



2024-25

IMPACT REPORT

College of Health and Human Services





Students in front of CHHS after a graduation ceremony

Dean's Office

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Nancy Hock, Chair, Department of Occupational Therapy

Amy Heath, Chair, Department of Physical Therapy

Drew Zolp, Chair, Department of Physician Assistant

Robin Criter, Chair, Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences

Kieran Fogarty, Director, Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Ph.D. Program

Ann Chapleau, Director, School of Interdisciplinary Health Programs

Kyoung Lee, Director, School of Social Work

Christopher Briggs, Director, Unified Clinics and Center for Disability Services

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Schools/Departments

BSON – Bronson School of Nursing

SLP – Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences

BLVS – Blindness and Low Vision Studies

IHS Ph.D. – Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Ph.D.

OT – Occupational Therapy

SIHP – School of Interdisciplinary Health Programs

PT – Physical Therapy

PA – Physician Assistant

SW – Social Work

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Questions?

Email us at hhs@wmich.edu



From the Dean

Dear colleagues, students, alumni and friends,

As I reflect on my first year as Dean of the College of Health and Human Services, I am filled with gratitude and optimism. This past year has been one of strategic focus, collaborative momentum and meaningful progress—and I'm proud to say we are moving in the right direction.



I firmly believe that appropriate infrastructure fuels innovation. Through intentional planning and the collective efforts of our faculty, staff and partners, we've laid a strong foundation for the future. One of our newest developments has been the implementation of Envisio, a project management platform that is already transforming how we track and communicate our college-wide initiatives. Soon, we will launch a public-facing dashboard that will provide real-time insights into key metrics such as enrollment trends, student retention rates, articulation agreements, and more—offering transparency and accountability as we continue to grow.

While enrollment declined by 31 students (fall 2023 to fall 2024), we are projecting growth in the next fiscal year—an encouraging reflection of the continued relevance of our programs and the unwavering commitment of our recruitment and academic teams.

In response to the enrollment challenges ahead, we've strategically reorganized our Student Engagement Center—bringing together advising, outreach and engagement, communications, marketing, and career exploration to create a more integrated and student-centered experience.

Each year, I choose a word to guide my leadership and mindset. This year's word is Grace—a reminder to lead with empathy, patience and purpose, even in times of challenge or change. CHHS is well-positioned to actively guide and support our students throughout their academic journey and into meaningful careers.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to our mission. I look forward to all we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

With appreciation,

Lillian Upton Smith, DrPH, MPH
Dean, College of Health and Human Services
Western Michigan University



➔ Mission

We engage every person in an experiential, interprofessional and inclusive academic environment that inspires compassion, integrity and advocacy.

➔ Vision

We prepare all learners to thrive in health and human service careers that are high in purpose, high in satisfaction and unsurpassed in impact.

➔ Strategic directions

- 1.(Re) Igniting College Pride and Belonging
- 2.Modernizing our Systems and Procedures
- 3.Collaborating Internally and External

Research by the numbers

Number of research awards



Faculty engagement in research



Total book chapters written



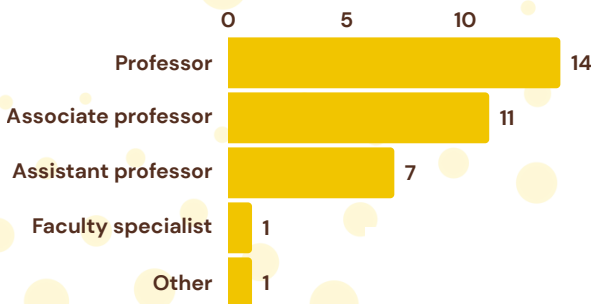
Total publications



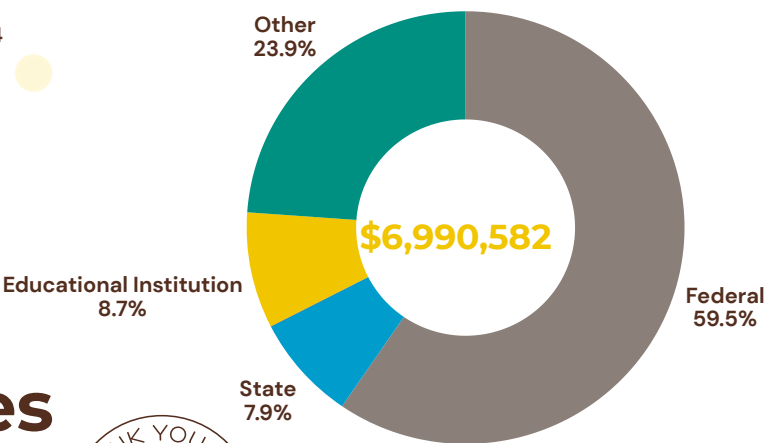
Total books published



Engagement of traditionally ranked faculty



2024-25 research dollars and funding sources



Gifts and pledges

Fiscal year 2024: \$1,535,458
Fiscal year 2025: \$2,520,286



Changing futures through giving

A transformative gift from two influential figures in the practice of occupational therapy is set to shape the future for students at Western Michigan University and the landscape of the program.

Drs. Fred Sammons and **Barbara Rider**, both pioneers in the field, have committed to a landmark legacy donation, which establishes a lasting endowment to support both the program and its students. In recognition of their contributions, the program is now called the Sammons Rider Occupational Therapy Assistant Degree Program.

Together, Sammons and Rider have dedicated their careers to the advancement of occupational therapy, and their most recent gift to WMU represents their ongoing commitment.



You too can make a difference. **Scan the code to donate today.**

Scholarly Inquiry

Hard-hitting research: Transforming concussion diagnosis

From falls to fender-benders to sports injuries, concussions are common among most of the population. They can have longterm health implications, and worse yet: They're often unreported and consequently untreated.

Researchers at Western hope to change that.

"The goal is to develop better diagnostic tools and make them available not only for the community but also for health care providers," says **Dr. Alessandro Danna-dos-Santos**, director of WMU's Laboratory for Advancements in Rehabilitation Sciences.

He teamed up with **Dr. Carrie Barrett**, associate professor of physical therapy, to develop a series of tests to quantify concussive events—also known as mild traumatic brain injuries (MTBI)—and measure their impact over a lifespan.

"Our group at Western is on the front wave of this type of development," Danna-dos-Santos says.

The goal is to identify physical biomarkers with MTBI that give health care professionals better data to diagnose the injury.

"We're trying to create clinical scores that work like a blood work result, but instead of getting specifics from your blood, we're going to get that from the central nervous system," says Danna-dos-Santos. "Once we have that, it's going to be much easier for us to develop interventions and track their success."



Graduate students test out technology used in concussion evaluation and diagnosis, which includes goggles that measure variations in eye tracking.

Students have the opportunity to gain experience at the clinic both through data collection and literature review, helping to expand knowledge that could lead to important breakthroughs in concussion treatment.

"We all feel really good about it. We got into PT and health care to take care of other people, so being able to start doing that before we even get out of school and put some research forward backed by actual work we've done ourselves is really cool," adds physical therapy doctoral student **Joshua Chirackal**.

“As first-year students, this is a very unique opportunity to be involved in research like this and also make an impact on quality of life in an area of research that could potentially have a profound impact on a huge portion of the population.”

— **Emma Springer**, physical therapy doctoral student and graduate assistant

Building a resilient future: WMU's Y-MIND Program trains the next generation of youth mental health professionals

In response to the growing mental health needs of young people in southwestern Michigan and beyond, Western Michigan University launched an initiative in October of 2023: the Youth Mental Health Interprofessional Networking and Workforce Development (Y-MIND) program. Spearheaded by the Resiliency Center for Families and Children (RCFC), Y-MIND is reshaping how future professionals are trained to support youth facing mental and behavioral health challenges. The Y-MIND project is led by **Principal Investigator Dr. Michelle Suarez**, with **Co-Principal Investigators Dr. Adriana Degani and Dr. Ron Cisler**.

A Holistic Approach to Workforce Development

Y-MIND is more than a training program—it's a comprehensive, interdisciplinary experience designed to prepare students across health-related disciplines to promote resiliency, wellness and quality of life in young populations. The program addresses a critical gap in the mental health workforce by equipping students with the knowledge, skills and real-world experience needed to make a meaningful impact.

Participants engaged in:

- **Asynchronous learning modules** on topics such as trauma, neurodiversity, cultural responsiveness and evidence-based treatment approaches.
- **Mentorship and interdisciplinary discussion groups** that foster collaboration and deeper understanding.
- **Hands-on community experiences** at sites like the RCFC at WMU Unified Clinics, Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS), and the Kalamazoo Autism Center of Excellence (KAC).
- A **capstone project**, where students from diverse disciplines work together to develop and present innovative solutions to real-world challenges.

The success of Y-MIND lies in its collaborative foundation. The program brings together a wide network of stakeholders, including:

- WMU partners: CHHS, CAS, RCFC and Unified Clinics.



Y-Mind participants at a poster presentation in April. Pictured left to right are Jonny Haskell, WMU clinician mentor; Audrey Lackey, OTD student; Tiffany Brown, SLP student and Selina Baidoo, sociology student.

- External partners: WMed, KPS, KAC
mentors and faculty: 7 WMU mentors, 8 WMU faculty/clinicians and 8 WMed faculty/clinicians who contribute to curriculum development, module delivery and student mentorship

This interprofessional model ensured that students gained a well-rounded perspective on youth mental health, learning to work across disciplines to provide holistic, client-centered care.

Impact and Progress

Since its launch in January 2024, Y-MIND has trained three cohorts of students:

- Cohort 1 (Jan 2024): 7 undergraduate and 60 graduate students
- Cohort 2 (Oct 2024): 19 graduate students
- Cohort 3 (June 2025): 4 graduate students (currently in progress)

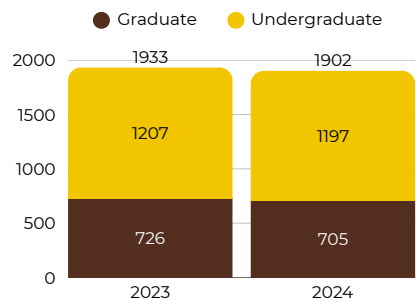
With a total budget of \$1.82 million, the program is fully funded through September 30, 2025, with remaining funds supporting the final cohort and program evaluation efforts.

College metrics

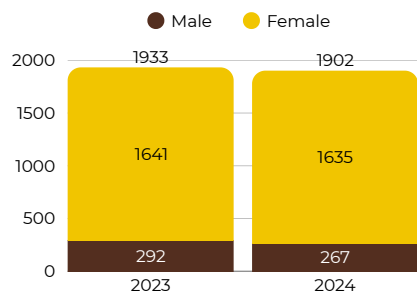


These infographics present key insights into student enrollment patterns, illustrating changes in total enrollment and demographic breakdowns.

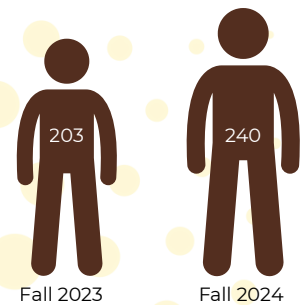
Fall enrollment numbers, primary and secondary majors



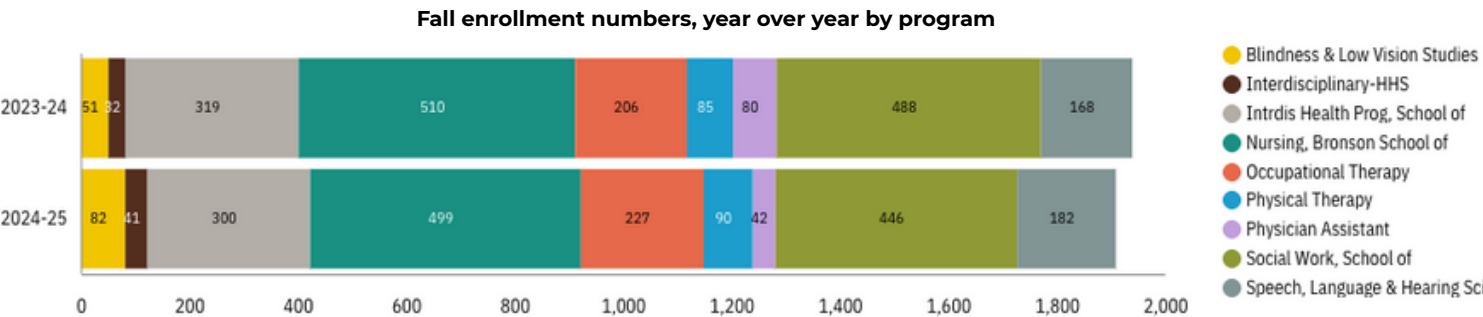
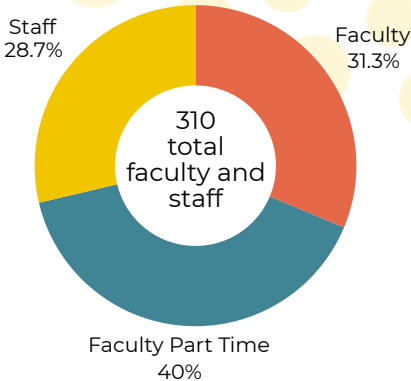
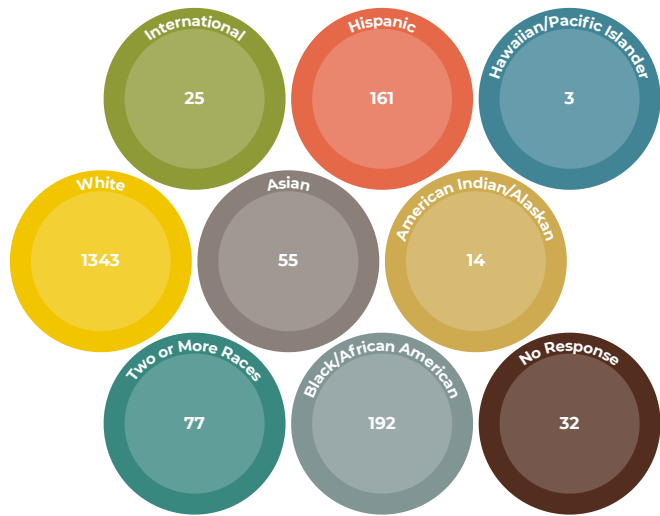
Fall enrollment numbers, primary and secondary majors by gender



CHHS FTIAC (First time in any College)



Fall enrollment numbers, primary and secondary majors by race/ethnicity



Milestones in motion



WMU and SMC form seamless pathway to social work

Two Michigan institutions, Southwest Michigan College (SMC) and Western Michigan University (WMU), have established a strategic partnership to create a streamlined educational pathway for aspiring social workers.

Upon nearing the completion of their associate degree, students are presented with a seamless transition to WMU's Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program. The articulation agreement between SMC and WMU ensures that every credit earned at SMC is fully transferable, facilitating an efficient and straightforward progression to a bachelor's degree.



Representatives from Southwestern Michigan College and WMU at the School of Social Work articulation agreement signing.

\$2 million grant supports nursing pipeline from KCC to WMU

Kellogg Community College received a \$2 million state grant to help associate-degree nursing (ADN) graduates complete prerequisite courses for Western Michigan University's BSN program tuition-free. The initiative supports a smoother, more affordable transition from ADN to BSN, addressing workforce needs in Michigan's healthcare system. The grant also funds new staff, equipment and student support at KCC. Students can begin now, with funds available through September 2026.

In print: WMU authors honored at annual reception

Each year, University Libraries celebrate WMU authors who published books and monographs during the previous year at a reception during Research, Innovation and Creative Scholarship Celebration Week. This year, **Dr. Robert Bensley**, Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Health Programs was recognized for his book, *Community and Public Health Education Methods: A Practical Guide* - available on Amazon.



Diversity, equity and inclusion

Over the past fiscal year, the DEI Committee continued its commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable college through a series of impactful initiatives. These efforts have strengthened our culture and deepened our collective understanding of DEI principles.

Wellness and belonging events



Committee members



Staff and faculty awards given

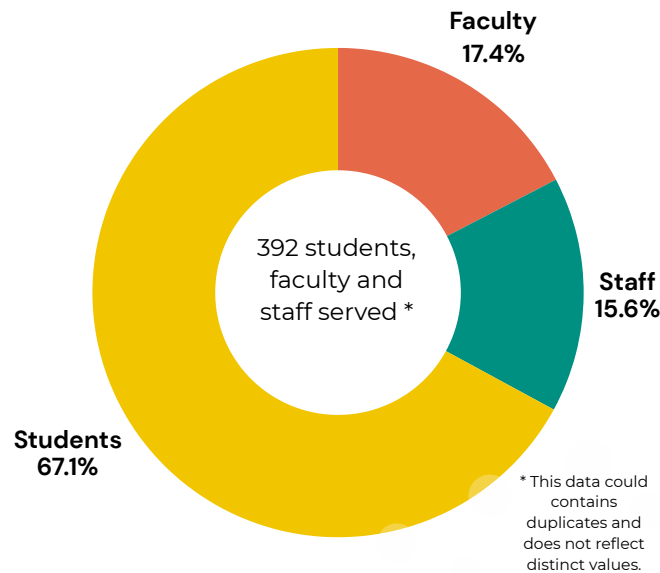


Dr. Betty Dennis and former President Montgomery at the Excellence in Diversity Award Ceremony (above).

Annual CHHS award winners, Charles Hanks, Clayton Stapert, Dr. Betty Dennis, Dr. Ben Brady and Dr. Don Cooney (below).



Attendance at lunch and learn events



Lunch and learn topics

Why DEI is important in Healthcare
—Alejandro Quiroga, M.D
President, Corewell Health

Visually Impaired
—Dr. Jim Leja,
Faculty Emeritus, Blindness and
Low Vision Studies

Ageism
—Dr. Janet Hahn,
School of Interdisciplinary
Health Programs

African Americans Diagnosed with Cancer
—LaShawnda Bates,
Bronson Healthcare Group

Honoring Personal Choices
—Hilary Kerr, Advance Care Planning Specialist, Bronson
Methodist Hospital

What is your Definition of Wellness, Belonging and DEI?
—Dr. Betty Dennis,
Director of CHHS DEI

Animal Therapy and Health Disparities
—Angie Moe,
Therapy Dog Clinic Coordinator at WMU Unified Clinics

Students in the spotlight



Jeffrey Crouch

Vision for the future: Grad works toward more accessible world

Jeffery Crouch, a blind single father, recently graduated from Western Michigan University with a bachelor's in healthcare services and sciences. Inspired to show his daughter what's possible, he's continuing on to pursue two master's degrees in orientation and mobility and vision rehabilitation therapy. Passionate about helping others with vision loss, Crouch aims to empower independence through education and advocacy. His journey reflects resilience, purpose and a commitment to making a difference.

"Western has set me up for success by creating an atmosphere of acceptance. No matter the challenges, individuals are always there to help figure out solutions," Crouch says.



Scan to read Jeffrey's complete story



Emily Bosak

International health care experiences put nursing grad on path to career success

Emily Bosak graduates from Western Michigan University with degrees in nursing and Spanish, plus a minor in biological sciences. A Medallion and Heyl Scholar, she completed internships, research, and three study abroad programs. She's already accepted a full-time role as a critical care nurse at Bronson Methodist Hospital and plans to pursue graduate studies in anesthesia. Bosak also co-founded WMU's chapter of Sigma Psi Zeta, creating a supportive space for Asian students on campus.



Scan to read Emily's complete story



College of Health and Human Services

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The Bronson School of Nursing received an exceptional in-kind donation valued at \$79,839 from LogiQuip.

96%

of College of Health and Human Services
graduates participated in experience-driven
learning

97%

of College of Health and Human Services
graduates working full time have a job
related to their degree

99%

of College of Health and Human Services
undergraduates had instructors who made
them excited about learning

Through WMU's 2023-24 Post-graduation Activity Survey of graduates (bachelor's, master's, doctoral and post-baccalaureate certificate), the University collected data for a total of 2,859 graduates, or 73%, of those who earned their degrees between August 2023 and June 2024. The data collection cycle ended on Oct. 31, 2024.
wmich.edu/about/facts