

State of the University  
"Building a Healthy University"  
Dr. John M. Dunn  
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Good afternoon, Trustees--Chair Ken Miller and Vice Chair Larry Tolbert--honorees, students, faculty, staff and friends. Allow me to add my welcome to the formal beginning of the 2009-10 academic year. I've been listening carefully to the accomplishments of those honored today, and I have to say this is the truly a wonderful way to set the tone for the year and remind ourselves and our students about the caliber of the people who make up Western Michigan University.

By any measure, honoring our best and brightest faculty and staff members is an appropriate--a healthy way to begin this or any academic year.

First, I would like to add my congratulations to:

- Distinguished Service Award winners Dr. Eileen Evans and Sue Oole;
- Distinguished Teaching Award winners Drs. Chad Edwards and Peter Parker;
- Distinguished Faculty Scholar Dr. William Liou; and
- Emerging Faculty Scholars Drs. Michael Grammar and Takashi Yoshida;

You make us proud by what you've accomplished already. We're eager to see what you will do next and more aware than ever of the potential for achievement in our own work. Thank you.

Our honorees today also epitomize the kind of strength and balance that leads to achievement. That sense of strength and balance is my focus today. I will urge each of you here to join me in building a healthy university and to view health--health in the broadest sense of the term--as one of our overriding goals.

Some may see this as opportunistic. We are, after all, passionately engaged in a long-overdue national conversation about health care, preventive medicine and personal and social responsibility for our own well-being. That conversation has taken some turns that are the antithesis of a healthy dialogue. As engaged citizens, we can and must be involved and take some lessons from that dialogue.

What I ask you to build is a community in which healthy dialogue, respect for our collective resources and commitment to human capital is a way of life. We are off to a good start. You've just seen evidence of that in the seven people we've honored today.

### **A Healthy University**

Good health and its role in the academy have been the focus of my personal academic career. I was pleased to see us welcome our new students last week with one healthy activity, in particular--Buster's Moonlight Stampede. I decided to take part. I ran the 1.8 miles with vigor and relaxed afterward with students, still in my shorts and T-shirt, which was a little bit wet with perspiration. And one young man asked me, "Are you a professor or something?" Well that was too good to pass up. "No," I said, "I'm a freshman. I've raised children and they've gone to the University and now it's my turn. As a matter of fact, I think I may be living on your floor." I

finally decided I better confess because what we don't need now is a student to dis-enroll. So I made the truth be known and we developed a positive relationship. But I may have introduced, however, a sense of healthy skepticism in at least one of our new students. Watch out for him.

Good health is integral to our role as educators. Over the past two years, as I have settled in to the privilege of leadership at this outstanding institution, I have found myself returning to the tenets of my discipline and reflecting on how both the metaphor and the practice of healthy behaviors can be important tools in building not only strong individuals, but strong organizations as well.

I am reminded of the definition of health adopted more than 60 years ago by the World Health Organization. It is this simple statement.

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."--World Health Organization, 1948

This definition has stood the test of time because of its breadth and balance. Health is about living life to one's fullest while respecting the nature of each person's uniqueness. Good health is a quest; a conscious effort each and every day to maintain balance and harmony in our physical, mental and emotional well being--or in the vernacular of the young, to be "in the zone."

What is a healthy university? Again, I want to use "health" in the broadest sense of the term. Our goal as a university community must be good health in all of its manifestations:

- Intellectual vigor
- Physical health
- Emotional and spiritual awareness
- Financial health and stability
- A healthy dose of self-esteem and confidence, and
- The ability to think beyond our individual and limited view to a larger perspective of the needs of our greater society--a world view, if you will.

That is what we can build together. We can be good stewards of the health of this university for the near term and for generations to come. Much of what we need to accomplish can be done by:

- Preserving our individual, institutional and natural resources;
- Preserving and enhancing our commitment to human capital--allowing the full development of the potential of every member of our community; and
- Committing ourselves to the fundamental principles that already are part of the mission and values we have defined as a university community. We have defined what a healthy organization looks like in that mission statement, and we must adhere to those principles to achieve our goal.

Let's begin by examining the condition of Western Michigan University, with special emphasis on developments during the past year.

## **Where We Are Now--The Medical History/A Checkup**

We live and operate in perilous economic times, but despite that, this University has continued to reach past the limitations imposed by tight budgets to innovate and extend its influence, find new opportunities for students and preserve its resources.

### **Academic directions**

On the academic front, the past few months have been productive ones. We have solidified and enhanced initiatives focused on global education and improving access for students.

- Seita Scholar support. We've carved out a reputation for working with young people who have aged out of foster care. Our mission is to combat their historically low rates of college attendance. This fall, we will welcome our second class of Seita Scholars. Retention for our first class is better than many expected--more than 50 percent instead of the 10 percent some had predicted. But that rate is not as high as we want it to be. In June, to help us move forward with the program and measure and enhance its success, the Kellogg Foundation awarded \$500,000 to support that work. Special appreciation is extended to Dr. Yvonne Unrau of our social work faculty for her leadership and commitment to the program.
- Confucius Institute at WMU. In July, a small group from WMU, myself included, traveled to China to finalize plans to make WMU a member of an international network of top universities authorized to be home to a Confucius Institute. It's a development that reflects our existing strength in Chinese studies and will allow us to provide new Chinese language and cultural studies options for WMU students and faculty. We'll also be able to dramatically expand international opportunities for area K-12 schools and their students as well as local businesses and corporations. As we launch this initiative this fall, our community should take pride in the fact that we are one of only 61 schools in the nation to become part of this network. We have a partner institution in China with which we will work, and our partner is outstanding. It's the Beijing Language and Culture University, China's premier international institution for language instruction. I had the opportunity to visit their campus, which has 11,000 students. Half of their students are international students who come from other parts of the world. Professor Jun Wang in our Department of Foreign Languages deserves special recognition for his vision and willingness to sustain the effort to bring about an agreement that will be viewed over time as a seminal moment in the history of the University.
- Engineering Partnership with Kellogg Community College--The first beneficiaries of our new dual enrollment engineering initiative with Kellogg Community College are on board for this fall. Already, however, this partnership is earning the interest and praise from the state's business community. It received a statewide Innovation Michigan award from Business Review in July. This is a model we need to extend to other disciplines and other community colleges. What is now in place at KCC must be replicated with other community colleges to include additional departments and colleges within WMU. Our efforts must be directed toward reducing barriers and encouraging community college students to sustain their education at WMU. The University's future enrollment is dependent, to a large extent, on establishing positive, win-win relationships with our community college partners.

### **Sustainability achievements**

Over the past several years, and particularly during the past year, we have organized and expanded our sustainability efforts in a way that makes us more efficient and allows us to model good stewardship practices for our students. Those efforts have attracted some serious headlines recently. Since those stories appeared over the summer while many on our campus were on hiatus, I think it's important to recap.

First, a few headlines:

- **"Higher Ed's greenest existing building"** In late May, our College of Health and Human Services building became the only higher education facility in the world to achieve LEED-Existing Building Gold Certification, which is arguably the most difficult green certification category to achieve. That achievement attracted national attention that continues, with both the U.S. Green Building Council and Green Business Quarterly currently working on stories about this landmark accomplishment--stories about Western Michigan University.
- **"WMU nabs one of the three highest green ratings of all colleges and universities in Michigan"** In August, Princeton Review named WMU one of our state's most sustainable universities, giving us 92 points out of a possible 99. Our sustainability work puts us in third place among the state's college and universities overall, but in some efforts, our work is without peer among our sister institutions.
- **"Internal campaign is West Michigan's 'Greatest Green Initiative'"** Just last week, Business Review West Michigan honored Western Michigan University's internal sustainability campaign, making us the only higher education entity honored on a slate of awards that also singled out Herman Miller and the city of Grand Rapids.

Those are the headlines. Here's the background. We implemented a campus green awareness initiative that included forming a sustainability advisory committee, launching a comprehensive sustainability Web site, initiating an LED pilot lighting project, unveiling two electric vehicles to mark the transformation of the campus maintenance fleet, entering the Southwest Michigan Regional Sustainability Covenant, and signing the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. When I say, "green rules" on this campus, I'm not necessarily referring to another university in this state, and I'm not necessarily referring to our distinguished provost, Dr. Tim Greene.

We need to acknowledge Dr. Harold Glasser, who has been instrumental on many of those accomplishments, has agreed to serve as our sustainability director as we move forward and continue to weave sustainability into our academic and service initiatives. Our spectacular accomplishments in the areas of energy conservation and resource management remain under the direction of our Associate Vice President for Facilities Management Pete Strazdas with the support of Vice President Lowell Rinker. They're doing a great job and we're very, very proud of them.

Our research in sustainability continues unabated with new projects focused in such areas as green manufacturing, recycling fast food paper materials and developing new sources of energy. One of today's honorees, Dr. Michael Grammer, has built his research around these important issues. Our research in this area must continue to grow.

### **Enrollment and faculty recruitment**

We've just begun our academic year, and we are still a week away from our official census, and I know that you're interested in enrollment. Preliminary analysis leads us to believe we're well within 1 percent of last year's enrollment. That's exactly what we predicted some five to six months ago. We're doing very, very well, and we're very pleased about that. We're also seeing some important enhancements and improvements in enrollment patterns--an increase in graduate students and an increase in the percentage of nonresident undergraduates. Those are patterns we expect to continue. I am also very pleased to report that with your help, we experienced a substantive increase in the retention of students. All I can say is thank you, thank you, thank you for all that you're doing to help students recognize the potential and the importance of staying after their studies and staying in this university. I'm very proud of you and thank you very much for all of your hard work.

Budget constraints have limited our new faculty hiring, but we have hired a small group of outstanding new scholars. In a few moments, I will share with you a plan, a goal, for hiring additional outstanding faculty members to boost our research and teaching capacity.

### **Community engagement**

We continue to work with our community partners with intensity and focus. Our partnerships include those focused on economic development, K-12 education, the arts and, increasingly in these critical budget times, service and outreach to help our most vulnerable neighbors.

We are about to embark on a United Way campaign to help handle areas of incredible need in our community. Heading into that campaign, we recently learned that our most recent campus United Way campaign--in fall 2008--was the third largest university campaign in Michigan and that the WMU campaign had the highest percentage of employee giving of any Michigan school. That is a testament to the commitment of this campus community to its Kalamazoo home. Thank you for what you have done, please continue your generosity and join with me in committing to do even more. The needs of our community have never been greater.

### **Leadership**

We are graced at this point in the University's history with academic- and employee-group leadership that is committed to making the most of this University's potential. We successfully negotiated a period of transition and are now enjoying the kind of stability that allows the time and careful thought needed to plan for the future and think strategically about where we will be a decade of more from now.

Over the past year, our academic leadership--made up of our deans and associate deans led by Provost Tim Greene. They've worked together to build a strategic plan that recognizes this University's unique niche in higher education. Their efforts also call for some bold steps to build the strength and health of Western Michigan University. I applaud their efforts and believe it's time to share some of the major initiatives they recommend with our entire campus community and the public at large. These are initiatives that will make this University, stronger, healthier

and more ready to serve our state and nation. They are part of what I would call an overall prescription for the future.

### **Prescription For the Future**

Here's a bit about that prescription. Our future as a healthy organization will be dependent on our ability to keep our focus on

- Sustainability,
- Diversity, and
- Enhancing our Strength and Health.

Sustainability--I've just recounted our efforts on sustainability. We will continue to build on that foundation to ensure we maximize use of our current resources and preserve for ourselves and generations to come the necessary resources to remain strong in the future. On a practical level, the more that we can reduce waste and enhance efficiency, the outcome will lead to a redeployment of resources into other areas of need within the University.

### **Diversity**

Like the term "health," diversity in the very broadest definition of the term is one key to a strong future. Diversity demands first that we commit to access for the broadest range of deserving students, and second, that we commit to the development of the full potential of each person we bring into our academic community.

Our outreach efforts aimed at former foster care youth, veterans and transfer students are good examples of what we will need to do more of in the future. Transfer students, in particular, will make up a growing percentage of our undergraduate population. We must continue to make this University a place that welcomes them, shows respect for their education efforts to date and exercises good judgment and flexibility in how we assess the academic experiences they bring with them.

We will rely on outreach and accessibility to build the kind of student population we need to serve, but it is what happens once our students arrive in our classrooms that is most important. Our ability to demand and honor civility and respectful discourse will be our most important ally in nurturing the full potential of the students we bring here.

At no time in my professional career has this been as critical an issue as it is today. Increasingly, our students come to us with the view that dialogue is a win/lose effort. Many will believe that the loudest participant in each conversation is the winner. I can think of no better way for us to have a positive impact on our nation's future than to inculcate in our students the value of respectful and reasoned discourse that focuses on the issues and is free of ad hominem attacks. Those are lessons that will serve our students well in their professional lives and will enhance their value as citizens in their communities.

### **Strength and Health**

The strategic plan developed by academic affairs will be the cornerstone on which we can base all other planning and build our strength. It is central to who we are and what we do as an organization. The academic strategic plan is comprehensive and includes ambitious goals intended to build additional strength across our academic enterprise. It is designed to enhance our student recruiting efforts, bring new strengths to our undergraduate and graduate programs, raise our research and creative activity profile, and nurture our work with the greater community.

In the coming weeks and months, the elements of this thoughtful and thorough plan will be discussed and evaluated across the campus, and all of our operational units will have a chance to determine how they can support the goals of the plan.

There are several critically related organizational linchpins in the strategic plan that are bold but necessary. They will allow us to fulfill our institutional commitment to serve our state and nation and fulfill our desire to maintain the highest levels of excellence and achievement.

The strategic plan calls for:

- First, a dramatic increase in our externally funded research to reach a goal over the next 5 years of \$60 million. That is more than double our current annual average. Given the credentials and talent that characterize this University's faculty, this is an ambitious but entirely doable goal.
- Second, an increase in the number of faculty by up to 25 per year over the next four to five years to support expanded research in specific areas, to transform our teaching, allow more students to participate in research initiatives and improve our faculty-to-student ratios.
- Third, an increase in University staff to support the strategic plan and an increase in the professional development opportunities for all employees.

These three steps will give us the additional resources to achieve the goal that is at the center of our strategic planning--student success. It is all about our students. Increased strength in our academic enterprise will allow us to increase retention and move our students quickly toward graduation.

These are bold plans, but strategically, they are necessary. Let me reiterate our faculty goal just to drive the point home. We are talking about the possibility of 25 additional tenure and tenure-track faculty lines each year. These are new additions to our faculty to boost our existing strengths. These will be scholars who will be selected for their ability to carry us forward and meet our research, creative activity, teaching and service goals. Funding those positions will come at a price. The plan and how we achieve it, including balancing the associated costs in relationship to other needs, will require careful review by the University community and endorsement by our Board of Trustees. We will continue to make affordability one of our goals, but we will also continue to make excellence our hallmark. These are steps Western Michigan University needs to take to continue to be a strong and healthy institution. This is not the time to retreat, hang our heads and kick the dust. To the contrary, now is the time to be agile, flexible, rational and bold in our thoughts about the future of this great University.

## **Reaching our Full Potential as a University**

There is one other element to being a healthy organization that we must keep in mind as we move forward. We must be willing and able to stretch and reach for goals that take us outside our comfort levels but will, in the end, make us the kind of healthy and intellectually vibrant institution we want to sustain.

For more than a year, now, we have been examining the possibility of building a medical school in Kalamazoo with our community partners. That conversation continues unabated. We have recently watched other universities make commitments to similar projects, but we have not allowed those developments to push us prematurely into a decision about the wisest course for our university and our community.

The bottom line is that we can build a medical school. There is an impressive infrastructure already in place. And there is a growing realization that a carefully designed academic health center model could be successful here. An academic health center, privately funded and structured to be integrated into this community, would be of incalculable value to this University. It would lead to new and vibrant doctoral programs and additional science resources campuswide. The addition of a medical school would enhance the intellectual vibrancy of the University and community, increase our research capacity, enhance our national and international standing, and assist in student recruitment and enrollment.

This idea, however, is not just about Western Michigan University. It is about Southwest Michigan, the state of Michigan and our nation. The looming shortage of physicians for Michigan and the United States is alarming. And the deeper we delve into this concept, the more powerful the benefits to our region appear. But this is an idea with a limited time frame in which to make a decision, so you can expect to see the pace of these discussions quicken in the coming weeks.

We cannot let temporary economic cycles and short-term expediency dictate our ability to plan for a better future for ourselves and our community. We owe this idea a thorough analysis. We owe ourselves the opportunity to seize and act upon a vision that some have described as transformational for our region and the University.

## **Closing**

Let me close by reiterating that the intersection of health, sustainability and diversity is the commitment to maximize resources and reduce waste, including, most importantly, the waste or loss of human capital. We have a responsibility as a University to be cognizant of the greater needs of our society--and there are no greater needs now than:

- Respect for our planet;
- Respect for the people--all of the people--who share the planet;
- And encouragement that allows every human being to maximize his or her potential by staying physically, mentally and emotionally healthy.

Virgil said it best when he asserted that "the greatest wealth is health." We as a university must make our mark by reminding students who enter this university that they will receive a first-class

education, taught by an exemplary credentialed faculty, and they will leave us wiser and ready to serve. This we know! In addition, our students will leave here with an appreciation and respect for the earth, a realization of the importance of diverse ideas and people, and a commitment to be good stewards of their own physical, mental and emotional health.

When we meet at this time next year, many of the things I've talked about this afternoon will be yesterday's news. Decisions will have been made, ideas considered and embraced or rejected, and we will have dealt with issues not yet foreseen. But at the end of the day and the end of the year, my goal is for us to be a healthy university--stronger, more diverse and even more sustainable than we are today.

We cannot afford less, for, in the words of Herophilus, physician to Alexander the Great:

"When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied."

We are all about art, strength, intelligence, and the building of wealth and wisdom. To succeed, health must be our focus as well. Thank you for being here today and thank you for working with me to build the University we want ours to be. Have a great year, and Go Broncos!