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# MARQUETTE COUNTY ENROLLMENT RESEARCH REPORT



NORTHERN MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY



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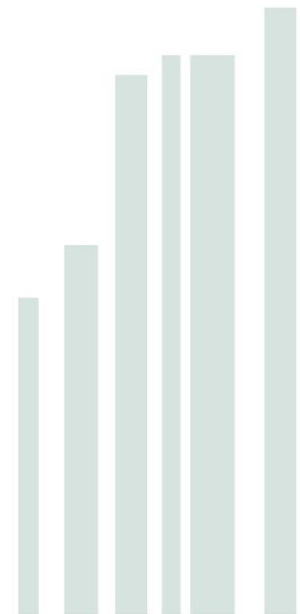
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Enrollment of first-time freshmen from Marquette County at NMU has been on a steady decline for the past decade. Our team from PR250 conducted research on graduating seniors from Marquette County and why NMU isn't their number one choice. Our group focused on factors driving students away as well as the ones drawing them in and got their direct feedback. In our research, our goal was to find precisely where NMU is lacking in their attention to the local Marquette County student.

Through our secondary research, we first learned exactly who Generation Z is. This generation is now enrolled in college and will be doing so for the next 9 years. They were born from 1995-2010 and make up around 25 percent of the US population. Gen Z is extremely determined and believe in a college degree but fear the debt that comes with it. Almost half of them expect to become their own bosses. There is high interest in entrepreneurship and 78% of Gen Z believes that their drive is higher than their peers. We also learned that NMU is not alone in the enrollment crisis. It is a national trend for mid-size non-specialized public universities to experience falling numbers due to smaller high school graduating classes and less people deciding to attend college

In our primary research we conducted 2 focus groups, 3 interviews, and a survey. This data was collected from September to November of 2019. Our target audience were high schoolers in their sophomore, junior, and senior years, as well as instructors that have spent many years in the public school system. The focus groups were conducted with MSHS and North Star Academy students separately. We interviewed a Junior in high school, a Senior who is homeschooled, and a high school instructor of 25 years to get a wide variety of responses.



Our primary discovery through the research is that NMU is generally overlooking students in Marquette County until they have applied to the school in their Senior year of high school. There are other schools going after local students far more aggressively and giving better incentives to choose their school over NMU and enrollment is dropping. There are approximately 50 percent less first time Marquette County freshmen at NMU than there was 10 years ago. Local high schoolers hold the belief that Northern simply assumes they will choose to go here and therefore do not have to be as involved.

During our research we made it a point to take recommendations of those we interviewed. Northern must be more aggressive with their marketing and reach toward local grade school students. They must recruit through personal relationships and early involvement from kindergarten onward. Northern should encourage to come here to get their general education credits. There needs to be more incentives for those growing up in Marquette County such as free passes for PEIF usage, free access to sporting events, and even a discounted rate or guaranteed scholarship for students that choose to come here. Finally, Northern must enact a local ad campaign appealing to those who were raised here and be extremely transparent about the existing stigmas around attending the school.



## INTRODUCTION

Why isn't NMU the number one choice for Marquette County students? Enrollment of first-time freshmen from Marquette County at NMU has been on a steady decline for the past decade. Our research was conducted through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Overall, our goal is to better understand our key target audience and present our research findings in a valuable and knowledgeable way for the future use in enrollment strategies for NMU. Our project is focused on providing insights in order to improve NMU's relationship with the local high school community.

## ERAS MAP & SWOT

Our eras map shows four periods in the past decade and how the amount of freshmen from Marquette County compares to the total amount of freshmen enrolled. Finally, we show the total enrolled at NMU. It shows a steady decrease across the board with the outlier of a bigger freshman class in 2018.



## MARQUETTE COUNTY ERAS MAP

	2009	2012	2015	2018
MARQUETTE COUNTY FRESHMEN	464	361	319	239
NMU TOTAL FRESHMEN	1754	1634	1431	1608
TOTAL CAMPUS ATTENDANCE	9438	9159	8303	7595

Our project is focused on what factors make Marquette county high school seniors choose NMU over other colleges. NMU starts off with many strengths supporting their choice to come here. For one, it is close. Students who don't want to travel far or aren't ready to go off to college can still begin their higher education. NMU is still the second most affordable college in Michigan. The surrounding area is familiar and is safe. Students from this Marquette County don't have to stress about integrating into a new community and figuring out where things are, there is a university right in the heart of what they know. The acceptance rate is just over 75% which provides access to college for many locals.

NMU doesn't have the greatest reputation to locals and our study will show this to be true. "NMU, where the N stands for knowledge" is heard frequently. More often today you will hear the phrase "just Northern" or "last resort." Even if someone doesn't believe



it's true, hearing these things still plants a seed in your head that makes you think about dumb kids going to NMU, especially younger kids. For some kids, the college may be too close to home. They may be ready to hop on the first flight out of the UP and there is not much you can do to stop them. Northern also has a residence hall policy that affects locals excitement to attend. You must either live in the dorms and pay or stay home with your parents for two years. There are lots of kids who would love to go to NMU but do not want to stay at home, and do not have money to afford the dorms. For others, NMU simply just still feels like high school and they're ready to move on.

NMU has been doing a great job integrating with the community in recent years but there is much more to be done. They must make Marquette county love them. They could be involved from kindergarten. They could expand dual enrollment for all high school kids across Marquette county. There could be far more incentives including discounted enrollment, more personal invitations, and local benefits. Finally, there is an opportunity to personalize an ad campaign to Marquette County students with transparency addressing their local reputation.

There are threats that NMU has less control over that affect the institution as well. You cannot control what local teachers are telling their students about the school. They may encourage them to move on and experience the world or simply harshly critique the school. There are issues with peer bullying; students could judge you or make comments about how you're not going anywhere with your life. This leads to embarrassment and even more reason not to go. There is also no way to do anything about the shrinking senior class sizes, which affects not just our county, but the entire country. They have been getting smaller for years due to fertility rates. By 2025 the recruitment efforts will have to be productive if NMU wants to grow or even stay the same size.



# S

- CLOSE TO HOME
- AFFORDABLE COST
- SMALL CLASSES
- FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT
- ACCEPTANCE RATE

# W

- N FOR KNOWLEDGE
- "JUST NORTHERN"
- DORM RULE
- TOO CLOSE TO HOME
- "LAST RESORT"

# O

- EXPAND DUAL ENROLL
- INCENTIVES
- WILDCAT WEEKEND INVITE
- PERSONAL RECRUITMENT
- PEIF/GAME PASS
- DISCOUNT PROGRAM
- MQT AD CAMPAIGN
- EARLIER INVOLVEMENT

# T

- PEER OPINIONS
- NEW RECRUITMENT LAW
- OLD REPUTATION
- SMALLER SENIOR CLASS SIZE
- CLIMATE
- PARENT INFLUENCE



## REVIEW OF PRIOR SECONDARY RESEARCH

### College trends

Each new generation is faced with their own challenges and experiences, all unique and different. Generation Z is a group of individuals who were born between 1995 and 2010. Unlike other generations, Generation Z is filled with realistic problem solvers who appreciate honesty from their leaders (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). High school students have a better opportunity to attend college than previous generations. Although, Generation Z saw their parents and the economy suffer in 2008. Collecting mass amounts of debt is a fear of this generation. The question left standing for Gen Z, does a college education outweigh the cost?

Recent trends show that education cost plays a significant role in Generation Z's opinion about going to college, "80 percent reported being concerned about higher education cost, and 17 percent indicate it as their number one social concern." (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 100). Higher education is pricey and this generation has seen debt at its worst. Most students from Marquette County come from low-income areas. Higher education costs could be reason enough for Marquette County high school students to choose other options after graduation.

Whether in high school, college or graduating, this new generation is pushing its way into the working world and they're doing it quickly. "Two-thirds of Generation Z students believe that preparation for life in the working world is a joint responsibility between the institution and the student." (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 185). Generation Z wants to see more working opportunities within their education system. Entrepreneurship



is on the rise. This generation of students will go at lengths to be successful through their work.

“Members of Generation Z may skip working for an employer altogether. Nearly half expect to become their own bosses during their careers. With self-employment predicted to grow at a rate of 6 percent for the next five years, entrepreneurship is an even more viable option for this generation to make a living.” (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 103).

According to the annual eCities study, Marquette is one of eight top performers at fostering entrepreneurial growth and economic development (Clickner, 2012). Students from Marquette County grew up surrounded by entrepreneurship. The possibility of it playing a role in students’ college opportunity decisions is probable. Entrepreneurship could have an effect on Northern Michigan University’s college enrollment rate within the county due to Generation Z’s longing to be their own boss. (Seemiller & Grace, 2016)

## **Generation Z**

Generation Z will be a quarter of the US population by 2020; it includes those born from 1995 through 2010. This demographic has experienced the great recession where 8.7 million jobs were lost, the economy crashed and the aftermath of 9/11. The difficulties the world experienced while Generation Z grew up was catastrophic. More than 70% of Generation Z refuse to let others down, they would rather lift them up, (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) while also having grit for their own goals. 78% of Generation Z believe their drive to achieve is higher than that of their peers. (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) Generation Z is very career oriented. Generation Z Students know that it takes more than hard work to achieve their dreams. (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) “Generation Z students believe that education is the foundation for individual success and societal prosperity” (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 98). With 80% of Gen Z students concerned about the cost of higher education we see a trend of Gen Z choosing not to go to college. In this generation, 40% are willing to make a risk if there is a gain to be made. “they recognize that they will be responsible for taking the most out of college to prepare for a career,”



(Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 11). Generation Z still sees the importance of higher education but will be more critical before deciding on a college. Gen Z is concerned about the rise in the price of universities but recognize that they must make this sacrifice to succeed.

### **Attitudes and Behaviors**

We are living in a time where Generation Z is less likely to choose a large and expensive university. The top ten schools in the nation will always attract students with their reputation but many will be turned away by the cost. Generation Z's priorities are focused on being cost efficient and getting a degree that will get them a job. Smaller universities such as Northern Michigan University are becoming increasingly popular for this era of students. For Marquette graduates, Northern Michigan University could be the college they're looking for. Rather than gearing up to head off to a bigger school, Marquette County students may be more inclined to stay close to home and pay far less for a higher education. We found that 48 percent of Gen Z says that student debt is a major financial concern (Lincoln Financial Group, 2016). A university with a historic reputation no longer matters. A quality education at a decent price is the main concern for Generation Z students. It is important for universities to be aware of this trend and market accordingly. Generation Z must work to replace any negative stereotypes among high school students and show that Northern Michigan University is truly a 21st century university.

A blogger for Value Walk states, "as Generation Z students approach college many have begun to put together strategies that will allow them to more responsibly pay for higher education without as much fear of mortgaging their futures." (Value Walk, 2017). According to them, Generation Z students have a strategic attitude toward paying off debt. Having a plan in mind is very helpful when it comes to college debt.

Generation Z students are shaping change in the lives of previous generations. "As a digital generation, Generation Z expects digital learning tools such as these to be deeply integrated into their education." (Forbes, 2016). Generation Z has expectations for their



higher education. Once Generation Z students put their mind to something, nothing can stop them.



# GENERATION

A QUARTER OF OUR POPULATION

BORN BETWEEN

**1995 ▶ 2010**

IMPACT

TWO THIRDS PLAN TO HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT

HALF WANT  
TO START  
THEIR OWN  
BUSINESS



78% ARE SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS



80% ARE  
CONCERNED AT  
THE COST OF  
COLLEGE



MOST

EDUCATION

EMPLOYMENT

EQUALITY

IMPORTANT

50% OF GEN Z-ERS ARE CONNECTED TO THE  
INTERNET FOR 10 OR MORE HOURS A DAY



A graphic consisting of a yellow rectangular background with a white border of small white dots. In the center, there is a white rectangular box with a green border of small white dots. Inside this white box, the words "RESEARCH" and "METHODOLOGY" are written in bold, green, uppercase letters, stacked vertically.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While enrollment at NMU is up for the first time in ten years, the number of students from Marquette County continues to decline. For local students there are many reasons to attend. Northern is close to home. Students who don't want to travel far or aren't ready to go off to college can still begin academic career from the comfort of home. According to U.S. News, Northern is still the second most affordable college in Michigan. Our research will be focused around one question, "why is NMU the number one choice for Marquette County students. Our goal is to understand why student enrollment has gone down by 17% since 2008 (NMU Enrollment Data) and what trends are affecting enrollment.

### **Qualitative Research**

Our qualitative research will be done through focus groups, surveys, and interviews. We will conduct our research by asking questions related to Marquette County students and collect the data from our participants.

### **Focus Groups**

First, we will conduct a focus group at North Star Academy and with a few MSHS students. Here we will speak with juniors and seniors in groups of 4-10 participants. Our group will create a list of questions ahead of time and then discuss each question with the participants. After we complete each focus group, we will transcribe our data and locate the key information we need for our research.

### **Interviews**



Second, our group will conduct three separate interviews. The first will be with an MSHS student, the second, with a Marquette County homeschooled student, and the third, with a teacher at MSHS. As we conduct each interview, we will ask a series of different questions depending on the individual. Our group will record and transcribe our interviews. Then, our group will look over the transcriptions and look for key data pertaining to our research questions, “why is NMU not the number one choice for Marquette County students.”

### **Survey**

Third, our group will send out a survey collecting data from Marquette county high school and homeschooled students. The survey will contain data collecting questions and it will be sent to North Star Academy, MSHS and the homeschool community. During the focus groups, interviews, and surveys, there will be questions asked about location, top choices for attending NMU, marketing materials, reputation, and other questions relating to Northerns enrollment. After we collect all of the data, we will transfer the content into our quantitative research where we will convert the data into visuals.

### **Quantitative Research**

Our quantitative research will be done through collecting data from our surveys, focus groups, and interviews and placing the content into visuals.

### **Eres Map**

Our group will create an eres map containing the attendance of Marquette Country freshmen versus the total attendance at NMU.

### **Visuals**

Then, we will create visuals that contain current student enrollment, top choices for attending NMU, total freshmen versus total Marquette . These visuals will contain numbers and data placed into info-graphics using NMU colors, green and gold. As we progress further into the semester, our group will create a story-telling visual that describes two students and their views on attending NMU. Our quantitative methods will be focused around one question, “why isn’t NMU the number one choice Marquette County students?”



## INTERVIEWS & FOCUS GROUPS

Our group interviewed three people and conducted two focus groups connected to the Marquette County community. Our Interviewees included a homeschooled senior and future wildcat. A junior at Marquette Senior High School, and an expert interview with an MSHS instructor of 24 years. Our first focus group was at North Star Academy, a charter school sponsored by Northern, with a group of ten juniors and seniors. The second focus group consisted of a group of four college bound Marquette Senior High School juniors. We asked a wide variety of questions, modified for each interviewee and focus group. Questions ranged from local reputation of the school, how they felt about Northern Michigan University's reach toward Marquette County students, to letting the interviewees openly give us their own suggestions as to what Northern's next steps should be. Each interview lasted around 15-20 minutes and each focus group lasted around 30 minutes. We recorded each meeting on our phone and transcribed them to see our findings. Finally, we coded each transcript to determine the most useful findings and content.

### **Local Reputation**

Overall, each interviewee had positive things to say about Northern. When we asked the interviewees what their friends or family thought of Northern, they mentioned nothing negative. The instructor addressed his colleagues' opinions of Northern as being "very supportive." Quite a few of his colleagues attended Northern back in their college



years. Although, he informed us that very few of his colleagues talk about Northern with their students. In Dr. Ludwig's words, "they are normally talking about other schools." This topic brought us into Northern's recruitment tactics. Northern is lacking in making themselves known within the Marquette high school community. According to him, "Northern takes Marquette kids for granted" and other schools are "AGGRESSIVELY" going after Marquette County students. "Just northern," this is a very common phrase our research group heard from both of the focus groups we conducted. The meaning behind this is that high school students believe if you go to Northern, you are just settling. One student stated, "people who have lived here all their lives, the accessibility to go there makes it feel like you're settling for something I guess." Another student mentioned Northern was the "back-up plan" for most students. "Oh no I think people are just sick of Marquette, I feel like the weather is a big thing, like people are like oh it's just Northern, like it's a backup kind of plan. People go for their dream school and Northern is kind of a safety net, everyone wants to shoot for stuff and they feel like they failed if they ended up at NMU." As far as teachers opinion goes, the students heard mostly positive things and most of their teachers attended Northern and always included it in their discussions of higher education. Individual attention was another positive reputation of Northern, most students liked the small class sizes and individual attention they would receive. Many know about NMU athletics. We asked what the students knew about Northern and one student stated, "their athletics are pretty solid. We got a D1 hockey team so that's pretty exciting." Finally, the location was a huge reason for students to come here. Even though the weather is bad during the winter, the location is beautiful and is a reason for students to come here. "All year around you have beautiful views whether its freezing or not."

### **Top Decision Factors**

According to our interviewees, some of the top decision factors for attending Northern are, convenience (close to home), cost or scholarship opportunities, safe community, and their academic programs (science, nursing, art ). One of our interviewees



stated, "I really want to be able to graduate without any student loan debt and at Northern, I can do that with scholarships." Another interviewee discussed how Marquette was the safer option. "If you're from Marquette, it's a good and safe option, environmentally, it's a really good school." Our focus participants listed several decision factors: programs, cost, community, location, and professors. With cost, we saw that it isn't as important as we may have thought. One member of the group stated "I realize that NMU is cheap but it's still college so if you're gonna be in debt anyway might as well not go to Northern I feel is the attitude." Another followed up with "Yeah if you're gonna have debt don't settle for less debt." The expensive cost of college is so prevalent that these Gen Z students aren't thinking much of it. One student very straight forward said "I look at campus life, academics, professors, and the variety of general education electives." When we followed up about professors, she said that she will look into their credentials and what other students have said who previously took their classes. When it comes to location they all mentioned the climate and how many people want to leave to go to warmer areas with less harsh winters. They expressed the need for campus life noting that NMU has a large amount of reputable clubs and sports. Gen Z kids know what they are looking for and will dive deep into details before choosing their school.

### **Lack of Incentives**

An interesting statement from the instructor was "Michigan and Michigan State are writing handwritten letters. One thing that Northern does not do well with is making connections with our students. They've got advertising downstate, they've got advertising in Wisconsin, they've got all this outreach, but they are missing the local kids." We asked the MSHS junior if NMU had done anything to get him involved in the University and he said no. We asked if he was encouraged to use the PEIF or the Dome and he once again said no. It seems that Northern believes that locals will come here without effort from the University but the data we've received shows that fewer Marquette County students are enrolling at NMU. Currently, there are 239 Marquette County freshmen attending



Northern. Ten years ago that number was 464 which is 225 fewer students. Whenever we asked students about the lack of incentives, this area was very weak. Students didn't really have a "reason" to come to Northern. A student did mention that if they had a family member working for Northern, they receive free tuition and this was definitely an incentive to attend the school. "Oh yeah for SURE if I didn't get free tuition I'd be out of here." Another big incentive was the opportunity for juniors and seniors to come to campus and check it out. "Yeah I can't remember when but there were times we could leave class and go check out NMU and like what's going on and more specifics." Northern could also benefit by reaching out to local students and giving them a "reason" to visit campus. Also, how is Northern involving local students in wildcat weekend within the Marquette community? When we asked the students this, one states, "yeah it's only like if you show interest in NMU as a senior, then they'll make an effort."

### **Interviewees Ideas and Recommendations**

In our interviews we had a great amount of recommendations from our interviewees. The MSHS junior mentioned how NMU is very bad at transferring credits to other schools for students. He stated, "when we talk about it, some friends say they're thinking about going for two years to get like base credits but I've heard from some that they don't like that. They're stingy about transferring credits cause they want you go there for a major and a minor." He believes that if the school openly said and encouraged the students to come try the University for one or two years and transfer the students credits, more students would be open to attending. If the students fall into a groove then students will more than likely stay. However, NMU would have to put more attention into their general education. The MSHS instructor believes the school should be more aggressive with their marketing and reach toward local grade school students. "I think it all comes down to why don't they come out and recruit? The professors are not out talking to students. They are just assuming that the Marquette students will come, it's that simple. They aren't recruiting." We asked the students what they would personally



like to suggest to the president and the Board of Trustees. Similar to our interviews, they unanimously said more involvement to students who aren't yet committed to Northern. One student stated "Yeah making it so it's a step down from students already committed to going to students who don't know what they want. I think getting juniors to get tours or see what's going on will have a better impact." We found that NMU mostly becomes involved once you are a senior and have already applied to the school. They don't believe the presentations in their freshman year are effective because they don't quite care yet. Northern must hit the students in a more crucial decision time for life after high school.

### **NMU's Marketing and Involvement K-12**

Interviewees also explained that NMU's presence in grade school is sparse. There are a few examples that came up, for instance Ben stated, "yeah, freshman year transitions they had people come in and talk about (northern). Oh, one really cool thing they do is middle college, where you can get a job really fast with good pay. You get an associates degree. It's really good for like welding." This shows great involvement with K-12 students. The MSHS instructor mentions that Marquette isn't recruiting their local students and it's something they can't overlook." Marketing for the local homeschooled community is working well. The homeschooled student talked about how he is always receiving letters in the mail and that he recognized the local areas in the images of the pamphlets and other marketing materials he received. Based on this data from the interviews, Northern should direct more marketing toward the local high school students and one thing recruiters should push for is dual enrollment. We asked our focus group participants about the amount of involvement Northern with the Marquette County students during K-12. When talking to our North Star group had all noted, "Young Authors". Young Authors brings over 3,000 students kindergarten through fifth grade. The Marquette Senior high school student teacher mentioned that are placed in their own classrooms, the student teachers are then ambassadors of the university for these students. "Yeah the three of us have one in chemistry, they're not just watching and



listening they actually teach so that's pretty cool." Along with student teachers a student from MSHS mentioned, "We had transitions our freshmen year and they talked a lot more about northern because that's centered around after high school and college but as a freshman, it doesn't mean anything. It's not effective because we don't even know what we want to do." We then asked the MSHS focus group about the amount of effort they thought NMU gave them as potential students, "On a scale of 1-5 I'd say probably like 1.5 maybe hahah they mention it but they're not encouraging." A huge issue we've seen is Northern's inability to involve themselves with Marquette County high school students. Involving the local students and making events and organizations more accessible to students was a top problem students noticed.

During our interviews and focus groups, our group learned that Northern Michigan University has very little involvement within the local student community and need to work on their recruiting and marketing efforts within the Marquette community. Especially when it comes to community involvement and acknowledging the current local reputation. "Just Northern" is a phrase our group keeps hearing from our interviews and focus groups and it carries some weight to it. The lack of incentives to get Marquette County students on campus is something Northern must asses. Marquette County students are in the backyard of Northern Michigan University and the students feel like Northern just expects that they will attend Northern as their top choice. Other than on campus tours and marketing materials, local students don't see as much effort as other schools that choose to talk to them and make personal connections and have worked on recruiting them to programs. The top factors for Marquette County students in choosing a college are programs, cost, community, location, and professors. If Northern Michigan University was more aggressive with their marketing, personal recruiting efforts, incentives, and focusing in areas other than cost and location for local high school students.



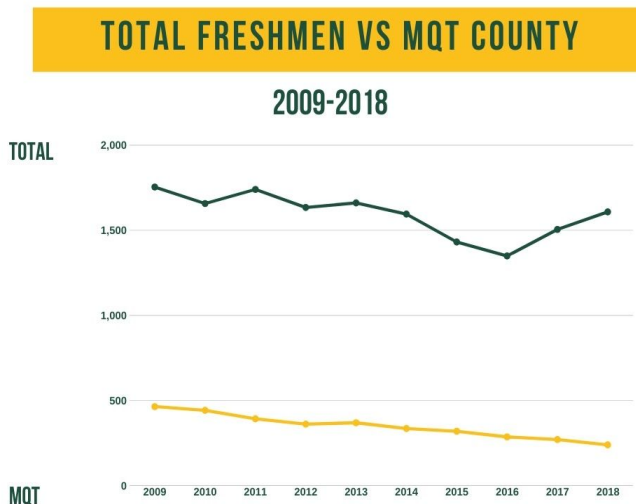
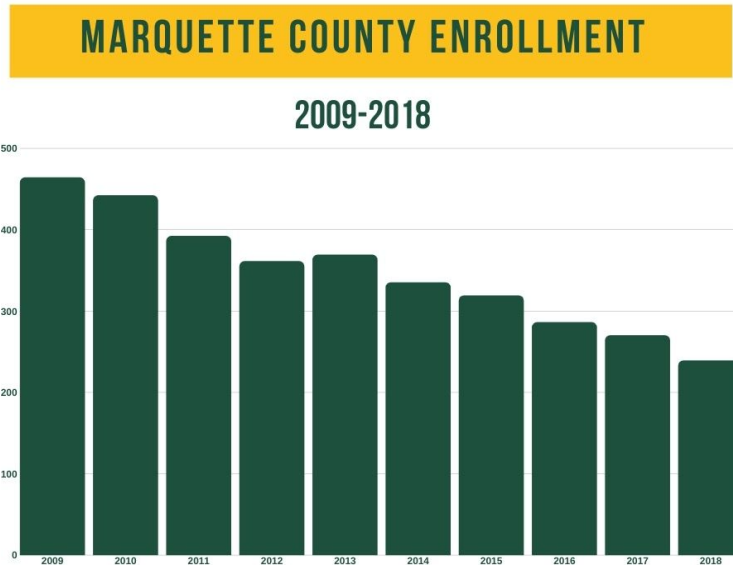
## Data Visualizations

Below you will find key pieces of our groups research. The data was collected through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Our group's data is focused on student enrollment, top reasons for attending NMU, alumni influence, NMU's marketing, and the cost versus the benefits of college. We took the data and transformed it into easily-interpreted visuals.

### Marquette County Enrollment

To the right is a graph containing Marquette County student enrollment at NMU from 2009 to 2018. In 2009, there were 464 students enrolled at NMU from Marquette County. In 2018, we

saw a huge decrease in students from Marquette County. A total of 239 students were enrolled from Marquette County. This is a 48% decrease.



### Total Freshmen VS MQT County

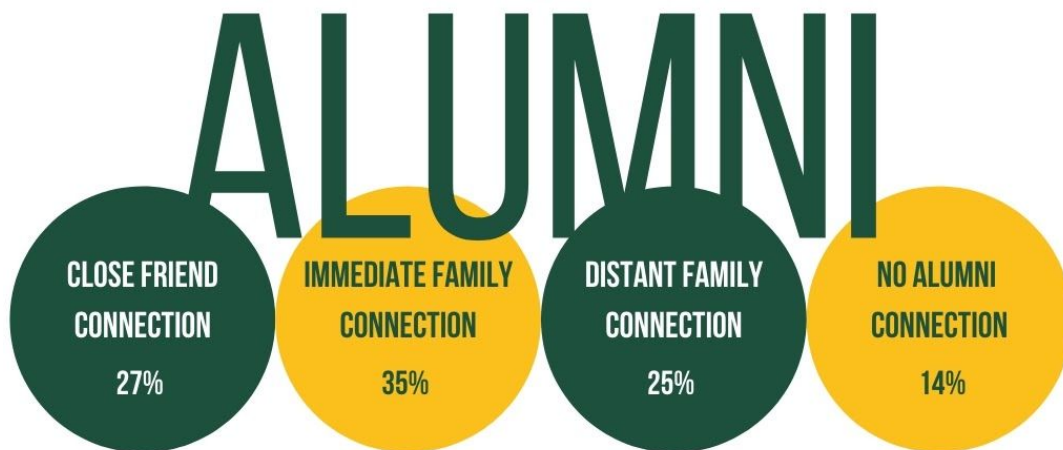
To the left is a graph containing data from the total freshmen at NMU compared to Marquette County freshmen from 2009-2018. The green bar is for the total freshmen enrolled at NMU and the yellow is for enrolled Marquette County freshmen. In 2009, NMU had a total of 1,754 enrolled freshmen and 464 of those students were from Marquette County. In 2018, NMU had 1,608 enrolled freshmen



and 239 of those students were from Marquette County. From 2009-2018, NMU had a 9% decrease in enrolled freshmen.

### Top Reasons For Attending NMU

In the graph to the below, our group pulled together the top reasons for attending NMU in 2016 and 2017. In 2016, 31% of students said they chose NMU because it was close to home, 19% said it was for their major programs, 14% said it was because of the area, and 13% said it was because of friendships or connections. In 2017, 21% of students said their top reasons for attending NMU was because it's close to home, 15% said it was because of cost and major programs, and 11% said it was because the size of NMU.



### Alumni

In the graph above, our group discovered the amount of influence on Marquette County freshmen alumni had. 35% of freshmen said they had an immediate family connection, 27% said it was because of a close friend or a connection they made at NMU, 25% said they had a distant family connection, and 14% said they had no alumni connection. This

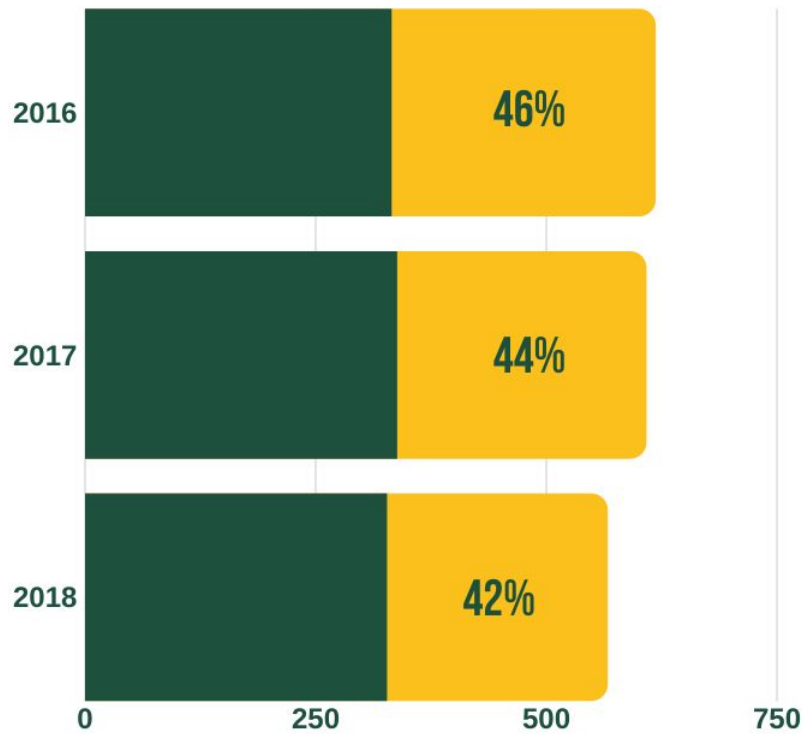


data shows that a student having an alumni or personal connection at NMU can influence their decision on enrolling.

### Marquette County Graduates VS Enrolled Freshmen

In the visual below, it shows the amount of Marquette County graduates compared to the total of number of Marquette County freshmen at NMU. This data is presented from 2016-2018. In 2016, NMU had 332 graduates and 286 freshmen from Marquette County. In 2017, NMU had 338 graduates and 270 freshmen from Marquette County. In 2018, NMU had 327 graduates and 239 freshmen from Marquette County. The number of graduates stayed similar from 2016-2018 and the number of freshmen decreased by 16% from 2016 to 2018.

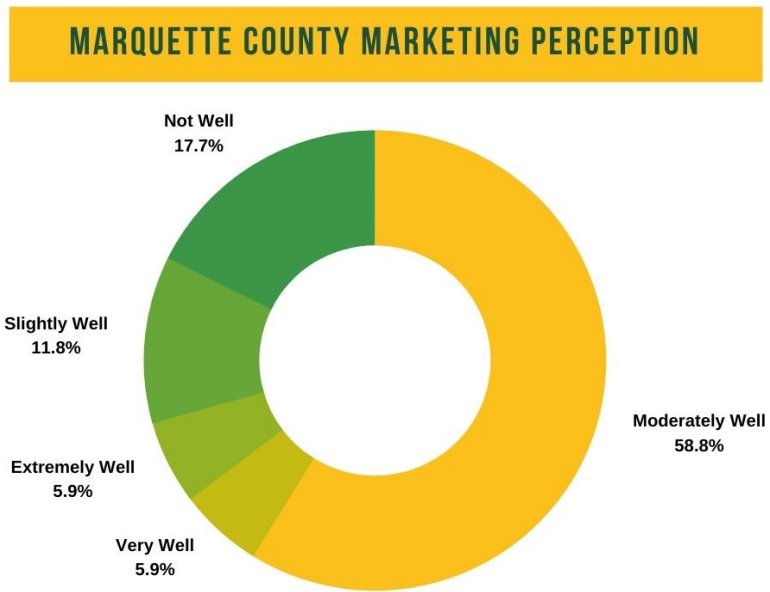
## MARQUETTE COUNTY GRADUATES AND ENROLLED FRESHMEN





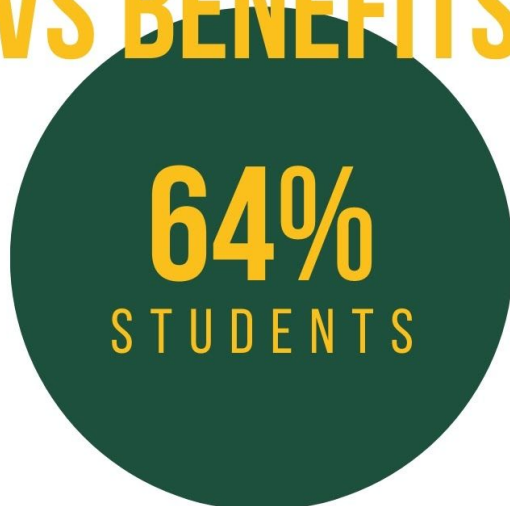
## Marquette County Marketing Perception

In the graph to the right, our group collected data on the perception Marquette County students had on NMU’s marketing and how well the marketing materials resonated with them. 58.8% said NMU’s marketing resonated moderately well, 17.7% said it didn’t resonate well, 11.8% said it resonated slightly well, and 5.9% said it resonated extremely well and very well. Throughout our research, our group noticed that Marquette County students felt neglected or forgotten by NMU. We asked a high school student at MSHS how encouraging NMU was towards enrolling and the student stated that, “on a scale of 1-5 I’d say probably like 1.5.” Based on the data to the right and data we collected from the MSHS student, NMU isn’t doing as well of a job with their marketing materials as they could be.



# COST VS BENEFITS

**MORE THAN HALF OF NMU STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT THE BENEFITS OF COLLEGE OUTWEIGH THE COST.**



## The Cost VS The Benefits

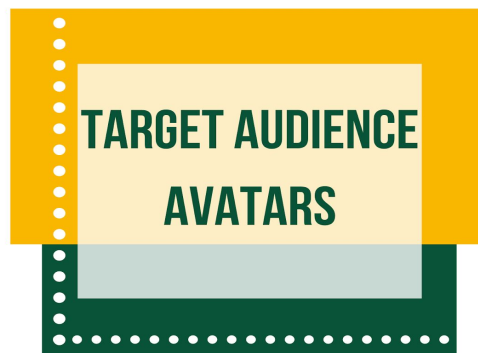
Our group collected data from one of our surveys about the cost compared to the benefits of college. According to the data, more than half or 64% believe that the benefits of college outweigh the cost. More students believe that what a college has to offer

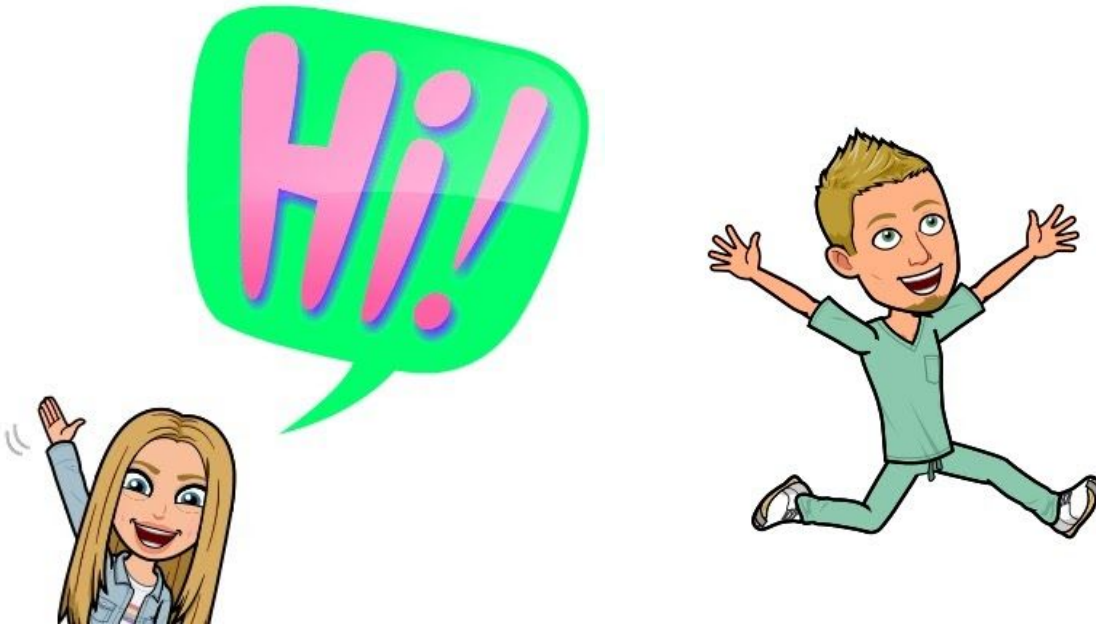


makes the cost of a higher education worth it.

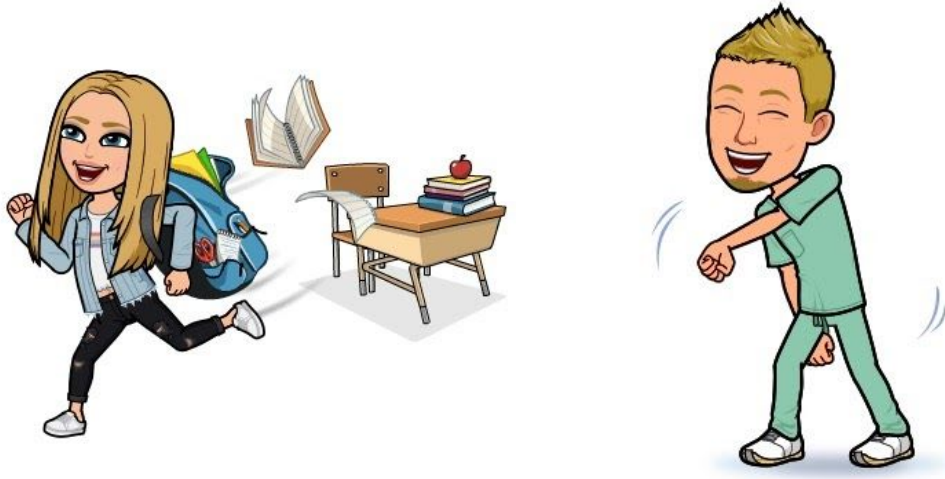
## Conclusion

Each of our visuals or graphs contained key parts of the research our group conducted about student enrollment. To sum it all up, NMU had a 48% decrease in enrollment of Marquette County students in 2018, a 9% decrease in enrollment of total freshmen, and a 16% decrease in Marquette County freshmen. The majority of students for 2016 and 2017 believed NMU was their top choice due to it being close to home and 35% believed having an alumni connection influenced their decision on enrolling at NMU. 58.8% of Marquette County students believed NMU's marketing materials resonated moderately well with them. Each piece of information gave us better insight as to why NMU isn't the number one choice for Marquette County students.





Meet Jenna and Tyler! Jenna is 17 and Tyler has just turned 18. In just a couple of months, Jenna will be graduating from North Star Academy and Tyler will be graduating from MSHS. College is right around the corner for both Jenna and Tyler. Jenna has already decided that she will be attending NMU in the fall, although Jenna is a little worried about being accepted due to her poor grades. Tyler, on the other hand, would prefer to attend a bigger, down state university but both of his parents are NMU alumni and Tyler's dad is a professor which means Tyler will receive free tuition. This will save Tyler a bunch of money in the long run. Unfortunately, he's still leaning toward MSU or UM. At Tyler's school, the other students talk about how NMU is a last resort and if you attend NMU, you've failed. Jenna grew up with the opposite reputation of NMU. At North Star Academy, most of Jenna's friends and teachers support the decision to attend NMU and believe it's a great value when faced with the cost of higher education.



Tyler is an excellent student. Tyler's parents are very proud of all of his accomplishments at MSHS, straight As and captain of the basketball team. Athletics is a huge college decision factor for Tyler. Tyler would like to continue to play basketball in college while pursuing nursing. Tyler is very self-driven and pushes himself hard in school. On the other hand, Jenna doesn't take interest in her studies. Jenna is very passionate about art. In Jenna's free time, she attends Art Week, a local art festival in Marquette, she also enjoys listening to alternative music and attending big music concerts. Jenna isn't very academically driven but she hopes she can make it into the art program at NMU. Cost is a huge factor for Jenna because she has to pay for college on her own. Jenna feels like if she going to already be in debt for school that she might as well attend a bigger school. Tyler doesn't worry about the cost because he gets free tuition and if he chose to go to a downstate school he would have to take out student loans. Student loans don't really bother Tyler because to him, debt is debt. No matter where he goes to school, he'll have debt, the amount doesn't make a difference to him.



Tyler enjoys working out and running. Regularly, Tyler goes for runs along the lakeshore or works out with his basketball team. Tyler’s friends try to convince him to go to the PEIF with him but he typically says no. Tyler doesn’t see any benefit to joining the college community because NMU hasn’t taken the time to reach out to him. Tyler is more motivated to look into the gym facilities down state. MSU has been sending him hand written letters and other marketing mail relating to sports. Jenna isn’t very passionate about the gym but she is more passionate about attending NMU than anything. Jenna wishes NMU would invite her to Wildcat Weekend but NMU hasn’t sent her an invite yet. Jenna is also a little bummed because some of her artsy friends haven’t been sent any mail from NMU. This is making Jenna nervous about attending NMU. Jenna hopes to move into the dorms with one of her friends but doesn’t think her friends will attend due to their interest in other schools.



Tyler is very excited to go into the medical field. Tyler looked over the academic programs at NMU and noticed that they have a good nursing program. The positive things he's heard about academics at NMU has helped him consider attending. Tyler is just a little nervous about going through with it because he's worried about what his friends would think. At MSHS NMU is known as, "Just Northern" and this statement that has been rooted in his brain since freshman year. Jenna, on the other hand, is very passionate about the Marquette community, she loves the location and being close to home. Being involved and attending events is one of Jenna's guilty pleasures. She just wishes NMU would invite her to more college events and would be more involved at the high school. Sometimes NMU visits the school but only for science experiments which isn't related to her interests in art and design.



If Tyler or Jenna choose NMU, they both will have so much to look forward too. Jenna can begin studying art through NMU's art program and Tyler can work his way into the nursing program. NMU is known for having great programs that are taught by great professors. Choosing NMU will be difficult for Tyler if he goes by what his friends think but he knows that NMU will be the cheaper choice. As for Jenna, she'll need to hit the books and study hard if she wants to get into NMU.



Northern should be more aggressive with their marketing and reach toward local grade school students. A direct quote from an interviewee states: "I think it all comes down to why don't they come out and recruit? The professors are not out talking to students. They are just assuming that the Marquette students will come, it's that simple."



They aren't recruiting." There needs to be more involvement to students who aren't yet committed to Northern. Another student stated "Making it so open conversation is a step down from students already committed to going, to students who don't know what they want. I think getting juniors to get tours or see what's going on will have a better impact." We found that NMU mostly becomes involved once you are a senior and have already applied to the school. NMU makes an appearance in the MSHS transitions class but students don't believe the presentations in their freshman year are effective because they don't quite care yet. Northern must hit the students in a more crucial decision time for life after high school. This would be even more effective if NMU was involved from Kindergarten and onward. There are endless opportunities over the course of 13 years to embed the university into their minds in a positive way. Making them feel like their local university truly cares about their future ending the "Just Northern" stigma

## **2.**

Northern should focus less marketing toward the local high school students and instead focus on the personal relationship. Students receiving marketing materials that show off the area don't resonate. There is nothing special about receiving mail from the University that is in your immediate area. One way to build a relationship is for recruiters and professors pushing dual enrollment with a personal invitation to participate. Allowing students to personally meet professors and talk to them about the courses offered will resonate much deeper.

## **3.**

The lack of incentives to get Marquette County students on campus is something Northern must assess. Marquette County students are in the backyard of Northern Michigan University and the students feel like Northern just expects that they will attend Northern as their top choice. Other than on campus tours and marketing materials, local students don't see as much effort as other schools like MSU that choose to talk to them, write handwritten letters, and make personal connections working on recruiting them to



programs. This is ultimately up to the University however some recommendations we have directly from our focus groups and interviews are

- Reduced Tuition for MQT residents
- High School meal plan to eat anywhere on campus
- Gift cards/prizes for attending Wildcat weekend or touring the campus
- Freedom of choice for housing your first two years
- Free access to PEIF and sporting events as a K-12 student