

## CMU 2010 FY08 Annual Report

Project Title: CMU / Flint Partnership

Project Leader: Patricia Benson

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Refer to your *Outcome Evaluation Worksheet* to complete the information below. Insert additional rows if needed. Rows will automatically expand as you type. You are welcome to attach additional documents to supplement – but **not** substitute for - the information provided below.

	Outcome/Milestone	Status (Complete, in Progress, or Not started)	Date Measured	What are the next steps to achieving this outcome?
1	2007 CMU Summer Academy	Complete	June 2007	For one week, CMU mentors and project staff met daily with students in Flint to participate in ACT preparation and team building. Students, staff and mentors spent the weekend at Camp Copneconic for a cultural experience. Students then spent a week on campus with mentors in Campbell Hall. The mornings included two hours of writing instruction taught by Eng. Prof Diana Luehm. Afternoons and evenings included various academic and team building activities on campus and throughout the community.
2	CMU & You Day	Complete	September 8, 2007	Mentors and project staff hosted 2010 students for CMU & You Day. Students met faculty in the morning, ate lunch in the residence halls, and spent time with mentors in the afternoon. The group attended a CMU football game in the evening.
3	ACT Dinner	Complete	October 27, 2007	CMU mentors and project staff met 2010 students in Flint for dinner and final ACT preparations prior to re-taking the ACT on Sat. 10/27/07. Discussion following dinner served as practical reminders for test taking strategies as well as personal encouragement for students.

<b>4</b>	Mentor Training	In Progress	November 8, 2007	CMU student mentors continue to receive training in the area of communication skills and the identity of mentors. Next steps include scheduling dates for training and preparing training topics.
<b>5</b>	Bi-monthly Dinners	In Progress	December 6, 2007	CMU mentors and project staff met 2010 students in Flint to celebrate their progress, answer questions, and continue to encourage students in their college application process. Next steps include scheduling a welcome dinner for 2010 students who are attending CMU in August. At that time we will set the schedule for future dinners based on student availability.
<b>6</b>	Campus Visit	Complete	February 20, 2007	CMU mentors and project staff hosted 2010 students for an evening on campus. Students attended the Nikki Giovanni speaking engagement and spent the night at the SAC. In the morning students toured campus and learned about the ACE program.
<b>7</b>	Matriculation of Flint Students	In Progress	June - August, 2008	Some 2010 students have already arrived at CMU as part of the ACE program. Others will begin in Fall, 2008.
<b>8</b>	Identify and train faculty members	In Progress	Summer, 2008	2010 project staff members are in the process of meeting with identified faculty members. Once students arrive in August 2008, specific academic needs will be identified and matched with faculty members.
<b>9</b>	Faculty mentoring	Not started	August, 2008	Will begin in August 2008. An advisory meeting will be held in September to coordinate tutoring services with those of the McNair, Athletics, and Minority Student Services.

What are your plans for sustaining support for your project beyond the CMU 2010 funding period?

A Title IIA grant was submitted for training teachers to better support Flint students' achievement in math.

How can the ISPC assist you with those plans?

Continue to keep the Center for Excellence in Education informed of other grant opportunities for continuing this work.

\*Please also see attached report, which was completed by outside evaluators Drs. Dick Corbett & Bruce Wilson.

## **CMU 2010 Report July 2008**

Michigan Schools in the Middle (MSIM), in partnership with its parent institution, Central Michigan University (CMU), has been working with seniors in the four Flint City School District high schools to recruit highly able students of color to attend CMU and more generally to enhance their prospects for college admission. During the past year MSIM staff members have organized two, week-long information and skill-building sessions – one in Flint and one on the CMU campus – related to the “ins and outs” of the college application and admission process, have met regularly with the students to discuss particular concerns they might have, and kept in touch via phone and email to cheerlead the students’ efforts to get into the colleges of their choice.

As a follow-up to interviews conducted last summer with nearly all of the CMU 2010 participants, evaluators designed a survey to use in June 08 that addressed key influences on the students’ eventual college decisions in general and, more specifically, the contribution of their CMU 2010 experiences to those decisions. Students who took the survey were asked to volunteer for brief interviews that would embellish and clarify some of the survey responses.

The goal was to survey as many participants as possible, recognizing that June of their graduation year was a busy time and that it might be difficult, therefore, to track many of them down. Indeed, the challenges were significant. The primary strategy was to hold a celebratory dinner to honor all of the seniors and to use the captive audience as the respondent pool for the survey (no survey – no dinner ticket!). The program staff did heavy recruitment and invested in a number of prizes to enhance attendance prospects. Despite that effort, eleven of the 40 attended and all 11 completed the survey. To increase the respondent pool, CMU staff also contacted all of those who did not attend the dinner and offered a small gift certificate as an incentive to complete an online version of the survey. This increased the respondent pool to a total of 17. The 11 dinner attendees also agreed to do the telephone interviews. Eventually four of these took the time to respond to multiple contact attempts. They offered additional insights into the survey results as well as their more general impressions about the value of their participation in the CMU 2010 Program.

This report begins with a description of the survey respondents’ high school performance and a summary of their college admission and financial aid-seeking experiences. Then the report outlines the important influences on the college decision process and more specifically details the role that various aspects of the CMU 2010 program played. The report concludes with students’ own words about the value of the program.

## High School Performance

CMU participants (n=40) were selected because of their academic potential and, by their own admission, were not characteristic of the overall group of urban peers they went through school with. One might suspect that the 17 survey respondents were even more unique. After all, the more successful might be more inclined to show up to a dinner to celebrate their accomplishments. However, a comparison of this smaller group to the larger cohort of participants shows that the two groups were remarkably similar, as Table 1 summarizes.

**Table 1: Overall Participants and Survey Sample Characteristics**

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Participants (n=40)</b>	<b>Survey Sample (n=17)</b>
Gender (% Female)	78%	71%
GPA	3.31	3.47
ACT	17.3	20.2
School – Central	49%	59%
School – Northern	32%	24%
School – Northwestern	7%	6%
School – Southwestern	12%	12%

The averages for gender, grades, test scores, and schools attended are not far apart for the two groups. Both GPAs and ACTs are a little higher in the survey sample, but those numbers were collected at different times and would reflect expected increases as the impending time to present oneself on a college application loomed larger. The general impression we take from these numbers is that the two groups are marked more by their similarities than their differences. While this is not a definitive test that would allow generalizations from the survey sample responses to the larger participant group, it does give us some confidence that they are not grossly discrepant.

The survey also asked for additional high school performance data. Survey respondents took an average of 1.47 AP courses and nearly 40 percent took none. Just 22 percent of those who enrolled in AP classes actually took the exams associated with the course and none reported a score of three or higher – typically the score that many colleges use as a benchmark for granting college credits or placement status in higher level college courses.

All of the students responding to the survey took the ACT exam. All but two of them did so more than once, and just over half endured three or more administrations. The goal of taking multiple tests, of course, was to improve the result and thus enhance college entrance prospects. Recognizing the importance of the test as a gate-keeper, the CMU 2010 Program staff offered an ACT prep class. This effort seems to have had a marginal impact, as the students' average score before the assistance was 20.25 and the average after was 21.13. Just over half of the students showed no gain on the ACT; five

students gained two or more points. When asked about their ACT performance, students were generally fatalistic, with one responding “It is what it is” and another saying “I’m just not good at tests.” Still, they did not appear to believe that increasing scores in a significant way would have materially altered their college prospects.

### **College Admission and Financial Aid**

Nearly every one of the students interviewed last summer wanted and expected to go to college. This motivation carried through with the survey responders, as all of them applied to college, were accepted, and planned to attend. Informal information from the complete set of program participants is that as of this June, the vast majority indicated a desire to attend college. Even though survey takers did not identify family support as a major factor in their decision process, three-quarters of them said that they came from families with siblings or parents having had experience in college. Thus, there was undoubtedly a general family nudge in that direction to begin with.

While the national average for college applications has been creeping up over the past decade (with some reports suggesting students apply to about 10 schools), the Flint students applied to a smaller number – the average was 3.5. The maximum number of applications submitted was six while one student only applied to one school. These students did not view the application process as particularly onerous; hardly any said the paperwork was difficult. The biggest complaint was the need to press their high school counselors to submit their transcripts, recommendations, and other essential records. Indeed, one student reported that he had to hand-deliver all the application material to a local college because documentation from his school had never arrived. This same student never received a response from schools he applied to that were outside the region and he hypothesized: “I haven’t heard from the other schools I applied to and I assume it is because they never got my paperwork.”

The Flint students were quite successful in their application quest. Students reported that 92 percent of their applications produced letters of acceptance. Nearly all of the applications (88 percent) were to schools within the state of Michigan and all of the students reported that they would be attending Michigan schools. The biggest winner in the acceptance pool for these students was UM-Flint with five of the 17 planning to attend there; but CMU was right behind with four students. An additional student who planned to go to CMU switched to Michigan State at the end of the spring acceptance period when the mix of financial aid each school was offering was weighted.

Indeed, securing financial aid proved to be a bit more of a challenge than did the application process. Almost half of them reported that they found the process challenging, especially in dealing with the FAFSA form:

*I needed a lot of help from my parents and gathering the forms.*

*For some reason I had to do it all over because of some issue.*

The student with the biggest financial challenge seemed to be one whose guardian would not release any personal financial information and the colleges would not offer any financial support without having that information. At the time of this report, CMU program staff members were still trying to assist this student in trying to resolve this roadblock.

Despite the challenges, students reported good success with financial aid offers. Nearly 60 percent indicated that their admission acceptances were also accompanied with offers of some combination of loans, needs-based aid, and outright grants. Respondents said that scholarships or grants would be the largest source of support (almost 50 percent of their aid would come from that source) and that loans would be the second largest (25 percent). Family contributions and/or work study filled out the financial picture. Over two-thirds of the students listed specific scholarships. Several had multiple awards, and even though many of those were small (e.g., local grants of \$100 to \$500), some were sizeable, the largest being \$45,000. Just over one-third of the students said that families would be offering no financial help. Students did not think CMU 2010 played a large role in the process of helping with financial support; just over half of them said it had no or a minor impact, 29 percent said the CMU program offered moderate help, and 14 percent said the help was “major”.

### **General Influences on College**

Of particular importance to the CMU staff members are the factors that Flint students considered in making their college decisions. The survey asked students to rate 20 potential ones on a four point scale from “No” influence to “Major” influence. Table 2 organizes the responses from most to least important.

**Table 2: Survey Respondents' Assessments of General Influences On the College Decision Process**

<b>Factors Influencing College Decision Process</b>	<b>Mean score</b>
#1 program offerings at the college	3.40
#2 cost of college	3.13
#3 financial package supplied by college	3.07
#4 high school academic record	3.00
#5 ACT scores	2.88
#6 getting a scholarship	2.87
#7 reputation of the college	2.87
#8 social life on the campus	2.79
#9 CMU2010 Program	2.73
#10 visits to the campus	2.60
#11 participating in other college preparation experiences	2.60
#12 how close the college is to my home	2.53
#13 size of student body	2.38
#14 conversations with my family	2.25
#15 a college that has more people of my race	2.13
#16 conversations with my high school friends	2.13
#17 my family wants me to stay home	1.69
#18 the need to take care of siblings	1.60
#19 the need to work for awhile	1.60
#20 availability of daycare facilities for my child	1.27

Finances played a large role in students' deliberations as three of the top ten items dealt with money matters (#2, #3, and #6). One of the students succinctly captured this important constraint by suggesting:

*Regardless of how great the program is or how nice the campus is, if you can't pay for it, you can't stay.*

Students appeared to regard the academic side of college very seriously. They listed the quality of the program offering at a school as their single most important factor. Several students elaborated this finding, showing a maturity that belied their age:

*While I want to have friends at school, I don't want to be with friends if I can't pursue my goals. My career goals come first.*

*The biggest factor in my decision was the program and the fact that as part of the program they have a coop that will give me plenty of practical job experience.*

*I turned down three schools because they didn't have the program I wanted. My career is more important than playing ball.*

Family issues were generally at the bottom of the list of influences (#17 - #20). Students also noted that their friends (#16) and the issue of race (#15) played an insignificant part in their decisions.

### **CMU2010 Program Influence on College**

The CMU program staff members were particularly keen to learn about students’ assessments of the relative importance of the CMU program to the college decision process. They identified 15 key aspects of the program and the survey asked students to rate them on a 4 point scale from “No” importance to “Major” importance. The means of those 15 items are listed in Table 3 in order of importance.

**Table 3: Flint Student Assessments of CMU Influences on the College Decision Process**

<b>CMU Factors Influencing College Decision Process</b>	<b>Mean score</b>
#1 Interactions with CMU program directors	3.38
#2 Spending a week on the CMU campus	3.33
#3 Week long seminar in Flint learning about college	3.12
#4 Learning how to write college application essays	3.12
#5 Conversations with CMU admissions staff	3.07
#6 Learning how to prepare for the SAT exam	2.94
#7 Interactions with college students on CMU campus	2.94
#8 Having a CMU mentor help with the program	2.88
#9 Conversations with the CMU financial aid staff	2.82
#10 Conversations with other CMU2010 high school peers	2.67
#11 Learning how to complete financial aid applications	2.67
#12 Meetings we had throughout the year	2.65
#13 Learning how to complete admissions applications	2.63
#14 SAC overnight lock-in with Nicky Giovanni	2.50
#15 Interactions with CMU professors	2.38

The most important aspect of the CMU program was the interaction and relationship that the students built with program directors (mean=3.38). When asked in follow-up interviews to describe what the directors did, students reflected fondly about their interactions with them:

*The directors had a certain mindset – they were there to help students. They did whatever they could do to help us. They also had the power to help – they know lots of people and can get things done. I wouldn’t be in college without them!*

*Ms. XX was like our teacher for college. She offered insights in a cool manner. She made us comfortable and she was very experienced . . . She was like our ticket to the future.*

*[The director] was always emailing me and wanting to know if I had any questions.*

During last summer's interviews, participants had positive things to say about both the opportunity to rub shoulders with Flint peers with similar goals and aspirations and with CMU faculty who helped expose them to college work (especially the writing class). But in the larger scheme of things a year later, students said that their interactions with peers and faculty were relatively low on the list. They also gave lower ratings for the purely social activities (e.g., the student union lock-in).

The survey data suggested that, relative to other items characterizing the college decision process, the CMU mentors did not seem to rate as particularly important – only eighth out of 15 items (mean = 2.88). But to further explore the role that mentors played with program participants, survey items were also inserted to probe specific mentor activities. Flint students reported that what they valued most were their personal insights about college (mean = 3.44). As one student commented during follow-up interviews:

*I think the mentor related better to me because he was close to my age. The mentors made us think that college was possible if you did what was required of you. It helped me realize that college is a great investment!*

This role as an encourager and motivator was reinforced by the survey results with a mean rating of 2.59 for the two questions about “reminding them of important deadlines” “acting as a general cheerleader throughout the process”. The role that was much less important was anything to do with either admissions or financial aid – with means closer to 2.0 on both those. Participants said they interacted with their mentors primarily either by phone, text, or via Facebook. The general consensus in follow-up interviews was that the mentors' influence was about right: “It played out as I expected.” However, if changes were to be made to the role, it would be to promote more interactions during the application time with specific guidance on how to navigate the process.

The importance of the various program pieces needs to be placed into a larger context that students approached their involvement in the program quite seriously -- two-thirds suggested that they attended all or most of the events. Attendance at the week-long events last year was also nearly universal (leaving little doubt about their value) but enrollment at other offerings throughout their senior year reflected less enthusiasm – something matched by the low rating of the question on “meetings we had throughout the year (#12).”

This reflects an earlier message that what is of most interest to students is the academic program and how they might pay for college. On this latter point it might seem surprising that financial aid help was generally important but the assistance they

received from CMU staff of this issue was generally rated lower (#11). This probably reflects a need to have more specific financial aid help with the institutions where the students eventually chose to attend.

## **Conclusion**

Was all of this worth the time, effort, and expenditure of fiscal and human resources? Were students any better prepared or knowledgeable about the college admission process because of CMU 2010 Program participation? The answers to those questions are not easy to parse from a survey. And it is still early because the ultimate goal is to not only get more of these students into college but also keep them there, and only time will reveal whether those goals can be met. However, comments from several participants leave us with the distinct impression that the experiences have great potential for being life changing. Their own words are a fitting testimonial to that possibility.

*You can't put a true value on these experiences and what you can take into the future from the experiences. But what it did for me was made me think [about this whole process] to a much higher depth. . . . I was better prepared than my friends [who were not in the program] because I had more information . . . I learned and internalized things that I would never have been aware of, for example, the importance of ACT and GPA for admissions and scholarships.*

*I'd be much further behind without the help of CMU staff. I'd be thinking about wanting to go to college, but not doing anything to make it happen.*