optiMize challenges students from all majors to turn their ideas into impact that can make the world more just and sustainable.

The challenges of the 21st century require students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and perspectives to identify societal needs, take action, and innovate toward a positive future. At optiMize, we believe college is a time for students to develop their passions and their capacity to act on them, whether for climate solutions, public health, diversity and inclusion, education, social justice, poverty alleviation, or something else. optiMize encourages students to exercise their full range of knowledge, curiosities, creativity, and problem-solving ability while working in teams to build solutions to social challenges.

Since 2012, when optiMize was founded as a student organization, hundreds of student-led projects have been incubated, combining entrepreneurship with goals for societal impact to make a difference in local and global communities. In 2015, academic leadership recognized the impact of our work and elevated optiMize from a student organization to a university program by integrating faculty, staff, and budget support into the structure.

optiMize is now the nation’s largest co-curricular innovation and entrepreneurship program, annually engaging a diverse group of more than 1,400 students. optiMize’s Social Innovation Challenge, a flagship initiative, is a multi-semester incubator that supports approximately 450 projects annually. The project groups presenting the most promising ideas participate in an intensive summer cohort program to continue developing their businesses and nonprofits.

"The concept of entrepreneurial education in the liberal arts is gaining steam, and at this moment, no other institution is better positioned to lead the nation than the University of Michigan."

—JEFF SORENSON, DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION
SOCIAL INNOVATION STUDENT SUPPORT

optiMize SUMMER FELLOWSHIP
Students come to optiMize with ideas and then work on plans to bring those ideas to the world. After completing the 5-month optiMize Challenge—our incubator program that helps students develop their ideas through mentoring and a series of workshops—student teams pitch their projects, and optiMize Fellows are chosen. Supporting an optiMize Summer Fellowship empowers a student to focus on their project all summer without having to work a traditional summer job. Annual gifts of $5,000 will fund one student’s experiences, or an endowed gift of $125,000 will ensure a student’s participation each year in perpetuity.

optiMize PROJECT TEAM FELLOWSHIP
If selected for funding, each member of a team will receive a summer fellowship. Supporting a project team empowers an entire team of students to focus on their self-directed social impact project all summer. Gifts for team support are the most effective way to help optiMize meet our highest-priority need. An endowed gift of $500,000 would establish a named award that would be presented annually to a project team. A one-time gift of $20,000 will support an entire team’s summer fellowship.

TRANSFER BRIDGES SCHOLARSHIPS
In collaboration with partners across the college, Transfer Bridges helps community college students successfully prepare to transfer to Michigan and make the most of their time here. optiMize Transfer Bridges supports those students who are interested in social innovation with dedicated programming that enhances their ability to focus on their goals. This funding enables them to forgo working a part-time job while at U-M and allows them the time they need to develop a self-directed social impact project. Annual gifts of $6,000 support one student, and an endowed gift of $135,000 will establish a named award for a new student each year.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAVEL GRANTS
Professional development grants enable students to become career ready by providing the resources necessary to travel to conferences, pitch competitions, or meet with a professional coach. For Fellows to maximize the potential of their projects, it becomes more and more important that they move into the professional world well-prepared and with confidence. Annual gifts of $5,000 - $10,000 will support 10 - 15 students who seek these opportunities.

“optiMize was one of the core aspects of why I transferred to Michigan and a huge part of my experience. I was able to find my voice, develop my skills, and make an impact in my community because they believed in my project from the beginning.”
— Nesreen Ezzeddine, A.B. ’21
Transfer Bridges Fellow and founder of Michigan Democracy Institute for Civic Engagement, a nonprofit designed to get more college students involved in civic engagement.
SOCIAL INNOVATION PROGRAM SUPPORT

SOCIAL INNOVATION WORKSHOP SERIES

When students have access to experienced leaders, they hear first-hand how to navigate challenges as they build relationships and gain perspective. The Social Innovation Workshop Series brings top change-makers to campus to lead action-based workshops for hundreds of optiMize students. Gifts provide needed funds to host guest speakers and workshop leaders, provide session materials, and create an engaging structure for our students. An endowed gift of $500,000 can be recognized by naming the annual series of five workshops. Annually, gifts of $20,000 are needed to support this core program.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

optiMize programs are organized by a dynamic partnership between a student organization and university staff. The Leadership Development Program is an intensive one-month bootcamp in August for the six students who are preparing to take leadership of the optiMize student organization. These students go on to be the primary leaders of the optiMize community, providing leadership for more than 600 participants. An endowed gift of $250,000 will create a named fund to support this crucial program. Annual gifts of $10,000 would fund participation for a cohort of students as they develop leadership skills and prepare to organize the Social Innovation Challenge.

WAYS TO FUND YOUR GIFT

Your gifts of cash, pledges, or appreciated securities change lives. Wills, estate, and planned gifts allow you to create a lasting legacy that will enable the best and brightest minds to experience a liberal arts education, solve problems in a changing world, and yield ideas and innovations that will make a difference in Michigan and around the globe.

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