Opinion: Higher ed collaboration is key to Detroit’s economic growth

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Partnerships between universities and businesses benefits both students and regional economy, Boyers writes. (Photo: Bebeto Matthews / AP)

Detroit has gone from the least favorite destination on the planet to the hottest place to visit. It’s exciting to see new energy and enterprise in Detroit after such a long period of negative attention, but do we understand the formula that has allowed this beautiful rebirth — and which can sustain it?

If Detroit is going to continue to progress, it’s going to have to be a collaboration between industry and higher education. In a global economy, businesses want to relocate to places where they can find an educated workforce, and where their workforce will experience a good standard of living.

You don’t necessarily have to live where you work — or learn where you live. Schools offer online opportunities, and the future of universities depends on the broader economic ecosystem. It takes partnership between education and industry to create a thriving regional economy.

Detroit is one of the most geographically spread-out communities — which is a challenge and also an opportunity. Whenever somebody comes into the region, it’s a win for all of us. It’s not one thing that builds the economy; it’s a rising tide. It is everybody working together to make this a more attractive place for people to be.

The way forward for Detroit is breaking down silos between talent and education and having them work intimately with industry.

This will not only boost our regional economy, but will also allow the many universities in this region to stay afloat — and eventually thrive. Today, we are faced with a growing crisis in higher education.

Faced with the college debt crisis and the rising costs of higher education, we are all struggling to figure out a solution that benefits all involved.

Students need affordable education. Universities and colleges need diversified revenue streams. And companies need an educated workforce.

Recently, Cleary University partnered with TEAM Schostak to provide free online education to its employees in four states. The company pays our university in a subscription-style setup and gives the benefit of higher education to employees, their children and their grandchildren in much the same way that health insurance has become an expected benefit of employment.
In this arrangement, everyone wins. Employees become more loyal to a company that invests in their long-term growth; they are also more likely to rise through the ranks due to their education. The university gains a robust pipeline of incoming students, and students don’t have to worry about their education's price tag. It’s a win-win-win.

This is not the only such partnership we’re seeking to create. Partnerships like these create a way for private colleges to keep curricula relevant and to keep revenue streaming. Best of all, they allow students to let go of anxiety about seemingly endless college debt.

An educated populace stimulates the economy to grow, which, in turn, strengthens communities.

We can’t think in terms of either-or; it must be yes-and. We can’t stand on the tuition model alone; colleges and industry must partner. The only way forward — for Detroit, and for our nation — is in collaboration.

*Jayson Boyers is president of Cleary University in Howell.*