

CAPSULE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN

The origins of the University of Michigan-Dearborn can be traced to manpower supply studies conducted by Archie Pearson, director of training for Ford Motor Company, in the mid-1950's. Convinced that serious shortages were looming for the Company in qualified, college-trained engineers and junior administrators, he made discreet inquiries of educational institutions in the Detroit area concerning their willingness to adjust their programs to meet these needs.

Pearson was particularly interested in a program with a cooperative education component that would provide several periods of full-time work experience, alternating with regular terms of professional academic study. However, until Pearson and his associates were put in touch with members of the top administration at the University of Michigan, the search had been futile. In late 1955, Pearson, with his associates, began negotiations with the University of Michigan officials that led to the establishment of the Dearborn Center of the University of Michigan. The announcement on December 17, 1956 of a gift of land and capital development money from the Company to the University emphasized the building of an upper-division and master's level campus which would adopt a cooperative work-study requirement as a part of its regular degree program in engineering and business administration. The University was to provide the regular professional and liberal arts courses necessary to a University of Michigan bachelor's or master's degree, with the co-op work assignments forming an integral addition to the regular academic requirements. UM-Dearborn opened as the Dearborn Center of the University of Michigan on September 28, 1959.

The upper-division cooperative education program was the first important educational emphasis of what is now UM-Dearborn. Cooperative education is still a vital part of the professional programs, and not only has it expanded to include liberal arts students, but other kinds of off-campus experience for credit have been added as well. There are now regular program-related internships in political science, economics, social work, humanities, health studies and public administration. Nevertheless, it became apparent in the early days that the campus could not afford to be limited to a single focus, and over the years the University has gone through several stages of modifying its original purposes and structure.

From its inception in 1956 to about 1962, the cooperative education program was confidently set forth as a sufficient *raison d'être* for the campus, in spite of growing evidence that this admittedly fine and educationally sound opportunity was not drawing a sufficient number of students for economical use of the facilities. In the fall of 1962, William , the University of Michigan Vice President and UM-Dearborn's first chief executive, extended cooperative education to the liberal arts areas on an optional basis. Few liberal arts co-op work assignments were actually made before 1973, when the present liberal arts co-op program was officially established. This early attempt to extend the co-op program to liberal arts constituted the last major attempt to build the campus solely on the basis of the co-op programs and the upper-division/graduate structure. That effort came at about the same time as the change in the name of the institution from "Center" to "Campus" (to make its objectives seem less limited). Both events marked the beginning of a period in the mid-1960's characterized by growing uncertainty about the future of the institution. This period ended in 1969 with the recommendations of

the Ross Committee (also referred to as the Balzhiser Committee, and officially called the Dearborn Campus Planning Study Committee), which radically changed the direction of the campus.

The 1969 report of the Dearborn Campus Planning Study Committee, appointed by University Vice President for State Relations and Planning Arthur Ross to consider the future of the campus, recommended the addition of the first two years of undergraduate education for the Dearborn Campus to become a full four-year institution along with expanding non-co-op programs. Those and other changes were implemented in 1971 giving the campus its present structure along with the newly designated title of "The University of Michigan-Dearborn" and a Chancellor as its chief executive officer. Two years later, the organizational structures changed from "divisions" to schools and colleges, and the Division of Education ("Urban Education" for the first few years) was created, with each of the major academic units headed by a dean. The Board of Regents appointed the first Chancellor of the UM-Dearborn, Dr. Leonard E. Goodall, in July 1971.

After that watershed change in 1971, UM-Dearborn grew rapidly from just under 1,000 students to over 6,000 in 1979. From 1971 through 1979 there was a scramble just to supply the courses and facilities needed to accommodate the soaring student population propelled by the transition into a University. New faculties were added at the rate of 10 to 20 per year, and the face of the campus changed as a new set of buildings (the former University Mall now remodeled as the University Center, the Fieldhouse, and the Library) was planned and constructed to the south of the original four buildings. These years of expansion also ushered in a period of severe retrenchment, when the debt burden of the new structures coincided with a recession and cuts in state aid to the campus. Dr. William Jenkins, appointed as UM-Dearborn's second Chancellor in 1980, took the helm at the beginning of what may be called the institution's "Years of Consolidation."

The early 1980's at UM-Dearborn were, as in the state of Michigan as a whole, a period of severe financial crisis. From 1979 through 1982, over a million dollars of funds allocated to UM-Dearborn by the state had to be recalled. During that same time, faculty and staff salaries were cut and student tuition rose 44 percent in three years. Nevertheless, student enrollment, after a slight drop from 1982 to 1984, resumed its steady rise that has continued to the present. Facilities were constructed also, including Manufacturing Systems Engineering Laboratory, the Social Sciences Building (formerly the School of Management Building), and the Computing Wing of the Science Building.

From about the time of the inauguration of Chancellor Blenda Wilson (1988), several developments in campus organization, administrative personnel, and academic offerings have highlighted what might be called the "Years of Redirection". At the center of this "redirection" has been a program of strategic planning, initiated in the summer of 1990 and reinforced by planning retreats for the whole campus in the fall terms of 1990, 1991 and 1992. A new campus mission statement arose out of the first retreat which rearticulates UM-Dearborn's commitment to providing an experience of academic excellence for a diverse body of students from the metropolitan Detroit area, encouraging full community attention to the traditions of free intellectual inquiry, critical thinking and ethical behavior through interactive teaching, research, creative and applied scholarship, and service. From the second retreat emerged the principal points of a set of learning goals for undergraduate students.

In 1993, the Board of Regents appointed Dr. James C. Renick as the fourth chancellor of UM-Dearborn. Under Chancellor Renick, UM-Dearborn experienced several important developments: (1) a new Mission

Statement was formulated; (2) a new set of Campus Bylaws provided for a newly formed Faculty Senate; and (3) funds were received from the State for the construction of four major new facilities for the School of Engineering, the College of Business, the Center for Corporate and Professional Development, and the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.

In July of 2000, the Board of Regents appointed Daniel Little as UM-Dearborn's fifth Chancellor. Under Chancellor Little's leadership the campus has achieved record enrollment growth, increased the academic quality of the student body, and improved the academic support system for student success. During these years the campus came to embrace a metropolitan vision that encourages engagement with the community by students, faculty, and staff. Particular areas of metropolitan focus include supporting advanced manufacturing, contributing to racial and ethnic equality, enhancing P-K-12 education, addressing urban environmental issues, and contributing to progress in health care and health equity. Little has helped to build strong relationships between UM-Dearborn and a wide range of community-based organizations to enhance the impact and partnership of the university in the Detroit metropolitan region. The Chancellor also led the campus in establishing a public-private partnership to offer a student-housing option for the first time on campus since the 1980s.

In 2009, UM-Dearborn welcomed its fourth Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dr. Catherine A. Davy. Under her leadership, the School of Education was transformed into the College of Education, Health, and Human Services with a focus on health studies. In addition, a new campus-wide general education program titled the Dearborn Discovery Core was developed. Finally, in the fall 2014, Provost Davy led the successful reaccreditation of UM-Dearborn by the Higher Learning Commission and the follow up assurance visit in 2017 where assessment of student learning outcomes and general education were of focus.

In 2018, Chancellor Domenico Grasso, Ph.D joined the university as the sixth chancellor and the first Michigan graduate to lead the university. Chancellor Grasso successfully led the university through the COVID-19 pandemic by pivoting to online learning and remote work. Chancellor Grasso launched the Go Blueprint for Success and encouraged forward thinking initiatives like Urban Futures. Campus continued to grow as the new Engineering Lab Building opened in 2021 to support hands-on learning, research, and student space. Under Chancellor Grasso and Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Gabriella Scarlatta, appointed formally in the summer of 2022, research and scholarship have increased. The University secured National Science Foundation funding for more than \$4 million dollars and was named a top producer of Fulbright U.S. Scholars and 2021 and 2022. Since 2018, externally funded research expenditures have nearly tripled, increasing from \$4.8 million to a projected \$13.2 million for FY25. In February 2025, that growth led to a reclassification of UM-Dearborn as an R2 institution, a designation from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education for universities that award at least 20 research doctorates and have \$5 million average annual research spending. It's the first time the university has received this designation. UM-Dearborn Chancellor Domenico Grasso says the honorific is, without a doubt, an important new feather in the cap for the university.

In May of 2025, the Board of Regents appointed Domenico Grasso as interim President of the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus and in April 2026, appointed as President. He is the first Dearborn chancellor to lead U-M as interim president. Provost Gabriella Scarlatta assumed the role of interim chancellor for UM-Dearborn.

In May of 2026, the Board of Regents appointed Gabriella Scarlatta, Ph.D. as the seventh chancellor of the University of Michigan - Dearborn. Dr. Scarlatta has dedicated 30 years to the UM-Dearborn community. She began as an adjunct faculty member in the French Studies Department and rose through the academic and administrative ranks, serving as department chair, associate dean, provost, and, interim chancellor. Prior to being named interim chancellor, Scarlatta served as UM-Dearborn provost. Among her accomplishments in that role, she oversaw the integration of practice-based learning across all colleges, a four-credit transition initiative, a new partnership with the Diploma Equity Project for adult learners and mission realignment for the Office of Community-Engaged Learning. She also played a key role in the ongoing consolidation of all four UM-Dearborn colleges on the main campus. Dr. Scarlatta, who is also a professor of French studies, received her B.A. and the maîtrise in modern languages from the Université de Savoie in Chambéry, France. She earned her M.A. in French and Italian literatures and her Ph.D in modern languages from Wayne State University. She has published several books and scholarly articles about the French and Italian Renaissance and early women writers. Her forthcoming co-authored volume, "Surviving Voices: Honoring Renée de France's Enduring Legacy," reconstructs the life of the second daughter of King Louis XII and Queen Anne de Bretagne through historical documents and poetry. She joined UM-Dearborn in 1996 as an adjunct faculty member in the French Studies Department and became an assistant professor in 1998. She was promoted to professor of French, with tenure, in 2017. She has served as the director of the French Studies Program since 2004. She was named provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs in 2022, after serving in those roles in an interim capacity for one year. Prior to this, she served as associate dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters from 2014-2021. Dr. Scarlatta received the Women's and Gender Studies Outstanding Research Award in 2004 and 2013 and was an honoree of U-M's Council on Global Engagement in 2012.

A timeline of the University of Michigan-Dearborn can be found here (<https://umdearborn.edu/about-um-dearborn/university-history/>).

Source of information up to 1984: *A Gift Renewed*, written by Professor Elton D. Higgs.