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4-24-2008

Michigan Community College Association

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WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Dunn, John M., "Michigan Community College Association" (2008). *WMU President John Dunn*. 356.
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn/356>

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Michigan Community College Association
John M. Dunn, President
4/24/08

- Good afternoon--I am absolutely delighted to be here with you late on this Friday afternoon. We're in the middle of a very busy two days on my campus, with a Board of Trustees meeting and Alumni board meeting earlier today and four commencement ceremonies tomorrow. When I received this invitation to speak, however, I knew this a priority for which I needed to carve out time.
- Over the past two years, those of us who are higher education partners in Southwest Michigan--the presidents of five(?) community colleges and myself--have been meeting regularly. It has been a productive time for us and we've been laying the groundwork for more opportunities for our students.
- If there's one message I'd like you to take away from my remarks this afternoon, it is this. I regard all of you as partners with me in one core mission for Michigan--ensuring our students have every opportunity to earn associate and bachelor's degrees and reach their full potential.
- That's it. We're not competitors. We're partners. If we think creatively and work collaboratively, we'll be able to accomplish higher education and economic development goals for this state that never before possible. And we can do it despite a grim economy.

Michigan's Future

- We must do it. We all know Michigan has an unemployment rate of 12.6 percent--the highest in the nation. But I hope every one of you shares with your constituents every day the other piece of news they must have. Nationally, for those with a bachelor's degree, the unemployment rate is 4.3 percent.

- Just a few days ago, the Ann Arbor think tank Michigan Future Inc. issued its annual report on how well Michigan is doing on its march toward a knowledge based economy--which is defined for that report as an economy populated by business in which at least 30 percent of the work force has a bachelor's degree. The organization's president Lou Glazer had a core message about how we can turn our state around.

"Talent concentration trumps everything," Lou Glazer said. "If everything else we're doing at the state and regional level that we call economic growth or economic development works fabulously well, and we do not increase talent concentrations, we will get poorer."

We can attract talent and business interest:

- 1) First, by growing our own--Using our strong higher education infrastructure to increase our percentage of those with a college degree. That number now stands at just over 24.6 percent of Michigan adults, compared with a national average of 27.4 percent.
- 2) Second, by convincing businesses outside the state that we can provide a well-educated work force and a quality of life that they and their families will enjoy.

Following those two commitments and paying attention to quality of life issue in our cities will allow us to reach a critical mass--a work force and a business portfolio that is focused on technology and the future.

There are, as Lou Glazer noted, communities around the state that have already repositioned themselves as friendly to the knowledge economy and are seeing success.

Kalamazoo, where more than 30 percent of adults hold at least a bachelor's degree is one of them, and while our unemployment rates are two percentage points below the Michigan average, we still have a ways to go before we catch up on other important metrics like per capita income levels.

- That's why I think what we do together to achieve our students' educational goals will pay off for each of our communities and our state as a whole. That's why we need to fiercely protect our resources and learn to leverage those resources in new ways.

WMU/KCC engineering agreement

- I know President Haring has already filled you in on the most recent initiative between KCC and WMU through which we are working to provide a seamless path to a four-year engineering degree for engineering students. That program is one that will help us develop a template for programs with other community colleges to provide similar opportunities in a range of disciplines.

- We're very excited about a new population of Bruin Broncos--students who are dual enrolled, have access to the resources and personnel of both institutions and have the comfort level with a four-year university that will put them on the WMU campus whenever they have a need or desire to be there.

- Our agreement with KCC takes our partnership to the next level by leveraging our resources in a way that will help student families get the maximum benefit when they invest their resources in higher education. If we get this right, and we will, every course a student takes at the community college level will put them one step closer to a bachelor's degree and the career they want.

- Engineering was the logical choice because WMU has a top-notch engineering school with a reputation for turning out job-ready graduates who hit the ground running when they land their first jobs. We know from our colleagues at KCC that engineering is one of the programs about which their students most frequently request transfer information. And we know that engineering is one of those fields that will help Michigan move forward into the new economy.
- But the range of programs and disciplines covered by such programs established in the future, again, will be limited only by our imaginations and ability to think outside any walls or barriers that harriers that we mistakenly think of as a traditionally relationship between a community college and a research university.
- I treasure our relationship with Michigan community colleges and consider us partners in meeting student needs. Every year we more than 2,500 students come to us as transfers from your colleges or from four-year schools. The number is rising and will continue to do so as your numbers surge and people embrace the message that our future is in the knowledge economy.

Advocacy office

- Because we have so many transfer student and because we have an enormous number of military veterans--the most of any Michigan university--we took some serious steps two years ago to address their unique challenges of both groups.

In June 2007, we launched an Advocacy Office for Transfer Students and Military Affairs. The primary function of that office is to serve as a liaison between WMU and community colleges around the state to make transitioning to the University as easy as possible.

Another function is to work with you--our partners--to determine ways to better ease the transition to WMU. This includes examining current practices and policies that negatively impact student success or satisfaction and developing workable solutions.

Closing

- We'll continue to do that work with your help. In the meantime, I want you to know that we welcome your students and are always delighted to welcome them to our campus. Those students who choose WMU have access to all the resources of a research university that is one of fewer than 200 public research universities in the nation and just five such schools in Michigan.

- We want to be your partner and I look forward to working with you for many years to come to enhance the prospects of our students, our communities and our state.

I'd like to leave a few moments to answer your questions. An please, if you'd like to talk further, don't hesitate to introduce yourself this evening and let me know what's on your mind.

Some stats:

2008 Fall transfers from 2- and 4-year schools 1,825

FY 2007-08 transfers 2,633

Largest transfer student sources (Top-10 fall 2007 numbers)

KVCC--413

Oakland CC--51

Grand Rapids CC--113

Macomb CC--49

Kellogg CC--89

Muskegon-CC-42

Lake Michigan College--86

Schoolcraft College (Detroit area, Livonia)--42

Lansing CC--60

Southwestern CC (Dowagiac and Niles)--36