

Dear President Montgomery and Board of Trustees,

On Friday, Western Michigan's Student Media Group (SMG) learned the university decided not to include SMG in its list of 'essential services.'

The Student Media Group board is asking WMU to consider its three branches (*Western Herald*, *Western Herald Video* and WIDR FM) as an essential service, as our vital role in keeping the student body and WMU community informed during the public crisis we are currently facing has never been more clear.

The WMU SMG is not alone in our declaration of operational necessity: [Earlier this week](#), The Minnesota Newspaper Association asked Gov. Tim Walz to join the state of California in formally deem news publications in its state as an "essential service."

Other news organizations around the world are joining suit.

Earlier this month, the [UK published a list of roles it considers "key workers"](#) in its response to COVID-19 movement restrictions. The list includes medical, food and public services such as police, the courts and *journalists* due to their role making sure their communities stay informed.

We have decided to join our contemporaries at Michigan State University's *The State News*, the University of Michigan's *Michigan Daily* and Central Michigan University's *Central Michigan Life* in a commitment to continue to serve our community in a capacity deemed safe by the Center for Disease Control and state of Michigan – regardless of any decisions made affecting our pay.

During the current crisis we are facing, the university must not only acknowledge the critical role journalism plays in our society, but the crucial impact *Western Herald* and WIDR FM has on our campus. Even though students are not on campus, we are still reaching the community as a digital-first news organization. Our actions throughout the COVID-19 crisis are evidence of the necessity our service provides.

Since Jan. 28, we have updated westernherald.com with more than 65 items that include information regarding COVID-19. WIDR FM and *Western Herald* report on information from local businesses and restaurants which the university does not include in its releases, and continue to provide an independent news outlet crafted *by* students, *for* students.

Not only have we proven to be a source of accurate, need-to-know information regarding COVID-19 updates on campus and throughout the state, our visibility within our student body, staff and faculty has never been greater.

In February, *Western Herald* published an [opinion-editorial](#) from Provost Jen Bott, and a [letter-to-the-editor](#) from Dr. Candy McCorkle, which was forwarded to the *Herald* the night before our print publication at the request of strategic communications director Paula Davis.

Following the two pieces *Western Herald* published online and in print, the *Herald's* reporting was [referenced twice](#) in a campus wide email from President Montgomery.

This is further evidence of SMG's value to WMU's campus. The experiential learning opportunity that we provide is unlike any other, and should not face pay cuts for continuing to cover such a unique and unprecedented situation.

For more than 100 years, *Western Herald* has interacted with different university departments to independently inform the WMU community, like Marketing and Strategic Communications, WMU Athletics and every college within the university. Since February, westernherald.com has been visited more than 40,000 times.

Along with declaring WMU's SMG an "essential service" in the event of future movement restrictions, we're asking WMU to consider maintaining SMG student employee payment (paid for by the Student Assessment Fee) similar to other essential student workers.

WMU students have already paid for our service until the end of the semester through the Student Assessment Fee. In order to continue our daily operations (that continue to comply with all CDC distance recommendations), we're asking you to work toward a solution to continue SMG's student employee payment or distribute allocated payment to its intended employee through the student assessment fee.

Attached are examples of our work directly related to information regarding the COVID-19 crisis from westernherald.com.

We appreciate your consideration of this matter, and encourage dialogue as a result of this letter.

Thank you,

Western Michigan University Student Media Group Board:

Kirk Nicholson, SMG Board Chair & Student at Large, WIDR Program Director

Dare'l McMillian, SMG Board Vice Chair, *Western Herald Video* Production Manager

Michelle Herrera, SMG Board WSA Representative & Treasurer, *Western Herald Video* Assistant Production Manager

Zack Zagula, WIDR General Manager

Samuel J. Robinson, *Western Herald* Editor-in-Chief

Chris Sligh, Director of Student Engagement

Glen Dillon, Assistant Director of Student Media

Sue Ellen Christian, SMG Board School of Communication Representative

Greg Gerfen, SMG Board Faculty at Large, Haworth College of Business professor

Mickey Ciokajlo, SMG Board Community Representative, WMU '94, Western Herald alumnus

Fritz Klug, SMG Board Community Representative, WMU '10, Western Herald and WIDR alumnus

Sarah Mazurek, SMG Sales Manager

This page contains just a few examples of our reporting amid the COVID-19 crisis, which includes not only university releases, but reactions from WMU community members. This is a crucial point in our history that will be referenced for decades. As Western Herald, Western Herald Video and WIDR-FM 89.1 continue to operate through these unprecedented times, please take into consideration the student employees who rely on SMG as their only means of income.

[WMU creates 'COVID-19 Task Force' in response to coronavirus threat](#)

[BREAKING: City of Kalamazoo declares city wide State of Emergency](#)

[New 'express checkout' method for students leaving WMU residence halls amid closures](#)

[Student sports reporters around the country adjust during COVID-19 outbreak](#)

[WMU athletes wrestle with impacted collegiate careers due to coronavirus pandemic](#)

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FEATURED

Residence halls closing, distance learning to continue through end of semester at WMU

Aya Miller, Lead CAC Reporter Mar 20, 2020 Mar 20, 2020 1

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Latest News

WMU residence halls will be closing with some exceptions, on Tuesday March 24. For the "10th, 2" and Draper Hall, these will be their last days housing students before being demolished this summer.

Western Michigan will begin distance education on Monday March 16 until April 3.

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FEATURED

U-Haul to provide 30 days of free storage amid university residence closures

Chris Miller, Staff Reporter 22 hrs ago 1

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Latest News

U-Haul is providing 30 days of free storage for students whose residence halls are closing.

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BRISKID **FEATURED**

Amid distance-learning challenges, WMU to allow credit/no credit grading for all classes

Chris Miller, Staff Reporter Mar 18, 2020 Mar 18, 2020 0

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Latest News

Comments on article: WMU has moved to distance learning.

• WMU football machine: Brisikid released for top