



The Michigan
Center for
Adult College
Success

Central Bound: Co-Enrollment Takes Center Stage to Help Adult Learners Complete



CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Earning a bachelor's degree can feel impossible when careers, mortgages, and family responsibilities pin adult learners to their home communities. While local community colleges offer a vital starting point, transferring to a distant four-year university often comes with challenges navigating the transfer process and concerns on lost credits that can stall student momentum. Central Michigan University (CMU) is eliminating that barrier through Central Bound, an initiative supported by an Innovation Investment Award (IIA) from The Michigan Center for Adult College Success. By restructuring the transfer pipeline, CMU is bringing the full university experience directly to students where they already live and work.

By restructuring the transfer pipeline, CMU is bringing the full university experience directly to students where they already live and work.

Through Central Bound, the concept of co-enrollment takes center stage. Adult learners do not have to wait to finish their associate degree

before stepping into the university ecosystem. Instead, they hold a dual identity.

From day one, a Central Bound student enjoys the best of both worlds. They continue taking localized classes at their community college while simultaneously gaining full access to CMU's critical support system, including the university library, writing center, career development services, and even campus athletic events.

"Central Bound represents the kind of innovation higher education needs right now," said Sarah Marshall, PhD, Professor and Department Chairperson. "With support from the Innovation Investment Award, CMU is building a model that

reflects the realities of adult learners' lives while making a four-year degree more accessible, flexible, and achievable across Michigan."



The Michigan Center
for Adult College Success

By easing institutional friction with highly intuitive transfer guides, proactive advisor check-ins, and a significantly more flexible credit-transfer policy, CMU is attacking the root causes of adult student attrition. The message to place-bound students is clear: you belong to the CMU community no matter your zip code.

A smoother pathway is only half the battle. The academic programs themselves must also adapt to the realities of a busy adult's life. To address this, CMU utilized a portion of the Innovation Investment Award to fundamentally restructure how it packages and delivers higher education. Debuting in the fall of 2026, CMU is launching a Bachelor of Applied Science degree designed entirely around stackable achievements.

Through this program, CMU has developed 50 distinct digital badges that stack into specialized digital certificates, which then feed directly into

the final degree. This approach ensures that working adult students can hit tangible, career-boosting milestones along the way, rather than grinding for years through an all-or-nothing curriculum.

While the inaugural cohort of Central Bound students will officially launch in the fall of 2026, the framework is built for rapid statewide expansion. With a prototype already active alongside Lansing Community College, and bolstered by additional funds from MiLEAP, CMU is on track to roll out four new community college partnerships over the next three years.

By utilizing the Innovation Investment Award from The Center to build collaborative, cross-institutional alliances, CMU isn't just helping adults finish their degrees. They are creating a scalable blueprint for flexible higher education across the entire state of Michigan.

"Central Bound represents the kind of innovation higher education needs right now. With support from the Innovation Investment Award, CMU is building a model that reflects the realities of adult learners' lives while making a four-year degree more accessible, flexible, and achievable across Michigan."

— Sarah Marshall, PhD, Professor and Department Chairperson

About the Innovation Investment Awards

The Michigan Center for Adult College Success is supporting nine institutions through the Innovation Investment Awards to help postsecondary institutions implement best practices or pilot new ideas to better serve adult students in a way that increases completion rates.

The Center awarded \$6.4 million in Innovation Investment Awards through a competitive award process to postsecondary institutions seeking to implement innovative solutions for improving persistence and completion rates among adult learners over the age of 25. Grants of up to \$1 million were awarded to Michigan colleges and universities that show they are ready to launch effective, lasting improvements to systems that help students 25 and older obtain postsecondary credentials.

