

**Declining Standards  
at Michigan Public Universities**

**How Changes in Curricula and Teaching  
Affect Academic Achievement, Career  
Preparation, and K-12 Education**

**by Thomas F. Bertonneau**

ISSUES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: THE MICHIGAN MODEL  
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**ABSTRACT** The state universities of Michigan, like their counterparts across the United States, are suffering from a general erosion of academic standards and a radical politicization of the undergraduate curriculum. An important dimension of this problem is the effect on K-12 education in Michigan. Poor student performance and poor teacher preparation are directly related. There are many reasons for the decline in academic standards, including the disintegration of an effective core curriculum and the pervasiveness of trendy, politically correct courses, as well as declining standards of instruction in reading and writing skills and a gap between what students are taught and what they really need to know. Emphasizing basic skills has been characterized as elitist or as discrimination against ethnic minorities, and teacher education courses frequently focus on the trivial. In some states, the problem of the "dumbed-down university" is being addressed, and Michigan could learn from these efforts. Recommendations are made for improving undergraduate education at Michigan's public universities. These center on reinstating sound instruction in English composition and adopting a core curriculum so that every student in the Michigan state universities undergoes the same essential training and gains exposure to common, high-level material in the arts and sciences. Some supplemental essays are included: (1) "Affirmative Action and Racial Preference at the University of Michigan" (Carl Cohen); (2) "Mathematics in the Postmodernist Era" (Arthur T. White); (3) "Undergraduate Engineering at the University of Michigan" (John A. Clark); (4) "What I Learned at the School of Education" (Andrew Titus); and (5) "Memory and Expectation: Language and Literature at Hillsdale College" (John S. Reist). Appendixes discuss what critics and postmodern professors say about higher education. (Contains 169 endnotes.) (SLD)

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