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HIGHER EDUCATION

Are Michigan’s private colleges doomed to close?



Illustration by Andrea Levy, Advance Local

Half of the post-secondary career and higher education colleges that have ever closed in Michigan did so within the past decade.

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When it comes to the future of education, who knows what could happen? Experts say it’s hard to predict what Michigan colleges could close or merge with another institution. There are a lot of factors affecting the financial health of a private college or university — let alone circumstances that prompt institutions to shutter for good. But on the heels of the announcement that Siena Heights University in Adrian will close at the end of the 2025-26 academic year, a more complex discussion about those circumstances has emerged. Is it just net tuition revenue and falling enrollment versus rising costs, or something else? And what kind of college is most likely to close its doors? There are more than 90 colleges and universities in Michigan. Close to two dozen post-secondary institutions — mostly private entities, but one public community col-

lege — have closed in the state over the past several decades. Of those, half shuttered in the past 10 years. **PROFIT AND LOSS** Rachel Burns, a senior policy analyst with the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, which concluded a multi-year look at the impact of college closures on student outcomes in 2023, said a bulk of closures came in the 2010s amid higher scrutiny and more regulations on for-profit institutions. In Michigan, those included DeVry University in Southfield in 2015, the Art Institute of Michigan in Novi in 2019, and the International Academy of Design and Technology in Troy and four ITT Technical Institute campuses in 2016. The nonprofit institutions that more recently closed were Robert B. Miller College and the Michigan Jewish Institute in 2016, Marygrove College in 2019, and Finlandia University in Hancock in 2023. Concordia University-Ann Arbor, meanwhile, has taken steps to shutter most of its presence, ending athletics and undergraduate programs this year. All that, Burns said, makes sense as the nonprofit college sector becomes more affected. By mid-2024, roughly one college a week on average nationwide closed up shop, according to her association. The previous year, it had been two a month.

EXTENDING THE INEVITABLE? Federal pandemic-related subsidies may have staved off some closures, Burns said. “We’re sort of in this in-between moment where institutions, they’ve been OK for the past couple of years. Their enrollment is kind of stabilizing post-COVID,” she said. “But we’re just about to get to — and it sounds really dramatic — the enrollment cliff. And so, I think we’ve been anticipating essentially since 2020 that this massive amount of closures was going to happen, and it just keeps getting pushed down the road.” Sooner or later, experts fear the challenges colleges face may catch up. For the past decade, Forbes has annually examined the numbers at private colleges with at least 500 students, with its College Financial Grades Ranking, using available data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Its 2025 analysis highlights a reality for already enrollment-weary college administrators amid the growing scourge on higher education under the Trump administration. Of 24 Michigan institutions, schools such as Hillsdale and Kalamazoo colleges earn high marks, but nine schools earned C-range grades and five schools were given D’s. **SEE PRIVATE COLLEGES, A3**

MICHIGAN POLITICS

House GOP budget targets ‘waste, fraud and abuse’

The plan eliminates 4,300 nonexistent employees and redirects \$5 billion to roads, education and public safety priorities.

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LANSING — Michigan House Republicans have unveiled and passed their \$54.6 billion budget proposal that slashes millions of dollars from most state departments and agencies and cuts thousands of government jobs. The government spending plan passed by a 59-45 vote Tuesday. Combined with their \$21.9 billion education budget, the House GOP’s proposed \$78.5 billion spending plan for 2026 is about \$6 billion less than what Senate Democrats have put forward. All House Republicans voted for the plan, and all House Democrats except for state Rep. Karen Whitsett, D-Detroit, opposed the plan. Under the Republican spending plan, only the Department of Transportation, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Executive Office, Legislature and Office of the Auditor General would see increased funding. Other departments — such Health and Human Services, state police and Environment, Great Lakes and Energy — would see tens of millions of dollars or more slashed from their current funding levels. House Speaker Matt Hall, R-Richland Township, said the budget is the product of finding and cutting “\$5 billion in waste, fraud and abuse” in government operations “and redirected to priorities that people care about, like roads, public safety and education.” Some cuts highlighted by Hall include eliminating 4,300 nonexistent “ghost employees” on the payrolls, a state fund to **SEE MICHIGAN POLITICS, A5**



House Speaker Matt Hall, R-Richland Township, says the budget passed by his chamber redirects state spending to Michiganders’ current priorities. *MLive.com files*



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