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Western Michigan University

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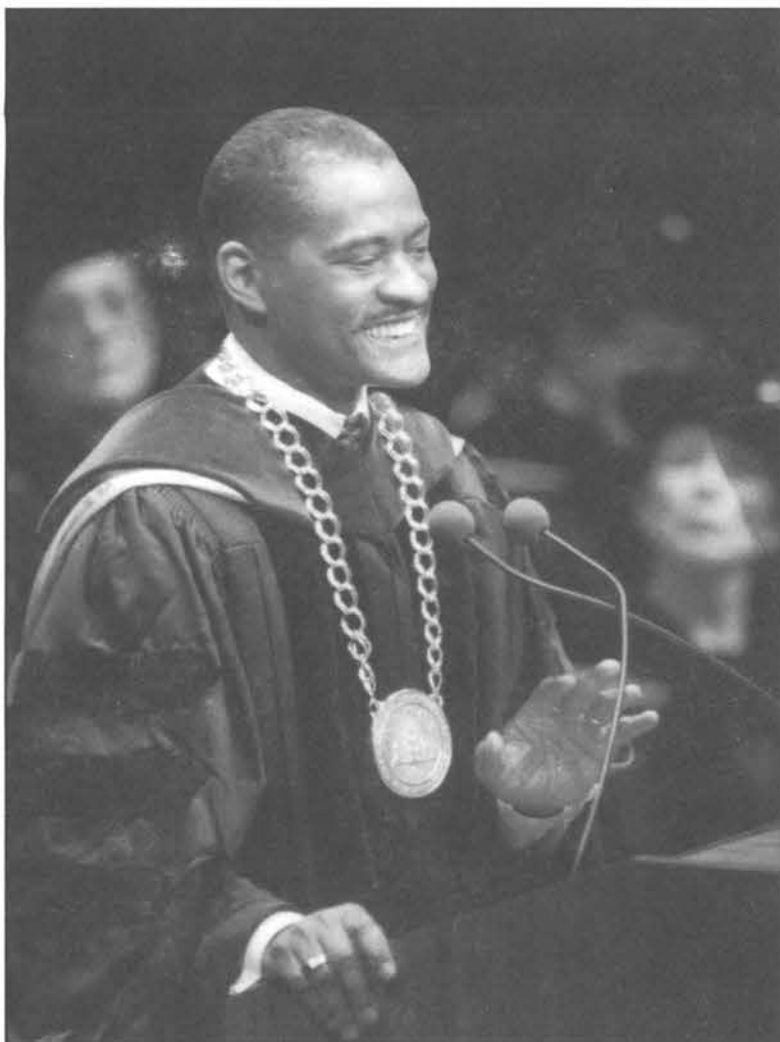




Inaugural Address

Moving Forward Together: Listening to the Voices of the Community

President Elson S. Floyd
Western Michigan University



Madam Chair, members of the Board of Trustees, Trustees Emeriti, Speaker Perricone, other distinguished platform guests, elected officials, delegates of other institutions, faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends of the University, personal friends, members of my wonderfully supportive family, and all members of the University community, I am indeed honored to have been entrusted with the leadership of this superb University as its sixth president.

A special acknowledgment must be extended to members of the Board of

Trustees who served on the search committee, chaired by Trustee Dick Haworth, who, unfortunately, could not be with us today, and the students, faculty, staff, community members, and alumni who unselfishly gave of their time and effort in this extremely public process. Many of you I've come to know over the past eight months. I thank you for your service to what is now our University.

I especially want to thank President Emeritus John Bernhard and his wife, Ramona, who so graciously agreed to chair this celebration, and all of my predecessors—Diether Haenicke, John Bernhard, Jim Miller, Paul Sangren, and Dwight Waldo—for leaving me with such a strong office to assume. To Ramona Bernhard, and to Carol Haenicke and to Jane Miller, you continue to serve as gracious first ladies, and Carmento and I remain in your debt.

I often preface my remarks by saying, 'I am absolutely delighted to be here today.' And that is always true. But on this occasion, I must confess that my feelings go beyond delight. The honor you have bestowed on me, by selecting me to lead this wonderful University into the next century, fills me with both pride and gratitude. I sincerely appreciate the trust you have placed in me, and I am grateful for the support you have already shown as we work together to advance this great University.

We already have made significant progress as we have built on the superb legacy of those who came before us. To those who already have worked so hard, to those who will share our work in the coming years, and to those we seek to serve, I pledge now, as I have pledged before, a presidency of vision, of vigor and of passion.

In our audience today are members of the families for whom many of our buildings have been named. I ask them to stand and to be acknowledged. Please join me in a round of applause. It is on your shoulders that we all stand.

Now, let me talk about vision, about vigor, and about passion, as I set my direction and purpose for our University.

Vision

My vision for Western Michigan University, which I will ask that you embrace with me, is that of:

- A university that is one of the nation's premier student-centered research institutions.
- A university that focuses its energies and resources on students while supporting and respecting the work of our faculty and the work of our staff.
- A university that values the contributions and ideas of individuals and, indeed, draws its vitality from its diverse community of scholars.
- A university that is committed to openness, to access and to diversity.
- A university that seeks active partnerships with those in both public and private sectors as we create new synergies for success. And
- A university that contributes to the quality of life here on our campus, in the communities we serve and anywhere that our actions and our ideas make a difference.

Ernest Boyer, one of the most profound thinkers in higher education, described in his book, *Campus Life: In Search of Community*, six principles that describe both my leadership and my management style—a style that I hope you have come to recognize over the first eight months of my presidency, a style



- I see a technology corridor that parallels Interstate 94, and that is fueled by the expansion of our College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, our College of Aviation, and our emerging upper division campus at Lake Michigan College.
- I see a health care corridor in Kalamazoo along Oakland Drive, where it is our intention to locate new facilities for our College of Health and Human Services. This campus will constitute one of the anchors of a Michigan health care triangle that includes Grand Rapids and Lansing.

that will embrace each and every one of you over the longevity of my presidency.

- Dr. Boyer states first, that a university is an educationally *purposeful* community, a place where faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus.
- Second, a university is an *open* community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.
- Third, a university is a *just* community, a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued.
- Fourth, a university is a *disciplined* community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.
- Fifth, a university is a *caring* community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported, where service to others is encouraged.
- Sixth, a university is a *celebrative* community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered, where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared.

Recognizing these principles, I announced to my Board that we would engage in a broad-based, inclusive and representative planning process that I regard as entirely consonant with these six principles, and one designed to ensure that we achieve those goals. Underlying this process is a commitment to quality and continuous improvement. Taken together, they will help us prepare for the 100th anniversary of our outstanding University. Here are some of the changes I see on the horizon as our centennial approaches:

- I see a greater presence and visibility for WMU in the communities we serve beyond the boundaries of Kalamazoo County—especially with regard to Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, and the Benton Harbor/St. Joseph areas, where our contributions already are substantial.

- I see a university whose reputation is increasing for cutting-edge research and cutting-edge technology transfer while our commitment to teaching remains strong, vibrant, and robust.
- And I see a university *of* west Michigan and *for* west Michigan that serves and impacts the entire state, recognizing the primacy of the citizens that reside here.

As I have said in other settings, we are faced with new social, political and economic forces in higher education that require universities to reexamine and significantly, if not radically, change the way that we conduct our business. Most dramatic is the infusion of information technology into the very fiber of American society.

Our University must respond to this cultural transformation and position itself to lead the pace of change—and we *must* be a leader or face the prospect of falling behind. We cannot allow this to happen, lest we fail our students, our stakeholders and ourselves. Our fundamental purpose is to serve the people of Michigan. In the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, the only competitive advantage that any state can enjoy is determined by the extent to which it nurtures and cultivates the intellectual brainpower of the state. To the extent that Western Michigan University can fulfill this mission, we fuel economic growth and economic vitality.

As beneficiaries of the support of the citizens of Michigan, we must remain firm in focusing on our *raison d'être*. Through teaching, research, creative activities, and service, Western is paving the way for the state's future prosperity and future growth.

Universities and private industry must form strong collaborative relationships and we must strengthen our college curricula to meet the current workforce needs of businesses and corporations by producing a college graduate who can "hit the ground running" and immediately add value to the firm he or she is working for. To do anything less is irresponsible and fails to satisfy the fiduciary responsibility entrusted to us by the state. We must meet and satisfy new market demands, and seek new corporate partners in ways that are not redundant, ways that are not wasteful, ways that are not duplicative, but in ways that add value and service to our institutions and to our communities.

"Our citizens and their elected representatives have a right to expect an excellent return on their investment in us."

"We regard ourselves as an integral part of the larger community, and that we are and will continue to be responsive to it."

The point is that universities must become more gazelle-like and less dinosaur-like. We must become producers of change and not merely respondents to change. We must graduate students not only with the competencies of their chosen field, but with the skills to adapt and to change in an increasingly dynamic workplace.

Our students must be trained to learn how to learn!

We must understand that limited competition has become global competition; standardization has become customization; unlimited resources have given way to limited resources and regulation is moving toward deregulation (at least for the time being). It is our responsibility to prepare graduates to face and to understand these realities and to make maximum contributions to our society.

At the same time, our University must be accountable to the people of Michigan for the wise stewardship of their investment in us. Our citizens and their elected representatives have a right to expect an excellent return on their investment in us. As a consequence, this University will continue to provide answers to many of the most vexing problems we confront.

As we consider these possibilities and necessities, I want to underscore a personal commitment of mine that I hope and believe already has become evident. That is a personal commitment to *listen*—not only to many voices here on our campus, but also to those beyond our campus borders. It is not only a part of my style, it is part of who I am.

To that end, I want everyone to understand that we regard ourselves as an integral part of the larger community, and that we are and will continue to be responsive to it—as a good neighbor and as a responsible citizen of Kalamazoo County. It is our moral imperative to do precisely that—nothing less.

As your president, I promise to continue to seek your counsel and advice—as well as that of our friends and neighbors—as we fashion our future together. We are no stronger than the sum of our component parts.

Vigor

Now let's visit the second element of my pledge. By vigor, I mean that I will pursue our collective agenda as vigorously, as forcefully, and as effectively as is humanly possible so that, together, we can achieve our goals and fulfill our vision of what Western Michigan University is now and, through our efforts, will become—a premier, student-centered research university. Here is an outline of that agenda:

Research Classification: As we announced not long ago, WMU has met the criteria used by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for classification as a Research II university. This means we have joined the elite ranks of the nation's 90 public research institutions.

We deserve to be counted among this state's public research universities. I am doing everything I can, with your help, to see that this is accomplished. Our recognition as a research university must be extended to every corner of our state, to every corner of the nation, and to the global markets that we serve.

Increased Legislative Support: This brings me to the second major component of our agenda. Our stature as a research university—that we resemble Michigan State University and the University of Michigan far

more than we do any other university in Michigan—is an image that must come into clearer focus in Lansing. To preserve the quality and complexity of our programs, our per-student appropriation must begin to move closer to that of the state's other public research universities.

Private Support: In this era of limited public resources, it is imperative that we turn to the private sector for support. We can accomplish this in at least two ways. The first is by forming public/private partnerships with those in business, industry, education and elsewhere, thereby leveraging public support to the benefit of our partners, our faculty, our students—and the greater community.

Universities of today must become change agents and connect in an aggressive and powerful way to effect a positive change on our communities and on society in general. We no longer can think of our universities as ivory towers isolated from our society. But, we must think of them as corporate partners—helping to forge a new tomorrow and to add to the overall economic vitality of the nation and regions that we serve.

The second is by turning to our alumni, whose lives we have touched in significant ways, perhaps most directly through the energy and the enthusiasm this institution provides. And we must look as well to our friends in the foundations and corporations of America who share our vision for what this University will become—with their help.

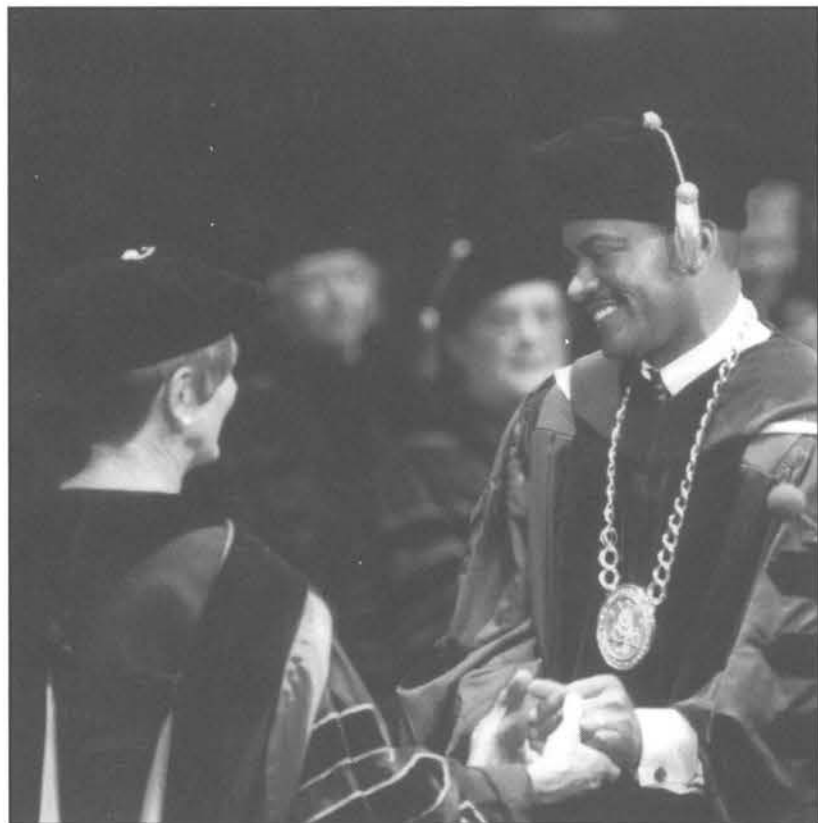
To this end, we are in the initial stages of a capital campaign that will carry our University well into the next century. Such campaigns require careful preparation and a clear sense of focus, so that when we step forward with a request for funds, it will be received with understanding and with support.

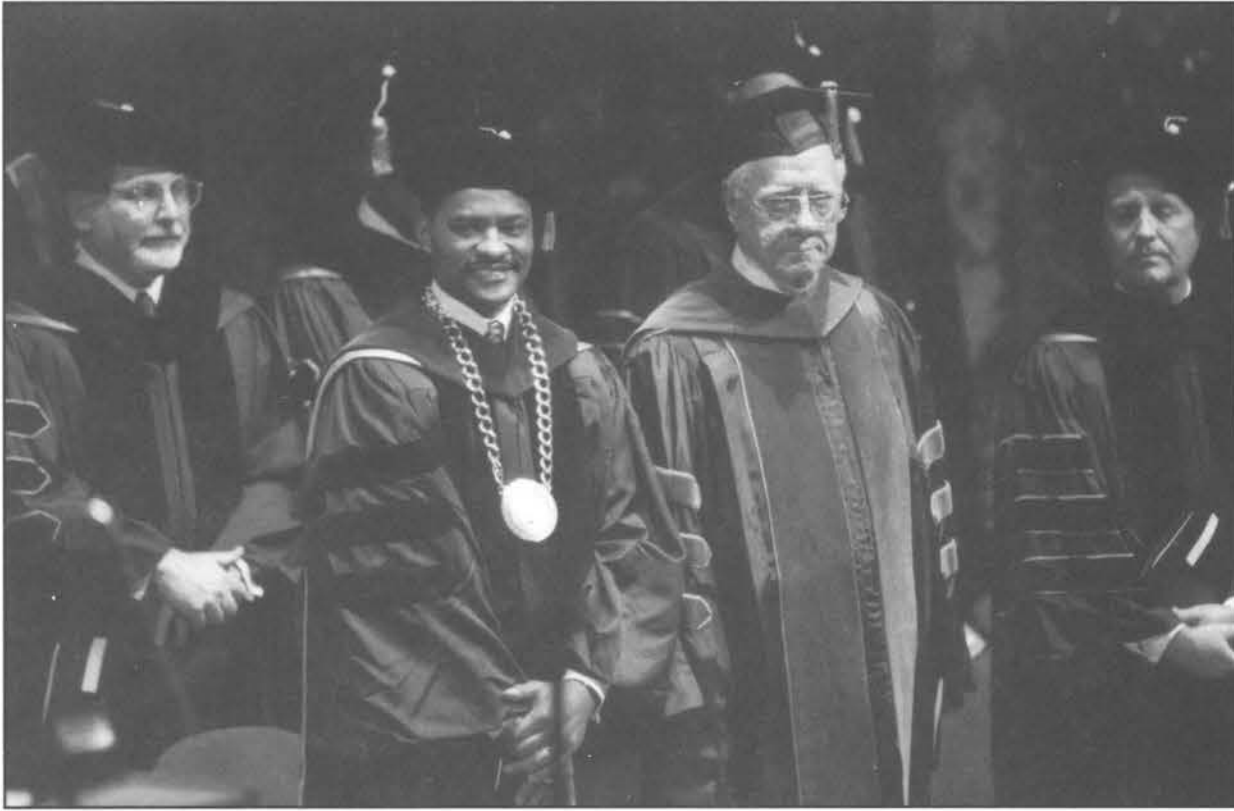
Each of you and your own vision for our University will help us to shape the form and direction of this next, great campaign, and I look forward to sharing this opportunity with you as the momentum for it continues to develop.

An important issue that affects each of us is the support we give our public schools—they need us. In consonance with our historical origins as a teacher's college, we must renew our commitment to our public schools. Our collective futures depend on a strong, effective public school system. Our College of Education is up to the task, and we will be successful.

- We must teach more and continue to focus on the quality that is in the classroom. We must recognize the brilliance that our children bring into the classroom and do everything that we can to make sure that brilliance redounds to their benefit.
- We must demand and expect critical thinking amongst our children and inculcate an appreciation for analytical thinking.
- We must provide the emotional strength to challenge and engage the stereotypical attitudes that are inflicted upon our youth and provide them with the coping skills to prosper in our global environment.

“Our recognition as a research university must be extended to every corner of our state, to every corner of the nation, and to the global markets that we serve.”





- We must recognize and build upon the strengths of our children.
- We must use familiar metaphors, analogies, and experiences from the children's world in order to connect what children already know to the classroom experience.
- We must create a sense of family and a sense of caring.
- We must involve the parents in the educational equation.

I have long believed that there should not be much difference between high school graduation requirements and college entrance requirements in the competitive, global, digitally-based economy of the 21st century. We must prepare our children for the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow.

Our College of Education will be a hallmark college of the 21st century. Our state needs us; our nation needs us; our children are crying out to us—and we will, and we must, answer the call.

Passion

The third element of my presidency is passion. To be passionate about something means to care very much for it and about it, and so I can tell you without reservation that I am passionate about Western Michigan University. Since I have been here, I have come to realize how passionate so many of you are about this University as well. And since coming here in August, my family and I have been made to feel truly welcome in your hearts.

And so I have taken you into my heart as well, as individuals, as groups and as members of the University community. This bond of ours, ever fresh and always renewing itself, can only continue to grow as we move forward together here at Western. And so I ask for your continued, active, engaged support as we take our University to the next level—and the next level after that!

We can only move ahead together. I will devote all of my energy and passion to:

- Creating a University that is a microcosm of the best our great society has to offer, a place where men and women of all colors, and all ethnic and religious backgrounds live, work, study, and learn in an environment of mutual understanding, of mutual respect, and of mutual support.
- Recognizing that the greatness of this University will always be determined by the quality of our faculty and the students that we attract. Thus, we must have a University that attracts the best and the most capable and creative people within the academy and then provide them with an environment of freedom and support.
- Nurturing a faculty that is committed to teaching, service, cutting-edge research, and creative activities that will redound to our collective benefit.
- Supporting a faculty that fully embraces the principles we cherish and assists us in the governance of the University and in determining those academic matters that rest at the core of our University and at the core of the academy.
- Encouraging a faculty that embraces interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies. For with the information explosion that is upon us, silos, standing tall but alone, are both inadequate and short sighted.

In short, we demand the best and the brightest—nothing else will be acceptable.

This building and growing of an institution—as with an individual—is truly a process without end, like education itself. And so I will issue a call that you join me in this great pursuit, perhaps the greatest one of all: the pursuit of knowledge for a new tomorrow, in a new century, in a new millennium full of hope, full of achievement, full of success and full of service—for each of us—and for all of us—here at Western Michigan University!

I thank all of you for sharing this special day in the life of our University. As I think about the challenges that are upon us, there is no way for me to be successful in those challenges without the support of this faculty, the students and staff, and the legislators. But also, I cannot do it without the support of this community, our alumni and trustees. For I need to listen to your voices and hear what you must say. And without a doubt, I could not do it without the support of my family.

As a final word, I would like to say that indeed it is my privilege to be here as the sixth president of WMU. I will listen very actively to the issues that you raise and to your concerns, as we mutually come to the best collective decision in all that we do.

And so I bid you farewell, good afternoon, good luck and good health. Thank you.