anticipate the project impacting pantry services or hours," Ray said in an email.

Swoops will be open Monday noon to 6 p.m. and Tuesday through Thursday noon to 5 p.m. during the winter 2026 semester, he added. The only change is that shoppers will need to enter and exit through the door that has the Swoop's logo on it.

In a welcome back email sent to students, the Swoop's Pantry team wrote, "EMU is renovating Pierce Hall this year. We do not anticipate this affecting Pantry hours and operations, but please be mindful of the work occurring and what zones are restricted. The main building entrance is closed, but the direct Pantry entrance & exit facing the street (College Place), across from Pease Auditorium remains open."

For more information, visit the choir's website at ypsicommchoir.org.

What's the Move?

Jan. 20 - 26

Allie Beecher

Copy Desk Chief

Looking for something to do around town this week? Check out *The Eastern Echo's* list of events happening Jan. 20 through 26.

Ypsilanti Community Choir Open Rehearsal, Jan. 22

Looking for a way to make music in the community? On Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026, the Ypsilanti Community Choir will begin rehearsals for its 2026 spring concert. Anyone who enjoys singing is welcome to join by attending this rehearsal or either of the next two on Jan. 29 and Feb. 5.

Rehearsals take place every Thursday at 7:30 p.m. in the basement of Emmanuel Lutheran Church at 201 N. River Street in Ypsilanti. Prospective members should arrive at 7:15 p.m. to register and collect music. Doors open at 7 p.m.

The Ypsilanti Community Choir is non-auditioned and open to all post-high school adults who like to sing. Members do not need to be able to read music, and no previous vocal training is required.

For more information, visit the choir's website at ypsicommchoir.org.

IsshoCon 2026: The Year of Yokai!, Jan. 23-25

Get excited, anime fans, from Jan. 23 to 25, 2026, Otaku Detroit will host IsshoCon 2026, a three-day anime convention at the Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest! Attendees can cosplay their favorite characters and connect with other fans.

To register, visit the IsshoCon website, isshocon.com. Badge prices vary. More details will be coming soon to the IsshoCon website.

The convention will last from 8 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. each day. The Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest is at 1275 S. Huron Street in Ypsilanti.

The Wildflowers at the Ypsi Alehouse, Jan. 24

In the mood for some live music? Visit the Ypsi Alehouse on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026, from 7 to 9 p.m. for a performance by The Wildflowers, a trio of women with a sound of their own. The performance is free, but tips are greatly appreciated.

The Ypsi Alehouse is at 124 Pearl St., Suite 100 in Ypsilanti.

For more information, look for The Wildflowers on Facebook or visit the Ypsi Alehouse website.

Houseplants: Tips from a Master Gardener, Jan. 25

Those hoping to find their green thumb in 2026 may want to join master gardener Carol Brodbeck at the Whittaker branch of the Ypsilanti District Library for a session about houseplants. Brodbeck will discuss which houseplants are best for which conditions and how to address common problems.

This event will take place Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. in the Whittaker Community Room. The event is free, and no registration is required.

The Whittaker branch of the YDL is at 5577 Whittaker Road. For more information, visit the YDL website.

Board Game Night at Ziggy's, Jan. 26

Need a break from the Monday grind? Visit local Ypsilanti bar Ziggy's for a board game night! This free event will take place Monday, Jan. 26, 2026, from 6:45 to 11 p.m.

Ziggy's is at 206 W. Michigan Ave. in Ypsilanti. For more information, look for Board & Brews at Ziggy's on Facebook.

For those who cannot make it to this event, Ziggy's hosts board game nights every Monday at the same time.

EMU students raise accessibility concerns

Gray Connor

Managing Editor - Operations

As the weather cools and the winter months settle in, so does the snow across Eastern Michigan University's campus.

The Disability Revolution Club is a student-led organization run by co-presidents Autumn Persinger and Willow Churchill-Torres, with a focus on offering support and a safe space to EMU students who have disabilities or are disability allies. The group also functions as a resource for students with disabilities to inform one another about potential hazards across campus, like snow that prevents mobility.

In December, the Disability Revolution Club raised concerns over the amount of snow on the ground across campus on the club's student-led Instagram page. In a short video montage, the post showcased a series of pictures from different areas of EMU where snow, ice and melted slick

covered the ground.

Alongside the video, the post also featured a caption with a satirical version of "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas," which read, "It's beginning to look a lot like ableism! Everywhere we go, take a look at the uncleared snow, glistening as it blows, with skidding wheels and slipping heels, oh no!"

Spencer Lyke, a graduate assistant studying social work at EMU and member of the Disability Revolution Club, spoke about the social post and the greater meaning behind it.

"Over the course of the semester, we [the Disability Revolution Club] had collected a lot of pictures of crazy sidewalks on campus that were either broken or unshoveled, and one of the board members suggested that we make a post about it with a holiday joke," Lyke said. "It wasn't meant to be any sort of big protest; it was more so us making a silly complaint about how terrible the winter weather is and how

inaccessible winter will typically make it for mobility aid users."

While the post was made in the holiday spirit, Lyke suggested that EMU, as well as students and staff, recognize how much the winter weather can have an effect on students who use wheelchairs or have other disabilities.

"For the walkers out there, shoveling sidewalks is more of a safety precaution to ensure they don't slip, or is primarily a convenience thing," said Lyke. "For wheelchair users, it's 'can I go down this sidewalk?'"

Liz Shawl, the interim director of the Disability Resource Center, explained at the DRC works closely with EMU's Physical Plant, which is responsible for removing the snow off the walkways across campus. The Physical Plant also identifies areas on campus where snow removal is a priority to ensure student accessibility.

While snowfall may make mobility for some students difficult, the Disability Resource Center and

Physical Plant work to ensure that certain routes used by individuals are cleared first as a priority.

"During active snowfall or worsening weather conditions, the Physical Plant makes every effort to maintain accessibility," Shawl said. "However, when heavy snowfall takes place over a short period of time, continuous clearing cannot be guaranteed."

For students in need of resources or further support throughout the winter season, the Disability Resource Center can be contacted through their physical office, located in Room 250 in the Student Center, open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The DRC can also be contacted via their email at drc@emich.edu or number at 734-487-2470.

For future events and resources, more information can be found on the Disability Revolution Club's Instagram @drclub_emich.

Civic education, media literacy laws rank last in U.S.

Ameera Salman

Special to The Echo

Editor's note: This article was written in conjunction with the Michigan Press Association's Trott Foundation Fellowship Program. Ameera Salman was selected as a fellow for the program in 2025.

Across Michigan, civics and social studies are disappearing from K-12 school curriculums, while children and young adults have more access to social media and the internet disinformation than ever before.

At the same time, efforts to expand Michigan's Freedom of Information Act remain stalled in Lansing.

Director of the Eastern Michigan University Jiu-Hwa Lo Upshur Institute for Civic Education calls it a "perfect storm" for democracy.

The public's right to know

FOIA is a fundamental tool for journalists and citizens. Most local and state offices are subject to FOIA. That means government officials must answer requests made for public records in a timely manner and without high fees.

However, in Michigan, these FOIA expectations look a little different. Public records are not available from the office of the governor and the state legislature, restricting access to the public's ability to understand some government operations.

At Bridge Michigan, a nonprofit organization covering state government policies, FOIA is a valuable resource for its reporting. Joel Kurth, Bridge's executive editor of impact, emphasized the importance of laws like FOIA that support government transparency.

"We are stridently nonpartisan and not opinionated about anything beyond government transparency and the people's right to access the basic doings of their government that they pay for," Kurth said.

Bridge's political coverage goes hand in hand with their mission to inform the public. The news organization collaborates with universities and other outlets to promote dialogue with the community, according to Kurth.

"We try to have a virtuous cycle, where the journalism informs the engagement, and the engagement informs the journalism," Kurth said.

Education marginalized

In the 21st Century, civic engagement has become inextricably linked with technology and media literacy. Brigid Beaubien, the director

of Eastern Michigan University's Jiu-Hwa Lo Upshur Institute for Civic Education, said that the definition of media literacy has evolved since the rise of social media.

As a social studies education professor, Beaubien works with her students on developing strategies for talking about and teaching civics.

"We've moved so fast in the last 25 years in this world that nobody's really stopped and thought intentionally about how this should be addressed," Beaubien said. "When I started in my career, both as a teacher and as a professor, [media literacy] wasn't even something we really had to think about. We as a society need to focus on building knowledge and critical thinking skills."

SEE FOIA LAWS, PAGE 4

Data center

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Transparency, communication concerns

In a Dec. 12, 2025 letter, U-M Interim President Grasso said, "Beginning in November 2024, and over the past year, representatives from U-M have held numerous meetings and briefings with the Township supervisor, trustees and counsel. These discussions have included project updates, environmental considerations and the Township's stated preference for the American Center for Mobility (ACM) site."

Winters pushed back on claims that numerous meetings were held between U-M and the township board.

"We have only had one face-to-face meeting, and that took place on July 24 of last year," Winters said. "That only came about because by that time we found out they had acquired 120 acres of our land. It took us until July 24 to be face-to-face. That one and only face-to-face meeting lasted about 90 minutes. The second meeting — took longer to set up the Zoom than the meeting itself."

"U-M continues to say you're not welcome to sit down and be involved in these negotiations ... if you don't have a seat at the table, you probably are on the menu," Winters said.

Stumbo said she wants to see more transparency and respect for the township from U-M.

"A lot of stress and anxiety has been put on our community," Stumbo said. "Data centers are new ... [there's] really not a lot of good information on them, right? Especially if they are large, but we really don't even know how large it's going to be [or] what their future plans are. We have no information."

"I feel really bad for our community and our residents who are so passionate and deserve answers," she said.

Winters said that after township officials made what he described as countless attempts to contact Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Ypsilanti has received no response or support from her office.

"Debbie Dingell is working with us, even though she couldn't be here tonight. We have received tremendous support from Rep. Jimmie Wilson," Winters said.

Environmental concerns

Winters raised concerns at the township meeting about the energy consumption of the project.

"This will also require the construction of a 110-200 megawatt substation ... this one substation on its face is equal to the entire current energy consumption of the township," he said.

In 2023, data centers accounted for 4.4% of all United States electricity usage, the Environmental and Energy Study Institute reported. In a previous interview with *The Echo*, Eastern Michigan University environmental science professor Chris Gellasch explained some of the environmental impacts of large-scale computing

facilities.

This massive consumption of electricity is an issue, Gellasch explained, because it makes sustainability goals to have more renewable energy and fewer fossil fuels that much more difficult to achieve.

"Even if we're adding more wind and solar, the overall amount of energy we're producing sustainably increases, but if the overall demand for electricity far surpasses that, we will still need a lot of fossil fuels," Gellasch said.

The proposed facility will not draw water from the Huron River or discharge into it, U-M reported. Cooling water will be purchased from local municipality utilities — in this case, the Ypsilanti Community Utility Authority, which will also manage sanitary discharge.

Gellasch, who is not involved in the proposed project and spoke generally about data centers, said similar facilities often use water from municipality supply to cool the facility, which can put a strain on the water supply.

"There's a large demand on water, which, if it's from a municipal system, may increase water rates, or there might be limits to the capacity that the municipality can provide," Gellasch said.

Large data centers can use up to five million gallons of water per day, the EESI reported.

Beth Gibbons, the director of the Washtenaw County Resiliency Office, told *The Echo* in a previous interview that a data center in the area could threaten the county's sustainability efforts.

"Our office passed the Resilient Washtenaw Plan to have emissions at a net zero by 2035 ... Data centers make that goal very difficult. In all these cases, our concerns are first on the energy use, but also on the water use and the impact on energy reliability and energy costs," Gibbons said.

Ben Illozer is a professor in the construction management program at EMU. His expertise is in how to incorporate sustainability into the building process. He said for large-scale data center projects, an environmental impact study should be conducted by a uninterested third party to assess the implications of a project.

"There needs to be a little more investigation," Illozer said. "Let there be thorough environmental assessment."

Illozer said everyone in the township community is a stakeholder in the project and should be aware of the benefits and disadvantages of the project.

"I think that people are right to be upset about the U-M project," Gibbons said. "People are in a really righteous position to ask U-M to explain clearly and with measurable metrics on how it is going to meet climate goals with this high-energy, high-water structure."

Financial concerns

The total investment for the project

In the Michigan Legislature, where bills to expand the state's public information law have stalled in both chambers for nearly a decade, that belief polarization is not uncommon.

Public Policy Manager at the Michigan Press Association Lisa McGraw said that despite public support for FOIA expansion, neither Democrats or Republicans have championed the public's right to know.

"Everyone, when they're running for office, says they're going to do it, and then somehow it doesn't make it," McGraw said. "I could never say that any one party has held this up. Often it is the majority that holds it up...because they all know it's going to apply to them."

McGraw said she sees that delay as damaging to public trust in the government and media.

"We are suffering a crisis in journalism from a lack of trust, and that gets exponentially bigger when you look at public officials," McGraw said.

Educating media consumers

At Delta College, Journalism Professor, Program Coordinator, and Advisor of the Delta Collegiate Crystal McMorris teaches a popular media

is \$1.25 billion, U-M reported. Los Alamos National Laboratory will contribute \$300 million, while U-M will contribute \$200 million and facilitate financing of \$630 million. In December 2024, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation approved a grant of \$100 million to support the project.

State Rep. Jimmie Wilson Jr. attended the township meeting. Wilson represents the 32nd district of Michigan and is a member of the Democratic Party. He said he is currently working on calling back the \$100 million. Wilson said the chair of the appropriations committee told Wilson that she hopes to get him a hearing on this.

State Rep. Jim DeSana also attended the township meeting. DeSana represents Michigan's 29th district and is a member of the Republican Party. DeSana voted no on tax breaks for the data centers and announced that he and other representatives are in the process of writing a bill to repeal the tax breaks that passed.

"Hyperscale data centers are out of whack on the cost-benefit analysis," DeSana said. "They don't employ people, take up huge amounts of property and take up very large amounts of energy on the grid ... the benefit is not to your residents."

Gibbons explained that the U-M and Los Alamos project is unique among data centers because the university is a tax-exempt entity, meaning it can bypass local land use regulations.

In a project like this, there should be a financial incentive for the host community, Illozer said, such as a percentage of the profit returned to benefit the township.

"The public interest should be the common ground amongst everyone, and I can't find that common ground because they're exempt from so many things," Stumbo said. "Compromise is not a dirty word."

Next steps

U-M is hosting an open house Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026, about its partnership and project with Los Alamos National Laboratory. The event will take place 5-7 p.m. at the Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti at Eagle Crest in the Roy Wilbanks Ballroom, at 1275 S. Huron St., Ypsilanti. This open house is available to the public but requires registration. The university previously held an open house on U-M's North Campus on Sept. 9, 2025, but received backlash from Ypsilanti residents for not having a local location.

Ypsilanti Township will host a second informational session at the township's civic center. The session will include a historical update on the project, a legislative update from state representatives, and a question and answer period. The meeting will take place Wednesday, Jan. 28, 6-9 p.m. at the Ypsilanti Township Civic Center, at 7200 S. Huron Drive, Ypsilanti. Registration is required and opened Jan. 19.

literacy course. She said that college students make up a big part of the shifting audience of traditional media.

"Students are tending to be more interested in trending videos with 15-second audios than they are in an in-depth investigation," McMorris said. "The appetite for that kind of news just doesn't seem to be there with the audience my students are creating for."

In the digital age and with the increased use of generative artificial intelligence, McMorris said there needs to be a greater emphasis on educating media consumers about accuracy and authenticity.

"Diverse opinions and approaches are what make our country great," McMorris said. "But when we don't even have shared facts...I do fear for the future of democracy."

Diminishing trust in media and government goes hand-in-hand with the lack of civic education students of all levels receive, according to Beaubien.

"I think most public servants go in with the best intentions and I think the two-party system has set up a structure that rewards polarization," Beaubien said. "At the same time, we've reduced social studies in the classroom. It's like a perfect storm."

Opinion

The WellNest Watch

Why local elections matter for our schools, communities and public health



Nathaniel King

Contributor

Editor's note: In WellNest Watch, master's degree candidates in EMU's College of Health of Human Services explore news, research and standard practices in the field of health and wellness.

Presidential elections gain a lot of attention in the news cycle. While voting at all levels is important in a democracy, many forget how important it is to vote in their local elections.

Local elections have the lowest turnout rates, compared to elections such as presidential and special elections. Local elections have turnout rates as low as 15-27%, according to the National Civic League. With a pool of voters that small, we leave out a large majority of citizens.

Why is this so important? Let's consider the impact that local elections can have on a community. Local elections have ballot initiatives, millages and proposals that impact school funding, school board officials, emergency services budgets, city zoning approval for buildings, affordable housing policies, local park improvements and more. Our everyday built environment depends on us using our voices in local elections.

The goal isn't to shame people for not voting but to look at the potential barriers in voting in local elections. I am currently a student here at Eastern Michigan University and have faced challenges when voting in local elections myself.

Voting as a college student in local elections comes with its own sets of unique challenges. The Fair Elections Center identifies the main barriers that college students face when voting in local elections as a lack of knowledge about local elections, the location of the polling site, the different voting policies for students living at campuses out of state, knowing their polling location, knowledge about local officials up for elections and ID requirements. College students are often further away from home, and may face issues receiving mail in ballots, or their state might not provide the option for mail-in ballots.

Other sources of people not voting can be the thought that one voice doesn't make that large of a difference. A nonprofit voting organization named NonprofitVote states that "local elections are often shaped by tight knit-groups, individuals that have been running for a long time, as well as have irregular polling dates and times." This makes it harder to show up and can lead a person to feel isolated, uninformed and powerless. While you may feel this

way, and there have been times I have as well, in smaller elections your voice holds more power. Your vote might be cast in a group of 100 people compared to millions at the national level. It's important to challenge these thoughts and show up for the community that shapes you, and to create a more sustainable future.

As a student, you may be thinking, I don't plan on going back home or staying in the area my school is in. These elections can impact local transportation services, rent prices, parking around campuses, as well as the planning of what businesses border campuses and local areas. You might be in the area for only a few years, but these decisions can affect generations of students. Local elections also impact factors that affect the health of the community. In November, Ypsilanti elections proposed a millage that would offer Ypsilanti Schools money for technical and career programs. While your voting address may not be linked to the city you attend school in, a lot of cities have had proposals for schools and fire departments.

Voting may not have always been viewed as a health behavior, but as of recently, it has become more evident that voting not only has a large impact on local infrastructure but also on healthcare and the policies that affect everyone. The Health and Democracy Index looks at a variety of ways that voting affects our health. States with less restrictive voting laws, as well as higher rates of voter turnout, have overall better health.

Voting is also a behavior that has been historically attacked across marginalized communities. For example, those who are incarcerated and people who cannot access polling locations. Local elections shape the community and have the ability to bring the community together; this connection is pivotal to one's health. This action allows for people involved to form social connections and feel empowered in their communities. While these are just a few examples of how voting impacts your health, I hope this encourages a deeper conversation and empowers students to become more familiar with local elections.

Contributors to the WellNest Watch health column: Kegan Tulloch and Ebrima Jobarteh, graduate assistants in the Office of Health Promotions; and Shafaat Ali Choyon and Nathaniel King, graduate hall directors in the Department of Residential Life. All four are master's degree candidates in the Public Health Program from the School of Public Health Promotion and Human Performance at Eastern Michigan University.



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Eagles fall short in offensive battle against Bowling Green



EMU men's basketball player, #3 Mehki Ellison, on Nov. 21, 2025, at George Gervin GameAbove Center. Ellison helped lead the Eagles by shooting 8-of-11 and scoring four assists on Jan. 17, 2026. Braden Copeland / The Eastern Echo

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

Despite a pair of 20-point performances and a late-game surge, the Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team dropped a hard-fought road contest to the Bowling Green Falcons, 85-79, on Saturday, Jan. 17. The loss moves the Eagles to a 9-10 overall record and a 3-4 mark in Mid-American Conference play.

Offensive firepower and efficient shooting

The game was a display of high-level efficiency from both sides, as both teams effectively dismantled the opposing defenses for much of the afternoon. Eastern Michigan finished the afternoon shooting 50.8% from the field going 30 for 59 and an impressive 85.7% from the free-throw line. However, they were unable to match the scorching outside shooting of the

Falcons, who connected on 69.2% of their attempts from beyond the arc going 9 for 13.

Junior guard Braelon Green and sophomore Mehki Ellison led the charge for the Eagles, with both players providing 22 points. Green was a model of efficiency, shooting a blistering 9-of-11 from the floor, including two critical triples. Ellison, providing a massive spark off the bench, matched that total by also shooting 8-of-11 and leading the team with four assists.

Inside, Mohammad Habhab anchored the Eagles' effort with a double-double, recording 15 points and a team-high 12 rebounds. Habhab was particularly active on the glass, securing 10 defensive rebounds to limit Bowling Green's second-chance opportunities. Addison Patterson also reached double figures, contributing 10 points and three assists in 36 minutes of action.

The Falcons' perimeter

dominance

Despite Eastern Michigan's offensive efficiency, they were unable to match the Falcons' scorching outside shooting. Bowling Green finished the afternoon connecting on a staggering 69.2% of their attempts from beyond the arc going 9 for 13. The Falcons were particularly lethal in the first half, where they hit 6-of-7 three-point attempts, setting a pace the Eagles struggled to mirror.

Bowling Green's Mayar Wol proved to be the difference-maker, leading all scorers with 25 points on 8-of-15 shooting, including five three-pointers. He was supported by Javontae Campbell, who added 18 points and five assists, and Troy Glover II, who recorded a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds while anchoring the defense with four blocks.

Game flow: A tale of two halves

The Falcons established control

early, utilizing their hot shooting to head into the locker room with a 46-36 lead at halftime. Bowling Green's offensive rhythm allowed them to lead for 77% of the contest, eventually pushing their advantage to as large as 21 points in the second half.

However, the Eagles refused to go quietly. Eastern Michigan outscored the Falcons 43-39 in the second period, fueled by a field goal percentage that jumped to 53.3% in the final 20 minutes. The Eagles found significant success in the interior, matching the Falcons with 40 points in the paint and utilizing their depth to outscore Bowling Green's bench 30-15. Despite several late buckets from Ellison and Green, the double-digit deficit established by the Falcons' early three-point barrage proved too much to fully erase.

Stat comparison

The final box score reflected how evenly matched these teams were outside of the three-point line. Bowling Green held a narrow 30-29 rebounding edge, while the Eagles forced 10 turnovers and converted those into 10 points. The game featured three ties and two lead changes, but the Falcons' ability to maintain their lead through consistent transition play—earning 17 fast-break points—kept the Eagles at arm's length.

MAC standings and looking ahead

As a result, the Eagles currently sit in eighth place in the Mid-American Conference standings, four games behind league leader Miami University Ohio. Bowling Green moves slightly ahead into a tie for sixth place with Buffalo.

The Eagles will return to the Gervin GameAbove Center on Saturday, Jan. 24, looking to defend their 6-2 home record against Kent State. The 3:30 p.m. tip-off will feature "Dribble, Dogs, & Greek Life" as part of the game-day festivities. Following the home stand, the Eagles will hit the road again to face Central Michigan on Tuesday, Jan. 27.

Eagle Sports Tips & Tales: Jan. 20 - 26

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

Women's basketball

What's on: The Eagles are in the heat of Mid-American Conference play, coming off a road swing that included matchups at Miami University and Central Michigan University. They will host the University of Toledo at the George Gervin GameAbove Center on Jan. 20, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. Keep an eye on Brooklyn Thrash, who recently set a career-high with 22 points.

How to watch: Stream live via ESPN+ or Eagle All-Access.

The tales: In the women's basketball rivalry against Toledo, the Eagles hold an overall record of 35 wins and 59 losses and an away record of 12-32. Their last matchup on Feb. 1, 2025, ended in a 49-77 home loss, so tune in as the Eagles look to rewrite the narrative.

Track and field

What's on: The Eagles men's and women's track teams return to Ypsilanti to host their only home meet of the 2025-26 season, the third annual Bob Parks Memorial Meet, on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026. The competition will be held at Bowen Field House. The Eagles are expected to host a variety of collegiate teams, including regional and conference opponents such as Central Michigan, Bowling Green State University, Ball State University, the University of Detroit Mercy and Oakland University.

How to watch: Fans can follow the Eagles in action through streaming coverage on Eagle All-Access or ESPN+. Additionally, live results and a full list of competing teams are typically available on Athletic.net.

The tales: The Bob Parks Memorial serves as a rare home-field advantage for the Green and White during a grueling 28-meet schedule spanning 10 states. As the only home meet of the year, it offers a crucial environment for the Eagles to build momentum before heading back on the road for split-squad competitions at the University of Notre Dame and Saginaw Valley State University the following weekend.

Swimming and diving

What's on: The Eagles are returning home to host Ball State at the Jones Natatorium in Ypsilanti, Michigan, on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026, at 1 p.m.

How to watch: Fans who cannot attend the meet in person can catch the action via Eagle All-Access or ESPN+.

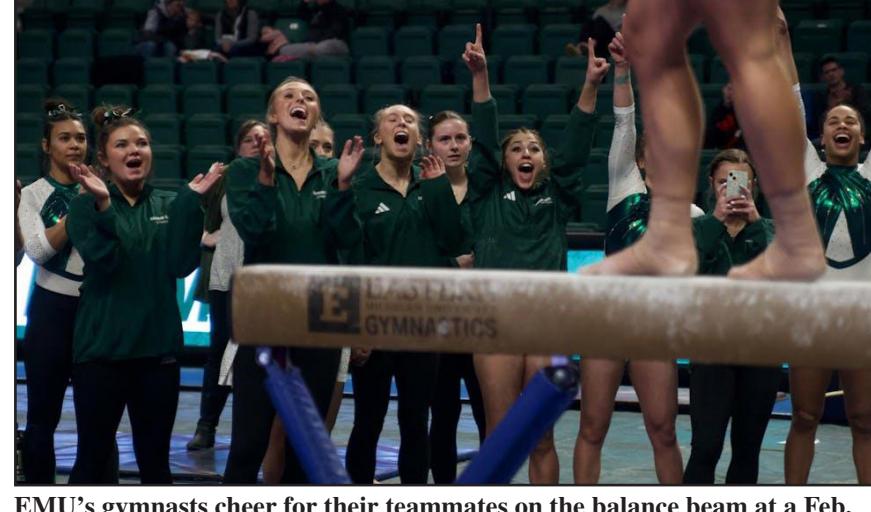
The tales: Historically, the Eagles have found significant success against Ball State, holding a 23-15-1 overall record and a strong 14-5 home record. Despite this, the Eagles are looking to avenge a 140-160 loss from their most recent encounter on Nov. 4, 2023.

Women's tennis

What's on: The Eagles are heading on the road for a pair of nonconference matchups, starting with a trip to Youngstown, Ohio, to face Youngstown State University on Friday, Jan. 23, 2026, at 11 a.m. They will then continue to Loretto, Pennsylvania, to take on Saint Francis University on Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026.

How to watch: Fans can catch the Eagles in action by streaming live via Eagle All-Access or ESPN+.

The tales: Historically, the Eagles have found significant success against Youngstown State, holding a 5-2 overall record and a perfect 4-0 home record. Notably, the Eagles won their most recent encounter on Feb. 18, 2023, by the same score. Against Saint Francis University, the Eagles remain undefeated with a 1-0 record, having earned a 5-2 road win in their only meeting on Feb. 29, 2020.



EMU's gymnasts cheer for their teammates on the balance beam at a Feb. 17, 2024 meet at the George Gervin GameAbove Center.

Jay Manea / The Eastern Echo

Brockport's Kyra Hockman stole the show individually on beam, posting a meet-high 9.875 to take the title. NIU struggled on the beam, scoring only 47.500, which allowed Eastern to build a significant cushion.

Rotation four: Finishing with Blanche

The meet concluded on the floor, appropriately themed after the flamboyant Blanche. Entering the final rotation, the Eagles needed a steady performance to hold off the Huskies. Kyrie Lowe capped her phenomenal night by tying for first place on floor with a 9.800, sharing the title with NIU's Dorothy White and Alana Wallace and Brockport's Kyra Hockman. Savanna Dunwoody and Priya Karle both delivered energetic routines to earn scores of 9.725, while Macy Nihart added a 9.650. The Eagles' floor total of 48.500 was enough to secure the meet victory.

NIU finished strong on the floor with a 48.775, the highest event total of the day, but it was not enough to overcome Eastern's lead in the overall standings.

A golden victory

The victory was a testament to the depth of the Eagles' roster, particularly the veteran presence of Kyrie Lowe, who secured the All-Around title with a 38.825. This meet was historically significant as it marked the final regular-season MAC meeting between EMU and NIU before the Huskies depart for the Mountain West Conference. With "Golden Girls" stickers distributed and a win in the books, the Eagles now look toward their next challenge: the Air Force Quad on Jan. 23, 2026, where they will face Kent State University, Boise State University and Air Force Academy. The 2026 season is officially in full swing, and if this home opener is any indication, the Eagles are ready to defend their status in the MAC.

Rotation one: Vaulting with Dorothy

The Eagles kicked off their home opener on the vault, an event themed after the "Golden Girls" character Dorothy. Eastern Michigan displayed remarkable consistency, finishing the rotation with a team total of 48.700.

The Eagles made an immediate impact, as Savanna Dunwoody, Kendall Landry and Georgie Slack all stuck their landings to earn matching scores of 9.775. These three gymnasts tied for third place overall on the event, providing a sturdy foundation for the Eagles' early lead. Gwendelyn Cantu followed closely with a 9.700, while

Rotation three: Balancing with Sophia

The focus shifted to the balance beam for the third rotation, characterized by the sharp wit of Sophia. Katin Childress led the charge for the Eagles, recording a season-best 9.800 to finish second overall in the event. Analiah Solorio was right on her heels, continuing her strong sophomore campaign with a 9.775. Kyrie Lowe remained consistent under pressure, adding a 9.750, while Keeley Kohler contributed a 9.700. The Eagles finished the beam rotation with a 48.650, their second-highest event total of the afternoon. However,

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5 secondhand stores within 5 miles of campus to check out this semester

Jada Hauser
Arts Editor

The new year inspires change in many people, including students at Eastern Michigan University. For some, that may mean a wardrobe makeover, but an overhaul of that nature can be costly.

Thankfully, for those looking for a change in personal style on a budget, five secondhand stores within 5 miles of campus are available to check out this semester.

The Thrift Depot

Located at 19 E. Cross St. in Depot Town, The Thrift Depot is 0.6 miles from campus, making it about a 13-minute walk. Its goals are to keep prices affordable for anyone who walks through the store and to help those experiencing homelessness.

Its hours are Tuesdays noon to 7 p.m., Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Fridays 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The store offers a wide variety of affordable secondhand items, such as clothing, accessories and home decor.

Find and Shine Vintage

Located at 6 N. Huron St., Find and Shine Vintage is 0.7 miles away from campus. Its hours are Thursday through Sunday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Find and Shine Vintage sells a variety of antiques, vintage and retro items.

Ypsilanti Thrift Shop

Located at 14 S. Washington St., Ypsilanti Thrift Shop is 0.7 miles away from campus, approximately a 17-minute walk. Its hours are Mondays and Fridays 1 to 4 p.m., Tuesdays through Thursdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturdays 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Ypsilanti Thrift Shop is a nonprofit secondhand shop that supports charities in the local area, including Hope Clinic, Dawn Farm and Food Gatherers. The store sells clothing, accessories, books, toys and more. Ypsilanti Thrift Shop is currently offering 50% off all red dot vintage items and buy-one-get-one deals on women's tops, bottoms and bras now through Jan. 24, 2026.

Value World

Located at 1410 Michigan Ave., Value World is 2.1 miles away from campus. The store is six minutes away by car or 26 minutes away by public transit. Value World's hours are Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sundays noon to 6 p.m. The store offers affordable clothing, accessories, home goods and more. Now through February 2026, it is offering "Thrift Bingo," where shoppers can play bingo by shopping in store to earn deals. Value World also has a rewards program in addition to running weekly sales. For more information, see its website.



Find secondhand goods for sale within 5 miles of Eastern Michigan University's campus to update your personal style on a budget. *Jada Hauser / The Eastern Echo*

Nu2U Again - Ypsilanti

Located at 3140 Carpenter Road, Nu2U Again is 3 miles from campus. It is about eight minutes away by car or 24 minutes away by bus. Its hours are Monday through Friday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday noon to 5 p.m. Nu2U Again is a nonprofit store with a mission to provide employment to those with disabilities. It offers a varied selection of secondhand items,

including a boutique section with high-end, quality goods. Check the store's Facebook page to stay updated on any discounts and sales the store is having.

Honorable Mention: Swoop's Pantry

Swoop's Pantry is on Eastern Michigan University's campus on the ground floor of Pierce Hall. Its current hours of operation are Mondays

noon to 6 p.m. and Tuesdays through Thursdays noon to 5 p.m. Swoop's hours vary by semester, so be sure to check out its website for the most up-to-date schedule. While Swoop's is primarily a place for students and faculty to shop for grocery items at no cost, it also offers many non-food items such as clothing, crafting materials, books and school supplies.

The Echo Q&A student discusses life changes and the stage



EMU graduate student Adam Weisman addresses students at Eastern Michigan University. *Courtesy of Adam Weisman*

Benni Klenczar
Contributor

Editor's note: The Eastern Echo staff meets regularly with interesting people on and off campus. Engage in those conversations with us through our Q&A reports.

Eastern Michigan University student Adam Weisman has lived in multiple places in the U.S., including Florida, Georgia and Ohio. Weisman moved to Michigan from Atlanta, right before starting EMU classes. He is a graduate student studying theater for young audiences, even though that wasn't always his academic goal. His academic career took an unexpected turn before he came to Eastern Michigan University, but now he is on track to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree in applied drama and theater for the young. Weisman said he'll be seeking jobs in academia and higher education when he finishes his master's degree at EMU.

Q: Where are you from originally?

A: I was born in Covington, Kentucky. And then my grandpa on my mother's side was diagnosed with cancer, so my parents moved down

to Clearwater, Florida, to take care of him. After he passed away, we went to the other side of Florida, to Fort Lauderdale.

Q: Eastern's theater department hosts a drama day. Are you involved?

A: Drama day is when students from high schools in the area, and some middle schools for the first time, come to Eastern to take some workshops, hour-long, theater workshops, in three sessions. They got to see a special matinee of "Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief the Musical," just for them. So, I taught three workshops, all about stage directing.

Q: What kind of teacher do you hope to become in the future?

A: That's a great question. I'm in this very exciting part of my life where I'm finishing my degree this winter. I will have a terminal degree in theater for young audiences, and my hope in life is to continue teaching college and continue in higher education. Not the best time to be looking for jobs in that field; so, concrete plans, unfortunately, not yet. But if everything goes according to my hopes and wishes, I

will still be teaching college in the next couple of years. Hopefully, theater, communication, that realm.

Q: Did you know that you were always going to be a graduate student or was that new?

A: No, and I really expected to be doing theater after college in terms of further education. I was actually planning on being a dentist. I was pre-dental in college, and I took all my pre-dental coursework. That was completely separate from majors and minors in my university. It was just like a series of courses I did to be ready for dental school. But I was always a theater studies major first and then I had a second course of study in sustainability sciences, which was through the anthropology department. But my initial plan was to become a dentist. I ended up taking the dental admission tests, and my parents really encouraged me to go down that path. I was more interested in theater because it's what I enjoy.

Q: What kinds of activities did you do in theater?

A: Last year here at Eastern, I was in the Theatre for the Young tour. The play was called "The Girl was Called a Cactus," and we went to a bunch of elementary schools and performed.

I'm part of the Spinning Dot repertory company, which also performs in the community. ... I play a narrator called Finnegan Krokermeyer in a play called "This Girl Laughs." I am going to be in a new play soon, and it's a devised work called "The Little French Hen," based on the folk tale. I will be in that as a mime-clown character, which is very exciting. I do still perform, not as often as I did when I was an undergraduate student. I was pretty much always in at least two shows at once in college.

Q: Has there been anyone who inspired you to teach?

A: Yes. When I was in eighth grade, my history teacher, Mr. Arnold, was just so happy and excited about sharing history with us, like it were stories. I didn't feel like I was getting lectured every single day; it was more interactive, and more visceral. And his lectures, to me, felt like theater, looking back at what it was. I wasn't doing theater yet, but his lectures were so lively, and so joyful, where

I could just learn about history in a really exciting way. And then, more recently, when I was in college, I had a professor, Dr. Michael Evenden, who is just the smartest man I've ever met, and every day I strive to be as caring and as passionate of a professor as him. His lectures are more of a lecture-style, but they were just groundbreaking and would change people's world views when they would take his classes.

Q: Do you have any tips for people attempting to earn their master's in a teaching program while juggling other things in their lives, such as family, extracurricular activities and personal care?

A: I will say that 30% of a master's degree would be coursework. What's far more important than your coursework, and obviously don't neglect your coursework, is building professional connections, getting involved in the community and the institution. Making connections with not only professors, but also the undergrads, and meeting as many people as you can. I really encourage people to fully immerse themselves in the school culture, get as involved as you can.

If it's more socially, definitely make connections with the professors at the institution. At the end of the day, because you're a graduate student, the professors are closer to being your peers than they are your mentors. You're going to graduate with your degree, and then you're going to be peers. You're going to be co-workers. So, definitely make the right connections. Try the teacher's assisting classes if you're interested. ... If you're a STEM person, go work in a lab; make connections with people and the STEM area because then, those are the people who will help you find further research opportunities.

Q: Were there any major obstacles that you have had to overcome in your life? What did those obstacles teach you?

A: I was bullied a lot when I was younger, primarily for my small stature; and I think that's also helped shape the person I am in terms of empathy, trying to befriend everybody and not making judgments about people based on their identity or things they can't change. My chronic illness, I think, has

presented a whole lot of challenges that I've been able to overcome in terms of just versatility and resilience. It was very hard for me during the pandemic to do much of anything, because I couldn't leave my house, because I was on drugs that left me severely immunocompromised. And, I was just not feeling well; it was hard to eat, hard to sleep. I think it was a lesson that I still take with me now, even when I have hard days, and even if I have Crohn's flare-ups, I know that it will get better. My mom would always say, 'this, too, shall pass.' So, I think through that resilience, I've definitely gotten better at, especially as I've been navigating this life with a chronic illness.

Q: Do you mind elaborating on your Chron's Disease?

A: My sophomore year of college, I was having these inexplicable, terrible, terrible, stomach pains. I did not know what it was, it was so random. I would wake up in the middle of the night, at three in the morning in excruciating pain. And then I would be in excruciating pain all day until noon, and it was exactly noon, the pain would go away. And I would be able to live a normal life from noon until I went to bed, and then I'd wake up at three in the morning, and the cycle would start over again. It was life-altering. I would be at all of my rehearsals, because in the evenings, I was fine. I would be able to do most of the things I'd be doing, but I would not be able to show up to any of my morning classes.

When I went to the hospital a couple of times, the Emory hospital system told me to be less stressed, and to change my diet. Then, I went on a very bland diet; I would eat the same things every day at the same time, and nothing helped. Thankfully, medicine is magic, and I was able to go back to school the following semester. I only withdrew from one semester, but I was so ahead in credits and classes that I was able to graduate on time. So, it didn't really affect me academically, aside from missing a few opportunities here or there.

Editor's note: Writer Benni Klenczar was a student in the news reporting and writing class at Eastern Michigan University during the fall 2025 semester.

Read the full interview on easternecho.com.



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Something About a Freshie #6 | Isaiah Sanders



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No. 4 Mohammad Habhab of the Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team dunks the ball for two points in the game against Northern Illinois University on Jan. 13, in the George Gervin GameCenter. Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo

EMU slam dunks into new semester



No. 10 Jon Sanders II of Eastern Michigan University's men's basketball team, looking for a pass in the game against Northern Illinois University on Jan. 13, in the George Gervin GameCenter. Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo



A view from the corner of the EMU Student Center ballroom where the 2026 WinterFest event was held on Thursday, Jan. 15. Kaleb Stanley / The Eastern Echo



Laleh Walker (left) and Zach Yourman from the Digital Summer Clinic program at WinterFest in the EMU Student Center on Thursday, Jan. 15. Kaleb Stanley / The Eastern Echo



From left: Amanda Curry, Halie Schmidlin, and Katelyn Fivecoate from the Music Therapy Student Association advertise their club at the 2026 WinterFest on Thursday, Jan. 15. Kaleb Stanley / The Eastern Echo



EMU students and faculty staffing the Honors College Pancake Breakfast on Friday, Jan. 16. Owen Cardenas / The Eastern Echo



Students together at a coloring table at the Honors College Pancake Breakfast in room 107 of the Honors College on Friday, Jan. 16. Owen Cardenas / The Eastern Echo

