

# EXECUTIVE DIGEST

## SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE

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**INTRODUCTION** This report, issued in May 1999, contains the results of our performance audit\* of Southwestern Michigan College.

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**AUDIT PURPOSE** This performance audit was conducted under the authority of Section 203(2), Act 85, P.A. 1997 (a section of the community college appropriations act), which mandates that the Auditor General conduct not less than three performance audits of community colleges each year.

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**BACKGROUND** Southwestern Michigan College is a public two-year institution of higher education. The community college district includes all of Cass County and Keeler and Hamilton Townships of Van Buren County.

The College, established in November 1964, operates under the authority of Sections 389.1 - 389.195 of the *Michigan Compiled Laws*, commonly known as the Community College Act of 1966. It is governed by a Board of Trustees, consisting of seven members elected by voters of the community college district for six-year terms of office.

The College's mission\* is to:

- a. Meet the needs and aspirations of the groups and individuals of all ages who make up the college service area.

- b. Provide one- and two-year occupational programs as well as two-year baccalaureate-oriented programs.
- c. Meet the needs of the area in providing educational, social, cultural, and economic programs.
- d. Maintain occupational competence in industry, business, science, agriculture, service technology, and skilled trades and provide opportunities for individuals to prepare for various occupations and improve skills.

For the fiscal year ended June 30, 1998, the College reported current fund revenue (general, designated, auxiliary activities, and restricted funds) of \$15,545,241; expenditures and transfers of \$15,077,164; and enrollment of 1,809 fiscal year equated students, which was the eighteenth largest of the State's 28 community colleges. As of October 1998, the College employed 45 full-time faculty, 164 part-time faculty, and 128 full-time and part-time administrative and support personnel.

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**AUDIT OBJECTIVES,  
CONCLUSIONS, AND  
NOTEWORTHY  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**Audit Objective:** To assess the effectiveness\* of the College's admission and monitoring practices to help students successfully complete their classes and programs.

**Conclusion:** The College's admission and monitoring practices were effective in helping students successfully complete their classes and programs.

**Audit Objective:** To assess the effectiveness of the College's efforts to evaluate the quality of its educational programs.

**Conclusion:** The College's efforts to evaluate the quality of its educational programs were effective.

**Noteworthy Accomplishments:** The College was first accredited by the Commission of Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in 1971. With the exception of a brief period during which the College voluntarily withdrew from the Association, the College has retained its accreditation. The College's methods for evaluating the quality of education include developing an academic assessment plan, analyzing student licensure and certification examination results, establishing advisory committees for its occupational programs, and obtaining information through student and graduate surveys and faculty evaluations.

Also, the College issues a quality assurance guarantee to students and prospective employers that individuals holding an Associate Degree in Applied Science are fully capable of competent performance. Under the guarantee, the College permits former students to retake courses without a tuition charge if employers consider them to be deficient in knowledge or skills in those areas of college instruction.

**Audit Objective:** To assess the effectiveness of the College's efforts to use its educational program resources effectively and efficiently\*.

**Conclusion:** The College was generally effective and efficient in its use of resources for educational programs. However, our assessment disclosed reportable conditions\* relating to repetitive course enrollments and low student class enrollment (Findings 1 and 2).

**Audit Objective:** To determine whether the College complied with the Legislature's reporting requirements for educational programs.

**Conclusion:** The College complied with legislative reporting requirements for educational programs.

**Audit Objective:** To evaluate the relevancy and accuracy of the most recent capital outlay program statement submitted to the Department of Management and Budget.

**Conclusion:** Our evaluation disclosed that the College's capital outlay program statement was relevant and accurate.

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**AUDIT SCOPE AND  
METHODOLOGY**

Our audit scope was to examine the program and other records of Southwestern Michigan College. Our audit was conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States and, accordingly, included such tests of the records and such other auditing procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

The financial statements of Southwestern Michigan College are audited annually by a public accounting firm engaged by the College.

Our review and testing of College records and procedures were primarily limited to the period September 1, 1995 through November 30, 1998.

We reviewed the College's admission process, evaluated methods used for monitoring student progress, and analyzed the academic assessment and placement process. We evaluated the College's efforts to assess the quality of its educational programs. In addition, we reviewed the methods

used to periodically assess the job training needs of the community's employers and determined whether the College had established procedures for evaluating and obtaining accreditation of its programs.

We evaluated the effectiveness of the College's efforts to use its educational program resources effectively and efficiently. We extracted student academic record information from the College's data base for use in examining repetitive course enrollments, minimum class enrollments, and underage student enrollments.

We reviewed the program and financial records for the At-Risk Students Success Program grants to determine the College's compliance with State requirements. We also reviewed the program statement, planning documents, and other pertinent information related to the College's most recent capital outlay project.

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**AGENCY RESPONSES**

Our audit report contains 2 findings and 3 corresponding recommendations. The College's preliminary response indicated that it agreed with 1 recommendation and disagreed with 2.