



HIGH COST LEAVES PARENTS & STUDENTS ASKING IS IT WORTH IT

Hardly a day goes by without conversation about the value of a college education. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, about 42 million Americans have accumulated \$1.3 trillion in student debt and one in four borrowers is behind in their payments.

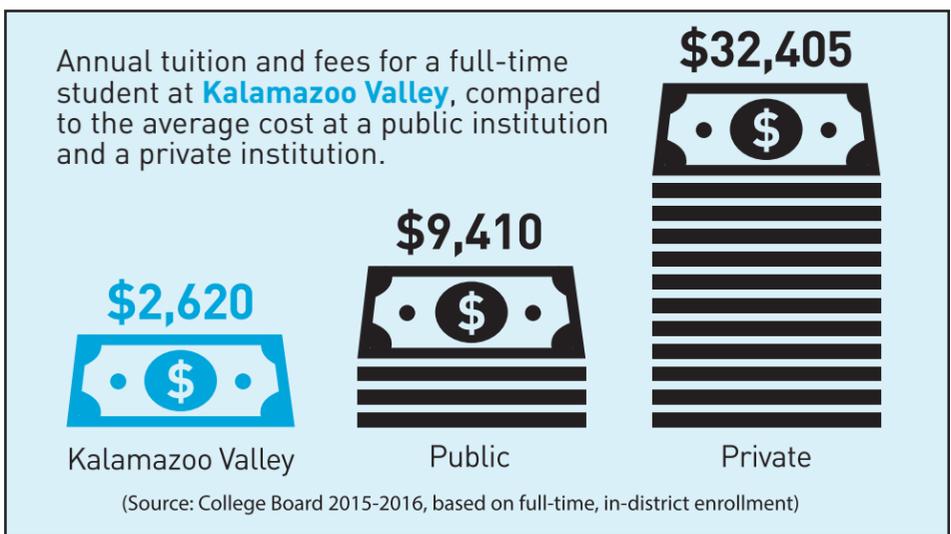
Parents, students, governmental leaders, and employers feel free to question the value of a college degree and community colleges are not immune to the scrutiny.

Keeping tuition affordable has always been a priority at Kalamazoo Valley. Recent statistics demonstrate the relative affordability of Valley when compared to four-year public and private educational institutions.

A Kalamazoo Central High School graduate, Jazmin Ravotas, said, "Even though my mom is a faculty member at an area four-year university, I decided to save money by taking all of my general education classes at Valley."

And it's not just a matter of tuition costs that have potential students and their families asking questions. Parents are concerned that their students are graduating with a mound of debt and few job prospects. Kalamazoo Valley's certificate and associate degree programs prepare students seeking to move immediately into the job market following graduation. Those seeking transfer to a four-year institution generally perform better than those who start there as freshmen.

"I came to Kalamazoo Valley because my mom attended here while I was in middle school," said Jade Bauer, a recent Gull Lake High School graduate. "Because of the affordable tuition plus grants and scholarships, I'll be able to graduate from Valley completely debt free. I plan to transfer to GVSU or Michigan State to pursue a degree and career in the sciences."



Even with one of the lowest tuition rates in the state, the college is "doubling-down" on its efforts to help curb student debt by implementing a guided pathway approach to academic course offerings and student advising. The college offers clear, coherent, and sequenced program pathways that are aligned with students' end goals for employment or transfer. The meta-major guided educational pathways at Kalamazoo Valley include:

- Art and New Media
- Business
- Health Careers
- Industrial Trades, Engineering, Design & Manufacturing Technology
- Public Service
- Sustainable Food Systems
- Transfer Programs

The guided pathways approach means even more contact between students, faculty, and support staff. Students are encouraged to meet regularly with staff in the Student Success Center and

use new tools such as Degree Works to help track progress toward their academic goals. This approach can nearly eliminate confusion about course requirements and classes that don't transfer or qualify toward a major.

Jazmin went on to say, "For me, it's not even all about the money, although that's a big part of it - I've been able to access all of the services offered at Valley to help me become an even better student and person." She is studying time-based new media and plans to transfer to Kendall College of Art and Design in 2017.

Is a Kalamazoo Valley Community College education worth it? For Jazmin and Jade and the nearly 300,000 students who have attended Valley over 50 years, the answer is a resounding yes.

Fall semester begins on Tuesday, Sept. 6. For more information about the application process and fall class registration, visit www.kvcc.edu/worthit.

47%
PEOPLE POLLED SAID THAT IF THEY HAD TO DO IT OVER AGAIN, THEY WOULD ACCEPT LESS FINANCIAL AID. THAT MEANS THEY'D HAVE TO GO TO A CHEAPER SCHOOL OR FIND ANOTHER WAY TO FINANCE COLLEGE.

THE IMPACT OF STUDENT DEBT...

44%
CUT BACK ON DAY-TO-DAY LIVING EXPENSES.

37%
DELAYED SAVING FOR RETIREMENT OR OTHER FINANCIAL GOALS.

28%
DELAYED BUYING A HOUSE.

12%
DELAYED MARRIAGE.

14%
CHANGED CAREERS AS A RESULT OF STUDENT DEBT.

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KALAMAZOO VALLEY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Paul Fazio and his wife Jennifer hadn't considered Kalamazoo Valley as a college option for their children until they discovered the honors program. "I'm a Hope College graduate and my wife's a Hope College graduate and we weren't sure about junior college for our daughter Marley," Fazio said. "Then we talked to Stephen Louisell about the Honors Program and discovered this hidden gem. It gives you a unique experience at a community college."

Marley (Mara) Fazio graduated from Plainwell High School in 2014 and earned an associate degree in biomedical science this spring from

Kalamazoo Valley. She is transferring to Western Michigan University to pursue something in the science and medical fields. "I was hesitant about coming to Kalamazoo Valley," she said. "All of my friends were going to big universities. Coming here was definitely worth it. I learned a lot and made a lot of friends. I'm really better off. I won't be \$40,000 in debt when I graduate with my bachelor of science degree," Marley said.

Her brother Joseph was also set to enroll at Kalamazoo Valley until a ROTC scholarship to WMU swayed his decision. "My whole perspective about

community college has changed," Paul Fazio said. "People become immediately condescending when you mention community college, but college is what you make of it and Kalamazoo Valley can be a great option in the formulation of a young person's path. It can open the doors to more opportunities. If you work hard and you're self-directed, it's a wonderful investment in moving forward."

Marley agrees. "You get more hands-on instruction here than at many four-year universities. I would highly recommend it."



The Fazio family (top l-r) Joseph, Marley, Jennifer and Paul

CAMPUS CLUBS

BRINGING STUDENTS TOGETHER

Sometimes all it takes is making a meaningful connection to keep you coming back – whether it’s a coffee shop or even the classroom. That’s the concept behind the more than 20 student clubs and organizations on campus at Kalamazoo Valley. From the Active Green committee to Student Veterans of America, there truly is something for everyone.

“Students who are connected on campus are more likely to do well and be retained at the institution,” said Coty Dunten, Orientation and Life Services coordinator for Kalamazoo Valley. “My favorite thing about student clubs and organizations is that we make the process transparent and accessible for students who want to start a group. You can get involved in so many groups that exist or you can start your own.”

Student clubs and organizations must include ten registered students, a full-time advisor who is a college faculty or staff member, and the group must develop and follow by-laws. The Science Club and Culinary and Sustainable Food Club at the Culinary and Allied Health building on the new Bronson Healthy Living Campus are two of the newest student clubs.

Adam Slater, Kalamazoo Valley biology lab coordinator, serves as the advisor to the Science Club. He said the group has about 20 active members. “Research is a major emphasis for the club,” Slater said. “We would like to provide students with similar undergraduate research opportunities as four-year colleges. At the very least

we can better prepare our students for summer research programs.”

While some clubs like the Student American Dental Hygiene Association have an academic focus, others, like the Soccer Club and Dagorhir Club are purely recreational. Dagorhir Club members explain that their club is involved in full-contact medieval reenactment with influences “from every fantasy universe in the known world.”

Eli Rodriguez and Don Ashbaugh are culinary students who started the Culinary and Sustainable Food Club. There are about 35 active members in the new club.

“It was important for me to start the CSF Club for a variety of reasons,” Rodriguez said. “I wanted to provide a place where culinary, brewing and any other students can come to network and congregate. We’re integrating ourselves into the community by providing food learning experiences and healthy living lifestyle information and most importantly, having fun while engaging with local businesses, culinary professionals and bringing a new and amazing experience to the city of Kalamazoo.”

Rodriguez said club members have an eye and passion for food, yet want to make a difference in the community. Ashbaugh agreed. “The club is just one way for students to support other students in the program,” he said. Meetings are held once a month both on campus and at community venues. In addition to the meetings, the group

maintains an email list and shares information about job postings and volunteering opportunities.

Although it’s technically a program and not a club, Brother2Brother is another way for students to make connections on campus. Transfer Services Director Ezra Bell leads the group for male students who want to network with other male students and academic and community leaders. The annual B2B Men’s Leadership Conference includes guided conversations with panelists who share their stories about academic and personal development.

The main focus of B2B is “getting males to understand that academic success is better achieved collectively than alone.” Last year about eight men attended weekly study group sessions. “The guys who attended definitely had more consistent grades,” Bell said.

Bell said he works to engage his B2B participants in meaningful conversations about what’s going on in the community and in the world. “Our goal is to do better by way of our counterparts,” he said. “We acknowledge that we have to do better as men. That’s the reality.”

Bell often brings in speakers to inform B2B participants about community resources. Group members also share their stories with Kalamazoo middle school students through the Communities in Schools program. “What we’re doing is building on men’s emotional intelligence or soft skills,” Bell said. “We’re establishing



Eli Rodriguez - Culinary & Sustainable Food Club officer

relationships to help prepare men for their academic journeys.” For more information about B2B contact Bell at ebell@kvcc.edu or 269.488.4045.

For the complete list of existing clubs and organizations, go to www.kvcc.edu/campuslife. Students who are interested in starting their own club can contact Dunten at cdunten@kvcc.edu or 269.488.4825.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Chris Higgins

When Mattawan native Chris Higgins left Kalamazoo Valley Community College in the spring of 1994 after studying graphic design, he had no idea he would be back 20 years later working with the staff at the new Bronson Healthy Living Campus.

Higgins, who now owns a controlled environment agricultural business in Texas and heads up other sustainable horticultural and agriculture efforts world-wide, has taken a non-traditional path to his current career. He never expected that path to cross with his favorite alma mater.

“I was first drawn to Kalamazoo Valley to play basketball,” said Higgins. He

remembers his two years at Valley as a great time to learn academically, and to be mentored and inspired by long time Cougars Athletic Director, golf and basketball coach Dick Shilts. “I remember feeling like everyone I came in contact with wanted me to succeed. I will always hold a fond place for Kalamazoo Valley,” he said.

After completing a Liberal Arts Degree (double majoring in anthropology and sociology) at Olivet College, Higgins planned to head to law school. But it wasn’t long before he knew he belonged with his original roots. Growing up, his grandparents owned a small farm in Fennville, Michigan growing mainly apples, peaches and pears. As with all small family farms, their business changed significantly through the years as they sold at every outlet possible, ranging from road-side fruit stands to main-stream baby food producers. Before the Bronson Healthy Living Campus was even a dream, Higgins’ path had led him back into the farming industry.

As a young person he couldn’t imagine the opportunities a career

in farming could provide, but as certain doors were opened for him, Higgins was up for the challenge. By April of 2009, he and a small group of investors founded Hort Americas, a wholesale supply company supporting controlled environment agriculture. They quickly established a reputation competent in the industry, particularly in the areas of greenhouse grown vegetable production, vertical farming and LED lighting technology.

It was last year that a message from Ben Bylsma at the new campus came across Higgins’ desk. They were looking for lighting products and other innovative ideas.

“I had no idea that Kalamazoo Valley opened a healthy living campus,” said Higgins. “They had no idea that one of their alumni was running a company offering innovative ways and products to support their efforts.”

Indeed, the program at Kalamazoo Valley shared the same philosophies as the programs run by Higgins. He also noticed during his first visit

in May that Kalamazoo Valley was ahead of most other colleges and universities.

“I have the ultimate goal of helping the new campus grow—they offer things that no other colleges do,” said Higgins.

With Higgins’ extensive experience with globally assisting farmers to grow crops where none had grown before, he would certainly know.

He helps make it all happen through the Foundation for the Development of Controlled Environment Agriculture (FDCEA) and International Congress on Controlled Environment Agriculture (ICCEA).

He is also founder and editor of the emagazine, *Urban Ag News*.

His other initiatives include raising money through the Tour De Fresh bike-a-thon to place salad bars in public schools in Michigan, Missouri and Texas.

STUDENT ATHLETES COME OUT ON TOP

Between practice, games, and off-season conditioning, student athletes must find a delicate balance between athletics and academics.

Luckily, it can be done.

"We always emphasize student before athlete," said Russ Panico, Athletic Director at Kalamazoo Valley. He says he encourages the Valley coaches to look for high school seniors who are already succeeding at both. For any kind of transition into college life, athletes at Valley receive support from their coaches, counselors, and the Student Success Center.



Ellen Bregg, Radiologic and Imaging Sciences

"Each student athlete has their own plan on how to tackle their schedules," said Maureen Brown, Kalamazoo Valley's head women's basketball coach. "We are here if they need help with the time management piece."

What most successful student athletes will tell you is that discipline is the key.

A big factor is that time is limited for each piece of their lives, so they need to maximize it.

Ellen Bregg, a sophomore recruited for basketball from Hopkins, feels she is a better student because she is an athlete. "For me, I have always been a student athlete. This has taught me the priority of time management. I know that each day there is a time for basketball/practice and a time for school/homework," said Bregg. "I know that if I want to be a successful athlete, I have to be a successful student. I can't have one without the other."

Bregg's plans are to finish her studies in Radiologic and Imaging Sciences at Valley and transfer to a four-year university.

Macayla Wright is a sophomore studying engineering. She was recruited to play basketball from Plainwell. She explains how being a student is enhanced by athletics. "For me it has to do with the competitiveness in both basketball and good grades. I push myself to do the best I can, not only on the court, but in the classroom as well because high grades mean better opportunities for my future," she said. "Also there has to be structure on the court. In life you have to learn to budget your time. Basketball helps with both of these. I had to learn to schedule efficiently around basketball so I could have time for all of my studies."

Wright's plans are to continue her studies at Western Michigan University.

Each year, coaches nominate two student athletes who excel at both. This past year, Head Baseball Coach



Jay Smith, Dale B. Lake Award winner

Cody Piechocki nominated outgoing sophomore Jay Smith. "I chose Jay Smith as the recipient for the Dale B. Lake Award due to his outstanding performance both in the classroom and on the baseball field," said Piechocki.

"Jay's best assets are his work ethic and mental toughness. This is a young man who was always prepared. He grew more as a ball player and as a person at Kalamazoo Valley than I have seen anyone else in my eight years at the school. A great example of how hard work and preparation leads to success."

Being a mentor and encouraging life skills and excellence on and off the court and field is all in a day's work for Kalamazoo Valley coaches.

"It means a lot to me that young ladies come to me for help," said coach Brown. "It shows they want to be successful. If I can be a small part of that, then I am doing more than just coaching basketball."

COLLEGE NIGHT CHOOSE FROM 90 SCHOOLS

High school students who are exploring college options are encouraged to attend the 2016 Greater Kalamazoo Area College Night on Oct. 10 at Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Texas Township Campus.

The event will include representatives from nearly 90 colleges, universities and training institutions. From 6 to 7:30 p.m., college and university representatives will be available to speak with students and their parents about higher-education opportunities, their programs and campuses.

Also scheduled to participate are representatives from the armed forces and training providers who will detail what's available at technical schools, and how military service can help pay for a college education.

A financial aid workshop will be held at 7 p.m. in the Dale B. Lake Auditorium. It will cover scholarships, student loans, and the kinds of financial assistance available from the federal and state governments.

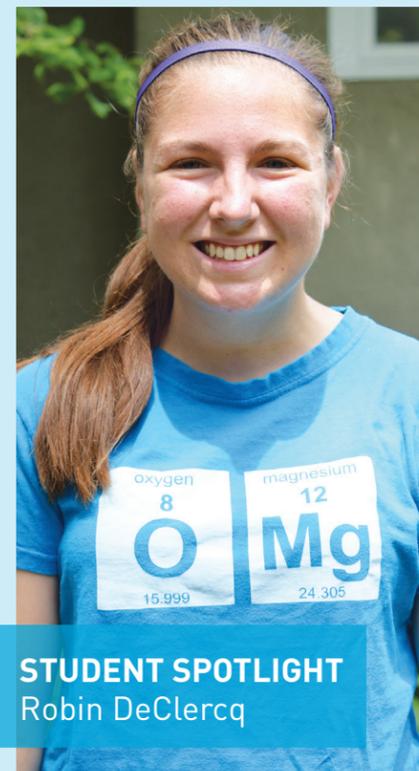
The event is free and open to the public.

Participating institutions will include Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Western Michigan University, Ball State University, Calvin College, Central Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Harvard University, Hope College, Kalamazoo College, Kendall College of Art & Design, Lake Superior State University, Lawrence Technological University, Michigan State University, Northern Michigan University, University of Michigan,

West Virginia State University, as well as dozens of others.

Student Recruitment Director EJ Bast said the event is an excellent opportunity for college-bound students and their parents to explore their options. "Where else can you access information about so many different colleges and universities under one roof?" he said. "It's a great way to learn about higher learning options that are both nearby and far away."

College Night is co-sponsored by Kalamazoo Valley and Western Michigan University.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
Robin DeClercq

As the oldest child of Kalamazoo Valley's well-known chemistry instructor, Chemical Kim, Robin DeClercq was destined to excel in chemistry. "Most young kids remember learning about the alphabet, but my mom sat me down at a very young age and drew out the parts of an atom," DeClercq said. That early lesson has launched her on the path to mastering the subject.

At the end of June, the Kalamazoo Valley graduate was one of eight semi-finalists in the American Chemistry Association's Chemistry Champions Contest in Washington, D.C. The contest involved creating a video to explain a chemical process to a non-science oriented audience. DeClercq's video explains the chemistry of popping corn.

DeClercq was the only contestant from a community college. "All except two of the other semi-finalists had a Ph.D. or Master's Degrees," DeClercq said. "They were all so friendly. It was an excellent opportunity for me to learn from their feedback. I'm hoping that we'll stay connected and I'll be able to contact them if I need assistance someday." DeClercq said the competition gave her a good idea of how to present in front of a large group. It's a skill she's certain she'll continue to use.

DeClercq received an associate degree from Kalamazoo Valley and will transfer to Michigan State University to study chemistry. She was able to earn her associate degree in one year because she was dual-enrolled as a senior at Hackett High School. She was still a student at Kalamazoo Valley when she entered the contest and did some of her filming in chemistry instructor Kim Greve's lab.

Check out her video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8SFuqqDwYY&feature=youtu.be>.

FOOD HUB BRIDGING THE GAP

Kalamazoo Valley's new Food Hub is poised to play a crucial role in getting fresh, local food onto more plates in Kalamazoo. Its purpose is to bridge the gap between produce growers and consumers. "We want to be the piece in the middle to help support getting fresh, local foods into institutions," said Randall Davis, Food Hub and food safety coordinator for Kalamazoo Valley. "I'm excited about what the future possibilities will be. Innovation will come naturally as we grow," Davis said.

hospitals, universities, and schools; to flexibly support the local food system by filling gaps in training, production, and processing; to provide hands-on training and credit-based education that leads to jobs in the local food system; and to create opportunities for education and engagement with community organizations.

Food production at the Center is focused on new, innovative, and high-tech methods for growing, including hydroponics and aquaponics. The outdoor growing areas also showcase traditional sustainable methods. "We will produce a diverse mix of crops for demonstration and educational purposes and a high volume of a few key crops for institutional customers," said Rachel Bair, director of Sustainable and Innovative Food Systems at the Food Innovation Center.

number of suppliers and customers, and diversify processing options to include frozen, dehydrated, and sauced products."

Bair said the Food Hub offers many benefits to the community and its farmers and consumers. She explained that with traditional fresh food distribution, a batch of carrots may contain vegetables from five different farms. Food hub distribution practices ensure that the local source can be identified and more benefits get back to the farm. Not only does the Food Hub get more fresh, local produce onto plates faster, but it provides unique training opportunities for students enrolled in the college's Culinary and Sustainable Foods programs.

"When possible, we also seek to create community benefits through our students' work," Bair said. "The Farm and the Food Hub do just that. They are venues for students to practice real-world skills while supplementing the Kalamazoo food supply and providing services to local farms and cafeterias."

Food Hub plans call for buying fresh produce from many local farms, processing - which involves washing, peeling, chopping, and sometimes freezing it - and selling it to local institutions like hospitals, schools, and universities for use in their cafeterias and patient meals. "We will aim for sales revenues to cover our expenses and any excess will support the facility and programs," Bair said. "We don't want to compete with any existing businesses, and have identified this as a market niche that needs to be filled."

Davis emphasized that the intent is not to compete with existing businesses. "We are running a business in support of our educational programs," he said. "As part



Herbs grown in the Food Innovation Center

of that, our students will grow, process, package and distribute food in order to help build a better understanding and appreciation around local foods."

Bair is finalizing the process to obtain Food Hub licensure from the state. She said that during the first year, about five to ten local farmers will probably use the Food Hub for vegetable processing and distribution. Within five years, Bair expects 30 to 40 farmers to use the Food Hub to distribute produce to as many as ten large scale customers. "We'll look for a nice, diverse, range of products so we can help ensure a secure supply and demand," Bair said.

Members of the Michigan Farm to Institution Network and the Michigan Food Hub recently hosted a joint meeting in Kalamazoo and toured the Food Innovation Center.

Noel Bielaczyc, Food Hub and Meat Value Chain specialist with MSU Center for Regional Food Systems and co-convenor of the MI Food Hub Network, called the Food Hub a huge asset for the state of Michigan. "The connection between Kalamazoo Valley Community College and Bronson Hospital is a great example of a Food Hub institution partnership and a model for other communities across Michigan," he said.

Colleen Matts, Farm to Institution Specialist with the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems and co-lead of MFIN agreed. "Food hubs can play a critical role in helping institutional food buyers source more Michigan foods on a regional level," she said.



Food Innovation vegetation wall



Bronson Healthy Living Campus, Food Innovation Center

The Food Hub is located at the college's Food Innovation Center, which is one of three buildings on the new Bronson Healthy Living Campus in downtown Kalamazoo. The Center includes a 16,400 square-foot building with a 9,600 square-foot greenhouse on approximately eight acres of reclaimed urban space.

Food Innovation Center objectives are to build the supply chain for local produce into institutions including

The center's Food Hub is a flexible space that was designed to be scaled up gradually and adapted to local market needs. "In the first two years we plan to start lightly processing produce grown on-site and at a limited number of local farms. We'll also distribute raw, washed and chopped produce to local institutions," said Bair. "Over years three to five we will gradually scale up the

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